Summary

Harry’s life is hard, but when he suffers another loss, he is pushed to the edge and intends to be killed at Voldemort’s hand to end everything he hates in the world, but something unexpected happens.

Notes

Before you begin reading, I just want to explain some formatting that I use and what it means.
While speech is obviously in quotation marks (i.e. "Hello"), whispers will be formatted like this: 'Hello.'
All Parseltongue will be between slashes (i.e. /Hello/).
Thoughts will be italicized.
Spells will be bolded and italicized.
Harry's head popped off his pillow, and he stifled a scream that was trying to erupt from his throat. His lungs burned, and his body was covered in a clammy sweat that he could taste on the palms of his hands, covering his mouth. In his chest, his heart throbbed and pounded, as if desperately trying to escape. After a moment, he realized he had just woken, and his heavy panting soon slowed to prevent himself from hyperventilating.

I should be used to these nightmares by now. But that one was so...real.

He knew for sure another would happen if he tried to sleep again. Normally, he would look out his window and imagine how different his life would be as someone else, but he didn't see any light indicating there was a window nearby.

Where am I? My room with Ron at the Burrow has a window, and at Hogwarts as well. So if not the Burrow or Hogwarts, that means...he sighed inwardly. Crap.

He raised his hand, trying to feel for the ceiling of his tiny room under the stairs that his horrid aunt had forced him back into. Apparently, Vernon had decided to turn the other bedroom into some kind of sitting room, but Harry knew they just loved to make his life a living hell. Sure enough, the ceiling met his hand. He growled and cursed under his breath.

After lying down again and staring into the darkness for what seemed like hours (but was only actually minutes), Harry heard some shuffling above him and a familiar creak of the squeaky step on the stairs. He figured his pig of a cousin was craving a late-night snack or something. The shuffling continued around to the front of his door, then stopped. Harry's heart hammered in his chest once more and blood rushed to his ears. He quickly turned over and pretended to be asleep.

His door opened, and moonlight spilled onto his eyelids, making the blackness behind them brighten into a deep purple. Suddenly, a hand grabbed his shoulder and pulled him up roughly, as if he were a rag doll. His eyes shot open and widened at the man he saw before him: his uncle, half-dressed with only his sleeping pants on, a familiar look in his eyes as he stared into Harry's fear-filled green ones. Vernon cracked a wicked smile as whispered words fell off his tongue, but never made their way to Harry's blood-rushed ears. Harry could just make out the words on his lips.

I'm using you, Harry. You know what I need.

Tears erupted from Harry's eyes and his breath hitched. His hands came up to frantically try and pry Vernon's large fingers from his shoulder, to no avail.

No. It can't be. Not again.

With disgust and white-hot fear in his heart, Harry squeezed his eyes shut and screamed for someone to help him, but no voice came.

Harry's head shot off his pillow once more, another scream threatening to burst from deep within his throat. Instead, he gasped as air rushed into his lungs, tears streaming down his face.

Damn. Another bloody nightmare.

He didn't remember falling asleep again, but he obviously had. Or, maybe he hadn't woken up in the
first place. He checked his surroundings once more to verify that he wasn't back in that hell-hole. The window across the room was filled with the vague pale light of the sun that would soon rise. He realized he was, thankfully, at the Burrow, and Ron was still fast asleep on the bed next to him. How his best friend could manage to stay asleep through his nightmares, he would never know.

With his breathing back to normal and his nerves somewhat calmed, Harry laid his head back on his pillow and awaited the day.

Far away from Harry, a man was halfway asleep when he felt it: a little tingle of panic right in the back of his head. It was small and insignificant, but he was a light sleeper. He let out an irritated growl, knowing he would not get back to sleep unless it went away. This tingle was about as irritating as Pettigrew's whining, and that was wholly intolerable, although it caused him no great problems.

With a roll of his eyes, he turned over in his bed. The little tingle seemed to calm just a bit. Hoping it would continue to calm further, he decided to try relaxing himself enough to reach sleep once more. He did what he usually did: closed his eyes and ran through his day in his mind. It's not that his day was particularly riveting, but he always figured that one could notice things one may typically skip over while actually living. He had discovered, more than once, that review is quite helpful to a dark lord.

After he had started his morning and his breakfast, Lucius entered with Narcissa and Draco to say greetings before they went along with their day. Of course, he knew it was just an attempt to get into his good graces, but he couldn't help but feel like the Malfoy family relied on him to begin their day. An evil smile came onto is face.

They worship me as a part of their daily ritual.

Taking a closer look, he discovered that Draco's proper business face showed a hint of fear. He smiled to himself, knowing the effect he had on people, but also noting that he would have to be sure not to scare him too much. When followers became too scared, they weakened their loyalty. A weakened loyalty led to them going behind his back to feel safe again.

As the Malfoy clan left, he could see Draco exhale in relief. Yes, he would be sure to fix that...

Later on, he was in his study, brushing up on some ancient spells he thought would be useful and practicing them wandless and/or wordless. One that had particularly caught his eyes was Vivamus intercessiones. It apparently sent electrical currents through the victim's body. While he originally thought it did not sound like much, especially considering it doesn't hurt at all when one is hit with the spell, he discovered that, theoretically, an oh-so-talented-and-practiced caster is supposed to be able to control their movements and brain functions with it. Obviously, it would take more practice than he had time for, but it was nice to watch someone lose control of their motor functions, if only for a few minutes. Looking back, he supposed it sounded like a more complicated version of the Imperious Curse.

No matter. It is the fun that counts.

After that, he had another meeting with his Death Eaters that was oh-so productive. They had discussed and revised most of the attack plans...again. It was uneventful, if not purpose-less...

At that moment, the tingle returned. Voldemort opened his eyes and huffed.

Just when I thought the irritating sensation was gone for good...how terribly inconvenient.
He wondered what could be causing it, but the answer came shortly after: Harry Potter. He closed his eyes once more, cursing the day he went to murder that child in Godric’s Hollow. With a deep breath, he concentrated on the part of his mind where the tingle was coming from. He could feel something there, so he gave it a slight, mental nudge. It pushed back, and from that, a thought squeezed out.

Damn. Another bloody nightmare.

Yes, it is definitely Potter, that insufferable brat. But at last, the sensation was gone. Turning over once more, Voldemort finally settled down and drifted back to sleep.
Breaking Point

Chapter Notes

From here on out, I will be switching between different perspectives. Mostly, it will be Harry's POV, but please pay attention to who is speaking. I will put a label before each section saying who is speaking (unless it's not changing).

**Harry's POV:**

My life has always been a mess. If I wasn’t getting abused by my crappy muggle “family,” I was busy diving head-first into the war against my own will. And if I wasn’t doing that, I was being yelled at for doing that previously. Recently, it’s been more of the last one. I absolutely hated this stupid war more than anything else. Not only was I dragged into the war at **ELEVEN YEARS OF AGE**, but I was also expected to be the one to single-handedly win it. That was a lot to take in, and even though I’d known about it for six (soon to be seven) years, I still couldn’t believe it. Who the fuck puts all their faith into someone who could hardly even perform magic outside of Hogwarts?

A constant topic of my scoldings happened to be how I am against people risking their lives for me. They said it was selfish to think it was all for me, when really it was “for the cause.” Bullshit. I **am** their cause. Without me, they would think they're prophesized to lose the battle. Hell, they might even surrender. In my view, people were risking their lives, but they were doing so for the bloody Boy-Who-Lived, not Harry Potter. **Merlin**, I hated that title. I should make a list of things I hate.

**Things I hate most in this world:**

-This bloody fucking war

-Being the Boy-Who-Lived/Savior/Chosen One

-Uncle Vernon

I thought a moment more but couldn’t think of anything else. Even though I felt as if I could smite the whole world, I knew I was just tired. I’m not actually one who hates easily, but those three things had more than proven to make my life worse at every turn. In my mind, I could actually rid of two of them by just killing myself. But my damn whale of an uncle would still be alive and well.

Sure, maybe I couldn’t bring myself to actually kill anything (maybe even my evil uncle), but I was somehow different. For some reason, I felt like I could have easily brought a knife to my throat, or a wand to my head with an **Avada Kedavra**.

*That sounds bad. But I’m not suicidal...right? Or maybe I am...just not in that way...That doesn’t make sense.*

I sighed. Even though the war was the bane of my existence, I would risk my life in it. That was the Gryffindor inside me talking, of course.

*I used to run straight into anything, but now even that has been taken away. Yeah, so it’s dangerous. And yeah, it’s stupid. But (and I hate to play this card, but) I’m the bloody Boy-Who-Won’t-Die.*
What makes them think I’ll die now?

Scratch that last question. My friends thought I was completely ready to die because of…well, everything. I wasn’t really trying to kill myself. I just wanted to get the whole thing over with. But that was another thing: everyone wanted the war to end so everything would go “back to normal,” but I never had a normal.

I don’t know what I’ll do after the war, if I’m alive.

It was around that point that I sighed again and thought, Screw it. I might not even be alive.

I knew for a fact that Voldemort wanted to kill me, if not let one of his Death Eaters who hated me do it. And if that had not meant that I failed the one task I was born for, I might have let them do it. But I can’t just let everyone down. Not Hermione and Ron, or the Order, or Dumbledore, or any of the wizards whose names I didn’t know who were relying on me to save them. And I had to do it for all those who gave their lives fighting. I didn’t want them to have died in vain.

The sun was finally up in the sky, so I sat up in bed and pushed away the thoughts that had plagued my mind for the past few hours. I was about to wake up Ron, but I decided against it.

He deserves to sleep, I guess.

I got out of bed, quietly got ready, and headed down to the kitchen to see if anyone was up. No one was there. The kitchen was still messy from dinner yesterday, so I took it upon myself to clean it up. Mrs. Weasley always told me I didn’t have to worry about cleaning anything, but after living in that hell-hole with Uncle Vermin (spelling intended), my wicked Aunt Petunia, and my pig cousin Dudley, it was a habit I had to give into. The pile of dishes by the sink was tall, and the countertops were covered with some sort of sauce.

What did we have for dinner yesterday? I can hardly remember.

I shrugged and started on the dishes the muggle way since I couldn’t remember the spell for it. I had gotten about halfway through washing when Mrs. Weasley woke up and came into the kitchen.

“What on Earth do you think you’re doing?”

I smiled and dried off my hands, knowing I wouldn’t be able to continue. “I was just cleaning the dishes. They were dirty still, so I figured you could use some help…”

“Harry, dear, I don’t need any help. I am just fine.” She gave me one of her motherly smiles that always made me feel so loved, and she patted my cheek. “Now, run along and wake up Ron. I’m sure he wouldn’t want to be late for breakfast, and Merlin knows how long it takes to wake him so close to school starting again…”

I laughed, knowing just how right she was. “Yes, ma’am.” I smiled and went back into our room. Ron hadn’t budged an inch from when I saw him last. His bright red hair was strewn about him, hiding much of his face, and his arms made him look like one of those chalk outlines of dead bodies in those really old muggle movies.

“Ron, wake up.” I shook his shoulders hard, but he just groaned and turned the other way. I sighed. “Come on, Ron. You can’t sleep all day. You’ll get hungry eventually.”

I sat on the edge of the bed, planning ways to wake him. Yesterday, I let Fred and George wake him with one of their noise buzzers and a bucket of cold water. His face was priceless.
“Ron, don’t make me get Fred and George in here again…”

I felt Ron tense on the bed. “You wouldn’t…”

“Try me,” I said. “You know how they love to try out their new inventions, especially on you.”

Ron groaned before sitting up. “Aw Harry, I couldn’t get five more minutes?”

I scoffed. “No, because you’re five minutes is more like twenty.” I smiled and nudged his arm. “Anyways, you don’t want to be late for breakfast.”

He grinned. “Yeah. I’m starvin’.” He pushed his legs off the bed and stood.

“Okay good,” I said standing, too. “I’ll be outside. And don’t you dare go back to sleep.”

“I won’t, Mother,” he retorted.

We both laughed, and I left to go outside. The day was already warming up, though it was still a bit chilly. I always enjoyed watching how the morning changed everything outside. The once dark sky would lighten into pink and orange, then fade into blue. I never understood why the sky changed colors (too much science for me), but I enjoyed watching. The mornings were so peaceful (unlike the day when everyone bustled about, or even the night with Bill, Fred, and George snoring). I never made a noise for fear I might interrupt the peace. It was nice sometimes to just get away from everything, even if only for a moment.

Ron came and sat beside me. “Hey mate, what’cha doing?”

“I’m just enjoying the peace. It’s nice sometimes, ya’ know?”

We sat in silence for a few minutes before Ginny came to tell us breakfast was almost ready. She was as beautiful as ever with the morning sun reflecting off her silky red hair and her eyes filled with happiness. Of course, we weren’t into each other anymore, mostly because the whole saving-her-life-from-Tom-Riddle feelings wore off. We decided to stay friends, but every now and then, I remember just why I had liked her in the first place. She was so…stable. It was as if nothing could affect her. I admired that about her, being my exact opposite. I was so unstable. Every loss I suffered only increased that. I hated feeling so vulnerable.

“You coming, Harry?” Ron asked from the doorway.

“Yeah, sorry. Lost in thought.” I joined Ron and went to eat breakfast, pushing my thoughts to the back of my mind.

We finished breakfast and went outside to wait for Hermione to arrive with Luna and Neville. Luna and Neville had been “really good friends” for quite a while now, so Hermione had been trying to convince Neville to ask her on a date, but he was a little nervous. And by little, I mean he would absolutely freak every time he thought about it, so it was still a work-in-progress. It was sort of funny to watch, actually.

“Hey Harry,” Ron said, uncertainty in his tone, eyes never moving from the spot in the distance where Hermione, Luna, and Neville would land.

“Yeah Ron? What’s wrong?”

“’Mione is always on time. She’s never usually this late. What do you think is taking her so long?”
“She’s probably just talking to Neville about Luna again. You know how well that always goes.”

We both chuckled a bit.

“Yeah, I guess,” Ron said. “I just…something’s off. I can feel it. Maybe I’m just worrying too much.”

“Hermione might be rubbing off on you, Ron.” I smiled, trying to ease his worrying. “I’m sure there’s nothing to be-”

A scream rang out in the distance, silencing whatever I was going to say. Ron and I looked at each other, horror in our eyes as we confirmed that we both recognized the sound.

Without further hesitation, we were running to it. Time seemed to slow. Ron and I couldn’t move fast enough. We needed to get there now, but our legs could only move in slow motion. Tears began to run down Ron’s cheeks, and he knew he was right. Something was terribly wrong. We didn’t hear any more noise come from the field after that scream, but Ron and I kept running towards the source. One word repeatedly erupted from Ron’s throat, hoarse and frightened, but loud and urgent. I could barely hear it over the adrenaline pumping in my ears and the thumps of my feet hitting the ground, but it rang through the now quiet field.

“HERMIONE! HERMIONE! HERMIONE!”

Time returned to normal speed as we arrived to a beat-up body of Hermione leaning over something. Hermione’s back was moving slightly as she looked over the lump in her lap. Ron immediately ran over to her side, but I stayed back, staring at the lump. Ruffled black hair stood out, blood crusted and greasy. Hermione turned her head onto Ron’s shoulder and her quiet sobbing continued. Ron was also looking at the mangled body.

“Bloody ‘ell…Neville?”

I walked over to face Hermione and crouched down in front of her. Neville was bruised, pale, and sweaty, even though his skin was clammy. His nose had dried blood all around it and his breathing was shallow, but he was breathing. We were immediately surrounded by the rest of the Weasley family, lifting up Neville and helping us up to get back to the safety of The Burrow. Right before I was in front of the door, I froze, coming to a sudden realization.

“Hermione…” I asked quietly, “Where…where’s Luna?”

I heard Hermione behind me let out a small whimper. I turned and faced her, my face full of anger of an unknown origin. Fury was building inside of me, and I clenched my fists to keep from yelling.

“Where. Is. Luna?”

Hermione’s scared eyes filled with more tears as she covered her mouth and shook her head. Everyone continued inside, but I stood by the doorway. Luna was…what? What had happened to them? I leaned against the side of the house and slid down to the ground, knowing this was somehow my fault.

After some time, I got up and went inside. Hermione was calmer now, her wounds healed, but her eyes were still bloodshot and scared. Ron had a hand on her shoulder, trying to reassure her.

“Just tell us what happened, ‘Mione.”

She took a shaky breath before starting.
“We were walking through Diagon Alley, like we always do before coming here. Luna said someone was following us, so we went and hid on the side of a shop, but someone grabbed us and apparated somewhere. It was dark, and I could hardly see a thing. Neville started screaming next to me, and someone hit me with a Cruciatius Curse. All of us were screaming. When they let go of the curse on me, I grabbed my wand, then Neville and Luna and was about to apparate out, but someone grabbed Luna, and I only made it back with…” tears filled her eyes again, and she let out a sob.

My fists shook, and my eyes went blurry and red.

They took Luna. And Merlin only knows what they are doing to her. She might even be…No! Not another person lost. Not for me. What the bloody hell do they want with Luna? Do they just love taking my friends from me?

I squeezed my eyes shut to keep my anger under control, and tears poured out. My knees hit the ground hard, and I punched the floor with all my might. Someone had their hand on my shoulder.

“It’s okay, Harry. We’ll find her and…”

“NO!” I screamed. This was the final straw. “IT’S NOT OKAY! THEY CAN’T TAKE ANYONE ELSE AWAY FROM ME! NOT ANYMORE! I CAN’T LOSE ANYONE ELSE! I CAN’T-” my voice cracked. I punched the floor again, but my anger had disappeared, sorrow in its place.

“I can’t…lose anyone else.”

Hot tears slid down my face. Someone wrapped their arms around my shoulders, but I pushed them off. I got up off the floor and went outside without meeting anyone’s eyes. I ran back out into the field, hiding in the tall plants. In a moment, my wand was in my hands, and I disapparated.
Voldemort’s POV:

I smiled to myself when the news came. It had not been planned, exactly, but my Death Eaters were always ones to reach for opportunities. According to the news, one of the members of the famous “Golden Trio” was found in Diagon Alley with some schoolmates. One of my (lesser) Death Eaters ambushed them and had taken the students to the dungeons.

Of course, shortly after, I also received news that this (lesser) Death Eater had also neglected to remove their wands. Thus, two escaped, including the ever-elusive mudblood.

She is an intelligent witch, I will give her that. No matter. Any friend of Harry Potter’s will do.

And right on cue, I felt that tingle in the back of my head. I chuckled darkly, content with the results.

With a wave of my wand and a silent *Morsmordre*, I sent a call to my Death Eaters. Before stepping out of the hallway, I ensured my hood fully hid my face. I made my way to my chair at the end of the long meeting table where a few Death Eaters already sat. One by one, more arrived, and before long, all of my followers were in front of me, silent, waiting for me to speak.

“Well, it seems that we have captured one of Potter’s friends,” I said to the room, my eyes running over every face, searching for nervousness and regret. “What shall we do now? I have a few ideas, but I want to see what…” I searched for the perfect word while building an atmosphere of suspense, “glorious ideas my followers have for me.”

*Who is brave enough to speak?*

“My lord?”

My eyes darted to meet those of the person who just spoke: one of my younger Death Eaters, platinum blonde hair just barely sticking out of his dark hood. I gave a small nod, allowing him to continue.

“I’m sure the idea has passed your mind,” he continued, “but what if we traded the girl for Potter?”

I showed no hint of emotion when I asked, “And why would they give up Potter for some girl?”

*This is all part of the lesson.* And it was. Nothing was more necessary than getting the young ones into the proper mindset.

“They wouldn’t trade, my Lord. Potter would. Trying to barter with The Order would be foolish… but Potter would trust what we say. He would sacrifice himself to keep his friend safe.” The young
Malfoy gave a soft scoff and muttered, “He is a Gryffindor after all.”

I thought over what he had just stated. It had occurred to me that Potter would consider the trade, but never that he would actually agree to it. Then again, Draco did know Potter better than I.

*I suppose he will not betray me, as I had feared. He may be a great and loyal follower, yet.*

“Excellent,” I praised softly. Eyes around the room grew wider. I was not one to praise easily. “You have much potential in this project. I wish to speak with the young Malfoy about this event. Privately. I will notify you if your service is needed.”

I waved a hand, as if to shoo them. With that, most of the Death Eaters left, with the exception of Draco, Lucius, and Bellatrix.

“I thought I asked to speak to Draco,” I said, my voice dangerously quiet. I did not appreciate waiting. “Leave so we may have our peace.”

“But my Lord—” Bellatrix began.

“Now.”

Without any further arguments, Bellatrix disapperated in a huff, but Lucius remained.

“My Lord, I will return later to discuss this with you, since you require my son.”

Lucius left, leaving behind a frightened young boy.

“Draco, my child, there is no need to be frightened of me at this moment.” I pulled back my hood, revealing my new face (or rather, my old one): young and warm, slightly rosy at the apples of my cheeks, and most importantly, charmingly handsome. “You should be proud that you have been asked to personally plan this trade with me.” I beckoned him forward.

He placed his steps, a careful neutral expression on his face, until he was a few feet from my throne. I cast a silencing charm to prevent any unwanted ears from hearing.

Suddenly, the tingle in the back of my head died out, then grew to twice its original size.

*My Potter, it seems the Draco was right…*

My head began to ache slowly, as if the tingle was taking over.

*Insufferable brat!*

A quick Accio, and a pain reliever was in my hand. After a sip, I turned my attention back to the boy.

“It seems that Potter has, indeed, been heavily affected. How exactly shall we propose this trade?”

“Well…” Draco began before adding, “My Lord,” for formalities. “Potter has always been one to lose his temper over things like this. He has probably locked himself in a room, or isolated himself somehow. I imagine it would be easy to send him an owl without alerting The Order or his friends. Tell him to meet you somewhere you both know, and that Luna will be released unharmed if he will give himself up. He will fall for it easily enough.”

Another Accio and a quill and parchment appeared in my young hand.
Incredible. I still marveled at the effects of Snape’s potion on me.

I quickly wrote the letter, then pricked the palm of my hand and smeared the blood on it.

“Morsmordre.” The ink instantly became red and my name signed itself on the bottom. Tom Riddle.

I hated my given name, but I figured Potter would know it was certainly mine, no matter how improbable he thought it.

Draco came back to my throne with one of my eagle owls on his arm. Before tying the note to the owl’s leg, I summoned Lucius, Severus, and some other loyal Death Eaters, minus Bellatrix.

She can ruin a delicate situation like this. I don’t need her carelessness.

I sent off the owl just as they all appeared before me.

“Now,” I announced, “we shall wait for him. To the Forbidden Forest!” I raised my wand and disapparated, ten others following behind.

**Harry’s POV:**

I’m numb. Why am I numb? I should be furious! I should be lashing out, diving head-first into battle with whoever did that to Hermione and Neville…to whoever took Luna away and possibly killed her.

But there was no fight left in me.

All at once, there were people around me; ones who died in battle, or in an ambush, or by His filthy hands. It was everyone I cared about, who gave their lives for me. There were so many. They all surrounded me, too close. It was hard to breathe. I was getting claustrophobic. My chest had pressure on it. But they kept coming closer.

Help us, Harry, they said. You are our only hope. Don’t let us die. We loved you. We still do. Help us. We need you…

“Get away from me!” I tried to yell, but my voice was hoarse. My eyes shut tightly, and I pulled my knees into my chest. I just wanted them to go away, but it was like they always haunted me. I opened my eyes again, and they were gone. Tears fled from my eyes. I hated this.

Things I hate in this world:

-This bloody fucking war

-Being the Boy-Who-Lived/Savior/Chosen One

-Uncle Vernon

-Being haunted by dead people I cared about

Reciting the list had calmed me a bit. My chest didn’t hurt so much, and my eyes didn’t sting so much. I looked around me.

Am I in some type of sewer? Oh, this is where I used magic to fight off that dementor right in front of Dudley. What a great memory that is…I sighed. At least no one will find me here. Thank Merlin.

I really needed to take things in. Nothing felt right anymore. I didn’t want to fight this bloody war anymore. I refused to let anything else bad happen to anyone I cared about. I needed to end it. I was
so sick of everything. My tears stopped flowing, but I stayed with my knees to my chest against the
cold, wet metal.

I don’t deserve to go back to people who love me. I am the cause of all of this. But I’m somehow
also the answer? That doesn’t make sense. I’m the reason all my friends are getting hurt, or killed.
But I’m supposed to be some kind of savior? I don’t feel like a savior. No matter what I do, people
around me were always getting hurt…

Self-revelation hit me. The answer was always there, but never before had it seemed so possible.

If I’m not around, people I care about won’t get hurt. If I’m not alive, the war will end. It would all
be over…

I grabbed my wand. I knew some pretty nasty spells, but only one that would kill. Putting it to my
temple, the words were in my mind and on the tip of my tongue. I was ready.

Before I even finished taking the breath to say the incantation, an owl, unlike any I had ever seen,
landed in front of me with a note tied to its leg. Frustrated tears poured down my cheeks. I lowered
my wand and untied the note from the owl’s leg. When I opened it, I realized it was written entirely
in blood, and the tears faded almost instantly. My eyes widened. If the contents of the note weren’t
shocking enough, the signature at the bottom was. The Dark Lord himself wanted to trade me for
Luna. It was almost too good to be true.

Luna’s still alive? I out a breath of relief. And I can save her! But wait… Some problem showed
itself. How could I make sure Luna is safe if I’m a prisoner? Or dead? Well, I’m sure there’s
something I can do. I’ll figure it out when I get here.

I lifted my wand, a perfect picture of the edge of the Forbidden forest in my head, and disapparated.

3rd Person POV:

With a crack, Harry landed at the very edge of the Forbidden Forest. It was dark and ominous as
always, the darkening sky creating shadows over the bare branches. Harry silenced his feet and
walked carefully into the forest, ducking under branches and watching for any movement that would
show a trap of some sort. He wondered around aimlessly for a while, not finding a single sign of life.
His nerves were starting to get the better of him when he found a clearing. Stepping into the open
space, he saw no one around.

Well, if I can’t find him, he thought, he can find me.

He lifted his wand into the sky and sent a bright red flare above his head that he was sure was hard to
miss.

Voldemort had been around a while and was beginning to think Potter had not taken his bait when
he saw the flare.

“It seems,” he purred to his Death Eaters, “Harry wants us to go to him.” A wicked grin grew on his
face, cloaked in shadows, and he began walking towards where the flare had come from. His Death
Eaters formed a line to follow.

“My Lord,” Lucius said quietly from behind, “a reply.”

Voldemort nodded his head before raising his wand and uttering “Morsmodre” into the sky. The
clouds darkened, and a green skull appeared, a snake slithering out of its mouth with a silent hiss.
Needless to say, Harry knew he was coming. Harry tried to get into some type of position that would ready him for whatever Voldemort threw at him, but in all honesty, he knew there was nothing he could do to prepare himself for this meeting.

Several long seconds passed before Harry saw Voldemort enter the clearing.

*His Death Eaters are following behind him like ducklings.*

Harry tried to stop a smile from appearing on his face. *That’s a terrible comparison.* Then, he couldn’t help but imagine Voldemort, his pale snake-like face with no nose, in a duck costume.

Harry grinned and let go of a small laugh. He couldn’t help himself.

*Maybe I’m going crazy.*

“Something funny, Potter?” one of the cloaked beings spat. He immediately recognized it.

“Well, Malfoy, I was just enjoying the last minutes of craziness I have before I die.”

The clearing fell silent. The Death Eaters were shocked, to say the least, and Voldemort smiled a small, sideways grin.

“And what makes you think I am here to kill you? We have business to attend to, yes?” He dropped his hood and revealed his young face.

Harry’s eyes fell on it with surprise. He wasn’t expecting this. It was almost like the Tom Riddle he had seen in the Chamber of Secrets, but slightly older. His face was…well, human, and not the least bit repulsive. And he had a nose.

“Well,” Harry shrugged, “I guess I just assumed I was here to save Luna, and then you could satisfy your long-time goal of killing me. Which speaking of, where is Luna?”

“She is safe,” one of the Death Eaters said. “Once an agreement has been reached, we will retrieve her.”

“Then let’s get on with it,” Harry pushed. “I will become your captive *after* I have assured that Luna is safe.”

“Oh?” Voldemort cocked a brow. “And how do you intend to do that?”

“I will take her to a safe place, with people who will care for her, then come back,” Harry replied, his eyes still taking in the features of Voldemort’s new face.

“Really, Potter? How stupid do you think we are?” Draco scoffed. “You wouldn’t return.”

“He would if under magical oath,” Voldemort said. He walked forward and beckoned Lucius after him. Lucius held his wand firmly and began to recite the terms of the oath.

“Potter, you will escort Luna to safety and return to the Dark Lord quickly, without arguing or resisting, if…” he turned to Voldemort, “The Dark Lord brings her forth unharmed.”

“And will never hurt any of my friends, ever,” Harry added.

“And,” Lucius continued, pausing to give a questioning look to Voldemort, who gave half a shrug. “The Dark Lord will not harm a *select few* of the people Harry cares for.”
Voldemort pondered a second. “I will give you eight people to save. Name them now.”

“Uh…” Names ran through Harry’s head at light speed, but his mouth fell behind. “Hermione Granger. Ronald Weasley. Luna Lovegood. Neville Longbottom. Molly Weasley…” He slowly realized he was running out of space.

*Only eight? Who else really needs it?*

“Ginny Weasley…Remus Lupin…”

Voldemort anticipated hearing Harry say his own name to ensure he wouldn’t be harmed. *That would be the intelligent thing to do.* He didn’t mind.

Harry shook his head as he made a hard decision mentally. Guilt washed over him immediately.

“My, Harry,” Voldemort said, sizing Harry up. “I suppose you really do not have anything up your sleeve. How idiotic.”

Two Death Eaters came back, Luna and her wand in tow. She was quickly handed over to Harry.

“Hello Harry. What’s all this?” she greeted, the same dreamy stare in her eyes as if it were a normal, casual conversation and she was not covered in dirt, blood, and sweat.

“I’m saving you, Luna,” Harry said, grabbing her arm and disapparating.

They appeared in the field outside the Burrow, and Harry let go of Luna to begin running to the house, Luna not far behind.

Upon hearing the crack, the Weasley family ran outside to find Harry and Luna heading towards them.

“Harry!” Hermione ran to him, hugging him once she reached him. “Harry, we were worried sick.” She pulled back, a relieved smile on her face. “How did you get Luna back?”

By then, the group was around them. They all patted Harry on the back and asked Luna how she felt. Ron came up and clapped Harry on the back hard.

“Must ‘ave battled them, huh?” he said with a chuckle.

“But he doesn’t have any scratches,” Hermione commented, her relieved face gone as she noticed the expression on Harry’s face.

Ron was starting to sense it too. “Must’ve been some…terrible guards then.”

“It wasn’t a fight,” Harry admitted quietly. Everyone around him fell into silence. “I…made an agreement. I’m sorry. I promise this whole thing will be over shortly. You’re safe now.”

Fear prickled at their eyes.

“Harry,” Hermione said carefully. “What are you talking about? What agreement?”

Harry sighed. “I’m really sorry.” In an instant, his wand was out, and before any of them could stop
him, he was gone.

Voldemort was growing impatient. The deal was that he return quickly. Of course, not even a minute had passed, but it seemed like so much longer.

The uncomfortable stiffness subsided as Harry arrived with a crack. He faced the opposite direction from where Voldemort stood, but was so close.

On a whim, Voldemort placed his hands onto Harry’s shoulders and whispered into his ear, “And now, you belong to me, Boy-Who-Lived.”
Harry’s POV:

I passed out. It was completely cowardly (not to mention un-manly), but I couldn’t help it. I was so shocked from what Tom did. I mean, what kind of dark lord walks up behind his enemy, put his hands on him, and whispers “You belong to me” in his ear? His voice was so deep and possessive… I thought I was going to be chained up in a sex dungeon or something.

After that, I really wished I hadn’t woken. I’d rather he had just killed me while I couldn’t fight back, but my “luck” said otherwise. I slowly came into consciousness, the memory of what happened and shame already filling my head, and I almost groaned.

Surely, he has some sort of torture lined up for me. Hopefully not the sexual kind. Bloody hell…

After much convincing, I finally got my eyes open, only to feel my head begin to reel again with what I saw. I wasn’t in any sort of dungeon or cell. There weren’t chains around my wrists and ankles, but dark green blankets and a black pillow by my head. I slowly ran my fingers over it.

It’s silk. Silk pillow case. I ran my fingers along the sheets. More silk.

My eyes moved from the bed I was in to the room around me. It was decorated in a gothic style with dark green accents here and there, like on the curtains, bed, and lamps. The rest of the room was black. A classic black desk sat to my left with black bookcases filled to the brim beside it. A comfy black and gray cushioned chair was on the other side of the room next to a door slightly open, a silver-framed mirror barely visible through it. Another door was to its right and was sealed.

Bloody hell…I swear to Merlin, if I’m naked…

Finally, I looked down at myself.

I was wearing dark gold and red silk sleeping pants and button-down shirt. They were amazingly comfortable (and pretty manly, I’d say). The scars I had collected on my hand were gone. I rolled up my sleeves and lifted up my shirt, only to find those scars were gone, too.

Bloody hell…

I touched my forehead with panic, only to breathe a sigh of relief.

No, not all of them.

The lightning mark was still there, and it felt like nothing about it had changed.

Well, let’s see what all there is to see, then.
I flung my legs off to the side of the bed and stood abruptly to walk over to the closed door, only to begin seeing black spots in my vision and feeling my head go dizzy.

**Bloody hell.**

I fell to my knees before I could gain a grip on my vision and dizziness. I shut my eyes tightly, trying to banish the black spots, when I heard the door open.

**Bloody hell.**

When I opened my eyes, Tom looked down on me. His eyes were still red, like when he had that snake face, but his body was distinctly young, maybe slightly older than I was.

“Good morning, Harry,” he said cheerfully. “Did you have a pleasant rest?”

*I’ve gone mad,* I thought. **Bloody fucking hell.**

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**Voldemort’s POV:**

I was in my study when I heard the distinct pop of a house elf.

“Master, Mr. Potter is awake,” a squeaky voice told me.

“Well, I have noticed that you may need some explanation as to what exactly is occurring. Maybe you will even need some…” I continued to watch him. He stared at his hands incredulously, as if they were dragon’s claws instead of hands. “…time to gather yourself.” I raised an eyebrow. He was clearly losing his mind. “I will tell you after breakfast. I will have a house elf bring your food to your room, so you don’t hurt yourself upon seeing the rest of my manor.”

Harry’s breath caught a moment, before he shook his head and replied, “Wait…*my* room?”

I sighed. *Do not force me to repeat myself, you brat. Yes, your room. I picked it specifically to suit you. I figured your time with Muggles would suggest you were comfortable with smaller rooms, therefore your room is the smallest.*
Harry chuckled humorlessly. “Small room. Yeah. My room was a cupboard under the stairs. This is like a mansion compared to that…” he muttered, looking over his arms as if trying to find something.

I was almost disturbed, either by the fact that Harry had spent a portion of his life sleeping in a cupboard or that Harry had uttered such a personal detail to me. I quickly dismissed it, convincing myself that it was his disorientation getting the better of him.

“Sadie!” A pop came from behind me. “Bring Harry’s breakfast here for him to eat.”

“Yes, Master,” the elf said before popping away.

My eyes had never left Harry, who was rolling up his sleeping pants and staring at his legs in awe.

“Your clothes are by the sink in the lavatory,” I said hastily before exiting the room.

**Harry’s POV:**

After Tom left, I was still shocked. There wasn’t a single thing about the situation that didn’t scream *alternate reality*. All the scars on my entire body were gone, with the exception of my lightning mark. My usually crazy hair was somewhat controlled, and I had a room in Tom’s manor.

*There’s no way this is happening. I must have hit my head too hard on something. I am actually in a dark, cold dungeon, and this is just some spell Tom is using to confuse me. And it’s working.*

I was obviously mad.

A house elf popped into my room, a large tray in her hands.

“Here be your breakfast, Mr. Harry Potter,” she squeaked. She set the tray down on the edge of the bed and popped away.

I was almost scared to eat. *Is it poisoned or something?* I crawled to it and looked it over. *Does it really matter if it’s poisoned?* I was as starving as Ron when he was late for breakfast. Really, I couldn’t have cared less about poison. *If Tom wants to kill me with poison, who am I to argue?* With that, I took my first bite. It was amazing, to say the least. I dug right in, not caring what it might be, or what was in it.

After I finished, which was no time at all, I tried standing again. One foot was steady on the lush black carpet, and I grabbed onto the bed for support before placing the other foot down and standing completely. I was steady, no dizziness, so I walked over to the loo. It very much matched the room, with the silver-framed mirror over the porcelain sink, a shower with a glass door and textured black tiles inside, a porcelain toilet, and dark green towels over the top of the shower door. My clothes were there, of course, by the sink. I picked them up, noticing they were cleaned, as if I had never walked through that muddy forest to meet Tom. I decided not to change, though, and went back to the room to sit back on the luxurious bed.

*If Tom said he picked this room for me because it was the smallest, then why on Earth did he give me silk sheets, a glorious bathroom, and beautiful (but awfully Slytherin) décor? He couldn’t think that this was the life I used to have, did he? Even Hogwarts isn’t this nice.*

I sighed.

*I suppose I’ll have to wait for an explanation.*
Voldemort’s POV:

I had finished breakfast and was contemplating going to talk to Potter. He certainly needed some time to let his situation fully sink in. However, I was not so certain that was all he needed.

Is a therapist in order? No, no…I’ll talk to him. I let go of a large breath, preparing myself before I stood and headed towards his room.

When I opened his door, I found him sitting on the edge of the bed, eyes glancing about the room before they fell on me.

“How was breakfast, Harry?”

For a moment, he did not answer, his face a confused mess. “Delicious,” he said at last, “Thank you.” He looked away from me and scanned the room once more.

The air was terribly awkward. Harry Potter, who is somewhat of my prisoner, just thanked me. My stomach began to feel uncomfortably light, as if its contents were rolling.

“I suppose you are waiting for me to explain the situation…and why you are still alive.” He looked back to me and nodded calmly. If I thought he was mad before, he seemed even more so. He was calm in my presence, and it was unsettling. And slightly irritating.

“Hmmm,” I began, pushing back my distaste. “I never intended to kill you. Well, not never, but not recently. I have realized that you would be a greater asset to me alive and on my side than if you were dead.”

I glanced over him, attempting to measure his reaction. He looked better than he had in the forest. His color was back, his hair was not a complete mess, and his eyes had their original luminance to them without most of the redness. The sleeping clothes I had given him were perfect, not only for his body, but his personality. He was now the red and gold in a room of green and black, both figuratively and literally.

“Being my captive does not mean I will kill you, Harry,” I continued when he said nothing. I was careful to use his name, as that is a way to build trust. “It means we will become allies.”

At the last word, his mouth dropped open. Hopefully, he is not becoming more unstable…but maybe that is more to my advantage at this point.

I smirked. “I no longer want to see us as enemies. That is why you have this room, and not a prison cell. I know you think you sighed up for an easy way to get away from your problems…” I watched as he noticeably winced, “…but I’m going to make sure that you face them all head-on, as a Gryffindor should.”

With that, I left, leaving Harry to contemplate my offer, which I would not let him refuse.
Harry’s POV:

It was later in the day. I honestly hadn’t left the room at all, or even taken the time to change my clothes, so I didn’t know what time it was. I felt like my world had been turned upside down, almost as much as it had when I learned about this war, or even when I learned I was a wizard.

Still, something is different about this. I can live with Tom not trying to kill me (no pun intended), but being his ally? I would be on the opposite side of the war, pitted against my friends. Would I have to hurt them? Was I mad to even be considering Tom’s offer? Probably. There’s no denying that. Even so…we’d definitely win the war. I wouldn’t have to be “The Savior” anymore…

I stood from the bed and debated what to do. Without knowing the time of day, my options were probably limited.

Is Tom awake? Is there anyone else in this manor that I needed to worry about? I wasn’t sure.

I shrugged and walked over to the door Tom had appeared through earlier. It opened into a long hallway with a few doors scattered here and there, and a large arch that led somewhere else, possibly another hallway; it was hard to tell from where I was. The walls were a dark color, and the small balls of light that floated close to the ceiling didn’t provide much visibility for me to see if it was dark green or black, or some other color entirely.

Instinctively, I reached for my wand, only to remember that I was in some sleeping clothes.

I need my other pants.

I went back into the room and went over to my clothes in the bathroom, still piled nice and neat. I patted them, discovering only cloth.

No. Where could it be? Did Tom take it?

“Accio Wand.” I cast, in hopes that my wand was not locked away somewhere. After a moment, nothing happened. I sighed and decided to go out and find it.

I stepped out into the hallway cautiously. I didn’t think there was anything on the floor in my way, but it was difficult to tell in the dim lighting. After many careful steps, the next door in the hallway was to my left. I pressed my ear to the door, listening for the sound of something or someone.

Silence.

I continued this process with the next door, and the next, until I had reached the end of the hallway, close to the arch.

I stopped just before the arch, looking down at the stairs that led into darkness. There were no balls of light past this hallway, though the windows let a vague amount of moonlight into the room, casting just enough light for me to make out a long table with many chairs on its sides. I could hardly make out the details, but one chair at the end seemed larger than the rest. Its silhouette was taller somehow.

I scoffed. I bet that’s Tom’s chair. It would suit him and his I’m-better-than-everyone view on life.
As I continued to look around, I saw that the room holding the table and chairs was huge. There was so much space in it, and nothing to fill the space, from what I could tell. All that empty space and the pale, dim moonlight made the room seem almost…eerie.

Without prompting, my heart began to beat faster.

Should I go down?

The question stewed in my mind—go down the stairs or go back into my room? —though I wasn’t sure which option seemed better.

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Voldemort's POV:

The day had surely been long. I was just finishing it up in my study, reading up on mental instability, when I heard a shuffling outside the door.

It must be Potter.

I brushed it off and continued reading. Not long after, a nagging thought entered my mind.

What if it is not him?

I closed my book slowly, irritated at my own paranoia, and quietly rose from my seat. Just as I did, the shuffling stopped. I held my breath and stilled.

Suspicious.

When the shuffling resumed, and stopped once more, I cast a wandless and wordless silencing charm on my feet and walked to the door, pulling the door open cautiously. There Potter stood, gazing out into the dining/meeting room. He seemed to be concentrating, although I could not tell if it was on the appearance of the room or on his own thoughts. Without making a sound, I closed the door behind me and walked up behind him, slightly to his side.

“Well,” I said suddenly, watching him jump, “you seem to be holding up better than I thought.”

“Bloody hell!” he exclaimed. “Stop sneaking up on me like that.”

I chuckled darkly. “Oh, relax, Harry.”

“How can I relax when you appear out of nowhere behind me when I think I’m alone?” He turned to face me, his gaze fixed on the doors of the hallway. “Where did you come from, anyway?”

I looked him over. He was still in his sleeping clothes, but I made no mention of it—I concluded that he needs more time before he was to return to normal. A slight bit of pride rose within my chest as I noted that he had not immediately gotten rid of the clothes once I told him where his normal ones were.

Well, I suppose they do fit him rather nicely.

“I was in my study,” I answered truthfully. “I heard you come down the hallway, so I thought you might need something. Do you?”

“Yes,” he answered, rolling back his shoulders and standing up taller. “What did you do with my wand?”
My eyebrows rose before my eyes narrowed.

*Are we alone?* There was no way for me to be sure. *Surely, he is trying to escape. How bold, and how stupid.* Instead of risking being overheard, I ensured no one else could understand what we said.

"/Trying to get away, Potter?/ I hissed. /It is not wise to talk of such things. They will think you are trying to escape./"

Potter looked around us with wide, cautious eyes. /I was honestly trying to be able to see better in this dark hallway. Is that a crime?/ he challenged.

"I suppose not," I answered simply. I still did not trust his intentions. "However, do not get any ideas. Your wand is in a safe place, I assure you."

Harry rolled his eyes and looked out to the room. With that, I turned and walked back into my study, intent on reading one more chapter before the night grew too late.

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**Harry’s POV:**

*Paranoid, are we?*

I rolled my eyes. Tom’s reaction was more than I expected. Although I hadn’t expected him to say, “Oh yeah, here’s your wand back. Safe and sound. And let me teach you some wonderful curses for escape, and might I say you look marvelous today, Harry,” I hadn’t expected him to be so touchy about it.

*Using Parseltongue? What, are people listening in? Who else would be in the Dark Lord’s manor this late?*

I took in a breath and turned to ask to Tom another question, but he was already gone, back to wherever he had come from.

*Figures…I just wanted to know what time it was.*

I sighed and went back to my room. I was starting to get a bit tired, so maybe it was pretty late in the evening.

*I suppose Tom’s reaction is to be expected. My question did sound an awful lot like I was trying to escape. If I had my wand, would I try to escape? He said I was his captive, but also that we weren’t enemies any more. What did that mean?*

I got into the bed, being too distracted by my thoughts to notice I had even entered my room already. Except where I sat, the sheets were now neatly tucked in around the sides, as if I had not spent nearly the entire day in it.

*Tom wants me as his ally but doesn’t trust me with my wand? Or even asking about my wand? Don’t allies trust one another? Do I trust him?*

I pondered the thought. It had felt like a long time since our deal, but it really hadn’t been.

*In so little time, I’ve trusted him so much. Probably more than is healthy. I trusted he wouldn’t kill me, even if I wanted him to. I ate the food he gave me, wore these clothes, slept in this bed, believed what he said…that’s a lot of trust to give to an ex-arch-enemy.*
I sighed. He hadn’t given me any reason not to trust him. I wondered if I had given him any reason not to trust me or if he just didn’t trust anyone.

Suddenly, I wasn’t tired anymore. My brain was awake and busy with thoughts of Tom and I no longer being enemies. I decided to shower; I had been in these clothes all day, after all. Plus, I need something to relax me.

I got up and went to the bathroom and turned on the shower. It was bare, save for an empty couple of shelves under the shower head. I looked around the bathroom for some toiletries I might use—I only really need soap. When I didn’t find any, I turned back to the shower, about to turn it off in defeat, only to discover that the shelf now had shampoo, conditioner, soap, and a rag: everything I normally use to shower.

Hmmm. Neat little trick.

As the room grew steamy and the mirror fogged up, I was careful to remove the silk sleeping clothes that had begun to cling to my body. Once inside the shower, the nearly burning water ran down my body, I could feel my muscles release the stress they held. As I grew less tense, I also felt the wave of repressed emotions wash over me: uncertainty, depression, anxiety, anger, restlessness.

This has been so much to take in in so little time…

I longed for pure and utter happiness, even if only for a few moments. My thoughts ran to third year, when Professor Lupin was teaching me the Patronus Charm. Think of your happiest thought, he had said, even if it’s not real. I always told myself that when I needed some cheering up. I searched through my mind for a good memory. There were so many, now, and I was thankful for that. I ran through the feelings of them all: excitement, friendship, a sense of belonging. I found another, too, yet I didn’t remember when it happened.

Maybe I’m making it up.

I was completely relaxed, asleep maybe, with warm, strong arms around me. They held me close, letting me hear and feel the beat of their heart. Our breathing was even and uniform, and our bodies created a warmth I’m not sure I had ever felt before. It was pure and utter safety, something completely foreign to my usual life. My mind felt lighter, like any possible worry was gone from my mind.

I grabbed the soap and proceeded to wash my body, spending time to focus on each part as I washed it. My arms and chest, smooth and new without all the scars; my legs and back, stronger than they once were to hold me up straighter and with more confidence. I was washing my upper thigh when I brushed my member ever so lightly, a ripple of pure ecstasy shooting through me like a shiver. It was an amazing, forgotten feeling.

I gently set down the soap, steadied myself with one hand, and wrapped the fingers of the other around my now growing arousal. I slowly pumped, savoring every sensation that came from it. The warmth and steam of the room brought a flush to my cheeks and my heart began to pound. I started pumping faster, my cock now fully hardened and alert to every movement my hand made. A small gasp escaped my mouth when I felt a wave approaching. And I was there again: safe in the arms of someone, held close, our bodies in sync. My fist pumped harder, and my head fell back. It crashed over me then, blurring my vision and causing my back to arch. I rode out the feelings and continued to stroke, black on the edges of my vision.

The feelings faded out, and I was left panting heavily, a big smile on my lips and a sticky substance on my hand. I quickly washed off the evidence and finished my shower.
Once I got out of the shower and dried off with a towel, I was suddenly exhausted. I yawned and felt the weight of my body being pulled down, as if I was heavier. A toothbrush and paste had appeared by the sink, and I brushed my teeth before turning to put on the sleeping clothes I wore earlier. Except, they weren’t on the floor. I looked around the bathroom, only to find they weren’t anywhere else in there, either. I went to the door and opened it slightly to find sleeping clothes folded nicely on the bed. I went over to them hurriedly, the cold licking at the warmth of my body. As I was putting them on, I noticed these were different from the last ones. These were a deep, rich gold with a black pattern on them. The silk made the golden color more three-dimensional, almost molten.

*I rather like these, too.*

I picked up my normal clothes, which sat on the bed beside where the sleeping clothes had been, and placed them on the black chair. After that, I did not hesitate to plop into the bed. Thoughts were on my mind, as they always were, but these weren’t the usual ones.

*What am I going to do now? My entire existence revolved around defeating Voldemort, but now I’m Tom’s ally.*

I pondered just exactly how I worded that. In my mind, Voldemort and Tom were two different people. Voldemort was the evil villain who killed my parents and had been trying to kill me since then. Tom, however, was the man who had taken me away from my friends (which is good. I can’t hurt them now), given me a room to stay in, and wants me alive so I can be his ally. It hurt that Tom didn’t trust me when I so clearly trusted him, but I would never in a million years trust Voldemort. He had a snake face and rose from a cauldron—it was easy to villainize him. But Tom had a sculpted face and was human. He wanted me to be comfortable.

*Did Tom see himself that way? I suppose he could. But who did he see as the good guy and who did he see as the bad guy?*

These thoughts spun around in my head, growing more and more distant until they grew tired and let my mind slip into sleep.
Possession

Harry’s POV:

The sky was dark and the ground beneath me was damp between my toes. I couldn’t tell what else was going on besides the event happening before my eyes. Snape and Draco stood in front of me. It had been Hogwarts before, but now it was just blackness, just space. Dumbledore stood to my left a ways, mouthing words I couldn’t understand. Then, he was beside me, his voice finally reaching my ears in a whisper.

Harry…Harry, please…

Then Snape raised his wand, his face cast in shadows, and green light shot from it, straight into Dumbledore. His body tipped over and fell into the darkness that surrounded us all. Suddenly, I was falling, too: a never-ending plunge to the unforgiving Earth that wasn’t there. From above, I could see Snape and Draco glaring down at us, smiling wickedly. Just as their faces disappeared, I could feel the ground growing closer, but when we hit it, we tore through it and into a grave.

I looked around, then, but Dumbledore was gone; it was only me in this grave. A shadowy figure came, looking down at me, and placed the Elder Wand in my folded hands. Piles of dirt flung itself over the sides and onto me, beginning to cover me. The wand grew scorching hot in my hands, but I couldn’t move them. Soon enough, the dirt covered me completely, leaving me surrounded by darkness and space again. The wand grew so heated that it began to burn through the skin on my hands. I watched as the flesh it touched melted and crumbled away while the rest surrounding it caught fire. Instead of orange flames, these were pure molten silver. The flames ate away at my body, destroying it slowly.

Unexpectedly, the wand floated out of my hands and into the air just above me. I reached out for it with a burned, shaking, skeleton-esque hand, but it was jerked away, landing in a bone-pale, slim hand. Voldemort appeared out of the darkness and smiled. With an evil chuckle, he lifted it to the sky and shot out a bolt that shook the whole world.

I was in the sky, then, watching the world be engulfed in the silver flames. In the distance, I saw Hermione and Ron in a small clearing free from the flames, huddled together to avoid the heat. Their mouths were opened in horror. I couldn’t hear their screams, but I knew what they said.

This is all Harry’s fault! Harry did this! How could you, Harry?!

The darkness returned, and a scream filled the room: my scream. My head ached sharply, and my face was sweaty. I reoriented myself to the room slowly by feeling around and realized I was on the floor by the bed, curled up. Tears poured from my eyes and I continued to scream hoarsely. It had been a nightmare, I knew, but the feelings were as real as ever. They all blew up inside me, and I couldn’t stop screaming.

Through the darkness, something grabbed me. I kicked it off me then turned and clawed at the floor, searching for something to throw. More tears fell down my cheeks and neck, making the breeze in the room feel colder and causing the small hairs on my neck to stand. The hands grabbed me again around my arm, and before I could try to rip myself from them, a light began to glow behind me.

Before me, I saw the legs of the bedside table just out of the reach. I turned my body over and looked to the one trying to grab me: Tom. A ball of light hovered by his shoulder, lighting half of his face. His red eyes stared at me tiredly, the one cast in light shining boldly, as if it itself were emitting light.
I relaxed, then, closing my eyes and laying on the floor limply. With a sigh, Tom pulled me towards him, putting his one arm around my shoulders and the other under my knees. I could feel the warmth of his chest and the beat of his heart as he lifted me back into the bed. My fingers curled around the folds of his shirt, keeping me to him as he tried to let me go.

I was safe. I wasn’t sure I had ever felt it before. I didn’t know if it was something Tom had given me, or a spell he had cast on me, but I let it happen. Before my cheeks even had the chance to dry, I had fallen back into a dream-less sleep.

I woke gradually, rubbing at my eyes and throwing off the heavy blankets that threatened to drown me in sweat. I opened my eyes, my vision blurry. For a moment, I forgot why.

Right. Bad eyes. I wear glasses.

I felt around to my left and to my right, searching for a table but finding only bed. I scooted to my left, leaning out to reach the bedside table, but missed and fell off the bed, knocking my head on the table instead. I rubbed my head for a moment before placing my hand on the table and finding my glasses.

Thank Merlin.

As I put them on, my mind began to wake. I looked around the room, finding the position oddly familiar.

Did that really happen or was it just a dream? I woke up in bed, not on the floor. But…did Tom put me back onto it?

The thought only lasted a moment before I shook my head.

There’s no way it happened. Tom wouldn’t care if I was having a nightmare. It was just a dream.

I slowly stood up and headed to brush my teeth, pondering it all the while.

If it was a dream, why would I dream something like that? Tom holding me? Me clutching to him?

I couldn’t even begin to process it.

I continued to get ready for the day, my thoughts muddled and confusing. After I was dressed in my normal clothes, I walked to the door that led to the hallway and opened it. I had to squint for a moment as the brightness of the lights hit me unexpectedly. They were at least ten times brighter than they were the day before.

Must be the time of day, I thought, blinking rapidly as my eyes adjusted.

As I made my way into the hallway, I noticed that the walls were a dark green and black pattern that seemed to be millions of tiny lines twisting themselves into each other.

I arrived at the arch only to find that the spacious room below was much grander than I expected. The long table was ornate with a design in deep wood under a layer of glass. The chairs were carved and polished, colored the same as the table, and regal. At one end of the table was Tom, sitting in what was practically a throne. Under the table and chairs was a rug with patches of various designs in grey and silver and pale blue all woven together. The floors were some sort of white marble with small streaks of glittering black stone in it. I looked down and my bare feet were on the softest black carpet I had ever felt. I wiggled my toes in it with a smile.
“Good morning, Harry,” Tom called from the table between bites of his breakfast. The echo rang through the whole room even though it seemed that he hadn’t spoken loudly.

“Morning, Tom.” I made my way down the stairs, then, still taking in the entirety of the room. The walls were painted with a dark grey texture that reminded me of a sponge, and the ceiling was a metallic silver that shone incredibly. “I didn’t realize this room was so decorated.”

A grin came onto Tom’s face.

“Yes. It’s amazing what you can see when there is light in the room.”

When I reached the bottom of the stairs, Tom gestured for me to sit at the chair beside him. As I looked at it, it transformed from a wooden chair that matched all the other ones around the table into one that was a simpler version of Tom’s.

I sat down, marveling at the secret comfort the straight-backed chair provided, and a house elf appeared, setting a plate in front of me and then disappearing without a word. I ate happily, savoring the taste of whatever egg dish was in front of me (it looked fancy but was definitely delicious). I was about halfway done when Tom finished his plate. The elf returned, took his plate, and popped away again.

“Harry,” Tom began, his calm face falling into a neutral expression, “I would like to discuss something with you.”

I looked up from my plate. Maybe last night really did happen and he wants to talk about it?

“Uh, okay.”

“If we are to be allies, I’m sure you need to hear what that means and what we plan to accomplish.”

I sighed inwardly. So not about last night, then.

“That would be…helpful.”

Tom nodded once. “Excellent. There will be a meeting later today with my Death Eaters. I would like for you to join us.”

My eyes grew, and I could feel my mouth hang open. My fork slipped from between my suddenly stiffened fingers, the clang from it hitting the plate breaking me from my shock. I picked it up and carefully placed it on the side of the plate before turning my attention back to Tom. “Um…What?!”

Tom’s jaw clenched. “Must I repeat myself?”

“No,” I replied too quickly. “No…I’m just…a meeting with your Death Eaters? That’s…” I couldn’t find the right words; “ridiculously dangerous” and “idiotic” didn’t seem to fit quite right.

“You will be wearing a black cloak with a hood, like those you have seen us wear,” he explained. “Not many will know it is you. They will only know that you are a special addition to our group. The ones who know are the ones who accompanied me to our trade. They are my most loyal.”

The thought was unnerving. It was like I was becoming a Death Eater. I wouldn’t have to get a Dark Mark, would I? I don’t know if I can live with that...

“Harry,” Tom’s voice said, a bit softer than it had been before. He must have sensed my stress.

I turned to look at him.

“Do not panic,” he continued, his voice returning to the neutral, cold tone it had before. “I assure you
nothing will happen that would put you in danger.”

Even though that wasn’t what I was worrying about, I nodded and tried to calm down. Tom wouldn’t make me do that. That would be too much to ask. Suddenly, my appetite was gone. I picked up my plate and asked, “Where is the kitchen?”

“Oh, do not bother cleaning up. I have house elves. Sadie!”

Sadie the house elf popped in, took my plate right from my hands, and popped away. I sighed.

“Well, what do I do until the meeting?”

Tom rolled his eyes.

“I’m not your babysitter, Harry. Just don’t go snooping around my manor.”

He rose and walked over to one of the hallways that branched off the large room, disappearing around the corner.

I decided to go back upstairs, but not to my room quite yet. I stood by the arch looking into the hallway I had become familiar with. There were several doors, but I didn’t know what would be behind them. I walked over to the closest door and turned its handle, finding that it didn’t turn all the way.

Locked.

I walked over to the next door and tried that one.

Also locked.

Then, I tried the next door, and the next one, and all the other doors.

Bloody fucking locked.

I sighed and gave up, walking over to my door, defeated. When I turned its handle, it was locked, too.

What? This is my room! It can’t be locked.

I put my back against the door and slid down to the floor with a huff.

If only I had my wand. A quick Alohamora could easily get me out of this mess.

Not having a wand was definitely taking its toll on me. I was practically powerless, with the exception of the very few wandless spells I knew.

Can I cast Alohamora wandless? Hmm…

I stood, facing my door, eyes closed, and focused on my magic. I could almost feel my magic in my blood, and sometimes it helped to imagine I really did.

“Alohamora.”

My magic jumped to the door handle, but did not unlock the door. It soon retracted, and I sighed. I concentrated once more on feeling my magic.
“Alohamora.”

My magic, once again, jumped to the door handle. This time, I took control of it and pushed it into
the lock like a key. I focused on turning it for several minutes without success. I was about to give up
when I heard a small click. When I turned the handle, it turned all the way. I smiled and stepped
inside.

Upon looking at the room, I noticed that nothing had changed. The bed hadn’t even been made.

*I didn’t close the door when I left. It wasn’t the house elves, since the bed isn’t made. So, who the
hell closed my door and locked me out?*

“You passed my lock, I see.”

I turned. Tom was now in his hooded cloak, glaring at me with his red eyes. On his arm hung
another cloak.

“Why was my door locked?” I asked, voicing my defiance.

“As I recall, this is my manor, and therefore that door is mine. I locked it because I do not want you
snooping.”

*What? That doesn’t make any sense. “Snooping? I was in that room all day yesterday. If there was
any snooping to do, I would have done it already.”*

Tom pulled the cloak off his arm and extended it out to me. “You were unfit to even consider the
idea of snooping yesterday. See how this cloak fits.”

I went inside my room and closed the door hard behind me. I didn’t need the privacy; I just wanted
the satisfaction of slamming the door. If he doesn’t want me to snoop, why not take out the things in
my room that he doesn’t want me to see? Honestly…

I pulled the cloak over my head, getting lost in its vastness for a moment before I finally found the
head hole. The cloak was huge, to say the least.

*It’s practically falling off me.*

I reached for the door to open it only to find that the sleeve engulfed my hand.

*Who is this made for? A giant?*

I pulled on the sleeve with my other sleeve-covered hand until I could see my fingers again, then
opened the door.

“I think it may be a bit big for me,” I said to Tom sarcastically.

Tom nodded seriously, either missing my sarcasm or ignoring it. “*Reducio.*”

The cloak immediately shrunk about ten sizes and fit me perfectly.

“Better,” Tom said. “Now.” He turned and lifted his hood over his head. “The meeting will be
starting soon.”

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**Voldemort’s POV:**
I made my way back to the large meeting room with Potter following close behind me, stumbling down the first few stairs before he discovered how to lift the front of the cloak so he would not step on it. I did my best to pretend it had not happened. Just as our feet hit the marble floor, Lucius, Narcissa, and Draco appeared. I made my way to my chair and motioned for Harry to take the matching one beside me that I transfigured for him that morning. He sat, a smile growing on his face as he sat back. He found it comfortable, I assumed. A quick wandless and wordless spell assured that Harry’s eyes and nose were covered in a dark shadow. I cast the same spell over my own face.

Lucius looked to me and bowed his head in greeting, then made his way to his usual place. His son sat to his right and his wife to his left. Before long, my Death Eaters began to appear, some together, but most separate. The table lengthened, as usual, to accommodate everyone. Once everyone was seated, it was quiet.

“My dear followers,” I began with a purr, “I have, today, a special addition to our cause.” I motioned to Harry with my right hand. “His name is…” I paused and looked to Harry. His face was hidden, but I could feel the panic welling up at the very back of my mind. “Aureum Serpens. He will be working privately with me to assure we are successful, but he needs to learn of what we must do, and how it will be done. As I’m sure you know, this is something words cannot convey. How do we offer Mr. Serpens this knowledge?”

Lucius immediately spoke up. “We send him off to experience it.”

“We don’t want him to be scarred, Lucius,” Severus’s usual monotone voice replied. “Such events are…traumatizing.”

“My Lord, if I may say, I think if Mr. Serpens is strong enough to want to join, then he would be strong enough to survive it,” another voice said from farther down the table.

“Survive, yes, but we don’t want him to merely survive,” Severus said. “We want him to become strong, and he very well may not afterwards.”

Through narrowed eyes, I scanned over Severus’s expression. *Reserved. Calm in appearance but with the occasional twitch of an eyebrow. He knows something and is keeping it from us…*

While I was busy considering, the table broke into noisy discussion. Through it all, Lucius and Severus were the only voices that mattered, but the volume rose, and they were drowned out almost entirely. I only caught pieces of the arguments.

“He is powerful!”

“But it is a tradition!”

“How is that any different from…”

My ears pounded, and I could feel my rage rise in my chest.

*How dare they.*

/*He is mine!/ I hissed.*

The room silenced at my snake tongue. Everyone looked back to me and settled.

“I shall decide his fate, you incompetent fools,” I said, dangerously quiet. My eyes met with theirs one at a time like a predator picking out its prey. “For now, we have other matters to attend to.”
Harry’s POV:

I really couldn’t listen to anything for the rest of the meeting. This was one of those memories you never forget, like when you move somewhere new or get married, but I couldn’t figure out if it was a good memory or bad. My head was reeling with so many thoughts, I couldn’t focus (not that the meeting seemed any type of interesting). I didn’t even know what to think anymore. The world around me was moving, but I couldn’t manage to even try to move along with it.

“Harry,” I could hear Tom’s soft voice say, “the meeting has ended.”

The words made it to my ear, but my mind didn’t process them. They were just sounds, almost as if they were in a foreign language. I tried moving my legs and my arms, but nothing was responding. Paralyzed and panicked, I fell back into my nightmare, falling into the darkness that never seemed to end.

**Tom!**

I tried to speak, yell, make any sort of noise that would bring me back to the world, but I just kept falling. Everything was dark, but I could remember the light of the meeting room, the shine of the white marble floors, the bright bold red of Tom’s eyes as he hissed in Parseltongue. I didn’t want this darkness, this journey that ended with me in a grave while the world caught fire.

“Harry…” someone said. It was so far away. I could barely hear it over the rush of the wind and the pounding of my heart.

“Harry, you…”

The words faded out and I was left alone. I hated that word. *Alone*. It always seemed to describe how I felt, recently.

Hermione and Ron are my friends, but I push them away. The Weasley’s, my adoptive family, almost, mean too much to me to be worried with my troubles. They were already going to fight for me in the war. Even if I did bother to tell them, my troubles were trivial compared to the war. I’d never be able to share that much about myself anyway.

*I’d always be alone.*

Through the helplessness I felt—the coldness in my heart and the tips of my fingers, the emptiness in my chest, the chaos of my mind—I took that word and forced myself to logically think something.

*Things I hate in this world:*

-This bloody fucking war
-Being the Boy-Who-Lived/Savior/Chosen One
-Uncle Vernon
-Being Haunted by dead people I care about
-Being alone
After seizing that much control, I pushed further and further until my mind was back in the present. Tom was in front of me now, his eyes level with mine. I looked into those eyes—his eyes. They were the same when he stood over Ginny’s limp body in the Chamber of Secrets, when he rose out of that cauldron in the cemetery, when we battled in the Ministry of Magic, in memories of a little boy at an orphanage, and when he appeared in the Forbidden Forest not too long ago. They were eyes I had seen a million times in my nightmares and, more recently, my dreams. They stared back into my own, their luminance turning my entire world red. They were Voldemort’s eyes, but also Tom’s. Those ideas conflicted in my mind, but I knew, in the end, he was always Tom. He understood me, and I understood him. We were linked not just by our minds, but by memories and prophecy. Our only difference was our nature, and even some of that was the same, just like our wands.

“Harry.”

My mind was back in the world again. I was lying down in my bed, and Tom was sitting in a chair brought up to the side. I sat up slowly, my hand rising to meet my aching head. Snape was standing on the other side of the bed, potion in hands. He removed the hand on my head (since the other was steadying me), and placed a small bottle in it. Without caring to ask what it was, I drank it all without even tasting it.

I looked to Snape. “That was a pain reliever, right?”

Snape let one eyebrow rise. “No. That was a small dose of Veritaserum.”

What! My mouth hung open a moment. “Veritaserum? What do I need Veritaserum for?”

“Well, Mr. Potter,” he began, using his usual disdain when saying my name, “we are about to have a little heartfelt talk, here.” He sounded almost sarcastic in his monotone. “I do wish for you to join us, My Lord.”

Tom nodded.

“We are concerned for your condition, Mr. Potter,” Snape continued. “Especially after your little episode after the meeting. My Lord and I decided it would be best to discuss it with you, and I am certain you would not do so willingly.” His dark, seemingly unconcerned eyes moved to look over to Tom. “And neither would My Lord, which is why I had a house elf put some Veritaserum into his drink.”

Tom looked to the drink in his hands, then to Snape, eyes narrowed and precise, as if to kill. “Traitor,” he spat.

Snape sighed. “It is for your own good, My Lord.”

I backed up so I could sit upright using my pillows. My stomach felt so light, I could have easily lost my breakfast trying to hold myself up.

Snape summoned a chair and sat next to the bed. “Now, what happened after the meeting, Harry?”

I could feel the Veritaserum working inside me. My mind had the answer ready and through my lips before I could even consider resisting. “I was reliving this nightmare I had where I was falling. Everything was dark. But I never hit the ground. I just kept falling.”

“Describe how you were falling,” Snape said immediately.

“Well, I was almost like a wet feather, falling in that kind of heavy floating kind of way. It was slow
and prolonged.”

He nodded. “So you were…descending?”

“I suppose that is a better word for it. Yeah.”

Snape’s brows drew up and his lips drew together slightly, as if she were taking mental notes. “What caused this?”

“When-” I held my breath and tried to withhold some of my answer. I struggled for a moment, concentrating on the idea that part of the truth was still the truth, but the whole answer came out anyway. “When Tom said I was his, I fell into my own thoughts and kind of lost myself. I had a nightmare last night of Dumbledore dying where, after he started falling, I started…descending,” I corrected. “That’s where I was stuck.”

Snape seemed to ponder a moment, connecting pieces together. In that moment, it occurred to me that he had no idea what Tom had hissed during the meeting until now.

“My Lord,” he said, and Tom looked to him, still silent and murderous. “It seems both of us want to know: what did you mean when you said Harry was…” he paused, “yours?”

Tom’s lips were forced together in a thin line. “Severus…” the serum seemed to force out. His mouth struggled for a moment before he switched languages. /I was taking ownership of my property. You are my captive after all. It is only like me to…/he continued to struggle for a few more seconds before the rest seemed to spew out at the speed of light./…become attached to those who trust me./

The darkness of the room closed in around me.

I can’t do this. Not again.

But Dumbledore trusted me.

“I’m not scared, Harry,” he had said, “I have you here.”

And I was descending again.

Voldemort’s POV:

That traitorous fool...

Anger boiled in my veins, but I remained calm, plotting his punishment. It was true, yes, that I had gotten around Severus hearing what I had to say, but I had no doubt that Harry had heard every word, and that almost seemed to unsettle me more.

Severus did nothing but stare at me. Obviously, he knew Harry heard, and that should be enough.

Why do I not kill him on the spot? I pondered to myself.

He is unfortunately useful to me, another, logical part said. There is no match for his mastery of potions. Killing him would be an awful waste.

A dungeon, then? Torture him in a dungeon.

There are no potion labs in a dungeon, and if there were, he would certainly have something ready to make his way out of one.
Just the torture, then.

Yes, I settled at last, the Cruciatus Curse will do wonders, I hope.

Through the business of my own mind, a terrible emptiness harbored at the back of it.

I turned to Harry, eyes glazed over and slowly drifting closed. “Harry.” He was gone again. I cursed myself. “Severus, he’s…”

I needed not finish my sentence. Severus had already stood with a sigh. He explained earlier that there was nothing to do but wait for him to come back. He supposed it was a stress disorder resulting from traumatic experiences (all my doing, of course). It was enraging that I, a powerful wizard skilled in Legilimency, could be the reason Harry was mentally traumatized but could not help to fix it. For the supposed “Chosen One,” Harry was awfully delicate.

And I was prophesized to match this boy? It did not take much to dissolve him into nothing…

Thoughts of defeating him ran across my mind, but I pushed them aside. I would have him as an ally. He was possibly the only other wizard of any merit.

“Severus,” I said, letting my curiosities take my mind in another direction. “Why are you so against Harry seeing the terrible ways of muggles? I understand he is…less than stable, but it is critical that he join our cause.”

His eyes moved from Harry’s now closed ones to me. “If there were only two wizards in the world who knew the terrible nature of muggles first hand, they would be you, My Lord, and Harry Potter.”

Harry knows? First hand? My eyes narrowed. Is this some sort of trick? “And how, may I ask, does Harry fit into that placement?”

Severus sat back down in the chair, his eyes downcast. “Harry, as you may know, lived with his muggle aunt and uncle after you killed his parents.” His gaze met mine for a but a moment before his eyes fell back down. “His aunt was incredibly jealous of his mother’s magical abilities, and when she was guardian of Harry, she often neglected him, and her husband often beat him. They detested anything having to do with magic and never let Harry know he was a wizard. Even upon receiving his letter to Hogwarts, they tried to keep it from him. He…found out, eventually. Attending Hogwarts only worsened his situation.”

My eyebrows rose. So he knows, then.

“I see…” I began. “Then, it will not be necessary.”

Severus nodded and stood once more. “If I may, My Lord, I wish to borrow your study.”

“Of course, Severus. As long as your purpose has been made clear that you are…” I clamped my lips together, attempting to prevent the words from escaping. I was not asked a question, I should not have to tell the truth. But the thought was no use.

“…going to help Harry.”

Severus smirked. “Of course, My Lord.”

His smirk was infuriating. My face grew hot with anger and my hands itched to grab his throat. But I was no savage.
He had made his way to the door and opened it when I cast a wandless and wordless *Crucio*. He fell to his knees immediately just before the door.

“And Severus,” I said, watching his body begin to quake and collapse onto the floor. “It would be wise if you would not use Veritaserum, or any other potions for that matter, on me without consent.”

I released the curse and Severus’s body stopped convulsing. With much tired, clumsy haste, he stood. “Yes,” he said between gasps for air, “My Lord.” He left the room, then, shutting the door behind him.

A smile drifted to my face before my attention turned to the rustling of Harry in his bed.

“Why the bloody hell did you curse Snape? I thought *I* was the one you’d be cursing.”

I let the humor fade from my face. “He used Veritaserum on me. I detest that.” I looked him over. His coloring was still pale, but he was responsive and moving. That was an improvement. “Explain why you think I would use such a curse on you.” I assumed the serum was still in his veins. I hoped that would prove advantageous.

His answer took a moment, not as if he was struggling not to say it, but as if he were struggling to find an answer at all. “Well, I’m the whole reason this happened in the first place. And…I missed the rest of the conversation.”

“Yes, we were aware. But it was—” *none of your concern*—the serum stopped me from finishing the sentence aloud. It was, truly, every bit of Harry’s concern. He would not have to stand any more horrid muggles. I would ensure it. “We decided to skip a previously traditional explanation. As it turns out, you know as much about our cause as I do. You simply do not know that you do.”

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**Severus Snape’s POV:**

It was well worth it. I would have gone through a hundred Crucius Curses to help Lily. Harry was terribly scarred still, even if I had removed his outer scars. I wanted him to start over, to move on from past pains. As it seemed, however, he and Voldemort had become rather connected through their past.

*I can easily see this getting worse before it gets better, if it ever even gets better.*

I suppose I would have to ensure it did.

I walked down the hallway to the last door. I knew it would be locked, so I said a quiet *Alohamora* before opening the door. I went over to a chair and sat down.

“Bring me all books on ancient rebinding spells and potions.”

After a few moments, a cart wheeled its way over to me, two worn, dusty books on top of it. The thinner one was titled *Potionibus ut ligatis* (*Potions to Bind*). I opened it and flipped until I reached the table of contents.

*Of course.* I sighed. *It’s all in Latin.*

*“Reddo.”*

The notes appeared on the side of the book in English. Anything from blood curses to magical bonding, but none of what I was looking for. I closed the book and tossed it in front of me. The book
stopped before it hit the ground and floated back up to its place on one of the massive, grey bookcases. I opened the other one, titled *Etiam obligare* (To Bind Again) and performed the same spell on it. The table of contents revealed one option that I could use, if altered slightly. I flipped through the pages reading various names before arriving at my destination. “*Tota anima: This potion brings a ripped soul back together, though temporarily. Ingredients needed are...*” I summoned parchment and a quill, copied down the ingredients and brewing instructions precisely, making my own notes alongside, and tossed the book in front of me. As it put itself away, I folded the parchment and placed it in my breast pocket. I had to go back to my lab and make this potion immediately.

I apparated and landed in my lab. After quickly checking and gathering all the necessary ingredients, I summoned my cauldron and began to brew. It definitely had some odd ingredients, which I spent only a moment to question (one, I was certain, did not have magical properties on its own; did it react with something else, I wonder), but I did not have time to dither. It already took long enough to make, and the sooner I got this to the Dark Lord, the sooner I could rest easy.

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**Voldemort’s POV:**

My mind was plagued. I could not banish the thoughts that were swarming it. Not only was I thinking of the future battles that would go on that I had discussed earlier with my Death Eaters, but also Harry. He was so emotional compared to myself. It was odd for him to be so distant, as he was today. It left a cold place in my mind where heat is usually plentiful.

I got into my bed and looked up to the black ceiling above me.

*Harry’s emotions are irritating, at times, but I am finding they are also helpful, in a way. There are not many feelings inside me. I am, quite literally, a body brought back to life. I am alive, but I could not live. I, of course, remember when I had those feelings. I hurt so badly, it was unbearable. This new me would never feel that way. Voldemort cannot feel or have weakness. Voldemort is all strength and power. But...Harry has brought back things I had once forgotten. Harry was so much like Tom.*

I cringed mentally at my idiotic given name.

*It is true. They are vulnerable, weak, and let their feelings control them. In some respects, however, Harry was so different from Tom. Harry knows what love feels like, supposedly. He has felt happiness. There are people he is loyal to and people who are loyal to him. He is able to trust fully. I once thought he was weak and powerless for that, but after that battle we had in the Ministry for Magic...I saw that he used these things to make him stronger, more persistent, determined. He was, dare I say, a real threat to me. Now...*

I growled under my breath. *Enough of this irrational rant. Accio Draught of Peace.*

A potion bottle flew into my outstretched hand. I could see it shimmer faintly in the darkness of my room. After opening it, I drank its contents and my clouded mind cleared. I was relieved.

*Sleep will come easy, now.*

I closed my eyes. There was no difference between the darkness of the room and the darkness of my eyelids. I found this rather calming. I may have even gone to sleep, but the back of my mind tingled. I sighed.

*Of course, Potter would be having another nightmare just when I was about to sleep.*
I debated going to his room, like I had yesterday. There was nothing stopping me except the oddity of what had occurred. I had gone in to wake him, give him some of the potion I had just taken, and tell him to go back to sleep. He thrashed around for a moment, then after I spoke his name, pulled me to him. It was completely unexpected, but then again, that was Harry Potter. I then moved him back onto the bed and let him sleep.

*I suppose, if it lets me sleep…*  

I got out of bed once more and went to my door.

*I will summon the drought to his room if he needs it.*

I walked down the hallway, into the dark meeting room. The shadows that fell across the walls made the room fit the description of a gothic mansion perfectly; fit for a Dark Lord. I turned and went up the stairs and over to Harry’s room at the end of the hall.

*Alohamora.*

The door opened, and I could see the vague outline of Harry in his bed, small whimpers escaping his throat. I walked over and sat on the edge of his bed, wondering what could be causing all of his fear. If it was known, it was likely able to be fixed.

*I can easily find out…*  

I let my mind reach out to Harry’s and was sucked into his dream.

I stood by a lake and the sky was dark; trees on all sides of the lake. On the ground before me was a man. He was familiar, though I could not make out why. He looked grumpy. He had the appearance Bellatrix often wore, almost like they were too crazy to groom themselves. His eyes were closed and over him was a dementor, sucking the soul from his body. I fell to my knees and tried to yell out to him, but my voice was gone. Suddenly, a small blue orb of light—his soul—arose from his mouth. The dementor reached its black, bone-hand out to it, but an eruption of light energy burst from the other side of the lake. The dementor was pushed away. I expected the light to go back into the man’s mouth, but instead, it floated there. I reached a hand out to the light, trying to push it back in, but it passed through my hand. Then, Bellatrix appeared, a familiar wicked smile on her face and wand pointed towards the man. ‘Avala Kedavra,’ she whispered, and a green bolt shot from her wand. I jumped in front of the bolt, but it went through me as well. The man was hit and the light above his mouth disappeared.

I came back just as Harry screamed.

*That was…Sirius Black?*  

Harry thrashed about in his bed, then. I placed my arms on his shoulder, trying to restrain him.

“Harry. Wake up.”

Harry stopped thrashing, but was obviously still asleep. He tried to turn over, but my arms stopped him.

“How!”

Harry’s eyes opened wide. He was panting heavily, and I could feel a warm wetness on my hands—tears. He swallowed hard, then continued panting.
“Harry,” I attempted to soothe. “Calm down.”

I removed my hands from his shoulders, and Harry sat up and wiped his face. “Tom?”

_Why does he call me that? I hate my given name._

“Yes,” I said, making no attempt to correct him on my name.

He sat there, silent for a few moments before finally whispering, ‘I hate nightmares.’

I nodded, though I was sure he could not see. “I can see why. That was a…terribly scarring time.” In that moment, I felt rather awkward. I had felt everything Harry had felt for Sirius Black, but now, I had returned to my…grand lack of emotion.

I could hear Harry intake a sharp breath. “You saw?”

“Yes, I did. That was Sirius Black, correct?”

Harry let out some air. A sigh? A huff? It was difficult to tell.

“Yes. He was my godfather. He was all the family I had left.”

“What of your muggle family?” I asked, only remembering a moment later what Severus had earlier spoke of.

Harry scoffed. “We’re related, but they aren’t family.”

_So Severus was correct._ I nodded absentely, trying to recall a memory of a memory. Being without family was something I understood, as was being treated terribly by muggles. However, Harry felt everything more than I did. Was the hatred I felt for them even a sizable portion for what Harry felt, then?

Harry lifted his knees to his chest and placed his chin on them.

_He is so vulnerable. It seems hardly likely that he will be helpful now. And yet…_

“Tom?”

I snapped from my thoughts. “Yes, Harry?”

He was silent a while. The back of my mind stirred a bit, and I implored further. An odd feeling came over me, then. I couldn’t identify it, exactly, at first, but it was an uncomfortable heat. _Is he… embarrassed?_ I pushed the feeling back into the back of my mind, finding it revolting.

“Did you…this may sound daft, and you can just curse me if you think so, but…did you come into my room yesterday?”

I paused. “Yes,” I answered, voice carefully measured. “I came to give you a calming draught. I could…sense you were not sleeping well.”

“So, I wasn’t dreaming?” His voice was higher, more confused.

“Dreaming?” I inquired. Before, I would have figured, if anything, he’d consider any thoughts of me in his sleep a nightmare.

The tingle at the back of my mind grew warm again. “Nevermind. Can I have the calming draught?”
Accio Draught of Peace. When the bottle landed in my hand, I gave it to Harry, who drank it down easily.

“Now, sleep.”

Harry laid back down, pulling the blankets back over himself. I stood and went over to the door, intending to leave then.

“Goodnight, Tom,” Harry called once I reached the door.

I paused once more. Harry knew how to confuse me well.

‘Pleasant dreams,’ I whispered.

Once I got back into my own bed, I understood what Harry meant when he said he was descending. It was a strange feeling in the stomach that makes your throat burn and your eyes blink and extra time; a feeling that draws you closer to something but never comes as quickly as you expect.
Harry’s POV:

I woke up the next morning unprepared to be awake. That calming draught had worked wonders, but I had the oddest dream I’ve ever had. I only remember something about riding a unicorn named Doug and yelling “Not the chicken!”

I just wish, for once, that I could just sleep and not have nightmares or dreams.

I sighed.

Things I hate in the world:
- This bloody fucking war
- Being the Boy-Who-Lived/Savior/Chosen One
- Uncle Vernon
- Being haunted by dead people I care about
- Being alone
- Having dreams/nightmares

I stayed in bed. Getting up was the last thing I wanted to do. It was one of those mornings where nothing matters. Not getting up. Not eating. Nothing. The mere thought of having to move made me want to groan.

Instead of groaning, I yawned.

Maybe I should at least brush my teeth. Get rid of my morning breath.

I held out my hand and (somewhat) concentrated.

“Accio toothbrush!”

Nothing happened. This time, I really groaned.

Stupid wandless magic.

Still, I didn’t move. The bed was too comfy, and my motivation was too low.

If anyone misses me, they’ll come find me. It’s not like it’ll be hard. I haven’t been anywhere else in this house.

I wanted to roll over and shove my face into the frustratingly comfy, silk pillow, but my arms didn’t want to move, and I wasn’t going to make them. I had no idea what time it was, but it felt like it was late morning on a Sunday, as if tomorrow I would wake at an early hour and be forced to go to classes and whatnot—what’s the point of getting up and being productive today if tomorrow was Monday, or Monday-like?

I yawned again. My whole being felt tired, but I didn’t dare go back to sleep. I didn’t want to dream
again, but the more I thought about staying awake, the more I felt the droopiness of my eyes, the inviting warmth of the bed…

*I really need some sleep...a light rest, a deep slumber, a power nap...I just need sleep...*

I woke up again after another odd dream. I shook my head and pushed away any thoughts that came to mind.

*I definitely don’t want to remember that.*

I yawned again.

*How long was I asleep? Why am I still yawning?*

I still didn’t want to move, so I didn’t. I just laid there, staring at the ceiling. While nothing seemed *quite as invigorating* as the unmoving ceiling (note: sarcasm), I began to think of ways to motivate myself to get up.

*What if there is another Death Eater meeting today? I should go to that. Even if I’m not really a Death Eater...Maybe I could ask someone to explain what I supposedly know about “the cause” that everyone talks about. If they’ll answer...I could work on my wandless magic. Yeah, that’s been working so well (sarcasm again). What if Tom is worrying?*

My thoughts stopped dead in their tracks. I almost laughed.

*The day Tom worries about me—and it not having to do with me escaping or snooping because he doesn’t trust me—is the day Draco and Ron will become best friends. Of course, that will never happen. Never. Not in a hundred years and in another dimension.*

I pressed my lips together in a thin line. I felt my heart sinking in my chest. Was I really thinking about Draco and Ron’s enmity…or Tom’s lack of trust in me? I couldn’t tell which was more unlikely, and that made me feel all the worse.

I wanted Tom to trust me. He told me that he was possessive with people who trust him, like I do, but I couldn’t think of anyone who trusted him like I do.

*Sure, his Death Eaters are loyal and follow him, but they’re also scared of him. They’d betray him in a heartbeat if they thought he were on the losing side. All except maybe Bellatrix.*

I sighed.

*Why do I trust him like that? I’m no Bellatrix. Just knowing that he can kill me at any moment should be a reason enough to not trust him, but somehow...I know he won’t. I mean, he said he wouldn’t. Of course, no one else in the world would believe that. So why do I believe him? We have a mental connection; is it that? Usually my scar hurts around him, but it hasn’t hurt at all, lately. If it had, would I know something was up? It hurt before when he had intentions to kill me. Did that mean something was different now? He said he didn’t want to hurt me, that he wants to be allies. But to be allies, there needs to be some trust, at least. I trust him. I do. So, Tom needs to trust me for this to work.*

I groaned.

*I need to talk to him. Damn.*

With that, I rose from my bed and got ready for the day.
I transfigured my clothes, which were a grey shirt and jeans, into a deep green shirt and darker jeans, and put them on. I tried to fix my unruly hair in the mirror, but as always, it was pointless. I looked at myself. My green eyes were a dark peridot. I expected my skin to be pale from all the time I’ve spent sitting/lying in bed the past few days, but it actually had some color to it. My shirt fit me perfectly, and my jeans made my lean legs a bit slimmer.

Maybe too slim? Whatever.

I didn’t care to wear shoes around the manor that I would probably never leave. I supposed I was ready.

I opened the door to the hallway and walked out. The hallway was lit brightly, but not bright as when I walked out yesterday. Right now, it was more of a soft yellow, giving the hallway a look of mid-morning.

Is it really only mid-morning? No wonder I’ve felt so tired and no one’s bothered to find me. I really need a clock in my room.

I walked down the hallway and down the stairs to the large room. Tom was there, in his chair as normal, eating breakfast.

I really just woke up bloody early and stayed in bed until a decent time.

Mentally shaking my head, I stood next to my chair, but decided not to sit.

Tom glanced at me curiously. “Why don’t you sit, Harry?”

“Because I’m not hungry, and once I sit down, the elves will have a plate of breakfast in front of me before I can refuse it.”

With a nod, Tom sat back and placed his silverware down his empty plate. An elf came and picked it up.

“Would Mr. Harry Potter want breakfast?” the elf, who I recognized as Sadie, squeaked.

“No thank you. I’m not hungry.”

The elf popped away, so I figured it was safe to sit down in my chair. When I did, I faced Tom, who was looking at me expectantly.

“Well?” he asked.

“Well,” I began. “I was just thinking…about this thing…”

Tom rolled his eyes. “What thing?”

“Us being allies,” I answered. “I feel like there’s not enough…” I searched for a word. I figured it would be best if I avoided the word trust. “…cooperation.” Was that a good synonym? Probably not.

Tom raised an eyebrow. “Is that so? And what, exactly, have we not cooperated on?”

My confidence was slipping. “Well…I just feel like we can’t be good allies until both sides are…equal.”

“Equal in what?”
I took a second to breathe and think. *Why is talking so hard?* “Allies need certain things to be mutual, so they don’t break the truce. Things like…like guidelines…and…and trust and—”

“Ah, so this is about trust,” Tom said, sitting back in his chair and looking far too casual for this conversation that was giving me anxiety. “You don’t trust me.”

Looking at his calm face only made my pounding heart beat harder. “Quite the opposite. *You don’t trust me.*”

For a moment, Tom brought his hands together before him and looked at the table. His pause seemed natural, like he was pondering, unlike my earlier one, which felt frantic and awkward.

“What planted that thought in your head?” he asked at last.

I huffed. Words poured out of me faster than I anticipated. “Lots of things. You lock the doors to rooms, even the one I sleep in. You took away my wand and won’t tell me where it is. So far, I haven’t a clue what you are planning to do. And I know you would probably kill me before I am allowed to leave your manor.”

Tom leaned forward, elbows on the table with hands folded in the air. “I trust you as much as you trust me.”

For a moment, I sat in stunned silence. Then, I scoffed. “No, you don’t. I trust you so much more than you trust me. Probably more than is possible from anyone else. I trust most things you say to be true. I took your trade, sleep in your manor, wore your clothes, ate your food. I went to a bloody Death Eater’s meeting, for Merlin’s sake. How much more trust could you ask from your ex-arch enemy?”

Tom just looked at me, face expressionless. I wondered if maybe he was considering what I said, or maybe trying not to be annoyed with my complaint. Either seemed possible. A few moments of silence passed before Tom looked around, brows drawing together.

“We can discuss this later,” he said. “I have some business to attend to.”


Tom waved me off with his hand as he stood, making his way down a hallway and disappearing.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” I grumbled to myself.

I shook my head and made my way back to my room. The door was locked, of course, which only irritated me more.

*This is exactly what I was talking about. What the hell am I supposed to do without a wand and all these locked doors?*

I used the slowest-acting *Alohamora* that took several tries to achieve success because of my lack of concentration. I went straight to my bed, put my face into the pillow, and wished I had never gotten out of bed.

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**Severus Snape’s POV:**

The potion was finally finished and bottled. I was extraordinarily thankful that my changes had cut down on the brewing time. I placed the bottle in my pocket and straightened my robes as much as I
could. It may have been a pointless gesture, but when meeting a Dark Lord, one does try to appear their best.

I had owled him about an hour or two ago that I had a follow-up potion ready. I had told him that the potion I had given him to regain his young adult body needed an occasional prolonging potion. I had expected some questioning, since I had failed to mention such a thing originally, but he offered none. That was extraordinarily unusual. I entertained thoughts for a moment that he already knew it was a trick, but quickly suppressed them as I apparated.

I met him in his manor at the designated time in the private meeting room beside his own quarters. When I arrived, he was pacing back and forth: an extremely unusual sight.

“My Lord,” I bowed. “Is something troubling you?”

Voldemort stopped pacing instantly and met my concerned gaze.

“Not at all,” he answered, calm mask falling into place. “I assume you have the potion.”

“Yes, My Lord. It’s right here.” I pulled the bottle from my pocket and presented it to him.

In this moment, I expected inquiry. The potion looked nothing like the previous one I had given him. The bottle was different, even, as the last potion would react with glass. A fool could have seen it, and maybe even have questioned it. I was prepared to answer such questioning, in the hopes that I could convince Voldemort to fall for the trick. I had guarded my mind in case he implored it for answers. I took an anti-truth serum shot before arriving, in the event that he no longer trusted me to give him potions after yesterday. All of this caution and planning, and he drank the potion without hesitation.

*Unusual, indeed.*

Then again, when Harry Potter was involved, everything was unusual. He was the reason for my own oddities, the first of which was my side on the war. If Harry Potter was The Light and Voldemort The Dark, then I was the grey area in the middle. Yes, I was in both the Order and a Death Eater. I found both sides to be wrong in some subjects and right in others, but before the death of Lily Evans, I was prepared to deal with the misgivings of Voldemort’s regime. It proved the worst mistake of my life.

Every time I saw Harry, I saw James. A part of me would always hate James for his unforgivable treatment of me during our school years. But in Harry’s eyes was his mother whom I still loved with my whole being. Knowing he was a mixture of both created a mixture in me: light and dark, care and hatred. When around him, I made sure to exude my desire to be elsewhere, yet I ensured nothing would harm him.

I felt it was a mistake of Albus to burden Harry with the war almost as soon as he arrived Hogwarts. With Voldemort, I agreed with his many political views, but not with his actions. He needed more wizards to side with him, and fear was not the way to convince them. In the middle of this war was Harry, and it was tearing him apart. With this potion, I will help Harry and, hopefully, Voldemort, as well.

The glass bottle fell from Voldemort’s hand and shattered on the floor. “Severus…what…” He grabbed at his throat. “…is going on?”

I closed my eyes and bowed my head. I knew after deceiving him like this, he would never let me live, but this was for the better. “Please, My Lord. Forgive me.”
Voldemort fell to his knees. He let out several hisses of pain, which anyone could assume were curses. I scowled as he writhed in pain, looking away. It was painful to watch, seeing one of the most powerful wizards in the world so vulnerable. He continued to yell out. Sooner or later, Harry would hear him.

*Harry...I must keep one horcrux.*

I quickly left the room to find him, almost running up the stairs and down the hallway. I pulled out my wand and cast *Alohamora,* opening the door to find Harry on the floor, clutching his head.

*For this to work, Harry must keep that piece of Voldemort's soul.*

I pulled out the other, smaller potion bottle from my robes, and knelt beside him. I grabbed his chin, but he tried to jerk it back, jaw clenched.

"Harry, you *must* drink this. It will stop the pain."

Still, Harry jerked away, but grabbed the potion bottle and drank its contents fully.

Almost instantly, he stopped clutching his head and relaxed on the floor, sighing in relief.

"Thank you, Professor. What in the world was that, anyway?"

"Before we get to that, how did the pain feel?"

Harry’s brows furrowed in confusion, but he answered. "It was like a part of my brain was being ripped away."

I nodded. "Do you feel like the piece left or is it still there? Are you whole?"

His expression grew further confused and concerned, but he replied, "I’m whole."

I sighed in relief. *I made it in time.*

"Mr. Potter," I said, standing, "I’m afraid I have dumped you into an incredibly delicate situation. A situation which might affect every aspect of your life as you know it." I raised one eyebrow as I continued. "Of course, you have never been particularly skilled in handling delicate situations, but I am sure you will be able to find an…appropriate way to fix it."

Harry’s hand went to his forehead. "What are you talking about?"

I looked to the door, then back to Harry. "I assure you that I am not lying. You *must* do this, as I am no longer able. I will never be able to come here again."

Harry shook his head. "What? Why? How am I supposed to do this?"

I looked to the door, then back to Harry. "I must leave. He will be looking for revenge on my
betrayal. You are grown, Harry. You know what is best for your followers. I find you will be successful in ending this war and bringing Voldemort’s views to non-violent action. I would wish you luck…” I turned, “but it has always been on your side.”

With that, I pulled his wand from my robes and dropped it before him before grabbing my own and disapperating.

Harry’s POV:

What?!

Snape was gone before I could say another word. He had just fixed my life’s purpose with one potion, and told me, basically, that my new purpose was to make it all better. I didn’t know how to react, but I knew I had to find Tom.

I scrambled to my feet and ran out into the hallway and down the stairs. For a moment, I stared at all the different hallways that branched off the large room and groaned.

Why didn’t Snape tell me where he was?

I picked the hallway I was fairly sure Tom had gone down earlier and stood in the middle, listening.

Silence.

There were no doors open, or anything that suggested this hallway was inhabited, so I just called out to him.

“Tom! Tom, where are you? Are you okay? Tom!”

I listened, then, but still heard nothing. Instead, I tried opening the doors. The first two were locked, and so were the next two. There were only two more doors, and I was getting nervous. I tried the door just before the end of the hallway. Amazingly, it was unlocked.

I went inside and saw regular-sized tables and chairs, rather plain. Beside the table, on the floor, was Tom. Before I knew what I was doing, I ran over and kneeled beside him.

“Tom?”

He didn’t answer. He didn’t move. He barely even breathed. I didn’t know what to do. I hadn’t brought my wand with me, and even if I had, I didn’t know any useful healing spells. My heart beat erratically as thoughts sped through my mind in a panic.

What do I do? What do I do?

I looked down at Tom. He seemed normal, like he was sleeping peacefully. I had to get him somewhere comfortable, off the ground.

After a deep breath, I concentrated.

“Accio wand!”

I waited in silence for a moment, but sure enough, my wand appeared around the open door a few long seconds later.

Before I levitate him, I have to find somewhere to put him.
I went back out into the hall. The next room was at the end of the hallway.

*If this hallway is anything like mine, that room is a bedroom.*

I pointed my wand at the door. “*Alohamora.*”

It easily opened, and I gazed upon the largest bedroom I had ever seen. The bed looked like it could have fit ten people in it, easily, and had black sheets with matching pillows. The walls were black, or more a really dark grey. There were two big sitting chairs on either side of the room that each could have fit both Uncle Vernon and Dudley in them. A large ebony door led to what I guessed was the bathroom. A charcoal rug lay in front of the dark trunk at the foot of the bed. A long black desk on one side had a few books on top of it. The only thing that wasn’t black in the room was the grand, decorative chandelier that hung from the ceiling. It was a bright, glimmering silver, and the lack of light from the rest of the room cast gloomy shadows over it. This room was fit for a Dark Lord.

Shaking my head out of whatever trance the sight of the room had pulled me into, I went back and levitated Tom onto the bed. I moved one chair over to the side of the bed, sat down, and waited. I assumed he was just asleep and that it would be a while until he woke, but it didn’t feel right leaving him. As Snape said, I had to make sure he was making it through his change alright. I was responsible for him.

*Those words sound weird without the phrase “being dead” at the end of it.*

But there I was, making sure he was okay.

A quick idea came into my head. “Sadie!”

The familiar little house elf popped in and said, “Does Mr. Harry Potter be needing something?”

“Yes. Can you check and make sure Tom is okay?”

She nodded and popped away. She came back not seconds later with an older-looking elf. He scanned over Tom a moment, then hopped on the bed, blue light shining from his palms, adding a navy shadow to the black room. After some time, he nodded.

“Master be okay,” he said in a husky, scratchy voice, before popping away, Sadie following just after.

I breathed a sigh of relief and sat back in the huge chair.

*He’s okay.*

I took to looking him over again. With his eyes closed, he looked almost like any normal guy, asleep in his bed. His dark hair was not only manageable (unlike mine), but in perfect order. His face was young, and if someone had no idea who it was, they would certainly expect him to open his eyes to find an intelligent, kind sparkle to them. He was rather (if I may say) good looking. I could see how he had a circle of influence around him. Even asleep, there was something about him that was so charismatic, though I couldn’t quite place it.

I repositioned myself in the chair until I was comfortable, and before long, I fell asleep, whispering my unanswered questions to him.

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**Voldemort’s POV:**
I have always been used to darkness. Darkness was sleep and comfort, cover from the light. Darkness was my room and my robes and the night sky I covered with my swirling green marks. Darkness was the lack of life in the eyes of someone who betrayed me, the shadowed secrets I kept to myself, and the hollow freedom I felt in my chest since making my last horcrux.

But this…this was awful, exposing brightness.

Light was everywhere, surrounding me, blinding me, engulfing anything I never intended it to. Thrown into the light of day, the sun’s rays were singeing my skin and blistering my eyes. It was worse than any curse I have endured. I clawed for something to help me escape this, but I was not sure my numb body was responding.

Then, I could see the outer edge. The line where the circle of intense rays ended and familiar shadow crept in. Its dark recesses whispered to me at a distance.

‘Tom…Tom…’

I needed it.

With every fiber of my being, I fought the light, but I was intertwined with it. Its restraints would not release me; I was immobile, but I would not, could not, let myself fall victim to it. It was my mortal enemy. My exact opposite.

The circle of light around me was getting smaller, yet more concentrated. Soon, I was trapped inside a spotlight that felt like a laser. The intensity ate away at my insides so that I slowly withered to nothing. I needed the shadows now.

In the shadows, I could grow; my wounds would heal.

The spotlight continued to shrink to the size of a needle, piercing my chest just above my heart. This needed stabbed at me continually and without mercy. The pain was excruciating, like pure fire welding my chest.

And then it was gone. Familiar, comforting darkness closed around me.

‘Tom…’ it whispered once more. ‘Why don’t you trust me?’
Chances

Severus Snape’s POV:

At last, I had accomplished what I had been planning since Voldemort informed me he wanted Harry as an ally. I knew I would never get to see the results—since The Dark Lord would no doubt have his Death Eaters find and kill me as soon as he was able to stand again—but as I have already calculated, there is not much that could go wrong, especially once counting in Harry’s perseverance.

Of course, now I have burdened Harry with a large, world-defining task. Maybe I am no better than Albus, after all.

Of course, that was why I had to run, rather than stay and help Voldemort go through the pain of soul rebinding: I had to stay alive. It would have been easy to just accept my fate, but I knew it was possible that Harry still needed my help.

Help…something Albus almost never offered Harry.

The uncertainty of it all made me worrisome. I decided to make note of how I have improved the situation.

Because Lord Voldemort has his entire soul once more, he will remember the dreaded memories he forgot, and Harry will be there to empathize with him because he understands—not to mention, his Gryffindor tendencies have made that second nature to him.

Because Harry no longer has any horcruxes to destroy, or a villain to defeat, a large part of stress in his life has been lifted.

Because Harry is going to help Lord Voldemort through his past, Voldemort will learn to not use fear to gain people, but compassion.

Because Lord Voldemort will be able to understand what Harry has been through, Harry will no longer act like a depressed teenage girl whom no one understands.

Because Lord Voldemort will no longer be considered “evil,” the war will end and many people’s lives will be saved.

Because both Harry and Voldemort will be political allies, magical children in muggle custody will definitely receive more care and concern.

There was not much that could go wrong. But…of course…there were always certain possibilities…

Instead of Harry being off the hook from stopping evil, witches and wizards of all types will expect him to solve their other problems, due to his “Savior” status.

Instead of overcoming his terrible past, Lord Voldemort will fall into a state of mental instability where he relives his most terrible memories at random times, in a sort of stress disorder caused by childhood trauma.

Instead of Harry feeling better and no longer depressed, both he and Voldemort will act like depressed teenage girls whom no one understands (though I’ll admit, Voldemort has too much self-respect for this to occur).
Instead of Voldemort being considered “not evil” when it is announced that Harry has joined his cause, Harry will be considered “evil.”

I knew that these things had more than a slim chance of occurring, but I could not let the possible negative consequences ruin the possible positive consequences, especially since the positive would, in turn, far outweigh the negative. My intuition had more than confirmed this.

For now, however, I had to hide away and wait. Knowing the effective hunting methods of The Dark Lord, I decided to hide in the muggle world that was London. I was currently residing in a small flat that would make Voldemort turn up his nose, but it would suit my purpose well. I had to have as little contact with magic and the magical world as possible. All there was left to do was await any news. I hoped I had not been foolish in my manipulations.

I sighed aloud, letting Harry control the outcome.

---

Voldemort’s POV:

I was so thankful to wake in my room. I could vaguely remember the intensity of all that light around me, and I vowed to never feel such things again. For the moment, I was content with being ignorant of what had occurred, what Severus had done to me, just feeling absolute relief that I was in my comfortable dark room.

I felt different, however. Something about my relief made me question it.

*Should I feel this relieved?*

I estimated that I felt twice as relieved as normal, and it was odd.

I opened my eyes to my dark room and Harry in the chair next to my bed, looking extremely tired.

“Tom. How are you feeling?”

*Tom. I detest that name.* “I am…fine, I suppose. I am in one piece, correct?”

Harry laughed humorlessly. “More than you know.”

I waited for him to explain what exactly he meant by that odd comment, but he simply rubbed at his forehead with one hand. I mentally growled.

“What do you mean by that comment?”

Harry sighed. “Well, Snape told me about what he did. I’m afraid he isn’t around to give you the news, so I’m the *lucky* one to tell you-”

“Out with it,” I commanded harshly.

Harry jumped slightly in his seat, but did not seem otherwise fazed. “You’re human again. Your soul is one hundred percent whole, minus my piece, so…actually you have about eighty six percent of your soul.”

I did not move. I was not certain that I was breathing. Nothing but shock ran through me, filling my entire being unlike it ever had.

“Don’t ask how I figured out that math so fast,” Harry said to my silence. “I was bored waiting for you to wake up.”
My heart quickened uncontrollably and my breathing grew labored and shallow. *Fear.* I never thought it would be possible for me to be afraid. Threatened, yes, but not afraid.

*I can die. Easily. I can feel. This is madness.*

I could feel Harry’s unusually luminous green eyes stare at me. I turned to look at him, not expecting what I saw.

He was dressed in a deep green shirt and jeans, but his eyes drew me in. They had the brightness of a cat’s with the composure of a snake’s; they were hypnotizing. I grew (more) breathless under their gaze.

*So weak. Useless under the gaze of another. Pathetic humanity.*

I could not catch my breath until I had looked away.

“I am…human…” I said, the words tasting sour in my mouth. I still felt Harry’s eyes upon me, but I dared not meet them.

“Yes,” he said, rubbing his head again, absently. It was obvious he needed sleep, but I would not allow him an extra blink until my situation was fully explained.

“How…” I began, but immediately answered my own question.

*Severus gave me that potion. He lied in saying it was to prolong my youth.*

“What do I do now?” I asked. It sounded idiotic, but it was all my brain—whirring with chaotic emotions—could muster.

“Well, I assume you need to get used to having an entire soul and all,” Harry said. “You could focus on that, for now.”

*Get used to* this? *Is it possible?*

I could not be certain, but it was necessary to continue with my life. I had to continue like nothing was wrong.

*I can still be Lord Voldemort, the most powerful dark wizard in all of history. The Dark Lord, whose name strikes fear into the hearts of every witch and wizard…I must do this. For my cause.*

An odd feeling came over me, then. I was ready to take on this challenge, as I had been with many challenges before, but this was…different, somehow.

*This feeling is… I couldn’t recall.*

“Harry,” I began cautiously. If anyone knew what I was…feeling…it was Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Feels-Everything. “I am…not so sure about this. It has been…ages, it seems, since I have been so…human. I have little memory of these odd…things inside me. Like feelings.” I wrinkled my nose in disgust. That was all incredibly difficult to admit, however obvious it was.

“Oh. Uh…okay.” Harry’s brows furrowed and he tilted his head to the side. “Should I…er…help you?”

*This is going to be more difficult than I originally thought. I have to…trust.*

Although every self-preserving instinct in me felt it was a terrible idea, I pondered it further.
Harry is no threat to me. At least, not at the moment. He also voiced his concerns this morning that I should…trust him more. It seems that may be mutually beneficial…

“Alright, Harry,” I said. “Go on.”

Harry stared at me, face confused and eyes blank. “Okay…uh…how do I do that?”

I sighed and rolled my eyes. “Can you not use our mind link? I know it is not one-sided,” I snapped. It was odd for me to be so short on temper.

*It is so much easier to get impatient now, I noted. I will learn to control these insufferable emotions.*

Harry’s eyes bugged. “Well, I-I…haven’t used it. Ever. And I’m not so skilled in Legilimency.”

I growled instinctively. My muscles tensed, especially in my arms, which I was unsure would remain at my side or reach out for Harry’s throat…

*If I must be the one to teach him. I must be calm to do so correctly.*

After a few breaths, I felt the frustration drain from my body.

“Close your eyes,” I said without edge to my voice. I watched as Harry followed my instruction. “Now, feel around your mind until you feel a presence that is foreign, but still a part of you. It should be in the back of your skull.”

I watched Harry, whose eyes twitched under their lids. After a moment, He gave a slight nod.

“Tap on it lightly, as if knocking on a door.”

He nodded again, seeming to concentrate. At once, I felt my mental barrier shift vastly.

*His door knocking is incredibly different from my door knocking…*

“Yes, I feel it. Thank you,” I snapped again. “Alright. When I open my mind, you should feel something odd come over you, like a sudden change in mood. That would be the strange *emotions* I am having.” The words stuck to my tongue.

*What a terrible word. “Emotions.”*

Harry nodded, eyes still closed.

*He does realize that he no longer needs to concentrate? I will be doing the remaining work. I sighed, still staring at him. He looks ridiculous.*

Even so, I opened my mental barriers—something I rarely did—and let Harry view the feeling(s).

Harry’s eyes opened, then, a slight smile on his face. “Well, first off, you are incredibly irritated with me. I can understand that. I may have looked ridiculous with my eyes closed, but I’m still learning. Also, you feel prepared to take on this challenge. Persistent. You secretly think you’ll enjoy it.”

I was tempted to pull back my thoughts immediately. The little brat had seen too much. However, it was too late. He had seen it.

Of course I was ready. After seeing the incredible rewards Harry had reaped from these *emotions*, a part of me was ready to be taught to reap those same rewards. I desired it all: loyalty, trust, adoration, respect. They all came with power, which I enjoyed. I did not, however, enjoy emotions.
I rolled my eyes. “That is absurd. I will most certainly not enjoy this process.”

Harry’s grin just grew. “Oh. No, of course not.”

*Insufferable brat*, I thought right at him.

“As it seems,” I began, “I feel more of each feeling than usual. Additionally, I have less control over them. Is that…” I clenched my jaw. Asking Potter for help was not something I enjoyed, but it had to be done. “…normal?” I finished through my teeth.

Harry did a poor job of containing his smile. “Most likely, I guess. When your soul was split up, you only had part of your emotions, so they were easier to control. No, you have your whole soul, mostly, so it’s harder to control because it’s…” his grin faded a bit, replaced by confusion. “…bigger? In a way.”

I sighed.

*I suppose that…makes sense.*

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**Harry’s POV:**

The rest of the day went by quickly. Mostly, Tom just kept asking me about his “weird feelings,” which involved all sorts of grouchiness towards me when I saw something he didn’t want me to see, like how he was appreciative that I was helping him, how he felt he needed to trust me more since I mentioned it. It was these little things that got me through the day with a smile on my face.

*Tom really does care,* I teased to myself. I would have teased him out loud, but he was so grumpy, I didn’t want to push my luck.

I stayed by his bedside until he decided to try and walk, which he did successfully. Once he did, he kicked me out of his “private quarters” so he could get ready for bed (as if he hadn’t just spent the whole day in bed).

I shrugged it off. There were still so many things I hadn’t told him about the situation, like why Snape did it, and how he gave me my wand back. I knew for a fact the thoughts had crossed his mind, but he never voiced them. I needed to tell him those things, though. That was a part of trust: being honest.

I decided to wait by his door after getting my wand from the other room, where I had placed it while he was asleep. Right beside it was an owl. I looked over it, hoping to see something familiar about it, but I hadn’t seen it before. I went over to it and removed the note from its leg.

*Dear Harry,*

*Where in the world have you gone off to? After you disappeared, Luna told us what she knew. Harry, what did you trade You-Know-Who to get Luna back? Was it you? You know we will find you in a heartbeat if he harms a single hair on you. Mrs. Weasley has the entire Order searching for you. Please come back. Ron hasn’t been the same since you left—none of us have. He won’t eat or get out of bed. We just don’t want you to get hurt. We need you safe, Harry.*

*Love,*

*Hermione.*
The note sent a shiver down my spine. I had almost forgotten about the world outside this manor.

They have the whole Order looking for me? Ron isn’t eating? My leaving has made a mess of things. I suppose I should have known I would be hurting them, still.

I looked around for some parchment. There was none, so I just decided to use the back of the letter, and transfigured the chair into a quill and ink temporarily.

Dear Hermione,

I know I left unexpectedly, but I promise I’m okay. I know everyone will freak out when you tell them, and I’m sorry for that, but I did trade Luna for me. It was really the only way to save her, and Tom

I shook my head. They don’t call him Tom. I scratch out Tom.

and Tom Voldemort hasn’t hurt me in any way. Tell Ron I’m sorry, and Mrs. Weasley to call off the search. I feel really bad for causing so much trouble. I hadn’t thought of the consequences. It was one of my “act don’t think” moments. I am perfectly safe, though. Snape, however, is in need of some protection. I’m sure, if you can find him, he can explain everything that has gone on while I have been here. I have to stay here for now, but I promise to be back by the time school starts.

Love,

Harry.

I nodded and tied the note back to the owl’s leg. It flew out the open door. After I transfigured the quill and ink back into a chair, I grabbed my wand and went back to Tom’s door. I knocked on it but didn’t get an answer. Sighing, I sat back down in front of the door.

What am I going to do? I know when Snape tells them everything they will try to find me. I can’t just bail on Tom. He really needs some guidance.

I tilted my head back against the door.

This is just a giant mess.
Voldemort’s POV:

After tossing Harry from my room, I got ready for bed. The day had been terribly long for me. Never before was I given so much information all at once; it was overwhelming. I had to match each feeling with a name and memorize it.

Although it may sound simple, humans have so many useless emotions. Of course I am having difficulties.

The frustration from such a task caused me to ache to be alone. As helpful as Harry had been, my thoughts and feelings were not safe when he saw them. I knew the job would not be enjoyable, but the tiredness I felt, the vulnerability… I had let him into my mind for far too long. I stood in front of my bathroom mirror, one hand on the granite around the sink, the other gently rubbing my temple.

I need rest.

I slowly shuffled back into my bedroom, hopeful that I would be able to rest through the night without Harry’s nightmares interfering. Just as I was walking to my bed, my ears picked up a ruffling outside my door. I froze as my mind calculated the source of the sound.

My Death Eater’s would not dare bother me in my home at this hour. They would send a message. It could be Harry, for some god-awful reason. It could be Severus, intent on finishing me off. Of course, Severus would silence his feet…

I sighed and shuffled to the door. Upon opening it, Harry’s sitting form fell backwards onto my feet. He looked up at me, those bright green eyes like a cat’s in the darkness.

He immediately fumbled around, trying to stand up. Once he did, he turned to me.

“Hi,” he said.

I raised an eyebrow. “Yes?” I asked, my voice sharp with impatience.

“Well, I-I, uh…” he scratched his head, “forgot to tell you about Snape. He came and told me why he did everything, so I thought you might want to know.”

With a groggy rub to my forehead, I nodded. “Alright then.”

After the events of the day had overwhelmed me with other matters, I had not taken the time to consider such things. Why did Severus do this, if not to murder me on the spot? What other motives does he have?

“Well…” Harry began, eyes downcast but not shame-filled. “See, he told me that he needed you to
change how you did things. He said that I needed to help you get used to being…well, having normal feelings, and to change the way your cause was carried out. He didn’t say much more than that, but he did give me my wand back.”

I watched as Harry pulled none other than his wand—the very one I had locked away in a place only I was able to open—and held it out to me as if to display it.

*How on Earth did Severus manage to get that? The amount of powerful wards surrounding it was vast, and I had the only key…*

My eyes narrowed, although my heart beat erratically. “Did he mention how he retrieved that?”

Harry’s eyes met mine. “No. I figured you gave it to him. I definitely wouldn’t have thought he had it.”

*Well, Harry is certainly more naïve than I originally thought…*

“I would never take such a chance. No follower of mine can be trusted to hold a wand I cannot destroy.”

There was a moment of silence between us, then. Harry still held his wand up with the flats of both of his hands, and I realized, after a moment, that he intended for me to take it.

*Trust… said a voice at the back of my mind, ever nagging. Trust…*

I growled inwardly.

“Considering you have not yet escaped, I suppose you can handle keeping it.”

He nodded, poorly hiding the growing smile on his face. I was quickly growing tired of this foolishness.

*What? Do I have a conscience, now? Is that possible?*

“Oh, and Tom?”


“You know my friends at Hogwarts, right? Or at least know of them? They sent me an owl telling me they were worried, and that The Order was searching for me. I replied to let them know I was safe and to cancel the search.” Harry ran a hand up the back of his neck into his hair. “Just…thought I should let you know.”

I nodded. I did not think the information was particularly useful at the moment, but the thought that Harry would inform me about such trivial things at all…I did not regret trusting him.

*He may be a good ally, after all.*

“I see. I am glad you handled that. Now, if I may, I would like to rest. Pleasant dreams, Harry.”

Harry nodded and gave a vague wave. “Goodnight, Tom.”

As he turned and walked in the other direction, I shut the door.

*I really do wish that he has pleasant dreams. I cannot stand when he keeps me up with his nightmares…*
Harry’s POV:

The whole world was in chaos. Wizards and witches ran around, shooting red and green bolts of light at each other. I was running through the middle of the massive battle, dodging and throwing *Finites*. I didn’t stop running until I saw Hermione and Ron, facing each other, on opposite sides of the battle. Hermione had reddened eyes and wild hair. Ron looked pale and gaunt, almost ready to pass out.

With an unsteady hand, Hermione raised her wand at Ron. I began running, trying to stop it, but I was too far away. A green bolt of light ran across my vision, leaving everything white for a brief moment.

When I could see again, Hermione no longer held the wand that killed Ron. In her place was me, a wicked smile on my face. I watched as I walked over to where his body was, looked down at it, and kicked his head. Hermione ran to him, then, tears in her eyes, and pulled her wand out on me.

My perspective shifted. I could now see through the eyes of the me who murdered Ron. I could hear myself chuckle darkly before raising my wand at Hermione. I tried with all my might to pull my hand back down, but my body wasn’t responding. Before a word could pass Hermione’s lips, another green bolt of light came from my wand and hit her.

She collapsed beside Ron, head rolling to face him, a look of shock in her dull brown eyes.

I continued to kill everyone on sight: friends, enemies, bystanders. The battlefield grew quieter with every spell that left my wand until there was only one person left. A little boy stood before me, eyes as red as the blood that still coursed through his veins. He was obviously alone, though not only literally; his tattered clothes hung from his small body. Blood began to drip from his nose and mouth, as if he had been battling with his hands, rather than his wand, and bruises lined his arms and legs.

I raised my wand to him. I couldn’t stop myself. I knew what spell was on my mind and could feel my lips form the words, but I didn’t hear them.

*Avada Kedavra.*

Just before the spell hit him, the world went black.

My mind came back to the real world one sense at a time. I could feel the shaking of my body, the cold sweat on the soaked sheets that entangled me and the warm tears that ran down my face. A pair of hands held my shoulders firmly. Whimpers escaped from my mouth in between my gasps for air. My mouth tasted dry and my lungs and throat were on fire. I grabbed at the arms holding me, digging my nails into them, trying with all my might to breathe. The air smelt of salt and sweat. I still couldn’t see, but my head still grew dizzy and fuzzy. Distant words made their way to my ears.

“Harry…” the voice purred in the darkness. “Harry, come back.”

I inhaled a quick, sharp breath that sent a stabbing pain through my chest, but my world became clear. The room around me was dimly lit. I was in my room in Tom’s manor. Tom sat beside me, pulling me to him by wrapping his arms around me. His breath was hot on my ear as he whispered to me.

“Harry,” he said more harshly. “Come back. I need you to stay with me. You cannot keep doing this. You cannot keep falling.”
“I wasn’t falling,” I said.

I could feel Tom’s body tense before he suddenly released me.

“I was killing everyone,” I continued on without prompting. “Even my friends. There was a battle going on, and I killed everyone on both sides.” Fresh tears pooled in my eyes as I thought back to the memory. “Tom, it was awful.”

My painful breaths grew shaky. I killed them. It was all my fault, my guilt told me. The words repeated themselves, taunting me. I killed them…I killed them…All my fault…


I tried, but every inhale sent pain everywhere. I was shaking more, and sweating again. I tried to shake the thoughts out of my head, but the nightmare kept replaying itself. I killed them…Avada Kedavra…my fault…“Ron! Harry, how could you?”…all my fault…

I pulled myself into Tom and buried my head in his shoulder, trying to get away from the thoughts, trying to feel safe again.

‘They won’t go away,’ I whispered. ‘I can’t wake up.’

I killed them. My fault. It’s my fault. I killed them all. Avada Kedavra! I killed every single person. It’s all my fault. “Harry! How could you? We loved you!” It was all my fault.

Suddenly, there was a push in my mind. An unknown presence entered, foreign and yet a part of me. From it came a soothing feeling, and the awful thoughts fled. All at once, everything was real again. I was in my room at Tom’s manor. I could breathe. I stopped crying.

I pulled my head from Tom’s shoulder and sat upright, wiping away what was left of my tears. My heart rate had slowed, thankfully. Any faster and it would have jumped right out of me.

‘That would have been a sight to see,’ a dark voice softly joked in my mind. ‘A heart walking around without an owner. Although, I suppose odder things have happened.’

I pushed myself away from Tom, eyes wide.

You’re in my mind!

‘Yes. Indeed I am. Only to stop your horrible nightmare and calm you. Did you realize you were screaming? I did not need any magic to figure out you were not sleeping well.’ I felt the slight irritation in his mind.

Oh. Sorry.

Tom handed me some calming draught. I held the bottle in my hands, turning it with uncertainty. I really didn’t want to go back to sleep because I knew I would dream. I didn’t care to let myself fall into some odd wonderland of strange things; I just wanted some rest.

I shook my head. I don’t think I should go back to sleep.

Confusion. ‘Why not? You have taken this potion before, as have I. It works. Incredibly well. You will have no more nightmares.’

Yes, I know. But I have weird dreams. I don’t want to dream. I just want to sleep.
Exhaustion fell over me then, pulling me back to the bed, threatening to make me collapse. I was certain Tom could see it. Still, I was determined not to sleep.

*I’ve been here a while and I’ve had maybe half a good-night’s sleep. I give up. Screw sleep.*

I couldn’t quite make out Tom’s expression, but I could feel the wave of confusion. ‘*Harry, it’s been four days. You must sleep. It is vital and simply unavoidable.*’

I sighed. *I know.* I laid back down and turned over to shove my face into the (still damp) silk pillow. *I hate dreams, though. I’d just rather stay up.*

Irritation, again. This time, more of it. ‘*Sleep does not work that way.*’

*I don’t care. I’m not having any more dreams.*

‘*Stubborn brat!*’

*I heard that!*

‘I intended you to. Now, stop being an immature child and go to sleep.’

*You don’t understand.* I sat up and looked at him, my dry eyes becoming wet once more. *I can’t stand nightmares. I fucking hate them. More than I hate most other things. It’s on my list.*

‘*What list?*’

*Oh…I didn’t mean to mention that.* Blood rushed to my face. *Thought conversations are weird.* Well…*I made this list of things I hate. I only have, like, seven things on there, and having nightmares/dreams is one of them.*

‘*A list of things you hate?*’ Surprise erupted from him. ‘*And there are only seven things?*’ Thoughts ran through his mind at the speed of light, then, too fast for me to understand. ‘*Alright then, Harry. If you wish not to sleep, we can discuss this…list you have.*’

I…uh…okay. *How should I…*’

‘*Just think about it as you normally would.*’

I nodded.

*Things I hate in this world:*

-This bloody fucking war
-Being the Boy-Who-Lived/Savior/Chosen One
-Uncle Vernon
-Being haunted by dead people I care about
-Being alone
-Having dreams/nightmares

I waited for a thought response from Tom, but once again, thoughts ran through his mind so fast. *Tom?*
'You really do not like being the Boy-Who-Lived? I always figured you enjoyed the fame it entitled you.'

I scoffed. No. I hate it. Obviously. I never wanted to be famous. I can't even remember doing the thing that made me famous. I was a baby! And people think that just because I didn't die that they can run my life, or that I can fix everything. But they don't know how much it sucks. I lived, yes, but no one else around me does.

‘Mhm…which leads me to my next question. What do you mean by being haunted by your loved ones?’

I sighed. These were deep scars that still pained me, but as much as I did not want to talk about them, I didn’t want to sleep more.

Well, sometimes I feel terrible, and I go somewhere to be alone. Then, I see people around me, like Sirius or Dumbledore, or even my parents. They always tell me that they need me, and that I need to save them. Tears I hadn’t even noticed rolled down my cheeks. But how can I do that? They're dead! It's all a cruel joke.

‘I…’ Tom’s thoughts came to a pause. I could tell he was confused, but also concentrating. ‘Who is Uncle Vernon?’

A sour taste came into my mouth. He’s my muggle uncle that I used to live with.

Now he was curious. ‘Why do you hate him? I understand that you had a hard life there, of course, but you do not hate your other muggle relatives. Why only him?’

That was a thought I tried to keep away from. It brought back every feeling I had felt that dreadful day it happened, and all the times that followed.

I…he...

I couldn’t find the words. I decided, instead, that if words could not describe it, there was another way to share it. Though, I feared opening up that memory.

Brace yourself.

In my mind, I saw it: the darkness of my cupboard. I had been thinking of new ways to avoid Dudley at school. Sometimes, if I stayed in the classroom until everyone else left, I could get around getting beaten up in the hallway.

At the time, my Aunt Petunia and Dudley were staying at my grandmother’s house, and since my uncle had some really important work to attend to at his job, he couldn’t take the time off to go. Of course, I never went on trips if they could help it.

On this particular night, I had tried for the longest time to go to sleep, but I just couldn’t seem to get there. My mind was full of too many thoughts. I used to wonder if it would have been different if I had fallen asleep.

There was a loud banging noise upstairs. It rang through the hallway and shook my door. I sat upright in my bed, listening intently.

What was that?

After a moment of silence, loud thumps came down the stairs and down the hallway, stopping just in
front of my door. A fist knocked on it loudly.

“Harry! Open up!”

Hearing Vernon’s voice, urgent and booming, I was startled. I immediately unlocked my door, worried something had happened.

“What is it?”

His moustache twitched. “I need you to attend to something. Upstairs. Now.”

Something about him was off. His normally flat hair was ruffled, and his fat pink face was red. There was a look in his no-nonsense eyes, one I thought was reserved for Christmas ham, or any sort of dessert.

I stood and exited my cupboard, confused. He prodded my back with his chubby finger, urging me to move faster. I did so, stopping at the top of the stairs. Nothing seemed out of place. I glanced around, even more confused.

A hand—his hand—grabbed the collar of my night shirt and dragged me into his bedroom. When the hand released, I practically fell to the floor.

“Now Harry…” his hand grabbed my arm tightly and pulled me towards him so that his mouth was right by my ear. “If I hear one word escape your mouth, one sound, you will find yourself receiving the worst beating of your life.”

His chubby fingers reached for my shirt and pulled it off. Before I knew what was going on, I was naked on his bed, frantically looking around the room. He unbuckled his trousers and slid them down.

Oh god. Tears began to run down my face. Oh god.

[***if you want to skip, go to the next set of stars***]

I tried to run away, to get back to my cupboard and never come out, but his hand wrapped around my thin arm painfully tight and threw me back. I stared at the bright red mark that he left on me with incredulousness. I was about to say something when he slapped my face hard, leaving a stinging on my cheek and bringing more tears to my eyes. I cradled my cheek, wanting to scream, call for help, but I didn’t dare utter a sound.

What’s worse? The beating or this? It seemed I was getting both, regardless.

He moved my legs around, but as much as I resisted, he was stronger than my eight-year-old self. One hand went to my hips, cold and alien. I shut my eyes tightly, trying to get away from it. Cold and exposed, I shivered.

Suddenly, something large and hot shoved itself into my ass, ripping the skin. I wanted to scream and sob as the pain, violation, and vulnerability ran through me. His other hand held my thigh in place, then, and he pulled out slightly before shoving himself all the way in forcefully. Whimpers escaped from my mouth, then, as the searing pain doubled. I could feel the blood escaping, now, and the tears continued to fall. He moved out again, cursing to himself quietly, and back in with more speed and force. I almost yelped, but I would not allow myself to. My whole body burned with pain. He continued to speed up, which only hurt more. I had never felt such pain before, even when he beat me, but I stayed silent. I couldn’t fight it. The screams stuck in my throat, choking me. I dug my nails into the bed so hard, my hands went white and numb. I laid there and cried and took it with shame.
After what seemed an eternity later, a small whispered moan came from him, and a thick substance coated my insides. He removed himself from me, picked up my limp body by the arm, and dragged me to my cupboard, throwing my clothes in before shutting the door.

I quickly locked the door after him and waited for the sound of his footsteps to climb the stairs before I vomited in the corner. I sobbed quietly to myself, then, and redressed.

I laid back down on my bed, eyes closed. My body was ridden with ghost hands, still feeling the places where he had touched my naked body, where he had gripped and hit me. My ass throbbed and my pants were wet with blood and… I didn’t want to think what else.

I hate you… I thought. I hate you…

I came back to reality. I was sitting up, my knees to my chest with my chin on top, arms wrapped around myself. My eyes dropped tears onto my sleeping clothes and air was trapped in my throat. I could still feel those ghostly hands…

I hate him. I hate him so much.

Disgust. Shock. Fear. ‘Harry…’ I could feel the conflicting emotions in Tom’s mind. He didn’t know what to do. ‘I...I’m sorry that…you had such an experience.’

He placed a hand on my shoulder in an attempt to comfort me, but I tensed and pulled away. He pulled back just as quickly.

I shook my head, trying to clear the memories, but they plagued my mind, like an ever-living nightmare.

I hate him.

After a moment, Tom’s mind cleared and he nodded. ‘I understand, Harry. Muggles can be cruel.’

How do I make the past go away? I thought more to myself than to him.

‘The past never leaves. It is only forgotten.’ A few quick images flashed through Tom’s mind, though I barely noticed.

I’ve tried to forget. I can’t. How do I forget?

Tom stood. ‘There are many ways. Follow me.’ He turned and walked to the door, so I followed.

We walked down the hallway to the arch, down the stairs, and into another hallway I hadn’t been down. We finally arrived at a door. Tom’s wand appeared in his hand, and he performed a complicated series of wand movements. After a few moments, he put his wand away and opened the door. The room seemed to be empty. Tom extended his arm, then, and a table appeared with a collection of bottles on it.

“This is a private room,” he said out loud. “Here, I keep the memories I wish to forget. No one knows of this room. Except me…” He quickly summoned another, identical table and placed it next to the first. “…and you. If you wish, you may use it.”

I looked at the bottles on Tom’s table. They had no labels (which would have defeated the purpose, I suppose), but the glass of the bottles danced with colors and little figures, almost like a child’s finger
“How do I…” I looked back to Tom, letting my mind convey the rest of my question.

Tom put his wand to his head to show me.

“Erado Harry’s nightmare of Sirius.”

A small light as thin as a hair came from Tom’s head, much like I had seen Dumbledore do with his pensieve. Tom twirled the light with his wand, and a bottle much like the others appeared and floated onto the table. It was a navy color inside, with a little black splotch over a light blue one.

He turned to me. “Start with something easily forgotten, then move on to the more difficult ones.”

I nodded. “Accio wand.”

I felt my magic reach out and grab my wand; I pulled it back quickly, and my wand hit my hand. I put it to my head like Tom had shown me and picked a small memory.

With help from Tom’s mind, I cast, “Erado Doug the unicorn.”

I saw the hair-thin light appear, and twirled it with some complications. It didn’t want to twist at all, but I somehow managed to get it around my wand and tipped my wand to let it fall off. It turned into a bright white bottle with a hint of green and floated onto my once empty table.

“Doug the unicorn?” Tom asked skeptically.

My eyebrows knit together. “What?” That was the most random thing I had ever heard Tom say. It hadn’t made sense at all.

Tom shook his head. “No matter. Be cautious when around these bottles. If they fall, they will break and release the memory back to its owner. That is also a way to retrieve the memory once it is erased, but I fail to see why you would want to remember anything after making it into a bottle.”

“Oh right.” I thought of a way to test exactly how that worked. “Erado Buckbeak.”

I pulled the thin light from my head and tried to twirl it, which was much easier this time. Its bottle became blue with a spikey white splotch. Tom gave me another look, and I felt the confusion come from his mind, but he remained silent.

Quicker than the bottle had landed on the table, I pushed it off, sending it crashing to the floor. As the pieces of glass dissolved into nothingness, I saw it all: Buckbeak; when I first met him, when he attacked Malfoy, when I saved his life, when I gave him to Sirius. All the memories filed back into their places like pieces to a puzzle that had empty spaces.

“Well,” Tom began, “now that you have remembered, what is a buckbeak?”

For a moment, I was confused. Our minds were connected, I thought, but he hadn’t seen everything I had just seen.

“He was a hippogriff that Hagrid had during my third year. I saved him from being executed, gave him to Sirius, and received him back after his death. Buckbeak’s been living with Hagrid again.”

We stood in silence for a moment, thinking our own thoughts in our heads, not necessarily paying attention to the other’s thoughts.
“What was it like?” Tom asked quietly. “Remembering.”

“It’s like I had blank spots in my memory that I had overlooked, and suddenly, they were filled.”

He nodded.

I thought about other things I really wanted to forget. Of course, the first thing that popped into my mind, I knew I had to try.

“Erado being raped.”

I pulled the hair from my head and twirled it. It was thick and complicated to twirl, but I managed it. When its bottle formed, it had pink and green and red splotches all intertwined together. I stared at it for a moment, deciding how ugly it all looked together. I felt lighter, then. Better. A great burden had been lifted off my shoulders, and it was great. I smiled.

_This is nice._

“Yes,” Tom agreed. “It is quite a relief.”

“Yeah,” I said through a yawn. I wiped a hand over my face. I didn’t want to sleep yet. I looked at the two bottles on my table. Two pieces of my puzzle that I would be okay not having.

“Well?”

“Well, what?” I looked to Tom, realizing I could no longer feel what he felt.

“Are you not going to pick other things? Losing friends? Loved ones? You have been through that many times.”

But why would I want to forget losing them? I thought to myself. “I wouldn’t want to still think they were alive.”

“Then forget them entirely,” Tom said, as casually as ever. “It’s as simple as that.”

Forget the people I care about? The thought was crazy, if not offensive. I _couldn’t_ do that. Yeah, I might not have to remember their death, _but I also wouldn’t remember all the good times I had with them_. “But then I’d lose everything good about them, too. All the love I felt for them and that they felt for me. I couldn’t do that.”

Tom sighed. “I see then. Well, if you have nothing else right now, you can always come here later. I altered the wards. You do not require any spells to enter. Simply open the door.”

I smiled and nodded. “Thank you, Tom.”

Tom looked at me, eyes tired. I wished for a moment I still knew what he was thinking.

“Yes, well, it really is late. Or rather, early. I need my rest. Do what you wish.”

With that, he walked out of the room, closing the door behind him.

I smiled to myself. I had the rest of the night to do “what I wished.” In my mind, I chuckled mischievously. _Time to snoop around._
Searching to Find

3rd Person POV:

Harry started snooping in the room he was currently in. He looked through all the bottles on Tom’s table, trying and failing to understand the vague pictures they held. They were mostly splotches of color with a few shapes and figures.

He sighed. **Onto the next room. Where shall that be, exactly?**

He stepped out of the room. He couldn’t quite remember which hallway this was that branched off the spacious room—he had just followed Tom before, not quite paying attention to where they went—but he didn’t want to start here, anyway. He feared it may be close to the hallway that held Tom’s room.

After considering for a moment, he walked to the archway that led to the spacious room and went through it. Nearing the long table and chairs, he looked back to where he had come from, only to find that there were several hallways behind him, all darkened and shadowed in the same fashion, and he had no clue which one he had emerged from.

**Bloody hell...so much for finding that room again.**

Harry didn’t know what to do, so he went back up the stairs to the familiar hallway that held his room. It was one he knew well, though he had never been into any of the other rooms. The irony was not lost on him.

Curious as to what lay behind the doors of this hallway—*his* hallway, he decided to label it—he went to the first door, which was locked.

He pulled out his wand. **“Alohamora,”** he said quietly to the door.

The door swung open, and Harry stepped inside the dark room.

**“Lumos.”**

The tip of his wand lit up, revealing another hallway that was somewhat damp and smelt of mold. He took one step deeper in before his guilt washed over him.

*Tom trusted me not to snoop, and here I am, snooping. He’s never going to trust me again if I’m caught.*

Harry sighed, thinking for a quiet moment. A small, mischievous voice in his mind spoke up.

*That is, if you get caught.*

Harry grinned.

**“Accio Cloak of Invisibility.”**

A few short moments later, the cloak was in Harry’s hand. He put it on and silenced his feet, as well (to be extra certain he wouldn’t get caught). He still felt guilty, but he really wanted to know what Tom hid in his house, to know what secrets his hallway held.
Harry walked down the dark hallway a bit more. He could see no arches or doors. Just a dead end made of old, moldy bricks. He frowned.

*It probably needs a spell or something.* Damn.

He walked out of the hall, locking the door after him.

Still under the cloak, he went to the next room. After a quick *Alohamora*, Harry walked into a large library. Massive books lined the walls—some grey, some black, all wooden and filled to the brim with books.

*Hermione would love this room*, he thought. *She could read for the rest of her life.*

In the middle of the room was a large mahogany table with a rather comfortable-looking grey chair. The table had nothing on it, so Harry assumed the room hadn’t been used much. A little disappointed that he had found nothing, Harry left the room, once again locking the door behind him.

He repeated the process with the next door, finding a potions lab. There was a cauldron on a massive wooden desk, a wall full of shelves that held ingredients and finished potions. Harry went over to inspect the potions. There was anything one would ever need, from antidotes to skele-grow to wolfsbane, all alphabetized. There was nothing there Harry needed at the moment, and so he left, locking the door behind him once more.

Harry went to the next door, spoke his unlocking spell, and stepped into what looked like a sitting room. It was, of course, decorated in blacks, greens, and silver. A green couch was in front of a fireplace filled with bits of black glass instead of wood, and a window was to its left. Through the window were green hills and trees with orange, yellow, brown, and red leaves, all drenched in moonlight.

*But it’s still Summer*, he thought, his brows drawing together in confusion. He figured it must be some sort of spell.

The walls of the room were covered with framed paintings of nature, many looking like the hills and trees in the window, but during different seasons. The leaves swayed in the breeze of Spring, or had disappeared under the snowy white hills. Wildflowers and bees popped up in another, and clouds stormed, pouring rain onto the thirsty grasses. All of them were pleasing to look at.

Harry found he liked the room a lot, but it held nothing of what he was looking for. He did make a mental note to return, though. He closed the door behind him and locked it, moving onto the next one.

The next door opened to a mostly empty room. The only item inside was what appeared to be a large magnifying glass. Harry walked over to the glass, expecting to see some vague reflection of himself, or even a close-up view of the wooden floor, but he didn’t.

*Oh, right. I’m wearing my cloak.*

He removed his cloak and looked into the glass again, finding his reflection distorted, as if it were a broken mirror. He thought it was odd to have such a thing.

*Unless it does something…*

Harry thought of what it could possibly do, but figured it would probably take a spell to work.

*Damn.*
Harry sighed and leaned his back against the door, staring at the…whatever it was.

*What would Tom think if he caught me? He’d stop trusting me. What would he do if I broke his trust? Probably keep a closer eye on me. Maybe he’d even follow me around. Harry blinked a bit as his heart began to race. How do I know he hasn’t already been following me? Seeing if he can trust me with my wand. He shook his head. That’s impossible. He went to sleep…right?*

He had been sure before, but now he wasn’t so sure.

“Ugh!” he said to the ceiling. *I wish I could make sure he was asleep. I don’t want to break our trust.*

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw movement.

He glanced back to the spyglass and found that it had changed. He crept closer and peered in, finding not his broken reflection, but Tom, who was laying in his large bed, eyes closed, breathing deep and slow.

Harry’s eyes widened.

*So that’s what it does.*

He just watched for a moment as Tom’s chest rose and fell. He looked so calm, so unlike anyone would imagine a Dark lord to be. It reminded Harry that Tom was just a person, especially now that his soul was in one piece. It wasn’t too far of a stretch for him to see it.

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“Show me Ron,” he said to the glass.

The image changed to show Ron, sitting up by the window of his room that Harry used to look out of after having a nightmare. The room hadn’t changed much, still messy with Ron’s clothes on the floor and all. He did notice that Ron was paler than usual.

*Maybe it’s the moonlight shining on him, or the glass altering it.*

While both explanations were plausible, the sinking feeling in Harry’s stomach told him it was real, and that he had caused it.

He hated to see Ron mistreat himself like this; it was so unlike the Ron he knew. His best friend Ron loved to eat, and he was often the first to sleep and the last to wake. But here was a Ron he did not know. A Ron who wasn’t eating and who stared out the window instead of sleeping.

Harry didn’t want to see Ron like that anymore, and so the scene faded back to his distorted reflection.

Guilt returned to the forefront of his mind and started to nibble on his thoughts. For a moment, he thought his night of snooping was over, but he shook his head, pushing aside his thoughts for the sake of his curiosity. He had a mission: to look behind every door in his hallway.

Harry put his cloak back on, locked and shut the door behind him, and moved onto the next room.

Behind the next door was another room. It had a hardwood floor in a dark oak color and a matching bar on the far wall opposite where he stood. He stared in amazement at the shelves behind it that held various alcohols and glasses.

Curious, he walked over and sat on one of the white stools.
Without warning, a glass of butterbeer slid down the bar right to Harry’s hands. He caught it and smiled.

_Exactly what I wanted._

He looked up towards the other end of the bar to thank whoever had sent it to him, but there was no one there.

_Curious…_

He picked up the butterbeer carefully and took a sip, enjoying the way it tasted. Memories of Hogsmead came into his mind: he, Hermione, and Ron, all sitting around a table, butterbeers in hand. They hadn’t been so carefree in so long, it seemed. He wished that he and his friends could still complain about the small things, like seeing Ginny snogging someone in the corner. But they had grown, and so had their problems.

After a while, Harry had almost finished his butterbeer and the lights above him began to grow brighter.

_It must almost be morning._

Harry sighed and quickly finished his drink before grabbing his things and exiting the room, leaving the glass on the bar. He still had two doors to look behind, but he had lost his curiosity. He was just tired.

He went to the end of the hallway to his door and unlocked it. Once inside, he shoved his cloak underneath the cushion of the grey chair and put his wand on the tiny beside table. Harry let himself fall back onto the bed, arms spread out. He laid there for a moment, wondering what to do.

_I guess I should shower._

Harry inhaled deeply and sat up. A hot shower sounded nice, so he went to the bathroom and turned on the hot water. He took off his clothes and stepped in, feeling the heat begin to melt away the stress in his shoulders. He considered masturbating, but he thought better of it.

_That’ll only make me tired._

Instead, he focused on working the stress out of his body. He rolled his shoulders back a few times, then forwards. He stretched his neck to both sides and lifted his arms up as high as they would go before letting them fall back down to his sides. He took in a deep breath and felt better.

He finished up, got out, and got dressed. For a moment, he looked at his clothes in the mirror then decided to transfigure them.

He watched in the mirror as he changed the color of his shirt, loving the effect it had on his eyes. He kept changing the color until his eyes reminded him of the hills he saw through that window in the sitting room. His shirt was an earthy deep brown like soil, and his eyes were the color of swaying grass; he loved it. After that, he really didn’t want to change the color of his jeans, so he let them be.

He walked back into his room, unsure of what to do next.

_It’s early morning, and Tom will probably sleep longer since I kept him up all night._

Sighing with boredom, Harry sat on the edge of his bed, thinking of things to do. He didn’t want to leave his room; he felt quite comfy there for the moment, but there wasn’t much he could do in it but
sleep.

_Maybe some magic?_

Harry straightened his back and reached for his wand, but hesitated. He had been so useless without it before. He really needed to work on his wandless magic. Hermione once showed him how to make a butterfly and make it flutter about the room where she pleased. He couldn’t do it then, of course, but maybe, if he could put his head into it, he could do it now.

He extended his right arm, feeling the magic in his blood move to his hand and come out his fingertips in little wisps. He focused on the wisps with his eyes, thinking at them to turn into a butterfly, but they did not do so. The more he tried to concentrate on the butterfly, the more the wisps seemed to disappear. After a long moment, he let his focus go, and the wisps died.

Harry sighed.

_I'm not getting anywhere. Why not?_

He tried to remember Hermione when she had shown him: twilight, just outside the front door to the Burrow, she wore a scarf to keep the morning chill at bay, her daring eyes tired but still curious. Harry had been awake for a while from a nightmare, and he hadn’t expected anyone to find him for quite some time. He was assuming Hermione was going to question him on what happened in his nightmare, but instead she held out her hand before them, curled up her fingers for a moment, and then released a butterfly, the details of its wings glowing softly.

The thought sparked another in Harry’s mind. He brought his arm back up and closed his fingers into a fist. He moved his magic through his fingertips once more, and the wisps became trapped in his palm, forcing them to gather. He could feel them build, and when he thought it decent, he opened his hand. In his palm was a glob of light with little wisps hanging off here and there. He prodded the glob with a finger, and it fell apart.

He tried again, this time letting more wisps build up. When he opened his hand this time, the glob of light was more of a ball.

_It's a start._

He prodded the ball, and rather than falling apart, it only moved a bit, leaving an indent where his finger had been. He poked it on the other side, and it left another indent. He smiled at what he figured was a wizard’s version of clay. He supposed it would work just fine.

He began to mold it, picturing in his mind a bird instead of a butterfly. After he had a basic structure (which looked more like an elephant with its trunk cut off than a bird), he tried making it move, starting with its head.

The clay twitched a bit, but never really moved. Harry huffed.

_Maybe it doesn’t look enough like a bird._

He smashed it in his hand, and it flattened into a patty. He thought, then, of an easier animal to make.

Many things crossed his mind, like worms and bats and spiders, but he really didn’t feel happy making those. He really didn’t think a butterfly would be much easier than a bird. Anything with wings, really, was out of the question, for he was terrible at making them. Harry decided to just mold whatever, letting his hand do all the work without much thought. After a bit, he had a ball with an almost cave-looking part hanging over it. Harry didn’t know what it was, but he tried to move it.
Suddenly, two eyes opened on top of the cave structure and the ball uncoiled, revealing its reptilian skin. It was a cobra in his hand. Startled, Harry jumped a bit, and in response, the snake’s head flew back and hissed, its hood widening.

*It copied me. In a weird way.*

Harry watched the cobra closely, turning his head to the side. The snake made of light turned its head, too. Harry smiled, and the cobra stuck out its forked tongue, assumingly happy.

Harry put his hand that held the cobra down on the bed next to him and thought for it to slither off, so it did, but as soon as it came off his hand, it fell into wisps.

As the wisps disappeared, Harry sighed. *Now what?*

He got off the bed and walked over to the bookcase.

*I guess I could do some reading. Anything interesting?*

He looked at all of the books, but none of them had a title on the spine. He picked one randomly and pulled it out. It had a blue cover, but no title anywhere, so he opened it. The first few pages were blank, but after flipping a few more, a title came up.

*Magical Paintings.*

The next page was a table of contents. Harry skimmed it, reading various things such as *Portraits: Why still Life Won’t Do* and *Moving from Frame to Frame*. He flipped to a chapter called *Magical Photographs vs. Portraits*. It was rather dull reading, and Harry quickly closed the book. When he went to put it back on the bookcase, he could not find where it had been. He shrugged and gave up looking after a few seconds, and just placed the book on the small space in front of some other books on a shelf. He let go and the book fell off. Harry inhaled in surprise, but before the book hit the floor, it froze and floated back up to a spot just higher than Harry had been looking, squeezing in tightly between two other books.

*I swear, this house knows more magic than I do.*

After a moment of standing quietly, thinking of what had happened and what to do then, Harry realized that he had nothing else he cared to do in this room. He did not want to read, sleep, or practice magic.

*Maybe it’s late enough for Tom to be awake?*

Harry cracked open the door to the hallway and found that the lights were bright now, showing that a decent time of morning had come, much to his relief. He walked down the hallway to the arch and looked down to the spacious room. Tom was in his chair, as always, eating breakfast by himself. Harry walked down the stairs and over to his own seat, standing just before it.

*Am I hungry? I have been up for a while, and I haven’t eaten anything since yesterday. Maybe I should eat.*

As Harry sat down, he noticed that Tom had only just started on his own food.

“Good morning, Tom.”

“A nice morning, indeed,” Tom replied. He slept rather well last night and was in a good mood, a frighteningly rare occurrence. “How was your night after I left? I assume you did not sleep, so how
Sadie popped in, a tray of breakfast in her hands for Harry. She placed it in front of him, he thanked her, and she smiled before popping away.

“Tom,” Harry started, unsure of how Tom would react. He seemed to be as ungrouchy as he had ever been, and Harry did not want to spoil it, but he needed Tom to trust him. “I’m not going to lie to you. I went snooping around in the hallway where my room is.”

Tom took a bite of his food, showing no emotion. Harry watched him, wondering for a moment if he had even heard.

In Tom’s guarded mind, a jolt of panic ran through his body.

“Oh really?” he asked. He looked straight into Harry’s confused eyes, both disguising his own expression and judging Harry’s. “And what did you find on your little…adventure?”

Harry was a little surprised he wasn’t being yelled at, or punished, but it was almost scarier that way. Were there going to be consequences? “Well, I found lots of things, but nothing too interesting.”

Tom raised an eyebrow, thoughts running through his head quickly. He knew Harry to be fairly clever, especially when it came to meddling, but had he stumbled upon something? “What rooms did you go into? All of them?”

“No,” Harry began, taking a bite of food. “I didn’t go into the last two rooms closest to my door,” he finished after chewing and swallowing. “I found the potions lab, some sitting room with nice paintings, a looking glass, a dead-end hallway, and a bar. The bar has some very nice butterbeer, by the way.” He took another bite of breakfast, smiling at its delicious taste.

Tom nodded casually. A dead-end hallway… No doubt he was not trying too hard to find something, then.

“Very well, then. I’m glad you enjoyed it.”

Harry put down his fork. “Are you mad?”

Tom always tried to be careful with his emotions, especially now. He sorted his feelings out before him in an attempt to decode them: relief of Harry not having found something dangerous, irritation for Harry not listening to his rule of not snooping, surprise and slight suspicion for the honesty.

“I suppose I can see no harm in what you have done, but I do not want you snooping around further, especially in other hallways.”

Harry nodded. He felt a bit disappointed in himself, now, knowing that Tom had no punishment for him but had trusted him to follow the rule. Would Tom continue to trust him after he broke that rule once?

“Am I allowed back into the rooms I’ve already seen?” Harry asked.

For a moment, Tom thought of himself when he was a child, breaking rules and yet still asking to
benefit from doing so. Was that not how Harry was currently acting? The thought made him want to smile for a moment, and then frown the next.

Tom watched Harry a moment, scanned over his face. He noticed guilt. It was rather laughable; maybe Harry was really a child—at some moments, Tom forgot this. He wondered if, in a change of heart, he should start yelling at Harry only to see Harry’s eyes begin to water. He supposed he could, if only for the amusement of it, but thought against it as he remembered he was supposed to be fostering an alliance…with a child.

“Harry, if you have already seen the rooms, what would be the point in keeping you out? You may go into the rooms if you wish, with the exception of the first room. I trust that you can respect that, especially since you found nothing of worth in there.”

Many things jumped out at Harry from what Tom had said. The first was that he said he trusted Harry. He smiled inwardly. Good.

The second was that, if nothing was inside the room but a dead-end hallway, why wasn’t he allowed inside? It could have just been a test, but that still wouldn’t explain the reason for the hallway in the first place.

The third was that Tom had contradicted himself, saying there was no reason to keep him out of any of the rooms he had been in, and then keeping him out of one of the rooms he had been in.

“If I may ask, why am I not allowed in the first room? If it’s just an empty hallway…”

Tom quickly found he detested Harry’s curiosity. He longed for the blind loyalty of his followers to rub off on him. Instead, he found he had two choices with the same outcome. He could tell Harry what was in the room, and he would go into it. He could not tell Harry what was in it, and he would still go in it. He hated that he was put into such a trap, but knew a good distraction would direct Harry’s focus elsewhere.

“Harry. Not everything is as it seems. There is some knowledge that is better left unknown, so that the seeker of it may not be harmed by its doing. It is a room that I have told you not to go into and you must trust…” Tom let the word have a moment for impact, “…that I have only the best of intentions for you in keeping you from it.”

Harry felt awful once more. Was Tom losing trust in him? Was Harry not trusting Tom?

He nodded. He would not go into the hallway room, no matter how much he questioned it. He could not risk the fragile bridge of trust they had just begun to build.

He was no longer hungry, even for the delectable plate of food before him. He pushed the plate away.

“Well,” Harry began, “what shall we do today?”

Tom had finished his breakfast and carefully placed his fork down on his plate.

“Ah, yes. We have another meeting that shall happen later. We shall be in a different meeting room this time. It is more private, as only my inner circle will be in attendance. There will be plans to discuss, as well as my current…predicament. You will need to wear the black cloak once more and shield your face. Even if most will know your identity, I cannot have them all know, especially Bellatrix. My, how she wishes to kill you…”

Harry’s breath hitched. Well, that’s comforting.
“Alright, then. I guess I’ll be in my room, or possibly that sitting room, until it’s time.”

Harry stood from the table and left, deciding that maybe he needed another butterbeer before he went to this meeting. Or maybe something stronger.
Severus Snape's POV:

As I assumed, my life hiding in the mundanity of the muggle world was bleak. Of course, my life had always been dull, but never so dull as it was now with my muggle job, no magic, and no one for company. I had not received any word from Potter. I figured he was busy convincing My Lord to join the Light or possibly even helping him deal with his painful memories.

I had just returned from my muggle job as a librarian at the public library. I did rather enjoy being around books all day, but there was something missing from within their pages. At times, I found myself about to toss a book to the floor, expecting it to stop before it hit the ground and raise back up to its spot on the shelf. There was a magic to books that made them unique, and while these muggle books may have had some, it was meant figuratively, not literally. I longed for the thick parchment of a potions book, a book on magical creatures, or even a History of Magic book. There was something about the feel of it when opened, like finding a portal into a different dimension, that made wizard books differ from muggle ones.

I sighed and sat down upon my makeshift couch, that was once a piece of wood left in the fireplace when I had moved in, and so it was an earthy brown color, and very uncomfortable in certain spots. I was never the best at transfiguration, but it would have to do. I was rather unsatisfied about my day at work. The next book in a popular series had just been released, and so I was not able to perform my normal duties, instead spending nearly the entire day checking out every copy and making a waiting list for when they were returned. There were at least ten people on each waiting list for the six books we owned. I went over to my bed that I had transfigured from a feather of my owl, so it at least was soft. I couldn't help but to just fall onto it, for I was exhausted. My face hit the soft feather pillow, and I immediately found sleep.

I awoke some time later. Looking to my muggle clock, I saw it was 3 in the morning. I sighed and got up to get some water. I pulled out a cup from my cabinet, then a scratching came from my meager window next to the couch. I approached it with caution and opened the window slightly. An owl placed its beak in the small opening. It was a normal owl's beak, nothing like the hybrid owls My Lord keeps. I let the owl inside and it flew to the arm of the couch. I removed the note from its leg, reading it to myself.

Dear Professor Snape,

We need you to explain what has happened with Harry. Luna was captured by Death Eaters, as you may have heard, and Harry traded with the Dark Lord, himself in Luna's place. But instead of saying he needed help, he said you were the one who needed help, and said you would explain what is going on, and why Harry can't leave. We have been trying to find you, but haven't the slightest clue where you are. If you are hiding, we will respect that, but we really would like to know about Harry.

Sincerely,
Hermione Granger

Of course, Potter would leave me to explain everything to them. I rolled my eyes.

I summoned some parchment and a quill with ink. It was safe to reply. I had so many wards up around this place; the owl would never be able to be traced back here.
To Whom It May Concern,

When Harry traded himself for Luna, it was a trap set by the Dark Lord to force Harry to become his ally. Of course, Harry did not need any forcing. I knew that Harry and the Dark Lord had a mental connection, as did both of them, as well as a similar past. I feared that the Dark Lord’s complete denial of his past would leave Harry hurt. I found that it would be best if forced to remember it, and so I gave the Dark Lord a potion to rebind his soul into one piece once more, minus Harry’s piece of course. Currently, Harry is helping the Dark Lord with that, and I am in hiding to avoid his wrath. Harry is fine, as he said, and the Dark Lord has no intention of harming him in any way. He must do this, for it may be the only way to bring Voldemort into the Light. And please, make sure this news does not make it to the Daily Prophet.

Sincerely,
Severus Snape
Headmaster at Hogwarts

P.S. I may need to resign as headmaster, for I am more than sure I would be in danger even there.

I tied the note to the owl, and sent it on its way. I went back to my bed and fell asleep once more, dreading the day to come.

I woke up to my muggle alarm going off. The irritating beep left me in a foul mood. I got ready and left to my job. As soon as I arrived at the library, I noticed almost all of our copies of the newest book of that one popular series had been returned in our return box outside the door overnight, even if they had just been checked out late yesterday. I called the numbers of those on the waiting list to get their books to check out. They, of course, arrived within minutes and left in a crazy, chaotic mess.

I will never understand muggles. I sighed.

I had just reorganized the books on the kids’ section, which would probably be a mess again in a few minutes, when a yell rang out from the back room. I went to see what was going on. One of my co-workers was ducked under a table as an owl flew overhead. The one I saw last night, no doubt. I helped up my co-worker and told her I would take care of the owl. She left the room, and I held out my arm. The owl landed on it, another message tied to its foot. I pulled it off and read it.

Dear Severus,

Thank you for that explanation. It was very helpful to us. We will not interfere with Harry and the Dark Lord, but I and the rest of the Order believe it would be best if you would not resign as Headmaster. We will assure you will be more than safe at Hogwarts. Please consider.

Sincerely,
Remus Lupin

I sighed once more. Should I leave? I do not think it would be wise, but I could not just leave my post as headmaster, no matter what threats I face. I summoned quill and ink and wrote my reply on the back.

To Whom It May Concern,

I suppose I shall return as headmaster. The threat of my death, however, will be greater, of course, and therefore a backup headmaster should be quickly decided. I will go to Hogwarts as soon as I am able to part from my spot of hiding.
Sincerely,
Severus Snape
Headmaster at Hogwarts

I tied it to the owl, let it go, and went to go quit my job.

---

**Harry's POV:**

The meeting was in 5 minutes, and I couldn’t remember my fake name. I was freaking out. Tom was busy preparing the room, with silencing charms and protective wards. I desperately wanted to ask him what it was, but not wanting to disrupt him, I just stood awkwardly by the table, wracking my brain for an answer. *It was something with an A... I think. Maybe it was a P. I really can't remember.* I lifted my hand and hit my forehead with my palm. I was hopeless.

Tom noticed my frustration. *What is wrong, Harry? I've already assured you this meeting will be much easier than the last.* he said in my mind.

*I can't remember my fake name. What is it?*

*A ureum S erpens.*

*Oh. Ok.* I relaxed a bit. I knew what to answer to now. *How did you come up with that anyway?*

*What do you mean?*

*Well, did you see that name somewhere or something? Or did you think of it?*

*I came up with it on my own. It means “golden snake” in Latin.*

*Oh. I smiled. Cool. I bet it sounds better in Parseltongue, though.*

/Aureum Sserpenssss/ Tom hissed. It did, in fact, sound better in Parseltongue. The way he said it made a shiver run down my spine and a large, goofy smile to my lips. I looked to where he was standing, but he wasn’t there. I looked from side to side then turned around. My nose was merely inches from Tom’s. He was looking down at me with a small smile on his face.

“Much better.” He said quietly. He was so close, I almost didn’t breathe. I could feel our warmth gathering together, blocking out the cold of the room. My heart sped up, and I really hoped he couldn’t tell how flustered I was. I was sure there was a blush to my cheeks.

“Uh... y-yea...” I swallowed. I didn’t dare think anything for fear he was still inside my head.

“Hmhmm” he chuckled darkly, “So very articulate, are we?”

He stepped back and over to his chair at the table, identical to the one in the spacious room, and so I followed him. My chair, sadly, wasn’t as comfortable as the other one I usually used. I crinkled my nose and tried to find a comfortable spot, but gave up after finding none. *Aw.*

*What’s wrong now?*

I almost jumped. *Oh, uh. Nothing. Nothing...* Tom didn’t look satisfied with my answer, and I could feel him poking around in my mind. *I’m fine, Tom. Really. I was just being childish.*

He rolled his eyes and looked to one of the Death Eaters that had arrived. Thankfully, it was only the Malfoys; we hadn’t put up our hoods yet. Lucius, Draco, and Narcissa greeted Tom and sat down at
the table. This table was a round table, so I couldn’t really avoid looking straight at Draco, who was pretending to faint. I rolled my eyes and put up my hood. He hadn’t changed one bit from school.

The rest of the Death Eaters arrived and all sat around the table. I noticed one seat was empty. Some others had noticed as well, judging by how they looked and whispered to the people next to them. We all were wondering who’s it was, and just as I realized the answer, Tom spoke up.

“My dear Death Eaters. These have been times of great trouble and conflict, and we have had yet another change of plans. A large change of plans. Severus shall not be joining us today, for he has betrayed me beyond ways I thought possible.” He paused for a moment, letting the tension in the room rise. “Severus has used a very rare potion on me. One that brought my soul’s pieces back together, even those that had once died. I have, however, found that the one that was within Harry Potter is still within him. Most likely to keep me from killing him.” The whole room was shocked, even Lucius showed it.

“My Lord, what shall we do?” said someone, “If you can be killed, there is no way to keep our plans for-”

“Yes. I fully realize this, Mulciber. That is why there must be a change of plans. We can no longer…” Tom paused. ‘I hadn’t meant for you to know this, but I suppose you would have found out anyway,’ he said in my head before continuing “…invade Hogwarts. There are many risks now that we must be aware of.”

My heart stopped, and a warm flush came over my neck and ears. **YOU WERE GOING TO INVADE HOGWARTS??**

“My Lord, since it is such a danger for you to go into battle, why not just send us in? We will make sure to get every single member of the Order, and I can personally handle Potter-”

“Bellatrix! Enough! I am not sending you into Hogwarts.”

Seeing the eagerness of Bellatrix wanting to kill me dulled my anger. *She really does want to kill me…*

I was so shocked from everything. They were going to invade Hogwarts? The thought blew my mind. Hogwarts was the safest place I knew of, not to mention filled with kids. How did they expect to carry that out?

‘Indeed she does.’

Draco spoke up. “My Lord, I fail to why we cannot go and attack Hogwarts.”

“Because, Draco, we can’t risk it now,” I spoke up suddenly. “I’m sure the Order knows of his weakness, and would stop at nothing to kill The Dark Lord. As long as he lives, others cower in fear, but if he was dead, all who weren’t in the war would join the Light. I’m sure you could understand that.” I knew he could only just see my mouth, and so I sneered at Draco, challenging him to reply.

“Well, of course, the Dark Lord would not be attending the battle. How could they possibly get him if he wasn’t there? It’s really an obvious solution, Potter.”

The room froze at the mention of my name. **Draco, YOU MORON!**

“Young Draco,” Tom started, deathly calm, “I have no idea wh-”

Bellatrix stood and flicked her hand which held a wand. My hood flew back. I tried to put it back on,
but it was too late. Everyone had seen me. Bellatrix’s eyes widened, as did some others. Bellatrix pointed her wand at me, ready to shoot something—probably the killing curse—at me. I could only stare with wide eyes, honestly expecting death.

‘Crucio’ I heard Tom thunder in his mind. I watched at Bellatrix hit the floor, writhing in pain. It was hard to watch, even if I had once used the same curse on her fifth year. “How dare you,” he spoke through his teeth.

I wasn’t surprised. Sure, I might have felt surprised, but compared to the reactions of the other Death Eaters who hadn’t been aware I was now an ally and not the enemy, I wasn’t surprised in the least. As they saw it, their enemy had been listening in on their plans, then when I was revealed, the Dark Lord was punishing someone else. I’m sure they were just about as shocked as Hermione and the Order will be when they find out.

Tom released his curse upon Bellatrix, and she lay limp on the floor, her breathing uneven. The others looked back to me. I gave a half smiled and a small wave. If I could guess how many out of the 23 people in this room did not know about me before, I would guess about 12. Exactly half of Tom’s inner circle had known about me (including Snape). They then looked to Tom.

“My Lord?”

Tom stood, giving the illusion that he was looking down upon everyone, and it made the whole situation more frightening. It struck me, suddenly, that this wasn’t Tom, but Voldemort.

“I will say this once and once only,” he hissed. “Harry has become our ally. He will be the key to our success. If you are so foolish as to even attempt to harm him in anyway, you will be severely punished.” His red eyes were filled with anger beyond belief as he looked to the faces of those who had not known. Bellatrix was still on the floor, and no one bothered to see how she was—I was alright with that. Tom sat back down in his chair, his face softening only slightly. “And now, we will find another plan.”

“I would really appreciate it if Hogwarts was not involved at all,” I said quietly.

Draco scoffed. “Why? I was sure by now that you would give anything to destroy it, seeing as how it is pretty much the reason you were on the wrong side in the first place. Or would you miss your pathetic little friends?” he said mockingly.

“Actually, Draco,” I spat, anger returning full force, “I would hate for it to be destroyed because it was the reason I was able to get away from my crappy life. But I’m sure you would have no idea what that is like, being a spoiled brat, and all.” The room seemed to disappear around us.

“Look, Potter. Just because you lived with muggles all of your life and I was living the wealthy life of a pure-blood doesn’t mean th-”

“Enough.” The voice had startled me. It had been like I was back at school, Hermione and Ron behind me, Crab and Goyle behind Draco, insulting each other like there was no tomorrow. “You both are acting like children.” I looked to Tom, and scarlet eyes met mine. “Harry. Draco. You both are dismissed. I no longer wish for you to sit in on this meeting.”

What?! You can’t do that!

‘Watch me,’ he whispered dangerously.

He flicked his hand and both of our chairs flew out the now open door into the hallway. The doors shut and locked. I could feel the blood surge, heated, in my body. I walked over to the door and tried
to open it, but the knob wouldn’t move an inch. My fist flew against it, not making any noise at all, only leaving my knuckles red and in pain. I continued punching, even if it was no use. *You can’t do this! I’m supposed to be in there! You can’t do this...* I put my forehead against the door. *This is useless.*

“All done with your tantrum now?”

I turned to face him. “Shut up Malfoy! You are the reason we are out here instead of in there!” I pointed to the door. “Just keep your big mouth shut!”

“Look, Potter. This is just as much your fault as it is mine! Don’t go blaming everything on me!”

I pulled out my wand. *Silencio!* I shot at Draco. His lips pressed together and didn’t open, though you could tell he was trying. “Now calm down. There’s no way we are going to find out what’s going on afterwards if we don’t.” I sat down on the floor, awaiting the door to open.
Lovely

**Lord Voldemort's POV:**

Step by step, I made my way to where Bellatrix still lay, limp on the floor. She was fine, of course, but for some reason—likely fear—she felt she should not stand back again and take her seat.

I hit her with one more Cruciatus curse to make sure the lesson had sunk in. She wanted to scream, but her lungs could not seem to gather the air to. She did nothing but wheeze and grab at her neck with her claw-like nails.

When I released, she was shaking, eyes large and red. I bent down beside her.

"Now leave my sight," I spat.

The meeting had just ended. It had been less productive than I would have liked considering we needed Harry's input in some places. However, I did not let him back in. I could understand that Harry and Draco disliked each other, but that did not call for mindless insults in the middle of a meeting. It was thoroughly childish.

Of course, Lucius and Narcissa stayed behind to collect their son, and after I saw Bellatrix had apparated away, I opened the door, expecting to find them arguing once more. To my surprise, they were sitting, cross-legged and quiet, on the floor, although Draco was giving Harry an angry glare. They looked up at us as we exited, but made no move to get up from their positions.

"Dragon," Narcissa said softly, her head just peaking out from behind me, "we are to leave now."

Draco huffed through his nose and looked to Harry, who rolled his eyes and said, "Sorry, Draco, but I can't seem to reach my wand. I guess that's because someone binded my hands."

Draco half smiled, but said nothing. Harry huffed.

"What is going on?" Lucius pulled Narcissa back and stepped out into the hallway.

"Well, is it not obvious?" I glanced between the two, shaking my head. "The boys have binded each other. Draco is silenced. They have been stuck and cannot get out." I sighed. "You both are extraordinarily childish." I waved my hand and they were released.

"Well maybe if someone hadn't silenced me, I wouldn't have bound his legs to each other."

"Well maybe if you hadn't been such a prat and revealed who I was, I wouldn't have silenced you!"

"Draco, that is enough," Lucius spoke up, though his tone was neither harsh, nor demanding. "Come now. We are leaving."

Draco did not speak another word, but left with face still red from his anger.

Harry was in no better state. Still, I was beginning to find it rather entertaining to watch Harry when he was angry. His face would grow a red-purple tint to it, his fists were clenched so hard, they turned his knuckles white. His usually calm, soothing eyes filled with fury and hatred. It was a good look on him. And I intended to keep him that way for as long as I could manage.
With a small shake of his head, Harry attempted to calm himself. "What happened at the meeting?"

I broke eye contact, looking down the hallway instead. "For now, it is none of your concern."

I could almost hear the waves of rage that flowed off him.

"None of my concern? It's all of my concern! I don't want you to attack Hogwarts! I don't want you to attack anything! Tell me what happened!"

Looking back to him, I angled my head down. "I find you are rather unfit to accept that information."

He stood then, as if trying to meet my height so I would not look down at him. "Unfit? How in the bloody fucking hell am I unfit? I am in this just as much as..."

I tuned out as he rambled on and on, yelling as loud as he could. After a few minutes of watching Harry—the crease that formed between his brows, the twitches in his mouth, the tenseness of his jaw—his voice grew hoarse. Harry stopped his talking, then, and it grew quiet. Only the thumps of Harry's fist against the walls quickly filled it.

"Harry, stop that."

He stopped, but left his fist against the wall.

"Now," I walked up behind him until I was close enough to hear his heart pound in his chest (which was actually not as close as one would think). "You will stop acting like a toddler and eat lunch."

"But I don't want lunch," he answered, voice scratchy and deep.

"You must eat. Just like you must sleep."

'I don't have to do either if I don't want to.'

I sighed. As much as I hated to admit it, I had grown attached to Harry. I had never been around him so much before, and now that I had, I felt as though life would be so much different without him. Knowing that he wasn't the person I couldn't kill, but the person I didn't want to kill. Somehow, in a world full of unworthy people, Harry was passionate, trusting, and loyal. It was such a change from the cold, paranoid life I had lived before. Harry brought so much life. And below the surface, Harry was like Tom, so much it was almost to the point of being identical. I would never tell him this, of course, or anyone else. I would not reveal a weakness if I could keep it hidden.

"Come. You are going to eat." I turned and walked away to the dining room, knowing he would follow.

---

We ate silently, even in our minds. Harry did not eat but a few bites of his lunch, which concerned me. How could he manage to deprive himself of such necessary things like food and sleep? Without magic. The concept was beyond me.

And yet, the more I thought about it, the more I saw the potential in Harry. If he was strong now, lacking food and sleep, I could only imagine his strength at his peak. I was certain he had some plan to "turn me to the Light," but that was only if I do not find a way to bring him to my side first.

"Harry, what would you say about receiving lessons?"

'Lessons?' he grumbled in my mind. 'What kind of lessons?'
"Lessons in advanced magic. It would be best for you to learn spells that you would never learn at Hogwarts."

'Uh, sure. Alright then.' He pushed away his plate.

"But you must eat, Harry."

He folded his arms. 'I tried, but I'm not hungry.'

I had finished with my plate at that point. Triven popped in and took both our plates away. I simply sighed and stood, motioning Harry to follow.

I decided to use a room in the same hall as my room; It was large enough and had many, meaningless little knick-nacks to practice on, as well as a few rats in cages to feed to Nagini that would also be useful for cursing.

I stepped inside, moving the useless tables and rugs that were in the middle of the room. Once the center of the floor was cleared, I turned to Harry.

"Now, where shall we start?"

Harry's eyebrows rose. "Wait. You're teaching me?" he said, voice so scratchy it was barely audible. He cleared his throat.

"Who were you expecting?"

"I don't know," he responded, voice a bit clearer. "I guess I wasn't really expecting anyone…"

We were silent a moment as Harry's sentence trailed off to nowhere. He offered no further explanation, so I took the liberty to continue.

"Back to the lesson."

I held up my hand and a book flew into it. Truly, it was one of my favorite books on curses. There were so many things in it that the wizarding world seemed to have forgotten. I searched for a simple one to start with.

"Ah, here we are…the Gelucrous curse. One of my favorites."

I walked over to the large cage of rats that sat in the far corner of the room and picked a rat out. It writhed and squeaked madly in my hand, but when I placed it on the floor, it dared not run away. I pulled out my wand and pointed it at the rat.

"Gelo cruore."

The rat was hit. At first, it seemed that nothing had happened, but then, the rat began to move. With each movement came a loud squeak or pain, and then more panicked movements. It began to run around, as if trying to escape. Its light pink feet grew in size and began to turn deep purple, as did its tail. After a couple moments, it's skin grew blotchy as well, and it stopped moving.

When I turned back to Harry, he looked horrified. "What the bloody hell was that?"

I smirked. "The curse. It causes the blood to become so cold it burns. Since the blood partially freezes during the curse, large movements, like the rat running about like it had, break the blood vessels, adding to the extreme pain. It is truly a torturous curse."
"That's terrible!"

"It's a curse, Harry. You may find yourself in a situation where it may be necessary to use it. It works on any type of creature, with the exception of those that have no blood, of course. It doesn't normally kill, but the poor rat was foolish enough to think running in circles would stop the pain. Terrible mess."

From behind us, Nagini slithered out of her bed and towards the rat. I watched Harry visibly jump upon seeing her attack it before eating the dead thing whole. Of anyone, she would enjoy this lesson most of all.

"Harry, it is vital to know these things. Our work will not be easy. It will be dangerous, and you will need to assert yourself as the greater wizard."

"What?" Harry's mouth hung open and his brows drew together. He seemed to be searching for something to say. "What-what kind of work will we be doing? Why will I need to torture people?"

I sighed, lifting my thumb and middle finger to my forehead to smooth out the stress in my brows. "Harry. There are many instances where others will try and attack you. You have joined forces with me, and once others hear of this, they will think you have betrayed them and seek their revenge. Revenge is the most violent motivator."

"And the answer is to torture them?" The cracking in Harry's voice revealed that he was losing it once more. "That would only confirm their suspicions. But if I didn't fight against them, they would know it was..." Harry put a hand to his head, his fingers running into his hairline. "I don't know... have I betrayed them?" The hand ran down his face and fell at his side.

Harry's eyes met mine. All the anger from earlier was gone. Instead, he had wide eyes and a troubled mouth. This was a Harry that was not enjoyable to see.

I sighed. "It is not that simple, Harry."

What do I want to say on the subject? Should I make him believe he has betrayed them? Or possibly that they betrayed him? Which would suit my plans more? Does this suit my plans at all?

I took in a breath and let it out. "Back to the lesson," I stated firmly. "You will learn these curses. You may not use them, if you so desire, but I expect you to know and practice them."

He sighed and looked away. 'So in other words, I have betrayed them,' he thought so loudly I did not even need to visit his mind to hear it.

As I was about to say something in response, I felt a nudge at my shin.

/Massssster/ Nagini hissed at me.

/What isss it, my pet?/ I bent down and gently pet her head.

/I have lossst my piece of you./ Her tone was shrill and quick; she was frightened.

/IYesss, I am aware. All isss well, though. I have it./

/Oh. Excellent. I am glad you have it./ I continued to stroke her, feeling the tenseness in her muscles slowly soften.

Harry's POV:

This whole lesson so far had been shocking, horrible, and odd, but the most odd and shocking part was watching Tom be so affectionate with his snake. I always saw Tom as a misunderstood guy who generally kept his distance from living things he didn't/couldn't control. He seemed to fit that assumption.

Merlin's **ass** was that assumption wrong.

He really cared for the snake. I not only saw it but sensed it. Judging by the conversation (surprise, surprise, the snake was a horcrux), it made sense. They shared the same connection Tom and I shared. I could see how that would make someone care so much for something. Not to mention, she had been his pet for some time. I know I cared for Hedwig, mental connection or not…

"Alright, Harry. Back to the lesson."

I closed my eyes and sighed inwardly. I always knew I would learn some bad spells, but I never imagined I would learn something so horrible, and from the Dark lord, master of all things dark and evil, of all people. As much as I felt we were alike at times, I could never bring myself to use something so terrible on a human being. Maybe a rat. But a person was different…right?

"You try."

I winced. I was dreading those words, and they just flew through the air at me. Still, I grabbed my wand from my pocket and pointed it at the next rat Tom pulled out of the large cage. My feet were glued to the floor, legs stiff, and arm stiffer. I took in a slow, deep breath.

*This isn't the proper positioning for spellcasting*, Hermione's voice said inside my head. *You'd be lucky if you could cast a simple floating charm like that.*

*Relax your legs*, Lupin's voice said. I complied. *Good. Now terrible spell or not, you can cast this. Now, this is likely an advanced curse, so confidence and desire to cast are key.*

*Your wand seems to be at the ready, Mr. Potter*, McGonagall's voice added, *but tell me, do you really cast your spells with your arm that extended? You've left yourself not room to move your arm.*

I took in another breath and relaxed my arm so that it was solid but bent. These were the voices of my teachers, my friends in my head. I may not be able to tell them in person, but in my mind, I let them know that I never meant to betray them, that I would never betray them if I could ever help it.

*"Gelo cruore."*

The rat was struck with the indigo-colored ray of light that shot from my wand, and it twisted on the floor. Unlike the last rat, this one didn't run in circles. Still, after one long, sickening moment, it fell onto its back, it's chest rising and falling like mad until it stopped, shook, and then laid still.

*I caused that. I did that to a living thing.*

"Very well done, Harry," Tom said, lightly clapping as if he had just finished watching a show. "I'm impressed."

"Yeah…sure." My stomach churned.

"Now…” Tom flipped through the book some more.
Whatever that book was, I was certain I would never enjoy it as much as Tom seemed to.

"Next, I suppose we could try this one." Tom set the book down. "I'm afraid we won't know if the spell is working right on a rat. We'll need a human test subject."

*What?*

"It doesn't have the potential to kill, does it?" I asked, my still-scratchy voice higher and more timid than I had intended it to be.

"Not from the spell directly," Tom answered, wand rising in the air to release something green, "but people are known to kill themselves afterwards."

I was nearly certain I was ready to vomit.

Immediately, Wormtail appeared in the room. "You needed me, Master?"

"Yes," Tom said coolly, his Lord Voldemort demeanor on. "We need a test subject for Harry's lesson on curses."

The more I stared at the shifty, mousy-haired man before us, the more I saw the fear in his eyes and the paleness of his face, the more I felt my dread turn to anger. Did he have the right to be afraid of a curse when he, out of fear, turned in his best friends to die? Did he have the right to be afraid when he murdered Cedric Diggory before he even had the chance to feel fear? Voldemort was a villain, yes, and he killed my parents and ordered the death of Cedric, but at least he had motives. It was logic: kill the things that get in the way. Not good logic, but logic.

Pettigrew had been friends with them through their years at Hogwarts. He, my dad, Sirius, and Remus gave each other nicknames, got into trouble, even put themselves in danger monthly for one another. And yet, this powerful dark wizard comes around, and instead of doing the right thing—protecting their hiding spot to his grave, as Sirius and Remus would have—he turned them in. Betrayal. Cowardice. The worst sins of a Gryffindor.

Something in me knew this would be satisfying, and the rest of me almost felt guilty for it.

"But-but *Master*..." Pettigrew pleaded.

"Enough!" Tom looked as irritated as I felt. "It shall be done." Tom's sharp glare turned to me and softened. "Now, this is a curse that takes over the mind. Images of the victim's worst fears become their only vision until the curse is done."

Normally, I would feel guilty about this. Unnecessary violence and torture was not the answer. That is not what I represent. But here, beside Tom, anger already buried inside my chest ready to escape, watching Pettigrew snivel and whimper...it felt as right as it ever would.

Tom's wand was already pointed at Pettigrew. "*Horrorem mente.*"

Pettigrew's eyes went completely white and he cringed. He was mumbling something to himself, but I couldn't quite hear it. After a moment, he screamed and fell to the floor as if he had been struck. As he writhed on the ground, I started to pity him. What was he seeing? I started to think, what if he had a bad childhood, or something? How did I know he wasn't beaten every day of his life before Hogwarts and was so scared all the time, so that's why he would-

"Alright, Harry." Tom released the spell and Pettigrew's eyes returned to normal. "Your turn."
My wand was up and the words were on my lips before Pettigrew could even catch his breath.

**Lord Voldemort's POV:**

I could sense the satisfaction Harry was already feeling; it practically radiated from him.

"Horrorem mente."

Harry cast the spell, and Pettigrew fell under the curse once more. Instead of the easy transition into the fear that I had given him (out of pity), Harry's curse plowed him straight into the horror, it seemed. Pettigrew, already on the floor, writhed and clawed at the floor, his screams practically choking him.

That was already a pleasant enough sight, but then I turned to look at Harry.

His grassy eyes were cold and piercing. The side of his mouth twitched up, as if wanting to break into an evil smile, but he would not allow it. His stance was powerful, controlled. This was his first time casting the spell, but he seemed to catch on that he controlled the level of power behind it, and he used that to his advantage.

This was a whole new side of Harry I had never seen. I had told myself earlier that he was enjoyable to see angry, but now…I found this much more (dare I say) attractive. Something about the dark side of Harry made my heart pound and my lungs press for the oxygen they so needed. A different kind of feeling set in, unlike any other I had felt before, and I was enjoying it.

I was unsure of how long it had been, but Harry lifted the curse. Pettigrew lay curled up on the floor.

'I rather like this rat,' Harry thought at me.

As do I. Shall we try another curse?

Harry did not respond for a moment, eyes scanning over Pettigrew's quaking, meager form. 'Yes. We shall. But first, I'd like to try something.'

As Pettigrew sat up at last, irritatingly slow, Harry's hand flew up, wand at the ready.

"Gelo cruore."

Pettigrew yelled and shut his eyes but dared not move otherwise. He knew this curse.

That look overcame Harry again for the briefest moment, and I could not help but smile. Beautiful, I thought.

'Thank you.' Harry's hand fell back down to his side and his piercing eyes looked down at Pettigrew, daring him to move.

Yes, the spell was brilliant and properly cast, but Harry was the true show. Filled with all that cold-hearted hatred…breathtaking.

The look was gone, then, and his hand rose up again. "Finite Incantatem."

Pettigrew fell back to the floor on his side, his chest heaving and his mouth filled with whines and snivelings. My moment of beauty was gone, replaced with such a revolting thing.

"Well done, Harry. And now," I flipped a few pages in my book, "the next curse."
Inevitable Blood Lust

3rd Person POV:

Snape had never enjoyed Hogwarts as much as he did now, looking over the empty Great Hall, and feeling magical once more.

*That awful muggle life of mine is thankfully over. I suppose I would live a life of magic and be killed than to live a life of none and deal with muggles every single miserable day of my life.*

As he said before, he would never understand muggles.

He had returned to Hogwarts with much ease. Now that he had been here, he noted that he needed to tell Potter where he was without The Dark Lord knowing. He didn’t want to bring trouble to Hogwarts when it could otherwise be avoided. Snape had spent the better part of an hour attempting to find a clever solution before he had finally determined that, of course, he couldn’t be sure what method he could use to send a message, as he could never know for sure when Harry was alone or not.

*Even if Harry was alone, who is to say that Lord Voldemort would not just glance into his thoughts? It is pointless to send Harry a message in any manner and assume that Voldemort will not discover where I am.*

He felt defeat for but a moment before he determined that, if he could not keep himself safe, he should, at the very least, keep Hogwarts safe.

*I’ll send Harry an owl now that it is nearing night. At least then I know that Harry will likely be alone, if not read it first. If I ask him to convince Lord Voldemort to spare me, I’m sure that Harry would not allow him to harm me. Possibly…*

He decided it was worth the risk, although he was well aware of the amount of hope and chance that was going into this plan.

*Dear Harry,* he wrote.

*I feel it would help me significantly if you could convince The Dark Lord not to kill me. I have come out of hiding, and I do not fear death, but I fear the safety of my current residence. I understand that you may be the only person who may be able to do this, and if you cannot, I do not believe there is a person alive who can. I won’t wish you luck.*

*As a note, if you find you are unable to convince him to spare me, I would appreciate a warning.*

*Sincerely,*

Severus Snape
Headmaster of Hogwarts

*P.S. Feel free to ask for any guidance while I am still alive and not forced into hiding. I’ve no doubt in my mind that The Dark Lord may have ideas that would ruin the purpose for my potion.*

Snape tied the note to an owl and let it go.

The owl flew out the window and into the beautiful world. It soared above forest colored with early autumn, its leaves giving in to gravity and covering the ground in its colors; grasslands where the
wind blew through, making a whistling noise ever so quiet as animals hid underneath, rushing to gather food for winter; lakes where the fish jumped out, revealing their metallic scales that would blend in with the sparkling waters beneath them; towns where people bustled about like tiny worker ants below, each living and concerned with their own stories; and finally, to hills that seemed to go on forever with grass greener than anywhere else, leaves scattered about in brighter reds, yellows, and browns, and in the midst, a large manor that overlooked it all.

The owl flew through the designated owl entrance, into the spacious room, and down a dimming hallway, landing just before the last door. He tapped on the door with his beak and scratched a couple times with his foot. No sound came from the other side, and so he continued to scratch.

Harry had just finished brushing his teeth, taking his time because he dreaded sleep, when he heard the scratches. He opened the door and an owl hopped forward, extending its leg to him. He removed the note and read it.

_Snape wants me to convince Tom not to kill him…_ he sighed. _Knowing Voldemort, that won’t be easy. “Accio ink and quill.”_

_Dear Professor Snape,_

_I will try my best. You know as well, if not better, as I that it won’t be easy. Doesn’t matter if I’m Harry Potter or the Queen of England._

_Since you mentioned help, and ideas he may have, Tom has started to teach me curses. Today, we worked most of the day on a few that he enjoys. I was against it at first. I felt bad for all the rats we were using, and the curses were pretty brutal. Then, Tom got Pettigrew, and I practiced on him for the rest of the time. I hate to admit it, but I rather enjoyed it. Is this a problem?_

_Sincerely,_

_Harry Potter_

_Boy-Who-Is-Saving-Your-Life-At-The-Possible-Expense-Of-His-Own_

_P.S. What’s with the whole “Headmaster at Hogwarts” being underneath your name? I’m perfectly aware you are headmaster._

_Harry smiled as he tied the note up to the owl and sent it on its way._

_Yeah…that’ll irritate him for sure._

_Harry could vaguely sense the distaste in his mind. ‘_I would cast many of the curses you learned today, possibly some others as well. I would torture him until he was begging for death, which I would only give him as an act of mercy and pity.’_ _Harry’s eyes were wide, and he felt his stomach churn. That’s horrible._
‘That is what traitors deserve, Harry,’ Tom thought back, nonchalant. ‘Disloyalty is the worst form of betrayal. I’m sure you can understand that. What would you have done to Pettigrew after you found out he betrayed your parents?’

For a moment, Harry felt his anger build, but he released it just as quickly. He did not need it right now. I tortured him. You were there. But I didn’t kill him. Besides, Snape is different from Pettigrew.

‘Different?’ Harry was sure he could almost hear Tom scoff. ‘How so? They both are filthy, backstabbing traitors who cannot keep their loyalty straight.’

That’s… Harry couldn’t find a flaw with that statement. Fair, I guess. But Snape had different things in mind when he betrayed you. He thought of what was best for you and me in the long run. He had good intentions. Pettigrew was too cowardly to refuse you, and he knew he was sending his friends to their deaths. That is worlds of difference.

One story below him and a couple hallways over, Tom sat on the edge of his bed. While earlier events had gotten rid of the stress that had been building in his body, he found it was all rushing back now. His head ached, and he rubbed at his temples. He was far more angered than he had been since being human the first time, and yet he still considered what Harry said. It was all so exhausting. Although I see your point, Harry, there must be some type of punishment to ensure I have no others who betray me. Not only did he defy me, but he did so in the worst way possible. He cannot get off easy, and the only consequence I see fitting the punishment is if he dies.

Tom could feel and hear Harry huff in their shared mind. If it wasn’t bad enough that he had to deal with his own amplified emotions, now he had to feel Harry’s as well. Twice the exhaustion, twice the stress.

‘Why is killing so easy for you?’ Harry thought at him, frustration behind his words. ‘I know you have this whole Dark Lord persona, and you strike fear into the hearts of all, et cetera, but have you ever thought about the person you were killing? Snape is so much more than a follower who has done something you wished he hadn’t. He’s an excellent potions master, for one. He actually found and brewed a potion to rebind your soul. Most others couldn’t even dream of such a thing existing, let alone make it perfectly. That couldn’t have been easy. He’s headmaster at Hogwarts. Without a headmaster, what will Hogwarts do? Snape is as qualified as anyone else for the job. He has a past he isn’t proud of, but who doesn’t? That’s something we both understand. He is more than just some pawn in some game that you think you control, Tom. He is a wizard, just like us. A half blood, like you. And he hates his father just as much. If anything, he should be spared. If you were in his position, and you thought you were doing what was best for your cause, wouldn’t you want to live? I know I would.’

Passion. Respect. Personal connection. Tom was feeling everything Harry was. It was astonishing, considering Tom was certain he had left up some mental barriers earlier so that Harry was not completely in his mind. And yet now, their two minds were one and Tom was not just hearing but feeling Harry’s point. Was he actually reconsidering what to do with Severus? He wasn’t sure if it was because he was feeling Harry’s feelings or because Harry was just that convincing. He hoped the former.

What do suggest I do, then? I cannot let him off without some punishment. Without consequences, there is no order, Harry. I must keep order. I have a regime. I am a dark lord. Nothing runs in chaos. He must have known he was making a sacrifice, just as he must understand that his punishment will allow the world to continue to work.

He felt Harry’s eye roll.
'The world won’t just erupt into chaos because someone did not die when you said they should. Sure, you’re a dark lord, but you are not some kind of god. Why do you get to decide who lives and dies? Besides, Snape is worth forgiveness. He did this for you. He knew your current method would not work. You know what he said to me? He said that he wanted me to make sure that you accomplish your goal using other methods. He knows that at the rate you are going, you’ll either end up dead at the hand of the other side or dead at the hand of your own people. If anything, Snape is possibly the most loyal to you and your cause because he’s done something in an effort to help you. You’re right, he made a sacrifice, but that sacrifice was betraying you. He knew that you’d never agree to do it. But he did it anyway because he believes in you and your cause.'

Tom had attempted to put up his mental barrier through Harry’s whole speech, but found that Harry’s mind was breaking it down faster than he could build it. He’d thought for his whole life that he had a silver tongue, but here was Harry convincing him as if he was a child. He was finding it more and more difficult to refuse to give in, and he hated that Harry could see it. Still, he would not.

If Severus knew the consequences of his actions and still performed them, he understands that he sacrificed more than his loyalty. He put his life on the line, and I will kill him for what he did.

Anger. Incredulousness. Tom wondered if Harry would explode, he was so full of those emotions.

‘Did you ever think that what Snape did isn’t as bad as you thought?’ Something shifted in Harry’s mind. ‘Sure, you can die easier. You’ve only got one horcrux, but that horcrux is me. Do you really think there is anyone alive, besides myself, who would have the guts to kill me? And Snape did that. He gave you that potion, and then he ran and gave me another one so that I remained a horcrux. That was no accident. He planned this. He made you whole again. He gave you the tools to bring people to your side without using fear. This isn’t the first time you’ve been betrayed, right? Fear doesn’t keep people on your side. You know what does? Compassion. Charisma. Actually giving a damn about the world and the people in it. Look at Dumbledore. People loved Dumbledore, and they would have done anything for him. That’s real loyalty. And many people lack the things to get to that level of influence, but Snape knew you could do it, and he made sure you would. You have a reliable advantage on your side, and you can’t waste it.’

Tom had been attempting to pull his mind away, and as soon as Harry finished that last sentence, Tom’s mind pulled away entirely too fast. He was finding himself convinced. What Harry said made so much logical sense, he didn’t want to admit that it was Harry who thought those things and not his own mind. Maybe, he thought to himself, it was my mind after all, but Harry’s use of it…what a dangerous thing.

‘Harry,’ Tom thought at Harry, his mind still keeping its distance, ‘the decision has been made. I am not changing my punishment for Severus. Now go to sleep.’

With that, Harry could feel Tom’s mind close off from his entirely. Harry huffed.

Tom is so difficult. Why can’t he just get it into his head that Snape is not the bad guy in all of this?

Most of all, Harry disliked that Tom had abruptly ended the conversation. Had he even been listening to what Harry had been saying? It didn’t seem so.

Merlin…so set on killing. Who’s being childish now? At least I didn’t run from the conversation.

Harry let himself fall onto the bed and stared at the ceiling.

Maybe it isn’t so weird for Tom to leave so suddenly. Maybe I’m the weird one. I am a Gryffindor, after all. I stand up to what opposes me. I might run straight into a brick wall if I thought it would
help. Harry nearly laughed. *I have run into a brick wall. Dobby closed the train platform…*

*But Tom isn’t a brick wall. Tom is smoke. All wisps. I’ll never be able to catch him. Not by running into it. But how does one catch smoke?*

He let his mind consider for a long while, secretly thanking the situation for keeping his mind active and unable to sleep.

By that time, the owl had arrived to Snape with Harry’s reply. Severus read it and frowned. It was so simple to see what The Dark Lord was doing. He was trying to turn Harry before Harry turned him. It was like a kind of metaphorical battle. Light versus Dark, as prophesied all those years ago, but instead of killing one another, they would kill the very essence of one another, for neither could truly be on the other side without undergoing a massive change. They would no longer have the traits that so defined them.

He summoned some parchment, ink, and a quill.

*Harry,*

*As it seems, My Lord is trying to “change” you to his side before you bring him to yours. I am thrilled you both have bonded over torturing Pettigrew. Yes, I’m sure that will help you in your task.*

*Be mindful, Harry. The Dark lord is clever, and he may influence you to do things that will take you steps backwards. Use caution. Do not do anything you feel is wrong. And do try and make The Dark Lord do something he considered useless. Make him see.*

*Sincerely,*

*Severus Snape*
*Headmaster at Hogwarts*

*P.S. It is a title I rightfully own. I am aware you know of it. I may sign my name as I please, as you have done.*

Severus sent the owl back, considering how irritating Potter was. *Just like his father.*

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**Harry’s POV:**

Snape’s letter had arrived a little while ago, and it made sense. I didn’t have anything to say back yet, so I sent the owl on its way.

I needed a plan. Everything I was hit with fusssed about in my mind, demanding a solution. I needed something to organize my thought. I needed a list.

*I’m not too fond of lists, but they come in handy, I guess.*

*Problems that need solving:*

#1: *I needed to convert Tom to The Light before he converted me to The Dark*

For the most part, this problem grew more confusing the more I thought about it. It used to be obvious who was on what side, but since arriving at Tom’s manor, it was becoming more difficult to figure out. Still, I knew that I liked Tom and not Voldemort, and that Tom liked Voldemort and not Tom. I needed a way to get rid of Voldemort and make Tom never want him back.
But how is that possible? Dumbledore showed me that neglect, loneliness, and anger created Voldemort. So...maybe their opposites will get rid of him? Happiness, friendship, and understanding...those are what have kept me alive this whole time. Okay, so he tried to convert me using a lesson on curses and the man who betrayed my parents. And I need to show him...happiness...so a spell lesson on happiness?

After a moment, it hit me. I nodded to myself.

#1: 1/3 solved! 2/3rds to go.

#2: Tom won’t spare Snape’s life.

This made me absolutely frustrated. Yeah, maybe I didn’t originally like Snape so much when I came to Hogwarts, or every time he humiliated me, Ron, and/or Hermione in potions class, or when he insulted my dad, but Snape seemed like a good person. He sacrificed himself for this plan to help out Tom, which shows dedication, if nothing else. And he was desperate enough to ask me to ask Tom to spare him, which meant something. I would have never expected that.

But how the bloody fuck to I convince Tom? I used all the arguments I had, and even some I didn’t know I had...

#2: Work in progress

#3: Snape said torturing Pettigrew was taking me “steps backward.”

What did that mean? I mean, I know what that meant, but what did that mean? I shook my head. I was confusing myself.

If I’m steps backward from where I was before, where does that put me? Where was I before? I’m allies with Tom, but does that mean I’m no long on The Light? What even defined The Light?

I sighed. Did I really care? I knew I wouldn’t let Tom “change” me to The Dark. I didn’t like torturing people. Just Pettigrew.

#3: Don’t give a rat’s ass (no pun intended)

#4: Tom wouldn’t tell me what happened in the meeting.

This was not a good sign, especially considering they had originally planned to attack Hogwarts. Even so, a part of me knew Tom wouldn’t attack Hogwarts if I said not to.

So if that’s one part of me, what does the other part think? That Tom will just go on and destroy Hogwarts anyway? Kill all my friends and teachers while I watch? That’s not Tom.

I was being paranoid. There was no way Hogwarts was still on the agenda.

#4: Solution: Take some calming draught. Stop being so paranoid. Trust Tom.

That seemed to be the end of the list, at least at the moment. That was enough.

I pulled out my wand. “Accio Calming Draught.”

Once the bottle fell into the palm of my hand, I drank it without hesitation. The stress that had been on my mind suddenly fell away, leaving me feeling loads better, but I still didn’t dare sleep.

I rose from the bed and went out the door into the hallway. After glancing around at the doors in the
dim light, I picked the one with the bar behind it.

Another butterbeer sounds perfect.

Just like before, a butterbeer slide over to my hand just as I sat down. With a smile, I took it and went to the sitting room to look out at the enchanted hills through the window, getting lost in wishes of standing on them.
Harry’s POV:

The morning finally came. I’d spent the whole night in the sitting room, staring out the window, watching the portraits, and warming myself by the fireplace; I really liked it. Now, I told myself, it’s time to try and turn Voldemort into Tom. Probably the craziest bit of transfiguration I’ll ever do.

I went back to my room, showered, and got ready, my mind focusing on everything that I did as an act of preparing for my mission.

I’ll need to be extra Slytherin like today.

I transfigured my brown shirt into a dark green one, that my eyes seemed to adjust to match, and dark jeans into black ones. Looking in the mirror, I realized I matched the whole décor of the house. Who’s to say I won’t blend in?

I sighed and shook my head. Slytherin’s don’t talk like that to themselves.

You look hot, the Slytherin in me said. You’re hot. You’re prepared. You’ve got this.

I began combing through my hair, trying to tame it. As I feared but expected, it never tamed.

No, you’re doing this all wrong, the Slytherin Me said. Try this.

I ran my fingers through my hair, front to back. The front part stood up, as if I had styled it like that. I tilted my head to get a sideways glance and found that I did rather like the style. At least, for my Slytherin-self.

You’re perfect. Now go.

I went into the hallway, which was now nice and bright, over to the familiar arch, and down the stairs. Tom was, of course, in his chair, almost finished with his breakfast. I stood beside his chair, too anxious to possibly eat.

“Not eating again, Harry?”

I grinned. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say Tom cared about me.

“Nope. Not hungry,” I answered quickly. Test your theory, the Slytherin me said. “I didn’t sleep either.”

Tom’s red eyes scanned over me, face appearing neutral. Maybe he’s waiting for me to collapse from lack of sleep and nourishment.

Or maybe he isn’t.

“I’m fine, Tom,” I said, pushing my Slytherin-self back. “Really. I’m used to this. In fact, if I eat every meal and sleep all night, then you should be concerned. I’ve never done that in my life.”

Without changing his posture or expression, Tom pushed his plate away. He wasn’t entirely finished, but who was I to judge?

He always finishes his breakfast. That’s a sign.
I shook my head. “Anyway, I was thinking...you gave me lessons on spells I might need. I figured maybe I could give you lessons on spells you might need.”

It was then that his expression changed: eyebrows bunched, eyes narrowed, mouth thinned. “Harry,” he said, tone a bit sharp. “I have been through all of my school years at Hogwarts and studied numerous books filled with advanced magic beyond your years. What possible spell could exist that you know that I do not?”

_He said that almost exactly as we rehearsed it._ Oh, my Slytherin-self was eating this up. I tried to hide it, but my smile burst through.

“You’ll see.”

A house elf popped in and took Tom’s plate away. He stood slowly, his eyes now not only annoyed, but curious. We both stood for a moment, not moving. I turned and motioned with my arm for him to lead the way.

Tom’s expression tensed before it relaxed, and he led the way to the training room he had used the day before.

And Tom was so right. I was a child. I was a child who was about to eat some candy before dinner and get away with it.

We entered the room and Tom carefully shut the door behind me. “Now, tell me this spell.”

Instead of talking to Tom, I glanced around, speaking to the room.

“You may have heard of it, but I imagine you have not been able to perform it,” I said. _God, my Gryffindor-self thought,_ is this what Malfoy feels like all the time? No wonder he’s such a prat. “I earned to do it my third year at Hogwarts, but it wasn’t exactly in the course material.”

Tom walked around to where I faced, his annoyance obviously growing. He glared down at me, just waiting for me to continue speaking, but I didn’t.

“What is it, Potter? I demand to know.”

_Oh, demand! He thinks he’s in charge of this lesson._

I looked Tom right in his eyes: a challenge. “It’s called a Patronus Charm. It’s a type of defensive spell. I’m sure I don’t need to explain it all to you. But one thing it is useful for is that it can pass messages. Since everyone has a different Patronus, you can always ensure who the sender is. Plus, it’s faster than any owl around.”

_Yes, Slytherin me purred. Now that he’s distracted and not expecting it, get into his mind._

I gave a mental push, gently, to one small part of his barrier. It was enough to show just how he felt: irritated, shocked...impressed.

_Oh, it’s picture worthy._

Within moments, the barrier was back up, almost as if it had never happened. Tom seemed none the wiser. Or, at least he didn’t show it.

“Ever cast one?” I smiled, trying to make it genuine, but surely it was cocky.

“No.” Tom broke our gaze, glancing down instead. “I have not,” he said through his teeth.
“Good. Then let’s get started.” I pulled my wand from my pocket and mentally patted my Slytherin-self on the back.

You were very helpful. But now, I need to be fully me.

I closed my eyes and took in a deep breath. True happiness...the Gryffindor Common Room, Christmas Day. Ron handed me gifts that I wasn’t expecting. Fudge and a Weasley sweater. My dad’s invisibility cloak. There’s snow on the ground outside. We play chess. I feel like part of a family.

“Expecto Patronum.”

A white light came from my wand and took the form of a stag. It stood proudly, turned to face Tom, and bowed. When it returned back to its full height, it vanished.

The sight of it brought thoughts of my dad to my mind. I quickly sobered.

“Look, Tom, I know you may not be ready to learn magic from me, but I promise it’s useful. The only thing is…” I looked at him, noticing his collected mask was back in place. “…to cast a Patronus Charm, you must think of a memory. The happiest memory you have. It has to be powerful.”

No reaction from Tom.

“When I cast it, for example, I think of various things. Sometimes, they aren’t even real. Once, I cast it without thinking of anything consciously, but it repelled hundreds of dementors. That was when—” Oh right. He forgot about my dream with Sirius. Does he know anything at all about what happened, then? “…when I was in my third year. It’s complicated. Anyway. It gets easier. You try it.”

I watched as Tom pulled out his wand. He seemed to debate some things. After a moment or two, he got into a ready position. “Expecto Patronum.”

Nothing happened.

“That’s okay,” I said, a feeling of awkwardness settling in. I was teaching a powerful dark lord how to cast a spell. I’m sure he didn’t feel much happier about it. “I didn’t cast it my first try, either. What did you think of?”

Tom barely seemed to acknowledge me when he said, “It’s a private memory.”

“Oh. Okay.” I was quiet a moment. “Well, it might not have been powerful enough. It needs to be happy. Very happy. Try something with more power to it.”

Raising his wand once more, Tom repeated the incantation. “Expecto Patronum.” Again, nothing happened. Tom hissed a curse.

“It’s alright. You’ll get this. What did you think of that time? If you don’t mind sharing…”

Tom met my gaze. “Raising to power once more. Having rule over everyone who ever defied me.”

I cocked my head to one side. “That’s…not exactly happy…” Maybe I have my work cut out for me… “It has to be a good memory. Have you ever been happy? While not being evil?”

Tom stood up straighter. “Of course, I have been…happy.” The word sounded weird in his voice. It didn’t fit. I was beginning to question if he even knew what it meant.
“When?” I tried to ask casually, but it sounded a bit suspicious and accusing.

His eyes narrowed, but he didn’t respond. Instead, he lifted his wand. “Expecto Patronum.” To his irritation, no white light came from his wand.

“Tom, it’s alright. Neither of us have had lives full of bliss. Really, I had to make things up my first time. Just think of something that would make you truly happy, even if it’s made up.”

I was sure Tom hadn’t heard a word I just said.


“Tom, just calm dow-”

His blood-red eyes pierced mine, full of fury. “How can a brat perform such a simple spell, yet, with decades of experience over you, I cannot?”

I sighed. “I’m going to be honest. I don’t think you know what happiness is. And if you did, would you be capable of it?”

Tom scoffed, folding his arms. “A dark lord doesn’t need such a pathetic emotion. This spell is completely useless.”

“It has been endlessly useful for The Order. That’s how they send messages to each other. It’s fast. They know it’s not an imposter. No one can intervene with the message. You just…have to get creative with what you think of. What would make you happy? Don’t cast, just think.”

Tom hissed a few more curses but did as I said. Just as I had, he closed his eyes and concentrated. The room fell silent. Several minutes went by.

Yep…just me staring at The Dark Lord while he tries to be happy...

“Do you need help?” I asked quietly.

He didn’t reply, but I felt his mind slowly open up. I pushed in, memories flashing by like lightning. I only just caught glimpses of each one.

None of them seem particularly riveting...

After a moment, they stopped. ‘Nothing useful? Nothing at all?’

I shook my head, but a new idea came to my mind. Maybe I’m a terrible teacher, but thank Merlin for this mind link.

I thought of my parents. I closed my eyes and they were in a room with me. They asked me about school and my friends, as if they had seen me just yesterday and this was casual conversation. They shared a loving glance and told me the story of how they met. It was such a simple thought, something most probably overlook, but to experience it would have made me a different person entirely. Their love and care…I let it fill me entirely. Then, I spread it over the mind link, too.

“Try it now.”

Tom opened his eyes, and they were different. “Expecto Patronum.”

This time, the words seemed to have meaning to them. Light erupted from his wand like a shield. After several seconds, it died.
“That was good,” I said, trying my best to encourage.

“I thought it was an animal.” Tom looked to me. “Why is mine not?”

“Well, it takes practice to get an animal at all, let alone a solid one. But you produced something. Which shows it was your memory that wasn’t strong enough, not any lack of skill to cast it.”

Tom pulled his mind away, and I followed suit. The further into this lesson we got, the more I began to realize the depth of Tom’s predicament. Yes, he had most of his soul back, but he had to borrow my happiness to feel it. He thought torturing people, getting revenge, and ultimate power would lead to his happiness, but it didn’t.

I watched Tom try to concentrate, the same cues of irritation on his face as earlier but not for the same reason.

After a few quiet moments, I sighed. “Tom, can I help again? I want to help you find your own memories. Surely you have something you can use.”

He opened his eyes to glance at me with warning, but opened his mind.

I dove entirely into Tom’s memories, trying not to linger on any of them for more than a few seconds for Tom’s privacy. I definitely saw some things I didn’t want to see—mostly Tom killing people—but I didn’t stop. I came to yesterday, when he watched me torture Pettigrew.

Merlin, am I smiling?! I look…evil! It wasn’t to hard to see how Snape thought I was moving backwards.

At my dismay, Tom chuckled.

“What?” I asked aloud.

Tom raised his wand. “Expecto Patronum.” A small spurt of white light came from the tip of his wand, stayed for a few seconds, then disappeared.

I stood, mouth agape.

Before I had the chance to form words, Tom pushed me from his mind and blocked it off. I was certain I agreed with his choice if it involved me and anything remotely close to that memory.

But then again, do I want Tom to be happy with images of me being evil?

“Expecto Patronum.”

A light erupted from the tip of his wand, like last time, but then morphed into the head of a basilisk. It was fairly solid, though not completely.

With a mixture of confusion, surprise, and uncertainty, I commented, “Brilliant.”

I wondered if this plan was going my way at all.

**Voldemort’s POV:**

This spell had more than frustrated me before, to the point where I contemplated pulling out my hair. It was not until Harry had shown me what he thought of that I realized I was completely unequipped to cast this spell. I nearly quit.
But then Harry would know a spell I could never perform…

I persisted. Then, Harry saw my memory of himself torturing Pettigrew and, through his horror, I was able to perform it, albeit barely. Slowly, I was learning the requirements for it.

Then, an idea struck me. It was…unorthodox, to say the least.

*Harry…that look in his eyes…that mixture of domination and satisfaction. He’s walking towards me and stops close. I look into his eyes…they’re cold and deep. He turns his head to the side, and I feel his breath on my neck, heated and thick. I close my eyes and become nothing but feelings: his breath, a wall behind me, a burning in my own lungs because I’m not breathing. I can’t. Then, teeth on my neck, nibbling and then biting hard. A rush down my spine and through my body.*

**“Expecto Patronum.”**

*A basilisk. An absolutely perfect match.*

Of course, the thought was humiliating. Not only did it not make sense to me, but it involved some kind of domination over me. It was…peculiar, to say the least. I could never inform Harry that this thought had ever occurred. I was not even certain of what it meant.

Still, I found pride that I was able to cast the charm without Harry’s help. I was well aware that it was my own plan turned against me, but from the obvious confusion on Harry’s face, I was sure he had never expected this. That was a start.

“Okay…” Harry began, eyes still wide and unsure. “Well, now let’s try to send a message with it.”

I raised my wand just as there was a scratch at the door. In what I assumed was a pause to the lesson, Harry walked over to the door and opened it. An owl hopped in. Harry looked to me and then back to the bird before untying the note from its foot and read it.

“Who is it from?” I asked. I assumed it would be his friends, but he had told me he handled that…

Harry’s mouth curled up a bit. “This is perfect, actually.” He smiled fully up at me. “Let me demonstrate. I am going to tell this person what we are doing and to reply with their Patronus. You can speak the message aloud or just say it in your mind. I’ll say it out loud, so you can hear.”

He looked back to the note, skimming over it a bit, before raising his wand.

**“Expecto Patronum.”** His stag appeared, and he began to talk to it like an old friend. “Tom and I are practicing Patronus Charms. He wasn’t so successful at first, but he’s just been able to cast one with no help at all, so…it’s progress.” He cleared his throat. “His Patronus is a basilisk. Shocking, I know.” He grinned up at me. “Please send a Patronus back. Although, I have to admit…” he paused. “Well, let’s just say I have quite some more work to do about you-know-what.” He flicked his wand out and the stag leaped into the air, galloped around the room, and finally went through the wall.

“Who is the note from, Harry? You will tell me.”

Harry stood a moment, grinning like an idiot, before his face fell into a satire of a pompous expression. “I feel you are unfit to handle this information.”

My eyes narrowed, and my jaw tensed. Insufferable brat…using my own words.

If I hadn’t decided he was the key to my absolute success, I would most definitely have punished him for what he said. Of course, that was not the proper decision, given my current situation, where
I...depended on him...

Another Patronus entered the room, a compliment to Harry’s own: a doe. It walked cautiously into the room, then went over to Harry.

“I fear,” a familiar monotone began, “that my voice is entirely recognizable. And so, I would like to ask for My Lord’s forgiveness. I meant no harm to you, My Lord, and I hope that you may see that. I am glad to hear that My Lord can produce a Patronus Charm, and a proper one at that. He does have an animal quite fit to his...characteristics. Continue your good work, Harry.”

The doe faded. I turned to Harry, anger boiling over, only to find a look on Harry’s face as though he had seen a ghost. My anger faded almost instantly.

“How long have you been sending letters to Severus?” I asked, not a hint of accusation or suspicion in my tone.

Harry shook his head slightly. “A day or two. And before you ask, Tom, I don’t know where he is. He didn’t tell me. He did say he was out of hiding, and that’s why I was asking you to spare him.”

Harry took in a deep breath. “*Expecto Patronum.*”

The stag erupted from his wand and galloped away before Harry even said a word. I turned to him with confusion.

“What did you say?”

Harry stared at the place on the wall the stag has disappeared through.

“Harry!”

He jolted slightly. “Sorry. What?”

“What did you say?”

Harry turned to face me, his face now entirely serious. He did not respond immediately, but when he did, said, “I told him to let us know when he gets a Patronus from you. It’s your turn to send a message.”

It was obvious that there was more that he was not sharing, but I did not press. Instead, I closed my eyes and focused my mind.

*My mental barrier is up, so Harry cannot see. Excellent.*

I replayed the situation from earlier—Harry’s breath on my neck, the sensation his bite left on me—and let the feeling from it grow. I could almost feel it in my veins, flowing alongside my blood.

*Yes. I am ready. * *Expecto Patronum.***

My wand tip lit up, expelling bright white light that took the shape of a basilisk (an infant basilisk? Adult basilisks were much larger).

*You are lucky, I told it, that Harry wishes you to live. otherwise, you would find yourself at Death’s door, pleading to be let in and be spared of the horrible tortures I would have inflicted upon you. If I were you, I would otherwise refrain from anything that would make me change my mind.*

I flicked my wand and my ancient snake of light slithered through the wall at striking speed.
“Did you send a message with it?” Harry asked.

I rolled my eyes. “Of course I did.”

Harry half smiled. “Good, I think. Let’s see if Snape gets it.”

A few moments of silence passed, which was an eternity when waiting.

“What did you say to him?” Harry looked at me, accusation in his tone.

“Some words,” I replied, being as vague as possible.

“What kind of words? Death threat kind of words? Or small talk kind of words?” Harry folded his arms, sarcasm evident in both his words and body language.

I smiled a bit. Maybe Harry knows me too well. “Can it not be both?”

Harry sighed but said nothing.

After a few more agonizing moments of silence, a doe appeared once more. “Harry…I’m afraid I cannot answer your question over Patronus. It will have to wait for another time. You have done well, Harry. I received My Lord’s message.” The doe turned to me and bowed. “And thank you, My Lord.” With that, it vanished.

Harry’s brows rose. “He…thanked you? For what? The death threats?”

I almost thought about informing Harry but figured it would require explaining that he had convinced me to spare Severus’s life, after all. I would not allow him the satisfaction. Additionally, this seemed to be the perfect time to anger him again.

“It is none of your concern.”

However, instead of getting angry, Harry just shrugged. “That’s fine. I’ll just ask Snape, then.”

“He wouldn’t dare tell you.”

Harry smirked. “I guess we’ll see, then. Expecto Patronum.” After a few seconds, his stag was off without Harry another saying another word. “It wouldn’t matter what you said…unless it was about you sparing his life.”

The brat! My irritation swarmed like bees. “My mind was sealed. Tell me, how did you know?”

“I don’t need to read your mind. I’m not stupid. Why else would Snape thank you, given the circumstances.”

Although Harry was being particularly irritating, I smiled inwardly. If I had not known better, I would have said that Harry would make a fine Slytherin.

“If you knew, then why send your Patronus to him? Were you uncertain?” I found my tone more teasing than irritated, which only served to irritate me more. Damn feelings. I will control them.


All humor in me faded. That is concerning…
“Then who, Harry?”

“Relax. I sent it to my friend Hermione. I’m sure you’ve heard of her. And before you ask, I only told her that Snape was safe.”

I narrowed my eyes. *That could be true…or it could not be.*

Harry sighed. “Check my mind. I’m not lying.”

I watched Harry for a moment. *How is it that he is anticipating my questions, my concerns? My mind is shut tightly. Am I that predictable?*

I let my body relax, but not my mind. “I trust you,” I said. “Do *not* make me regret that decision.”

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**3rd Person POV:**

The lesson ended soon after that. Harry admitted he only had that one spell in mind, and that seemed to translate as a dismissal. They both left the room, Harry first, then Tom, since he stayed longer to check on Nagini. She was well, having just finished her lunch, which still struggled in her throat.

Harry went up to his hallway, down to the room with the crystal looking glass. Sending that message to Hermione reminded him; he needed to see how Ron was doing.

He hoped he was better, though he didn’t see any reason for him to be. Nothing had changed.  

*Show me Ron.*

The outside of the Burrow appeared. Ron, Fred, George, Percy, Ginny, Bill, and Charlie played a makeshift game of Quidditch. By the looks of it, Ron, Fred, and Bill were on one team with Fred as Chaser, Ron as keeper, and Bill as seeker. The other team was Percy as keeper, Ginny as seeker, and Charlie as chaser. Since there were not enough players, George was beater for both teams, hitting the bludger towards anyone who was unfortunate enough to be within range. From what Harry could tell, Ron looked better.

He sighed with relief. *Hermione probably forced him to eat and snuck sleeping potions into his food. But at least he’s alright.*

Sure, Harry didn’t eat or sleep properly, but that was normal.

Harry watched for a bit, wistfully remembering when he had played along with the Weasley family. When the scene faded, he decided to go to the sitting room and look out the window again. He loved how the wind in the grass made the hills look like they were swaying, and how the leaves took to the air like they were dancing on a stage.

Rather than sit in a chair, Harry sat on the floor and tried working on his magical clay. This time, he molded it to a leaf, like the ones outside. He levitated it into the air, then released it, watching as it fluttered down in time. He felt that much closer to being outside. He lifted it once more, letting it fall down again.

It was funny how easy it was to make him happy. Harry was so simple. He wanted to go outside and watch the leaves free themselves from the trees. He wanted his friends to be well. He wanted to know little stories, like how his parents met, or how they fell in love. Simple things that he loved more than anything.
Things I love in this world:

Watching the leaves in autumn

He sighed. There had to be more than that. He thought some more and tried again.

Things I love in this world:

- Watching the leaves in autumn
- My friends and family (alive or not)
- Magic
- Riding a broom

That was all he came up with. He was disappointed. He hated more things than he loved.

Of course, he knew that he had just started this list, and the longer he had it, the longer it would get as he remembered more things (as he had done with the other list). Still...

Harry looked up to the window, finding instead an otter made of white light.

“Thank you for telling us, Harry,” Hermione’s voice said. “How in the world did you manage to convince You-Know...Voldemort to spare him? Whatever magic you have to do that, I would certainly like to learn it.” The otter looked to Harry, and he could’ve swore it smiled at him. “Snape told us what you were doing, and even what He was doing. We are all rooting for you, Harry.” It paused. “Snape is back at Hogwarts as Headmaster. School is going to start in a couple weeks. Two weeks from tomorrow, actually. I know you promised you would be back at school by then, but we understand if you need more time. We miss you. Please keep in touch.”

With that, the otter disappeared.

Harry decided to send another one back. “Expecto Patronum.” His patronus appeared.

Hermione, call him Tom. And it’s magic, alright. It’s called luck and, as Snape once told me, it’s always with me. I’m glad Snape is back at Hogwarts, and I will try my best to be there when school starts. I miss you guys, too. How’s Ron doing? I hope he’s better, now. I feel bad about that. I will keep in touch as much as I can. But please, let’s do that through letters.

Harry smiled and flicked his wand, sending his stag off to Hermione.

Nearby, Tom apparated to his study. It was in Harry’s hallway, and he did not want to chance seeing him. Not after their lesson earlier. And it was precisely those thoughts that he was attempting to distract himself from.

“Bring me a book on magical creatures.”

A cart rolled over, one random book on it about magical creatures. He picked it up and flipped to a random page.

The Lethifold, also known as a Living Shroud, is a carnivorous and highly dangerous magical creature. Its appearance resembles that of a black cloak roughly half an inch thick, although it gets thicker if the Lethifold has recently digested a victim. It glides along the ground and other surfaces in an unknown form of locomotion in search of its prey, humans. It attacks its prey at night, when the target is asleep, and suffocates and digests it in its bed. The only form of protection against a
Lethifold is a Patronus. Other spells will not work.

Tom slammed the book shut and tossed it as far away from himself as he could manage. It stopped for before it reached the ground, floating back to its spot in the library.

“Bring me a book on…magical history!”

The cart rolled back over, one book on it. Tom picked it up and, again, flipped to a random page.

Andros the Invincible was an Ancient Greek wizard. He was alleged to be the only wizard known to have produced a Patronus the size of a giant. He has a Chocolate Frog card. He was also very skilled at wandless spells, being able to conjure a Patronus without a wand.

Tom used both hands to close the book and threw it right at the ground. Still, there was no satisfying thud, as the book stopped before hitting the ground and floated back up to its spot.

“Change of form! A book on change of form!”

The cart brought another book to him. He was certain this time that he would not be reminded of the Patronus Charm at all. He opened to a random page.

An Animagus (pl. Animagi) is a witch or wizard who can morph him or herself into a specific animal at will. It is a learned, rather than hereditary skill, unlike those of a Metamorphmagus. Only very powerful and skilled wizards are able to become Animagi. The process of becoming an Animagus is long and arduous, and has the potential to backfire and cause the transformation to go horribly wrong. Once the initial training is over, an Animagus can change at will at any time, with or without a wand. Animagus forms, like the Patronus Charm, has been said to reflect the personality or feelings of the witch or wizard.

Tom carefully closed the book and held it shut, as if it would open itself.

Obviously, Fate is telling me something.

Tom hissed a few curses and tossed the book away, so it would put itself away. He sat in a chair and finally let himself surrender to those thoughts, if not to understand them, then to enjoy the pleasurable feeling they gave him.

What? That is the first question. What was it? Harry bit my neck, he placed a hand over his neck. And I found…pleasure in it. What did that mean? It was entirely…nonsensical. But it made me happy. So I would be…happy…if Harry bit my neck?

He huffed.

No, no. Not just bite my neck. He had that look in his eyes from when he was torturing. I enjoyed that…I suppose that could be more than me admiring his evilness…I will not lie to myself about this; I found it attractive…I haven't found anyone attractive since…ever. I never paid attention to appearances. But Harry’s took me off guard…so…I would be happy…if Harry looked attractive and bit my neck.

Tom thinned out his lips.

That is…severely odd.

Hours later, Tom rubbed at his temples. He’d been thinking of this all day, and he wished he could stop, but he would not rest until he made progress. He needed answers.
He closed his eyes. There was Harry, his neon eyes completely cold and evil. He was close again; so close, Tom could feel his heartbeat match up with his and hear them together, as one. Harry wrapped his arms around Tom’s neck, but instead of biting, buried his face in Tom’s shoulder. Tom looked down, and Harry’s expression had changed. His eyes were large and fearful and wet.

Harry’s breathing grew distressed, and his heart raced far faster than Tom’s. Without thinking, Tom placed his arms around Harry’s waist and pulled him closer, pressing their foreheads together so that his vision was nothing but bright green. Tom pulled his face away slightly only to press a vicious kiss to Harry’s quivering lips. Harry tried to pull away, but Tom held him firmly, not letting him escape. Harry let out a small, barely audible whimper, and tears slipped down his cheek.

Tom’s eyes flew open, and he raised his wand.

“Expecto Patronum.”

Sure enough, white light came from his wand and morphed into a very solid basilisk. It slithered around a bit before disappearing.

Tom sighed and sat back down, rubbing at his temples. He felt so odd. His heart was pounding, and he could feel his crotch throbbing.

*I am aroused, yes, and nervous, it seems. What else?! What else??*

“Bring me a book on…emotions!”


*Lust is similar to love, but it lacks the caring nature (see Caring; also Concerned.). Both feel they need another person in a way they do not feel for others, but Lust is completely sexual and temporary. Lust is completely normal to experience, but must be managed accordingly; otherwise you may find yourself in a mess, of sorts.*

Tom laid back in his chair and let go a breath he was not aware he’d been holding. *That explains it perfectly.*

He absolutely did not approve of the feeling, but he felt better knowing what it was.

Still, he had to continue to see Harry, to be around him and interact with him, after knowing he was having these thoughts. He didn’t imagine he could see Harry in the same way.

*Accio Draught of Peace.*

The bottle flew into his hand, and he did not hesitate in drinking it. As his thoughts cleared, he apparated to his private meeting room, where Lucius was waiting for him.
3rd Person POV:

Lucius had been waiting for a few days now to talk to Lord Voldemort about something rather important. He apparated to The Dark Lord’s private meeting room and awaited him. There wasn’t much to look at in the room, but Lucius seemed content enough with staring at the plain chairs and table, thinking, *What an ordinary room with such extraordinary purpose.*

At last, The Dark Lord seemed to float into the room, like a ghost. He turned to Lucius, who bowed low.

“Good day, My Lord.”

“What do you need, Lucius?”

Lucius rose from his bow and steeled himself. The Dark Lord seemed to be in a foul mood, and he hoped he would not take it out on the messenger today.

“I have some important information for you, My Lord. I wished to tell you a few days ago, when you planned with Draco to get Harry Potter, but the information is not stale. It may, in fact, be more relevant than ever.”

The Dark Lord sat down at the table, uncomfortable in the hardbacked chair (which was not nearly as cushioned as his normal chair). Lucius followed suit, taking the chair across from him, also uncomfortable but decidedly not voicing so.

“Yes, I recall,” The Dark Lord said. “Please, Lucius, continue.”

Lucius nodded once. “It pertains to the night Dumbledore was murdered. You are aware that my son did not kill him, but Severus…”

“Yes…” Voldemort’s voice deepened and slowed. “That news came from Severus…not you…not Draco…”

Lucius shut his eyes and bowed his head a moment. “Yes, well, My Lord…” he cleared his throat. “I learned that not only had Severus intended to kill Dumbledore, but Dumbledore himself asked him to do so previously.”

Lucius watched The Dark Lord with fearful eyes and bated breath. For a moment, he gave no reaction to the news, choosing to consider it and its plausibility. Upon reaching a conclusion, he finally met Lucius’s gaze.

“There are two possibilities of Severus’s reasoning. The first is that his loyalty truly laid with Dumbledore, and they knew I would regard the murder as an act of loyalty towards me. The second is that his loyalty truly laid with me, and when Dumbledore asked, Severus could not refuse the chance.”

Lucius shifted only slightly in his chair, fully aware that The Dark Lord was watching him. “Which is it, My Lord? The first, I would assume. He did rid of your horcruxes.”

For another moment, he considered.
“Lucius,” he said at last, breaking the silence that had held the room. “This is a careful matter.” His voice grew quieter yet more pronounced. “We cannot assume. We must know.”

Lucius nodded. “Yes, I agree fully, My Lord. But how will we know? I was sure Severus was in deep hiding.”

Voldemort gave half a smirk. “He was. Yet now, he has…come out.”

“Where is he, My Lord?” Lucius questioned, hands on the table, torso leaning in.

Completely ignoring the question, The Dark Lord stood. “Lucius, go and purchase a bottle or two of Veritaserum. We will need it.”

Without questioning, Lucius nodded, stood, and apparated away, leaving the room to Voldemort.

‘Harry,’ he thought, his demeanor changing. ‘Do you think you would be able to bring Severus here, to my manor?’

Upstairs, Harry had created a room full of magical clay leaves, all floating about the room in an impromptu dance. When he heard Tom’s voice, although soft and questioning, he jumped. At once, all the leaves vanished into nothing.

‘Uh…’ Harry looked around, a bit disappointed. ‘You’re not trying to kill him, right?’

Tom unconsciously ran his tongue across the bottoms of his upper teeth, feeling their sharpness, as he considered how to answer.

‘Not yet. There is still the possibility that things may…change.’

Harry huffed. ‘I’m not bringing him here if you’re going to kill him. You already said you’d spare h-’

Before Harry could finish his thought, Tom shared the memory of the meeting he had just had with Lucius. Harry watched, his emotions going crazy.

He could remember that night. He’d had nightmares of that night. Nightmares of being paralyzed, of falling endlessly to the Earth, of the grave they put him in. He saw as Snape killed him once, and now he’d watched it a thousand times, like a rerun. He’d hated Snape then. He didn’t want to forgive him. But somehow…he had.

And now this? Dumbledore had asked for Snape to kill him? And then with why Snape had done it, he immediately thought it had to be the first one. There was no way Snape would’ve wanted to kill Dumbledore. Harry, of course, understood what Tom wanted to do. The nature of how both of them would define Snape would be determined by this one choice.

Harry conjured his Patronus immediately.

Professor, he thought in a hurry, already making his way down to the private meeting room. I need you to come to the manor. Meet me in the private meeting room as soon as possible. Tom will be there. Please hurry.

Harry flicked it off and continued on, running down the stairs and down another hallway. He walked in to Tom and Lucius standing by the table.

“Snape should be on his way. So…what’s the plan?”
“The plan is…” The Dark Lord began, “…that Snape appears, we forcibly administer Veritaserum, and we have a discussion about his purpose for murdering Dumbledore. If he offers the first answer, I will kill him on the spot.”

Harry balled up his fists and set them gently on the table. “No. You can’t do that. I won’t let you.”

“If he answers the second,” he continued, ignoring Harry’s interjection, “then I will welcome him back as if he never betrayed me in the first place.”

Keeping his wrists on the table, Harry extended his fingers as far out as they would go before balling them into fists once more, causing a few of his knuckles to crack. “Yes…right after curse the living daylight out of him,” he muttered.

It was then that Snape arrived in the room, unaware that he was entering the center of a war. It was not the safety of the grey area he was so used to, but the empty, open field that was No Man’s Land: if one side did not get you, the other surely would.

“Ah, Severus,” The Dark Lord gave a truly fake smile. “How nice to see you again.”

Snape looked around the room, from Voldemort to Lucius to Harry. “What is this?”

The Dark Lord took his seat, and Lucius and Harry followed suit, leaving the chair at the end empty for Snape.

“Please, Severus,” The Dark Lord motioned to the last chair. “Sit. We will discuss it.”

With suspicion in his gaze towards Lucius and Voldemort, Snape took the last seat carefully.

“Petrificous Totalus,” Harry shot at Snape.

Snape, not expecting Harry, did not stop the spell before he was bound.

“I’m sorry, Professor. I know this is the second time I’ve done this, but you really need to stay put. I know…” he looked to Tom. “We know,” he corrected, “that you would try to escape.”

“Thank you, Harry.” The Dark Lord stood, pushed Snape’s chair back from the table a few feet, and slowly made his way over to him while speaking.

“Now, Severus, let me explain. It seems that…you’ve hit a bump in your loyalty to me…” he turned and gestured to Harry, “To us both. We have some questions…” he held out a hand, which Lucius hurriedly placed one of the bottles of Veritaserum into, “…which you will answer truthfully.” He held open his other hand, and a small glass vial flew into it from Snape’s robes: his emergency anti-truth serum. Without a second thought, he let it fall from his hand and smash on the floor with a quiet ring.

Voldemort was standing just before him, Harry and Lucius behind him slightly by his sides. Without warning, he stepped forward, uncorked the bottle, and forced it into Snape’s bound mouth. When the bottle was empty, he let that, too, fall to the ground. “There we are. Now, we can begin.” He momentarily turned his back to Snape to walk a few steps away, then stopped.

“It has come to our attention…” he glanced at Harry, then Lucius, before he turned, his red eyes falling back onto Snape. “…that Dumbledore asked you to kill him. Now, whether this happened before or after we formed our plan to murder him, I cannot say, nor do I believe it to be of importance. What we do find important, however, is why.” With a wave of his hand, the binding spell was released on Snape’s head and mouth but remained on the rest of his body. “You have
arrived at a crossroads. It is time to pick a side.”

Harry stepped forward, impatience boiling over. “Is it true? He asked you to kill him?”

“Yes,” Snape said immediately.

“Why? Why did you do it?”

For a moment, there was nothing but silence. Snape fought the potion, though he knew it to be useless. The others stared at him, watching, waiting. They had all guessed his answer. For them, it was just the matter of confirmation. For Snape, it was a matter of his deepest motivations.

“I did it for you, Harry,” he spat out at last. Once the words began, they did not stop coming. “Dumbledore asked me to kill him, and I jumped at the opportunity to end his control over you. He had made far too many mistakes, severely overestimated what you could handle. He thought of you as some hardened piece in his chess game, but I tried to tell him repeatedly that you were just a child. Burdening you immediately with such a large task, then keeping information from you when you most needed it, forcing you to live with those horrible muggles that treated you worse than Voldemort ever would have. It was a tyrannical reign of poor choices that lead to your undoing. I know you trusted him, Harry, but he knew what happened to you when you were eight, and every day afterwards. But he still kept you there. He still forced you to return each summer, spouting nonsensical excuses about blood lines and protection. I begged him to remove you, to put you in anyone else’s care, but he would not listen. He watched you break, but as long as you were alive and would die at the right time…” Snape shook his head, eyes just barely tearing up, though no one else noticed. “He asked me to kill him, and I did.”

Snape ceased his answer and the room fell back into deafening silence. The other three men found themselves in varying degrees of disbelief. His answer was unexpected and fell into a category they had no idea existed.

Harry was the first to speak.

“Professor…” was all he could manage. His mind was moving at a rapid pace, trying to form words and speak them, but getting lost in all the questions his mind seemed to produce. All this time you were protecting me? He controlled me? He knew what I went through? What happened when I was eight? Were you the only one who tried to do something?

“Well,” Lucius said quietly, an awkwardness settling over him. This had become much too personal for his comfort. “I’m going to be honest, My Lord. I’m not quite sure where this leaves us.”

Tom, unlike Harry, kept pace with the speeding thoughts in his mind. It was parts of both sides, he realized. Once again, he seemed to find the safe middle ground that he was not aware of. He couldn’t punish Snape, but he couldn’t quite trust him as a follower, either. He supposed that, if his motivation was Harry’s wellbeing, something could be arranged…

“Professor…” Harry tried again, to no avail. As much as he tried, the words would not move past his throat.

“Yes, Harry, I understand,” Snape said, his unblinking eyes watching Harry search his mind for answers. “It is…quite a lot to take in. Especially considering you have convinced yourself that I do not like you.”

At this response, Harry’s mind only filled with more thoughts. Professor, why didn’t you stop what he did sooner? Why didn’t you sneak me away from that horrible place? Why did you treat me and
“My Lord?” Lucius questioned quietly, his concern for The Dark Lord’s lack of speech growing. He had been entirely lost since the confession. None of it had made any sense to him. It was as if Snape had not spoken of Dumbledore or Harry at all. The information surely did not fit in with the definitions he had made of the two.

Tom thought of what to do. If Snape was not an enemy or a follower, then maybe he should be an ally, as Harry was. It seemed to sound right, but some changes would have to be made. For one, he would need to remove Snape’s dark mark. He couldn’t have him peaking in on business where he no longer belonged. He knew that Snape knew that the process would hurt, as it had hurt to receive it, but he was almost certain the idea would be an agreeable one. Snape could still be helpful to him in situations that benefitted Harry.

Professor...

Harry’s mind slowed to a halt, all thoughts ceasing. He sat back in his chair, dumbfounded.

“Certainly my confession was not this difficult to believe.” Snape glanced between Harry and Tom.

“Harry. My Lord. Someone speak.”

“Severus,” Tom began at last. “I originally believed your answer would be one of two choices, and depending on which you decided upon, I would punish you or reward you.” He paused, his eyes scanning over Snape, sizing him up. “Seeing as how it was neither, I have come to the conclusion that it neither consequence is appropriate. Instead, I want your mark removed. You shall become an ally of mine, and no longer be a follower.”

When Tom finished voicing his thoughts, he became aware of the room around him once more. Everyone but him, it seemed, was looking at Harry, who just sat in his chair, eyes glancing far off into nothing.

“As for Harry,” Tom continued, his mind reaching out. Although his body seemed to be doused in shock, his mind was as blank as he had ever seen it.

‘Harry? Are you alright?’

Breaking from his trance, Harry began to blink, his eyes beginning to water and widen in shock, as if the news had just hit him again.

As Tom looked to him, he remembered his earlier thought—Harry, eyes wide and scared, his for the taking—but quickly shunned it as he felt Harry’s mind begin to move about again.

“He only needs a bit more time to respond,” Tom said. From what he could gather, Harry’s thoughts were mostly positive. “Perhaps you will receive a ‘Thank You’…maybe a gift basket, or a hug,” Tom joked, although the more he considered it, the more he would not put it past Harry to give Snape a hug.

“I hope not,” Snape’s monotone complained. “I am not fond of hugs…”

‘Harry?’ Tom thought at Harry once more.

‘Yes,’ Harry thought back at last. ‘I’m…I’m fine. Just a bit…wow. I’m not even sure of what to say.’

Tom nodded. “Severus,” his glance moved from Harry to Snape, “I’m afraid Harry is at a loss for words.”
The room was silent another moment before Tom waved his hand, releasing Snape of his binds at long last.

Snape allowed his body to relax, but found the lack of comfort in the chair inhibited his doing so.

“My Lord,” the Veritaserum within Snape said, “I know this may be severely off subject, but these chairs are horribly uncomfortable.”

Lucius nodded in agreement.

“Yes…they are rather stiff…” Tom turned to the chairs. “I was considering changing them, but I felt it would distract. But now that we are trying to get away from the situation…”

With a wave of his hand, the chairs transfigured into large, comfy chairs, all identical in style but in different colors. One was dark green, one black, Snape’s was grey, and Harry’s was bright gold. Tom and Lucius each sat, Tom in the black chair and Lucius in the green one, and Snape brought his back towards the table.

Yet again, they were silent. Harry was less tongue-tied, and his mind worked, but he still said nothing. Suddenly, nothing felt worth being said. After that massive confession, would anything Harry said match up?

Tom continued to watch Harry, curious about his mind, his feelings, and most of all, his own feelings. The Harry in his intrusive thoughts was vulnerable and innocent, so able to be dominated. But the Harry he knew, the one that sat before him, had proved he was everything but. He was stubborn and willing to fight, no matter the cost. He held so much power, though he never used it, at least not on purpose. Tom knew this, and yet there was still a part of him that wanted to believe he could control Harry. It wanted to have the Savior at his mercy, to watch him break, to serve as a symbol of a lost cause, to push him up against a wall and…

Tom’s groin grew uncomfortably warm, as did his ears and neck. He looked away from Harry.

“If that is all you needed, My Lord…” Snape broke the silence unapologetically and stood. “May I be on my way?”

Tom’s almost unnoticeable blush quickly drained. “Of course. I expect you here tomorrow afternoon to remove your mark.”

Snape bowed. “Yes, My Lord.” With that, he pulled out his wand and disapparated.

Taking the cue, Lucius also stood. “May I also leave, My Lord? Or shall I stay?”

Tom waved a hand in dismissal. “You may leave if you wish.”

Lucius nodded and bowed. “Thank you, My Lord.” He disapparated.

‘And then there were two,’ Harry thought.

Tom nodded slightly to acknowledge that he had heard, but said nothing in response.

They spent a moment just sitting, brewing in their own minds, before Harry stood and walked to the door. When he opened it, he found the lights in the hallway to be dimming. He was about to contest the amount of time that had passed, but thinking back, it had felt like it could have been days, trapped in all of his thoughts, then the silence. Really, it shouldn’t have surprised him at all, he concluded.
“It’s getting late. I’m going to bed.”

Tom’s brows rose. “Oh? Are you going to sleep tonight?”

Harry shrugged. “Yeah. I guess.” Harry stepped through the doorway, leaving it open, a hint for Tom to do the same.

**Harry’s POV:**

I was in Dumbledore’s office, but there was an odd red light to it. The shelves of knickknacks all whirled and moved slowly but purposefully, as if a sarcastic shadow of their normal selves. Behind his desk, Dumbledore sat, not paying Harry’s presence any attention.

The door behind Harry burst open and he turned to find Snape hurrying in, his black eyes enraged and his face a light shade of pink.

“Allbus!” he yelled. “You must remove Harry from muggle care immediately! I will not let you be so foolish with him any longer!”

Harry had seen him angry, but never this emotional. He was used to the cold, precise anger of the Potions Master persona he had always kept. And yet, here he was, spit flying, hands moving about, voice full of feeling.

“I know what I am doing, Severus,” Dumbledore replied, not bothering to look up from the papers he was attending to. “I am aware that he may be suffering, but it is crucial the boy stays alive. His blood relatives are the only ones who can ensure that.”

Snape shook his head and blinked rapidly a few times. “You are only keeping him alive so that he may die at the right time. He will not make it to that time, Albus! He is at a breaking point. They are causing him harm beyond—”

“Enough!” Dumbledore finally looked up, his face cold and hard like a statue. The knickknacks around them ceased their movements. “Harry will remain with his aunt and uncle. That is my final thought on the matter.” Flames began to grow around him, on the banisters, the edge of the shelves, the peripheral of the floor. “He will stay there…no matter what terrible things happen to him. He will stay.”

Snape fell to his knees before him. “Albus…please…”

Dumbledore stood, pulling out his wand and sending a bright green light across the room. Snape fell to the ground, unmoving. I tried to run to him, but I was stuck to the floor where I stood. Dumbledore looked to me, his icy eyes twinkling not with charm, but mischief.

“Harry, my boy…” He shook his head slowly. “It seems you’ve gotten off track. I gave you things to accomplish, tools to destroy The Dark Lord…and you threw that all away. Why? To save the life of one girl? I am ashamed of you, Harry.”

He lifted his wand again, and I fell to the floor, a searing pain running through my bones. Tears fell from my eyes and my screams didn’t make it past my throat.

“You should have kept to the path I gave you, Harry,” he continued, but I couldn’t see him through the watery blur. “The path to greatness. Glory. It was the only way to rid the world of Tom Riddle. And now you have failed me…”
The pain increased as he spoke the last few words. My insides ignited like the room, and my skin froze. Tears burned my cheeks as if they were melting them. I was at his mercy, but I still reached out an arm for Snape.

I needed to save him. I owed him so much. I thought to myself, *I'll take it all for him. Please, just don’t let him die.*

From nowhere, a swirling blackness erupted from the back wall, swallowing the back reaches of the office. My pain stopped as Dumbledore was swallowed. My body seemed to weigh tons as I tried to lift myself. Papers flew about the room in chaos, only to find themselves swallowed by the blackness. In the mess, I crawled to Snape as much as I could. Reaching out a hand, I almost grabbed his arm, but he, too, flew into the air and into the blackness.

Once he was swallowed, it left. I was alone in the tattered remains of Dumbledore’s office.

I woke at once, vision blurred and watery. My face was wet, as were my pillow and sleeping shirt. Someone sat beside me, holding my shoulders to the bed. My thrashing lessened as I realized it was Tom. I tried to sit up, but his arms did not let me. In the darkness, I could barely make out his form hovering over mine, face-to-face. I moved my lips to whisper his name, but my words were quickly lost as lips pressed to mine. The more I tried to pull away or shake my head, the more he tried to force me to stay still; his mouth had captured and held my whole face, and his arms, still holding mine down, held my head in place. His body was on mine, keeping me down, pressed to the bed, unable to escape no matter how much I fought. He had me trapped.

*This is another nightmare,* I told myself. *Another terrible nightmare.*

A small, involuntary whimper came from my throat, and just as quickly as he had trapped me, he pulled away. I fought the urge to scream out, but I wasn’t sure why. I wanted nothing more than to scream, to pull myself out of such a horrible dream, to wake up and know it was all just a dream.

I shut my eyes, tears making a river down my face to my ears. *A nightmare. Just a nightmare. Wake up.*

The indents in the bed from his weight then released, and Tom was gone in an instant.

Everything in me stilled. *Was that me waking up? Tom was just here, but now he's gone. Is it over?*

I sat up and looked around, still not able to see even if my tears had stopped. I scooted to the edge of the bed, reached to the table for my glasses, and pushed them on. I felt odd and so unsure. I wasn’t entirely sure I was out of the dream.

I grabbed my wand, walked to the door, and opened it to look out into the hallway. The lights were hardly lit at all.

*Surely this is reality. Nothing bad is happening.*

I bit my lip instinctively, tasting something on them. I couldn’t place the flavors, but I was certain it was not blood.

*So, what is it, then?*

I shook my head and began walking down the hall, one thing on my mind.

I went down the stairs and across the room to the collection of branching hallways. For a moment, I stopped, trying to remember, then settled on one and went down it. I counted the doors and stopped
before the one I was sure was it. I turned the knob, and it opened, no problems.

This is it.

I walked inside, finding two tables, one cluttered with a collection of bottles of memories, the other with only two. As I stared at them, I let my fingers fiddle with my wand.

Do I really want to do this? To let parts of my memory be blank?

The more I considered it, the more it felt wrong. The privilege of forgetting began to feel more like a curse.

From my table, I picked up a bottle, bright white with a small green splotch. I turned it over in my hands, wondering what piece of me was inside it. I tried to hold it out gently with one hand, but my sleepy fingers slipped, letting the bottle fall to the floor and smash into nothing. At once, I saw the dream I had of a unicorn named Doug. It was hazy, at best, but like a piece to a puzzle, my mind was more complete.

I looked to the other bottle. It was mostly pink, some green and red splotches stitched together like a child’s sewing project. I didn’t dare pick it up, or even touch it. Something in me said I would regret it.

With my mind feeling fuller, I decided to let the memory stay. I would deal with it. It made more sense that way.

I turned to open the door only to find it already open, Tom standing just inside the room. If it hadn’t been so dark, there was no way he could have ignored the furious blush that came over my cheeks.

‘Harry.’

I was just…I had a terrible nightmare. Two, actually. I was going to...

‘Yes, I understand. I came for a similar thing.’

I stepped aside, and Tom came further into the room, wand in hand and poised to his temple already. As he glanced at my table, his wand lowered.

‘Harry, why is there only one bottle on your table? Before, you had two, and I thought you had just erased a nightmare.’

Oh. Well, I uh…I dropped one on accident. After remembering that dream, I decided to remember the one I just had.

Tom turned to face me. ‘Is that so?’

I shrugged. I don’t know…I guess it feels like I’m running away from my problems. This won’t harm me if I remember it so…I’ll just remember it.

Tom turned back to look at his own table. ‘I see…’

A moment of silence passed between us.

Well, I’m going back to bed. I turned to the door.

‘Pleasant dreams.’
I walked out of the room and closed the door behind me. Yes, I had chosen to remember the nightmare, but I could already feel the thoughts creeping up on me, ready to eat away at my sanity. *It was all so odd. Why did I even have a dream like that?* Normally, my nightmares were haunting, torturous, but only partially based in reality. I always woke and, once I was reoriented with my surroundings, would calm and understand that it was over. *But that didn’t happen this time. It felt so real.*

I went up the stairs, biting my lip once more and finding that odd taste to it. Halfway up, I stopped as it hit me.

*It was real, I realized. It was real, and Tom went to forget it, too.*
Harry’s POV:

I spent the next few hours being smothered by my thoughts while lying face up on my bed. I had been in Tom’s manor for almost a week, but so much had happened, so many problems that I felt responsible for. After facing the constant nagging, I finally gave into the urge to go over my problems again.

#1: I needed to convert Tom to The Light before he converted me to The Dark.

He had found a source of happiness. And although it was an odd way to think about it, I was the source of his happiness. Yes, it was some weird, demented version of me, but if it made him happy, who was I to try and ruin it?

Next, I’ll focus on friendship, then understanding. Understanding is going to be…difficult, probably. Friendship seems do-able. I…I don’t know what I’ll do for it, but I’ll figure it out as I go.

#1: 2/3 Solved. 1/3 to go

#2: Tom won’t spare Snape’s life-Solved

#3: I tort—No, you know what? I don’t even care. Skip 3.

#4: Tom wouldn’t tell me what happened in the meeting.

Well…maybe by becoming his friend, he’ll tell me? Or…maybe he’ll keep being a prat about it.

#5: TOM FUCKING KISSED ME

I…honestly don’t even know to begin with this one.

I sighed. I had no idea what the fuck to do about number 5. My instincts told me running headfirst into it wasn’t a great idea. Tom knew that I knew, I was almost certain.

He saw me going to forget it, so if he didn’t get the message that I didn’t like it when he kissed me, he certainly got it then…right? I mean, he also knows I chose to remember it, instead…

The more I considered it, the more it replayed in my head. It would have been weird enough for him to have kissed me, but the way he kissed me only added to the weirdness. It hadn’t been like that when I kissed Cho or Ginny. It was entirely different, and not just because Tom was a guy. (Sure, I’d never kissed a guy before, but that didn’t mean I was straight.) He was purposefully controlling me, trapping me, forcing me. It was horrible. How could anyone have an enjoyable kiss like that?

Without warning, another part of me (intrusive thoughts, maybe) began to think, as well.

Did…did I want the kiss to be enjoyable?

I…I suppose in some sense, I did. If I’m going to be kissed, I’d want a good kiss. Doesn’t really matter who it came from.

Tom is attractive, though.

I shook my head, attempting to silence that part of my mind.
So what? That doesn’t change anything. The kiss was bad and wrong and weird.

Still, the other part did not leave.

But what if it wasn’t?

My brows drew together. Huh?

What if the kiss hadn’t been weird and wrong? the other part said. Would I have liked it?

The question hung in my mind for but a moment before I pushed it aside. I was sure I didn’t want to answer it.

I sat up and got off my bed, suddenly making the decision to go to the sitting room. My room felt suffocating. I needed to get out, to let my mind relax.

I went out into the hallway and into the sitting room. As soon as I glanced about, my mind began to calm. The natural reds and browns outside the window, the peace in the movements of the paintings and in the swaying of the grasses; it was impossible not to let the tension in my body go.

I watched the grounded leaves be tossed up into the air again by the wind, fluttering left and right. They were careless and free. It was so serene, but also a bit saddening. I wanted to be those leaves. To just flutter about, not caring where I end up but knowing that wherever it was, it would be just as pleasant. Of course, that would never happen. Even after the war was over, if I even made it through.

If.

It was such a short word, but Merlin did it leave every situation with so much unknown. It meant that I could live, or I could die. I could be successful or a complete failure. If something good happened. If my life became a living hell. No guarantees. Just guesses and hope.

Guesses and hope don’t run the lives of those leaves.

I plopped myself onto the floor, back against a chair, and just stared out the window. I wondered where those hills were. There was no way it was just outside. Tom was all about his “The Dark Lord” aesthetics, so I imagined that the real outside was full of bare, sad skeletons of trees, or maybe a dark and thick forest lurking with equally dark creatures. That was the typical villain hideout, after all.

Funny enough, everything feels a lot like a story. I’m the hero everyone needs, the one who runs into battle without a second thought and saves everyone, possibly at the cost of my own life. Then the villain swoops in, more difficult to face than any other, and I must find a way to defeat them.

I sighed. I’d been doing that a lot lately.

But where am I now? The story’s all messed up. I’ve become the villain’s ally. I’ve made mistakes, done bad things. I’m not perfect by any standards. In fact, I’m probably hardly even good. I’m… very messed up. What kind of hero am I?

But looking out into the hills, I longed to be in a new story entirely. One full of brightly colored leaves, swaying grasses, and not a care in the world.

Then, I was outside, lying in the grasses, feeling their dew on my arms. I reached out with one hand to catch a bright orange leave that had fluttered close by. When it brushed the tips of my fingers, it began to burn, spreading until the whole leaf was nothing but ash. I stared in abject horror.
Around me, the grasses began to grow warm, then hot. I leaped up just as flames sprung up. My feet carried me backwards clumsily, my footprints also catching fire. The little fires quickly grew and joined until they became one big fire, engulfing the whole side of the hill. In a panic, I ran to the tree to try and climb it, but when my hand touched it, the bark caught fire. I stepped back in time to watch the flames consume the tree’s branches and leaves that had yet to fall. I turned and ran, trying to get as far away as I could. After a few seconds, I turned to look back. The hill was alive with the sinister fire, not a single bit of its original peaceful colors left.

I tripped and fell to the ground, my glasses flying off my face. I patted the ground in an attempt to find them, blurry orange coming into my vision everywhere I touched. When I found my glasses, I shoved them onto my face, finding the frames far too hot for my skin to bear. My eyes burned but the ground around me became clear; it was all on fire. It was too late to move and get away from it. The flames licked at my hands with hunger. I looked up to find everything was engulfed, every single bit of the once beautiful hills.

I bolted upright. **Bloody hell, I fell asleep.**

I tried to open my eyes, but a bubbling pain prevented me. My hand flew up to them as a reaction, but when it reached my forehead, the same pain erupted. I quickly drew it away, but the pain did not go away. Suddenly, my head began to burn, too, and the rest of my body grew terribly hot.

*Something is wrong.*

I tried to get my legs to push me up to stand, but once they did, my head grew dizzy and the world felt as if it spun. I fell back to the ground, barely keeping my head from hitting the floor.

*Something is terribly wrong.*

Though both my hands burned, I used them to drag myself to where I thought the door was. The more I pulled myself away, the more I felt the pain in my feet and stomach, as if I were on fire and it was spreading.

*This is just like my nightmare. But I’m the one on fire.*

I made it out to the hallway, but found myself fading fast as my head burned hot, prickly needles. I couldn’t see the world, but it was getting hazy anyway. I knew I wouldn’t make it to wherever I was going. Instinctively, I pulled my wand from my pocket. I tried to move my lips, but they felt burnt and dried together.

*I’m melting,* I thought.

I flicked my wand off, hoping my spell worked. I couldn’t tell. The world was collapsing in on me. I didn’t have the energy to curse. I just fell to the floor and let the darkness take me.

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**Voldemort’s POV:**

I woke to the same, familiar tingle in the back of my mind. Slowly, the world came into focus, and I reoriented myself with consciousness. Opening one eyes, I saw nothing but blackness. For a moment, I just laid there.

*I know I have voiced my concerns over Harry not sleeping, but maybe it is best for both of us if he does not.*

With much regret, I sat up and began to remove myself from my bed. It was late. The day had been
extraordinarily long. The night was seeming to be even longer. I questioned for a moment if it would ever end. It did not seem likely.

When I reached the edge of my bed, Calming Draught in my hand already (although I did not remember summoning it), the tingle stopped. I paused, wondering if Harry had settled his nightmares himself. He had never done that before.

Just as I was about to get back into my bed, the tingle returned in the form of a large, sharp pain.

*Insufferable brat! What is going on now?*

I rubbed at my head but stood and began to make my way upstairs to Harry.

The more I walked, the more my mind woke, revitalizing the thoughts it had before I slept.

*Harry decided to remember it. He remembered that I kissed him. And I chose to remember that I kissed him. We both knew. How do we interact now? Harry had made it obvious before that he did not enjoy the kiss, but does his decision to remember it nullify that? Why did he choose to remember? More importantly, did I enjoy it?*

I had been asking myself the question repeatedly.

*I think if I had enjoyed it, I would feel more strongly that I had enjoyed it. I would not be questioning if I had. I did not enjoy it.*

I thought back to the moment, feeling it once more.

*It felt…sudden. It was an impulse. I do not normally give impulses power over me. And Harry was helpless under me. Rather than feel powerful, as I had in my previous thoughts of such an action, I felt…guilty. It was a horribly unclean feeling, and I stopped immediately and left. If I were able to repeat the moment, would I still feel the guilt had I not been so domineering?*

As I began to climb the stairs, the pain faded away until it stopped completely.

*That is…concerning."

I quickly climbed the steps and entered the hallway. It may have been dark, but I could still make out Harry’s crumpled figure on the floor. My eyes widened.

*What has happened?*

Scanning the hall, I approached slowly, wand in my hand. There did not seem to be any threats. When I reached Harry, I put my wand away and lifted his head, which was warm to the touch.

*“Lumenat.”*

The balls of light in the hallway brightened considerably, and I was able to see Harry fully. Although his face was a bit flushed, he did not appear to be wounded in any way. Of course, being a dark lord, I did not know the proper healing spells that would have allowed me to confirm my observations. As it was, I did not have the slightest clue of what had occurred.

There was a crack, and the air parted as Severus appeared just before Harry’s door.

*“Severus,”* I said.

He turned to look at me, his black eyes bulging when he noticed the unconscious Harry before me.
He came over and kneeled on Harry’s other side.

“What on Earth happened?”

“I have no idea. Severus, why are you here?”

He pulled out his wand, casting a spell that covered a small bit of Harry’s head in blue light. “Harry sent his Patronus to me, but there was no message. I figured either something was wrong and he could not speak, or he found it entertaining to irritate me in the early morning hours.”

“He had a fever or some sort, as well as burns. Nothing I am able to treat,” he announced.

“Burns?” I questioned. “He does not appear to have burns.”

“They’re internal. Hence why I cannot heal them.”

“Internal burns? Severus, what did this?”

He shook his head. “Some kind of curse, I would assume. Possibly a potion. Nothing I have heard of.”

“Nor I.” I looked to Harry, eyes closed and face flushed. He looked more peaceful than I had ever seen him. For a brief moment, I wondered.

Have I done this?

I glanced back up to Severus, noticing the glint in his eyes that made their seriousness look worried.

I carefully lowered Harry’s head and stood. “I shall research. I may not remember the curse, but surely I can find it. If it is advanced, it may be helpful to know what curse it was. Otherwise, a simple canceling spell may work. Severus, if you would.”

He nodded, already readying his wand.

I turned to head to the library, instead my eyes catching on the nearby open door. The ends of black marks were just barely visible on the floor. I stepped closer, caution filling my body once more. After another step, I was in the doorway, and all caution fell from my body.

From the fireplace erupted a large, black char mark that seemed to consume most of the room. The paintings on the walls were ashy and full of holes, framed by crumbling bits of metal. The chairs and couch were all as dark as the glass that glittered underneath a large fire in the fireplace.

“Severus,” I called, eyes unable to be removed from the disastrous scene.

A few seconds later, he joined me in the doorway.

“That fireplace is charmed,” I explained. “It ignites when one thinks of doing so. Harry must have thought of a massive fire.”

But Severus was gone from my side before I finished.

“We must get him to medical care immediately.”

I turned and stared at him, standing before Harry.

My pulse jumped. “What would we tell them? I-I cannot go. They would not let me.”
“My Lord, this is urgent. Harry requires healing that I cannot provide. No one knows who Tom
Riddle is, or what you look like. The concern is Harry.” He bent down, then, about to pick Harry up.

Before he could get even one arm around Harry, I levitated him up and into my own arms. Although
Severus stared at me with narrowed eyes, he said nothing, just standing and placing a hand on my
shoulder.

We apparated, arriving in a blur of colors before St. Mungo’s Hospital’s front lobby. Without
hesitation, Severus went to the front desk.

“Miss, we have here a boy burned with a magical fire. He needs attention immediately.”

The woman behind the desk did not bother to look up at us. “I’m sorry, sir, but there is a line. Please
fill out this form,” one hand pointed at a stack of papers to our left, “and return it to me. Then the
healers will see you as soon as you come back from their break.”

“On break?” Severus asked, incredulous, his monotone disappearing completely. “We have Harry
Potter, who has been severely burned by enchanted flames, and you’re telling me your healers are on
break?”

The woman’s eyes widened, and her voice was high ad squeaky. “Harry Potter?” She stood and
looked to the boy in my arms. “I’ll page the healers immediately! Let me have a nurse get you a
room…”

She looked back down to the phones and began pushing buttons furiously. Various shapes of light
ejected from the front of her desk and ran off in every direction.

Not two seconds later, a nurse came sprinting down a hallway, grabbed my arm and nearly dragged
us down another plain white hall. As we traveled down it, a white hospital bed appeared. With some
reluctance, I placed Harry down on it, careful not to hurt him any more than he already had been.
The moment I released him, he was wrapped in a rainbow of swirling lights.

At least, we turned into a room where several men and women were apparently waiting for us.
Several of them began to ask questions all at once to the nurse who came with us while the others
checked on Harry. In the air, many clipboards floated, taking notes at an incredible speed.

The room was in chaos as everyone attempted to aid Harry, but Severus and I simply stood on the
outskirts of the room. I was useless, a feeling I did not particularly enjoy.

“May I be of assistance?” I interrupted. They all stared at me, silent, for they seemed unaware that
anyone else was in the room with them.

When the rest of them returned to what they were doing, one man came over to us. “Yes. Uh, first
off, who are you?” He looked to me, then to Severus. “Both,” he added.

“I am…a family friend,” Severus said as if the words could choke him. Was it the shock of the
situation, or the difficulty of saying the words “family friend” in reference to himself?

“And I…” I began. What do I say? Something simple. “…I am just a close friend.”

The doctor nodded. “And how long has he been unconscious?”

“About half an hour,” Severus answered. I was thankful he had kept the time, for I had not.

“Great. And what seems to have caused this?”
“We believe it may be a magical burn from an enchanted fireplace that lost control of its flame.”
Severus glanced at me, silently looking for confirmation.

I nodded, the scent of sterility making its way to my nose. My stomach churned in a most unpleasant manner.

“Okay,” the healer continued. “Has he been through any special circumstances lately? Anything that might cause him to want to kill himself?”

We just stared at the man, who had asked a terribly personal, serious question as if it was nothing but a casual conversation. I glanced to Severus, who, although capable of more patience than I, let a distinct look come over his features, one that said, “of course you bloody imbecile he’s the Boy Who Lived.”

“Not that isn’t normal,” he said at last through his teeth.

The healer nodded and walked away from us, a clipboard taking notes above his head following.

Between the irritation and concern, I felt an unease growing. The longer I stood, the more it consumed my stomach. No longer comfortable standing, I allowed myself to sit in the only chair in the room. Of course, once I sat, I found the cushion to be hard, and the back was angled much too far back. It was so wholly uncomfortable, I considered standing once more. And of course, I had my wand with me, but it was likely more recognizable than I was. And wandless transfiguration was… not something common wizards could do.

“Severus, may I borrow your wand? It seems I…left mine at home.”

Although his features voiced their irritation, he pulled his wand out and offered it to me. I took it, sensing its magical limits immediately. The wand was terrible for transfiguration. Still, I transfigured the chair I occupied into something more reflective of my usual comfort. Although it offered little release from my unease, I settled in and handed Severus back his wand.

We continued to watch from the edge of the room as the rainbow lights that had swirled about Harry then vanished, blue lights taking their place. I could only assume this meant they were treating him, although I was uncertain. After a moment of Harry being covered in the blue light, many of the healers left the room, leaving just one, the one we had spoken with previously.

He came over to us, showing a smile that revealed too many teeth. “Harry will be just fine. It was a magical fire, but the burns are not too serious. We are taking care of them now. He should be back to fighting You-Know-Who in no time!”

I smiled, sincere on the outside but wicked on the inside. How shocked he would be to know that he had just said that to The Dark Lord himself…

Severus and I nodded, and he thanked him. With that, he left the room, leaving myself, Severus, and Harry alone.

Severus took the opportunity to stand by Harry’s side, now that the spot was not taken by a flock of healers all scurrying about. For all of about ten minutes, we watched Harry, waiting for even a flicker of movement.

The healer returned, then with a very sterile smelling blanket. He carefully placed it over Harry and left the room again.

It was this addition that brought bile up into my throat.
“Severus,” I said standing. “I will be outside.”

I did not wait for a response or even a reaction. I went out the door, down the hall, and into the fresh air. Once the medical smell was gone, my stomach settled, as did my nerves.

The morning grew, but I would not have noticed any time passing at all were it not for the sunlight. It was bright outside now with midmorning, and I leaned against the wall next to the front doors of the hospital. I watched the amount of people grow from one or two into crowds, talking to their friends, or themselves, on their way to wherever their destination was, not noticing anything else around them. I had once hoped to better these people, but hope had long left my life.

Who says they are even worth my time?

I let my head lean back onto the cold panels of the wall behind me. The question had been a rhetorical one, but my mind supplied an answer nevertheless.

Harry. Harry thinks they are worth my time. In fact, he thinks they are worth his life. He would sacrifice his own existence for witches, wizards, and muggles he did not even know. What makes them so special? What makes them so worthy of his protection?

The more I watched them, the more I found myself confused.

In the early morning, when there had been few of them, no one had spoke or acknowledged the presence of the others. They did not seem to care about one another. If one of them was murdered, who was to say the others would not just scurry away, feigning that they had not seen? They were individuals, separated and unconnected in every way. That was life in all its miserable glory.

However, then the crowds arrived, the dynamic had changed. People walked in groups, some talking with others they knew, but many did not seem to know anyone. Still, these groups walked together in some unspoken bond of company. Perhaps they had the same destination. Perhaps they had the same journey to take. Although it would have been difficult to bear witness, were someone murdered in these crowds, everyone would know. It would start with those closest and move outwards in waves. They would call the authorities, perhaps too many of them. They would crowd the body, perhaps their eyes would follow the murderer in an endless line of continuous sight; the ones who saw would not move to follow him, but they would not need to. Everyone in the crowd would know. The murderer would stick out, go against the grain. The crowds somehow had a pattern, an unspoken connection they had that the murderer had broken.

Midst these thoughts, I heard someone begin to call out. I looked up to see a woman across the street, a wallet in her hand. “Sir!” She was yelling, trying her best to walk against the stream of the crowd and follow a man I supposed had dropped the wallet.

She’s broken the pattern, I thought. She'll never get there.

And still, she struggled. It was not until she placed the wallet high in the air and began to shout, “Excuse me, I need to return this!” that the crowd parted. I watched, slightly astonished, as she was finally able to make it to the man, tap him on the shoulder, and offer him back his wallet. He looked at the wallet, felt around at his pockets, and chuckled. I could not hear what he said to her, but he took the wallet from her with a smile. She smiled back. Then, they both turned and went their own ways, rejoining the crowd as if the incident had never happened.

Why return the wallet when she could have kept it and saved herself the effort? It would have been easier and more profitable.
I supposed she had hoped to receive a reward for her good deed, but she did not seem to be irritated when she did not.

*It is not punishable by law to not return a lost item. But they both smiled when she did return it. The man was happy, and understandably so. But why was she happy?*

Interrupting my thoughts, I felt a buzz in the back if my head, and then a tingle.

*Harry.*

I immediately went back inside to Harry's room. Nothing had seemed to change. Harry still just laid on his bed, covered in a sterile blanket and blue light. I walked over to Severus and cast a silencing charm around us.

“Severus, I can feel the connection with Harry, again. He is, more or less, conscious.”

Severus nodded, and I dropped the charm. I made my way back to the chair and resumed watching Harry.

The healer walked in, cast a brighter light over Harry for a moment, then flicked his wand and ceased all the light over him. Then, just as quickly as he had entered, he left.

I could feel Harry’s mind, sluggish and unprotected, move about vaguely. I reached out to it.

*Harry?*

His eyes twitched, but there was nothing more. I sighed. The morning passed ever slower. It would be an eternity before tomorrow came.

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**Harry’s POV:**

Just as the world had slipped from under me in a lazy haze, the world returned in the same way. I didn’t know where I was, but it did not feel familiar. I tried to open my eyes, but they were so heavy I could only get them to twitch. That itself took so much energy. My entire body, I realized, was heavy. I didn’t have the energy.

I felt a whisper somewhere, but it was so far away, I could hardly hear it at all. Still, it was soft and familiar. I longed for familiar. I longed for safe.

As I breathed, I smelt something odd, but I couldn’t place it. It was very clean. Maybe too clean. I couldn’t place how I felt about it, but it gave my mind depth, something it could grab onto and hoist itself into wakeness.

Voices around me spoke to each other in muffled tones. I could only catch a few words.

“Severus…moving…better.”

“I see…could take…really needs…”

I knew these voices. They were familiar, and I wanted to see them. I opened my mouth to speak, but no words came from my dry throat. I closed my lips just a quickly when the horrible smell of sterile hospital became a taste my tongue caught.

*Bloody hell, I’m in the hospital.*
It all came back to me. The sitting room, the nightmare, passing out. I realized it must have been as bad as it felt.

“Rest?” I heard Tom’s voice say. “Harry refuses to sleep at night. What makes you say he needs rest? He’s hardly slept since beginning to stay with me. And if he does sleep, he has nightmares. He functions on no rest.”

“He needs to let his body reorient itself,” I heard Snape’s monotone say. “It is not a matter of what Harry prefers. His body requires it. He will not be able to heal properly if you wake him.”

Who ever said I was asleep? my still foggy mind thought in Tom’s general direction.

‘Harry, you’re awake. Good.’ “He’s already awake, Severus.”

“If he is awake, then why has he not moved?”

I’m not sure I want to open my eyes. I already know I’m in the hospital. Just take me home before I have to talk to the doctors about what happened. Or worse, about being famous.

“He does not want to see the hospital,” Tom said. “I cannot blame him. It is a dreadful place with a horrendous smell.”

There was a pause.

“Harry will wake regardless of where he his so that I may confirm he is healed properly. It is not his choice. I do have some smelling salts in my emergency potions kit…”

I groaned. I already didn’t like the smell of hospital. Smelling salts sounded even worse.

“Allright, professor,” I managed, voice hoarse almost beyond recognition. I heard footsteps, then the darkness of my eyelids got a bit darker. “I’m awake. I just…feel like the energy has been sucked out of me.”

‘That’s quite alright, Harry.’ Tom thought. His words were as comforting as they had ever been. ‘Do not waste your breath if you do not wish to.’

What happened, exactly? What did you tell the doctors?

‘The fireplace in the sitting room. You did not know, but it is enchanted to light a fire when one thinks of it. You were burned in its fire, but only internally.’

Oh. Well…that makes sense.

‘As for the doctors, we mostly told them the truth.’

Mostly?

‘Yes. Severus said he was a family friend.’

I could have laughed. I supposed the irony was lost on Tom, since he stated it as a fact and not a joke. I was certain, were my parents alive, that they would have gotten a kick out of it.

And they bought that? I thought.

‘Yes, they did. As did Ms. Rita Skeeter. She stopped by to ask for an interview, which we gladly declined.’
Thank, Merlin. I can only imagine what kind of horrible headline this story would make. I shook my head, finding the motion made it hurt. What did you tell them?

Confusion. ‘Tell who?’

The doctors. Obviously, you didn’t tell them you were The Dark Lord, so what did you tell them?

‘I said I was a close friend.’

Oh. Okay.

Our minds were quiet a moment.

Well, I thought. Are you?

‘Am I what?’

Are you my friend?

I could hear Tom scoff. ‘Dark lords do not have friends.’

No, but normal people do, which is what you are, Tom. Well, maybe you’re not exactly normal, but I’m not either, so…

Tom did not respond.

So are you? I prodded.

‘I…do not know how to respond. I have never considered the idea before.’

Then I’ll be your first. I smiled. It’s okay. You don’t have to do anything different to be my friend. We already kind of understand each other. Maybe we’ll play a game every once and a while for fun.

‘Harry, you are odd.’

I smiled bigger.

“Harry, what are you two discussing?” Snape asked.

“Tom said he’s my friend.”

I could sense Tom’s annoyance, but he said nothing to deny it.

This was a good day, I could feel it. I didn’t care that I had internal burns and was in the hospital unable to gather enough energy to open my eyes. Nothing could ruin my day.
Harry’s POV:

I was thankful that I got to leave the hospital that day. The doctors checked me over one more time before they discharged me, and since the nurse began all the paperwork while the healers were fixing me, it was a pretty fast process.

It was afternoon, and the rest of the day was falling fast. Not only had I convinced Tom to become my friend, but he told me that because I destroyed all the paintings in the sitting room, he was getting someone to repaint them, which meant I got to watch.

I also learned that I was somehow able to send a wordless Patronus to Snape just before I passed out. The idea was almost crazy to me. But Snape was right; I did always have luck on my side. I put forth almost no effort to make great things happen, but they happened anyway. It never ceased to amaze me.

I was laying on the floor of the training room, Snape standing by the doorway. He had refused to let me out of his sight since I had gotten back, which I supposed I couldn’t blame him for. Tom had told us to wait for him here. He hadn’t explained why, of course, but I was too preoccupied with my own good mood, I didn’t take the time to stress over it.

Problems that need solving:

#1: I needed to convert Tom to The Light before he converted me to The Dark.

Happiness, check. Friendship, check. Understanding...well, he understands me, I think. At least, mostly. Really, what he needs is to better understand others. That’s...going to be tough.

#1: So close to being solved...but not quite.

I’m skipping the next two, since they either don’t matter or are solved.

#4: Tom wouldn’t tell me what happened in the meeting.

I suppose this can be my next order of business. Surely there’s a way to get him to tell me. Maybe...if I could...but I can’t be sure he would go for that...I’ll try it anyway.

#4: Planned, but iffy

#5: TOM FUCKING KISSED ME

Still not quite sure what to do with this. I mean, we’re friends now, so maybe we talk about it and...forget it ever happened? Maybe?

#5: Yeah, I’ve got no fucking clue.
My last two problems were still such a mess, but the fact that I had only two real problems left was incredible. I was making progress, and I could measure it. It was a great feeling.

I opened my hand, which I had been making magical clay in. I sat up and began to mold it. A small smile came onto my face as I decided to make it into a flower.

“Harry.” I glanced up at Snape. “What are you doing?”

I extended the hand holding it to him. “Making a flower.”

“What is that?” His voice held the same uninterested tone it always held, but I figured that he wouldn’t ask unless he was curious. That fact changed the way his words resonated in my head.

“I’m not actually sure.” I lowered my hand and looked at the clay myself. “I was bored one day, so I tried using wordless and wandless magic to make a butterfly. It didn’t go so well, but I made this. It’s kind of like clay. Watch.”

I carefully brought the ends of my petals together and pinched them together just barely, so they would hold that position but not mash together. I held out my hand a bit and told the flower to bloom. We both watched as the petals of light opened slowly, like real flowers, revealing much more detail than I had originally molded. It floated out of my hand, twirling and spinning until it hit the floor.

I glanced back over to Snape, finding a small smile ever gracing his normally grimacing mouth.

*There’s no going back to being a grumpy old potions master, now.*

“Harry, you remind me so much of your mother. She used to make flowers bloom all year, even in the winter. That is how she discovered her magic.”

The smile on my face grew. I could just imagine my mother running through a grassy field, red hair caught in the wind, green almond eyes—our eyes—closed and crinkled with happy lines, a trail of flowers blooming behind her. It brought a warmth to my chest.

“Well, that’s much better than how I found out. I mean, I did loads of weird things my whole life, but it wasn’t until Hagrid burst down the door to this grubby little shack we were in that I even considered the idea.”

I picked up the flower again and released it just so I could watch it spin back down. It was like seeing a real flower, but without the perks of being outside. With every day that passed, it seemed, I wanted to be outside even more. I wanted the freedom, the fresh air, the beauty. I longed for it, but it wasn’t possible yet.

*For now, the fake flowers will have to do.*

I looked back to Snape and saw he had pressed his hands into a ball. For a moment, he concentrated, then opened his hands. A bumble bee flew out, round and rather fluffy, and made its way over to my flower. I watched it land right in the center of my flower. If it didn’t have a distinct glow, I would have thought it was real.

An idea popped into my head. I made more magic clay in my hand and began to mold it into an oblong crescent-type shape: a cocoon, layered, thick, and textured. I flattened out my hand and told it to open. It twitched a couple of times before a thin leg made a hole in it. From that hole came a thin body, more legs, and finally a pair of wings. After fully leaving its cocoon, the butterfly stretched out and fluttered its wings a few times. The pattern on them was beautiful, like a mosaic of some exotic
creature’s eyes. It was a monarch, I was sure.

Before long, it flew off my hand and into the air. Tom walked into the room just in time to see the bee buzz off the flower so that the butterfly could land.

“Having a bit of fun, I see,” he said, his brows drawn together, but his face otherwise expressionless.

“Sorry. We were bored waiting for you.” I pulled the flower and butterfly back into my hand and closed it. When I opened it, little wisps of light were all that was left. I watched Snape’s bee buzz around a bit longer before it, too, disappeared. “So, what were we waiting for anyway?”

Tom produced a small box from his pocket, placing it on the floor in the middle of the room. He waved his hands apart from each other, and the box began to grow until it was a trunk.

“I hope you do not mind, Harry, but I took the liberty to roam around in your thoughts while you were unconscious.”

Uh… a furious blush came over my face. “What? Why?”

“I was looking for a way to train with the spell you taught me. Which, of course, I found. This box is a form of boggart. The difference between this and a real boggart, such as the one you trained with in your third year, is that this allows you to control not only the form it takes, but how many of them there are.”

My embarrassment subsided. “You actually want to train with the spell I taught you?” I smiled. This is new.

“Well, yes. Were I to be in a situation where I was around dementors—Azkaban, for example—I would need the means to escape.”

I chuckled, finding the explanation ridiculous. I’d never let you go to Azkaban. Not to release your Death Eaters or as a punishment.

Tom raised an eyebrow at me, but did not reply.

I stood. “Alright. Well, let’s get started.”

I walked over next to Tom and faced the box. Pulling out my wand, I was ready.

‘Impress me, Harry.’

I gave a wicked grin. That was a request I could certainly fulfill.

Tom undid the lock with a wave of his hand and the boggart was released. Slowly, one rounded black head popped out from the box and the temperature of the room dropped. As it pulled its body out, a group followed until about twenty dementors floated just between the box and I. They all came towards me, but I closed my eyes.

A small girl running through a field of grasses so tall, she was almost swallowed. Her red hair billowed behind her in the cold, autumn breeze, but from her steps sprouted bunches of spring flowers: daffodils, primroses, violets, azaleas. She laughed and danced until the field was covered, her flowers reflecting the brightness in her eyes.

“Expecto Patronum.” A white light came from my wand, and my stag appeared. It stood proud and strong as it cast a large barrier of light towards the Dementors, sending a repelling wave every time
my heart beat. The Dementors were forced back into the opening of the box, and the lid closed and locked.

“Well done, Harry,” Snape said. I smiled. It was the first compliment he’d ever given me.

Tom nodded his agreement. “Yes, excellent.” He clapped, a smirk on his face. “I shall go, now.”

“Okay,” I said, “but only start with one. You can cast it sometimes, but not always. Be careful.”

Tom already had his wand at the ready. He waved his hand and the lock released. When the box opened, two dementors came out and began to make their way toward Tom.

_Tom, that’s too many_, I thought at him.

“*Expecto Patronum*,” he said, but no light came from his wand.

My worry grew as the dementors made their way closer to him.

“*Expecto Patronum*,” he said again, but to no avail. They were just before him, then.

_One inhale is all it takes._

Just as the first Dementor began its soul-sucking, I raised my wand. “*Expecto Patronum!*”

A furiously bright light came from my wand and banished the Dementors back into their box in mere seconds. The box locked, and I lowered my wand.

I turned to Tom, who had fallen to his knees. “Professor, could you get some chocolate?”

Snape conjured some and held it out to me. I took it and pressed it into Tom’s hands, feeling around for his mind. When I found it, he felt a bit disoriented, but otherwise fine.

“Eat this,” I said.

He looked up at me with confusion. “What is this for?”

“It helps to eat chocolate after being attacked by a Dementor. It sends endorphins to your brain, which make you happy.”

‘I see…’

Although Tom stared at the candy like a foreign object, he bit a small piece off. “So this counteracts the effects of the Dementors?”

“Yeah. Kind of.”

He took another small bite then placed the rest in my hand as he stood again. “I will try once more.”

“Only one this time, Tom,” I warned. For a moment, the concern in my heart made me wonder: _Is this what I make other people feel like all the time?_

Tom unlocked the box and, thankfully, only one Dementor emerged. He stood still for a moment, closing his eyes and concentrating. The next moment, he raised his wand.

*“Expecto Patronum.”*
A great white light erupted from his wand and morphed into a basilisk, ready to attack. It stared the Dementor down, sending a shield of light at it. The Dementor was struck back into the box, which closed and locked itself.

“That was great, Tom!” It was my turn to clap.

“That was great, Tom!” It was my turn to clap.

“Indeed, My Lord,” Snape agreed.

The training went on for hours. Sometimes his Patronus would work, and others it wouldn’t. We went through nearly a whole bar of chocolate, and I had to come in to act a few times. Snape kept a record of how many times it had worked.

At last, Tom turned to Snape and asked, “how am I doing?”

“You have a 45 percent rate of success,” he answered. “It works less than half the time.”

Anger. I could feel it building up and pouring out from Tom’s mind. I knew it was the happy thoughts that were troubling him. I didn’t need to see into his brain to know that he did not have happiness down to a T, but he was getting there.

Through the whole lesson, I wondered what could make Tom happy. I had seen some of his happy thoughts—namely, me torturing Pettigrew—but surely that wasn’t a permanent solution, otherwise he’d use the thought every time and have a better rate of success.

I know what makes me happy. Friends, family. But Tom doesn’t have those things, just me and some followers. I sighed. Is there something I can do to make him happy other than torture Pettigrew?

I knew he didn’t much like the world we were in. He hated many things about it, in fact.

But what does he like about it? What do I like about it? I thought back to the hills. Maybe if I could take him there, he would see.

But, unfortunately, my idea had to wait.

“My Lord,” Snape said. “It is time.”

Tom nodded. With a grimace, he turned and apparated away.

I gestured to the air where Tom had just been. “Why’d he apparate? It’s just down in the next hall…” I turned to Snape, but he too, it seemed, had apparated.

I rolled my eyes and walked out the door down to the next hallway. It didn’t take long before I opened the door to the private meeting room where Tom and Snape waited for me. I quickly took my seat in the golden chair and watched as Snape kneeled before Tom.

“Severus,” Tom began, “you have been a fine servant in the past, but now your services are no longer mine to control. I free you of this bond.”

Tom outstretched his hand. Snape placed his left forearm in it, dark mark facing up. With his other hand, Tom ran his fingernails down Snape’s arm, cutting into the skin until blood began to pool and drip. Snape’s face distorted in pain.

It took all my willpower not to try and stop it. This has to happen, I told myself. Otherwise, Snape will still be a Death Eater.

Tom’s nails stopped at Snape’s wrist, covered in his blood. He let go of Snape, both performing
cleaning spells. When the blood was gone of his arm, I noticed that the mark was, in fact, gone.

“Episky.” Snape’s wounds were bathed in blue light. The wounds faded until they were faint shadows of what they had been.

He stood, then, and bowed to Tom, probably for the last time.


Tom huffed with irritation. “Yes, you may go now, Severus.”

Snape nodded. “Of course.” He pulled out his wand. For a moment, he looked to me. Then, with a turn, he disapperated.

“It is time for dinner, Harry,” Tom announced as he walked out of the room. I followed after him.

I didn’t feel hungry at all, but I decided to eat anyway, so Tom wouldn’t gripe at me. It was delicious, but there was no way I could have finished it all. When I finally pushed my plate away, I sat, not knowing what to do as I waited for Tom to finish. Of course, a little thought floated around the front of my mind.

Number five, it said. Ask about number five.

“Hey, Tom?” my mouth asked before I even realized it had even opened.

“Yes, Harry?”

I hesitated. Do I really want to bring this up now? I don’t even know exactly how I feel about it yet. I sighed internally. “Last night…after my nightmare, but before I burned myself…did you…kiss me?”

The silence the question left only served to deepen the blush I was sure I had.

“That depends,” Tom said. “Do you think I did?”

My eyes narrowed in confusion. “I’m…pretty sure you did. So, the better question might be…why did you?”

Tom didn’t reply. Instead, he continued to eat his dinner. My cheeks burned, and my head pounded with anticipation. Why wasn’t he answering?

Tom finally finished and pushed his plate away. I had been staring at him, probably not blinking, as I was lost in thoughts of why. His face was a careful mask, showing no sign of anything, and I found that distressing. Is he hiding something? I waited for him to speak, but he didn’t. I began to fidget. My nerves were getting the better of me.

What if I didn’t want to hear his answer? If it was something weird?

If…there that word was again. The one that never gave me any hints.

“Harry,” Tom began at last. “I am going to be completely honest with you.” ‘For once,’ his mind added.

I was sure my heart paused for a fraction of a second. “Okay,” I said, quieter than I intended.

“I couldn’t help myself,” he said simply, like it was blatantly obvious that he couldn’t help but force a kiss on me just like he had to breathe.
I stared at him, mouth opened slightly. He would not meet my eyes. “What the bloody hell does that mean?”

“I…” he started, but hesitated. “I simply felt the need.”

That wasn’t any better of an answer. I was getting impatient. I still wasn’t sure if the answer was something I wanted to hear, but at least it would put my stray thoughts and anxieties to rest. Merlin knows I needed that.

“You just…felt the need to force your mouth on mine right after I woke up from a nightmare? You felt the need to freak me out beyond belief?”

Tom met my eyes for a moment, and my impatience subsided. Something in them was different. These were not the bright, bloody red of Voldemort, or even the more tolerant red that was distinctly Tom. They were deep and maroon, almost like velvet. We looked at one another, and I felt the breath in my lungs pause. I was caught up in these foreign eyes, but then Tom looked back down to the table, and I was released.

“Exactly,” he responded rather lamely.

That was not the answer I was expecting. I mean, I wasn’t exactly expecting an answer, but if I had, that was certainly not it.

“What?” was all I managed to say.

Tom adjusted his body in the chair, as if uncomfortable in his entirely too comfy throne.


*Story of my life,* I thought.

“You want to know?” He finally looked back to me. I couldn’t make out his expression, it was so new. “I did it because I saw you at your most vulnerable. I wanted to know, Harry. I wanted to know what it would be like to have control over a being I knew I would never be able to.” His eyes were so piercing, they could have been looking right through me. “I kissed you, and it felt nothing like I had expected. I very much regret the circumstances in which it happened.”

My eyes widened. My heart stopped. I wasn’t sure I was breathing. He’d just told me everything, like I had read his mind. But I hadn’t. He just willingly gave me his thoughts.

I let my eyes fall down to the table as I attempted to process his answer. A second later, his hand grabbed my chin and pulled it, forcing me to look into his velvet eyes. I knew where this was going, and while a part of me wanted to fight it, another part just wanted to let it happen.

His hungry lips made their way onto mine, not forcefully, but with strength. I shut my eyes tightly.

*I don’t like this,* a part of me said. It was easy to think it, and yet I still did not pull away.

He parted and released my chin. We sat in silence for a long moment, unmoving and barely breathing. It was as if the world had paused. Then, I stood.

“What the hell?”
Tom did not look at me or answer my question, leaving me feeling angry, flustered, and used. I couldn’t make out his expression. I poked at his mind through our connection, but it was sealed shut.

*Let me in, damn it! Give me some explanation! Something!*

But he said nothing.

I grabbed my wand from my pocket and apparated to my room. The second I arrived, I cast up a silencing charm and began to scream.

“*I HATE YOU!*”

I threw my wand on the bed, angry thoughts consuming my mind. *How could you let him control you? Why does it feel so wrong? Why won’t he answer? Why did he kiss you? Why didn’t I pull away? What was wrong with him? What was wrong with you?*

I punched the wall, not bothering to let the pain get to me. “*I hate you! I hate you!*”

I wasn’t yelling at Tom. I knew I didn’t hate Tom. Deep down, beneath the anger, I knew I would never hate Tom. But I hated something. There was something I couldn’t quite place, a piece I wasn’t getting. I didn’t know what it was, but I hated it with every fiber of my being.

Tears stung at the back of my eyes, but I refused to let them fall. “*I hate you!*” I picked up a pillow and pitched it to the other side of the room.

With that last throw, my anger faded, leaving nothing but shivering sorrow. I sat on the edge of the bed, unable to prevent the feeling from taking over.

‘I hate you,’ I whispered, the first tear escaping from my eye. Then in a frenzy, tears poured form my eyes. I felt a chill on my arms, and my chest began to shake and heave with uneven breaths. My crying turned to sobbing, and I fell face first onto the bed.

*I hate you.*

I let myself cry until the tears stopped. Once they did, I felt level. I laid on my back, knees hanging off the bed. My thoughts swam around in a pool of confusion, mingling freely, coming to their own conclusions; it was the greatest way to find out how I truly felt without my interference. I knew what was wrong and what was right, but my thoughts only knew what they knew.

*That was absolutely disgusting. I hated that…but I stayed for it, so I must have at least wanted to like it. What didn’t I like about it? This kiss hadn’t been as controlling as the last. Still, it wasn’t my choice to participate. Would I choose to participate if it was a normal kiss? Maybe. I wouldn’t be opposed to the idea, but I didn’t want to be taken advantage of.*

And why did Tom do it? *He said the first kiss was because he wanted to control me, but that he didn’t enjoy it as much as he thought he would. Did he like this kiss better? It was less controlling. Did he want to like the feeling of kissing me or the feeling of controlling me? How did he feel about me? We’re allies. We’re friends. I know I can irritate him, but I know he doesn’t hate me.*

*Does he know how he feels about me? Do I know how I feel about him? I know I don’t hate him. I know I want to be his friend. I know that I care about him enough to help him. I’d give my life to save his, but maybe that didn’t mean much coming from me—I’ve done that a lot and would do that for almost anyone. I’ve shared a mind with him. I trust him, and he trusts me, to an extent. We’ve lived in the same manor for a week, although it is pretty big. We’ve taught and learned from each other. We know each other’s pasts. We’ve been enemies, and we’ve kissed. What does all of that*
mean?

I sat back up. I had no idea how much time had passed. I assumed a little bit, but not too long.

_I should see if there’s still time to talk to Tom._

I grabbed my wand, removed the silencing charm, then returned it to my pocket. I opened the door to the hallway finding the lights were hardly lit at all.

_So, a long time has passed. Great. Tom’s asleep, then._

I decided to head over to the still-charred sitting room. As an afterthought, I promised myself I wouldn’t fall asleep and dream of large fires.

I opened the door to the sitting room and just stared inside. The room had a whole different feeling, now. It was not calm and peaceful, but eerie and very much past, like ancient ruins. The char marks covered the walls and floor near the fireplace. There was one clear spot right in front of the chair that looked out the darkened, smoky window.

_That’s where I was. I was right in the path of the flames. No wonder I got burned._

Through the window, which I could just barely make out, the grasses rolled on the quiet hills, not a single char mark or bit of ash. I thanked Merlin that my dream had not been real enough to reach the hills.

I stepped inside the room and sat in the clear spot in front of the chair, making some magical clay. I did not pay much attention to what I molded, letting my hands do the work. Without my hesitation and second guessing, they moved with more precision than I was normally capable of.

When my hands stopped, I looked over their work. I couldn’t tell what it was exactly, but it appeared to be curled up. Curious, I told it to wake up. The clay moved, removing its head from the side of its body.

It was a doe.

It lifted its head and stood carefully, a little wobbly at first, then with more stability. As the doe looked to me, I smiled.

_It’s like Snape’s Patronus._

The doe’s eyes were like little green beads. I watched it as it trotted off my hand and around in the air, circling down to the floor. Behind it, it left a trail of small lights that floated down to the blackened carpet. It slowed to a stop once it reached the ground and turned to face the little lights. It shook its head, and the little lights opened up, revealing petals; tiny flowers.

I smiled bigger. _It’s not Snape. It’s my mom._

The doe curled up once more and vanished, leaving its flowers behind.

_My mom left, too, I thought. But she also left behind her trail of flowers._

With a sigh, I let my thoughts gather and take control once more.

_Problems that need solving:_

_#1: No change._
I’ve at least got some reasoning behind the first kiss and sorted out my own thoughts. Now, I just had to talk to Tom and get some answers. Did he want to control me, or kiss me? He couldn’t have both. I wouldn’t let him have both. In fact, I don’t think I would let him control me, either. Just kiss me.

I let that thought sink in.

Bloody fucking hell, I want him to kiss me.

#5: Screwed.

I ran a hand over my face. And this day had started off so well…what the fuck happened?

Voldemort’s POV:

Harry had disapperated, and I was left alone with my own mutinous mind. I was almost certain he had returned to his room here, but I did not dare go after him.

Why waste the time? He will only continue to yell and ask questions you do not have the answer to.

I did not leave the table for a few minutes. I did not feel I was able to.

Have I just made a mistake? I knew that Harry did not and would not enjoy it, and yet I still made him kiss me.

Nothing about my actions over dinner were predictable. Not my answers, not my confession, not the kiss. None of it had been planned. In fact, much of it seemed out of character. Dark lords do not confess. A dark lord would not even be tempted to confess. A dark lord also would not feel the way I had while Harry asked those questions.

I was lost. I was nervous. I was anxious and unsure. I wanted nothing to do with those emotions, but they still hung over me, even though Harry was gone.

I could feel bits of anger overflow from Harry’s mind.

He deserves to be angry. I would be.

I stood and began to walk to my room, thoughts of sleep entering my mind. It was still early in the evening, but the idea of escape was all too easy to give into.

As I turned down my hallway, my hand reached out and caught a bottle of calming draught I had not realized I summoned. With ease, I drank it, feeling my mind glaze over with the false serenity.

All except for the anger Harry felt.

I opened my door and stepped inside, mental exhaustion washing over me.

Why, I thought, are emotions so incredibly difficult to handle? Especially those that are not your own…

I did not bother changing into sleeping clothes. The effort was too much. Instead, I let myself rest on
my bed, closing my eyes and feeling Harry’s overabundant anger.

And just as quickly as it was there, it was gone. I did not wonder if he stopped feeling angry or simply put up mental barriers. My mind was entirely calm, and I fell asleep almost instantly.

I slowly awakened some time later, letting the world materialize around me. I was on top of my sheets, still wearing my robes, had not even brushed my teeth. I had been so careless with myself in such a long time.

My internal clock was sure it was not yet time for breakfast, and when I opened the door to the hallway, the level of darkness confirmed it.

*It seems it is barely early morning. The sun has not even risen. I do not feel I am able to sleep, so how shall I occupy my time?*

I walked out into the hallway and took the familiar path to the library, intent on reading until it was time for breakfast. I passed through the archway and to the door to the library when I saw movement in my peripherals. I turned and found the barely luminated figure of Harry staring back at me from the doorway to the sitting room.

We did not move, holding one another’s gaze. His eyes, not too far off bright green in the darkness of the hallway, refused to let me go. It was a kind of Priori Incantatem that did not require wands, or even magic. We stood and stared, unwinning. Both sides finding they were slowly losing.

I stared at him and saw the features of his face in pieces and then all at once, forming a familiar and yet new appearance. In my chest, I felt my great determination begin to fall. Yes, I had a mastery of dark and ancient magic, but Harry had mastery of something else entirely. I would admit that I had not been the same since he first arrived here, although I could not for the life of me explain why. There were pieces of him that I would never understand.

And there were many I would never cease desiring.

Without breaking contact, I took a step towards Harry. Sensing the challenge, Harry stepped forward as well. I took another step, and Harry followed suit.

In no time, we were before each other, eyes still locked. I had not intended to become so close, as we had, but I would not dare back down now. I could see the determination in Harry’s features, the challenge, the fierce bravery—all his strong suits, of course. They filled him with an intoxicating glow. Yes, I admired his green eyes, but more so, I admired his black-rimmed glasses that seemed to magnify them, the unruly black hair that swept over his forehead, the scar hiding underneath that I put there so long ago, marking him as my equal.

*My equal…*

I lifted my hand and gently held his chin, almost as I had earlier, but lighter. Harry was a wild force, one that I had intended to conquer for most of my unhuman life. I wanted to control him, to rule over him. It seemed that I had forgotten that we were equals. Such a quest was impossible.

Rather than force his face to mine, I brought mine to his in a gentle embrace. With eyes closed, I felt the moment of absolve and pleasure, my lungs and heart slowing to a near stop. Harry did not pull away, as I had feared he would. Still, I implored his mind.

*‘This is wrong,’* it thought.

I released his chin and pulled my face away, but Harry grabbed my robes and pulled me back. He
pressed his lips to mine, and without conscious decision, I took the invitation.

My tongue licked at his lips, and they parted. When I tongue passed through his lips, I could taste him, sweet and light. The moment was full of feelings I had been awaiting since the first time I placed my lips on his, and yet I grabbed his hand and removed it from my robes, pulling away from the kiss with much reluctunce.

/If it is wrong, why do you sustain?/ I hissed, nearly smiling at the wideness of his eyes.

“U-uh…” he stammered. ‘Good question. I have no idea.’

/Could you not help yourself/? I teased in his ear.

“Well…I-uh…”

No longer able to help it, I smiled. So very articulate. I nearly went back in for another kiss, but instead, took a necessary step back. He had questions, and I was more prepared to answer them.

I did not speak, leaving the silence for Harry to ask something, but he did not. Upon closer inspection, I noticed the shade of his cheeks.

Are you embarrassed? I asked, completely curious.

“No…” Harry stared at the floor. “Well…I mean…sort of.” ‘I really didn’t expect you to kiss me again, much less have me kiss you back.’

I would not allow myself to step closer, although my mutinous body wanted to. I wanted something from him, although I was unsure of what. I had believed it to be submission, vulnerability, but it was not. I could not rationalize it, and until I could, I vowed to keep at a distance.

Before I could commit to the vow, I was already closer to Harry, looking into his eyes, large with the innocence of a small prey baiting a predator to consume its poisonous flesh. Our foreheads nearly touched, our lips mere inches apart. I wanted to take the bait, to allow myself a taste of the beautiful poison before me. But another part, the part that feared death, held me back with all its might.

Yet Harry pulled me in, plunging us into a deep kiss, arms wrapping around one another to pull each other closer. I held back, not allowing myself to give in too much to the temptation. I battled with myself, aware of my every movement and thinking over each carefully. I pulled my arms from around Harry’s waist and set them on the front of his hips, as if to push away. Although we kissed, not once did I dare allow my tongue to enter his mouth. I was determined to win.

And yet Harry made it so difficult. His lips moved against mine with such silken ease. His chest pressed against my own so that I could feel the pounding of his heart. It was all so much, and then Harry draped his arms around my neck and let out a small, involuntary whimper escape from his mouth.

Never before had I been so willing to lose.

My tongue passed through his lips once more, exploring, as my feet turned us gracefully so that we faced the opposite direction. One slow step after the other, I drew us closer towards Harry’s room. In an unexpected twist, Harry’s feet redirected us left, and his back pressed up against the wall. I pushed him more against the wall and parted our mouths, trailing small kisses down his throat. His breathing hitched and fluttered. I nibbled at a sensitive area between his neck and shoulder for a moment before biting down lightly. He gasped, and as I opened my eyes to see the expression on his face, I noticed, instead, the trail of flowers that had followed us down the hall from where we once
stood.

No distractions, I told myself.

Turning back to Harry, I placed my mouth over his once more. The moment was growing, although I was unsure with what. It was all perfectly enjoyable, and yet I craved more.

‘Merlin, yes, more,’ Harry thought. And my fighting was over.

I pictured my bed, large and cushioned, covered in black silk. In moments, we apparated to its foot. I broke apart our kiss and gently pushed Harry to lay on it. I watched as he looked around, an uncertainty in his eyes, and I draped myself over him to whisper in his ear.

‘Harry, I will not do this without your consent. I promise not to harm you or force you. If you wish to stop, please say so. I don’t…’ I nearly stopped, finding the words harder to find. ‘I don’t want this to feel wrong.’

Harry did not say a word, but nodded, mouth slightly agape and hands clutching at my robes.

My hand wandered up his shirt, feeling the smooth skin of his stomach and chest, and our lips met once more. Without realizing I had done so, I made Harry’s shirt vanish, along with my robes. Harry ran his fingers through my hair, and his tongue plunged into my mouth, filling it with his flavor once more. My hand softly glided over his chest and over to his nipple, which I playfully flicked to hear him whimper once more. His sounds, just like his challenging glow, were intoxicating.

My pants grew tighter as my arousal pushed against them, begging to be released. I broke our kiss, and Harry inhaled heavily to make up for lost air. I unbuttoned Harry’s pants and pulled them off, along with his boxers. His erected member was released from its prison. I gently took it in my hands and massaged it with my tongue. Harry’s head flew back, the unexpected sensation catching him, and his hips bucked, just pleading me for more. Without hesitation, I lowered my mouth onto his tip and massaged it with my tongue. Harry let out an airy moan that whipped through the air and encouraged me on further. I took the shaft with my hand and covered the rest with my mouth, moving ever so painfully slow.

His taste alone was almost enough to bring me to the edge, and yet a moan, high and heavy, came from Harry’s parted pink lips, threatening to push me over entirely.

“Tom.”

I removed my mouth and, with my tongue, traced a large vein on his cock while massaging his shaft, then I released my own member and stroked it with my other hand. The air was thick with our pleasure and the absence of oxygen. I could hardly find new air, instead breathing in all of Harry, it seemed.

"Tom…I…Tom" Harry scratched at the sheets of the bed, his orgasm building. I brought us closer and closer, every second of ecstasy less bearable than the last. Harry's moans filled the room with music. "Tom…I’m…” Harry's back arched and his cock released a sticky white liquid I had no problem swallowing. I quickly finished myself off, coming with a soft moan and the same sticky substance. I used a quick cleaning spell on my hand, then looked back up at Harry. He was breathing hard, his eyes closed peacefully, a bed of flowers around him. I smiled and laid next to him, a happy kind of sleep overcoming me.
Harry’s POV:

I woke bit by bit, a smile on my face. It was the first time in a while that I had slept without having a single dream.

I opened my eyes and saw only black. I stretched my arms and legs out, realizing the tension was gone from them.

Wow. I slept really great. Not sure I’ve ever slept this well.

I sat up and rubbed at my eyes, still droopy with sleep. I went to swing my legs off the edge of the bed, but found that there was only more bed. I scooted once, twice, three times, but still did not find an edge.

With confusion beginning to bubble in my mind, I rubbed at my eyes again and attempted to squint to be able to see clearly. In the dark and through my terrible eyesight, I was barely able to make out black sheets.

Black sheets. Bed that goes on forever. That is not a good sign.

I looked down, and I was naked.

That is definitely not a good sign.

I kept scooting off the bed, and after several, finally reached the edge. I couldn’t find a table or anything that could have my glasses on it.

“Accio glasses.”

My glasses flew into my hand and put them on, the world coming into dim focus.

Yep. This is Tom’s room. Fuck.

I stood and searched the floor for my clothes, but couldn’t find them anywhere near.

Bloody fucking…

I stood, covering myself with a hand, and walked around the bed. I sighed in relief when I found my bottoms crumpled at the foot of the bed and quickly put them on.

There was no shirt with them, but I didn’t bother to keep looking. It wasn’t a priority. If my assumptions were right, Tom had seen me naked, so not wearing a shirt was nothing.

Tom.

I looked around the room, but he wasn’t there.

Well, it’s probably morning. He’s probably eating breakfast.

I went to the door and opened it, revealing the bright lights that mimicked day. As I walked down the hallway, thoughts of last night—or, actually, I think early this morning—flooded into my mind.
I let Tom kiss me, and I kissed him back. Merlin, I kissed him back a lot. I fucking brought him to me. And then he had me up against the wall...then we went to his room and...it was amazing.

I walked into the spacious room and sure enough, Tom sat in his usual spot, eating breakfast. The smell of food, warm and savory, made my stomach growl. I sat in my spot beside him, and Sadie popped in with a breakfast tray.

“Here be your breakfast, Mr. Harry Potter,” she squeaked.

I thanked her, and she popped away, a confused blush on her face.

As always, the food was delicious and unidentifiable. I shoveled what I thought to be scrambled eggs into my mouth, but found that it was such a different texture, there was no way they were eggs. I was done with them before I began to wonder if they were maybe just a different kind of eggs.

I looked up from my empty plate to find Tom staring at me curiously.

“What?” I asked.

“You finished your breakfast.”

“Yeah…” I looked back down at the completely empty plate, then back to Tom. “I was hungry.”

“I see,” was all he said.

Sadie popped back in and took our plates. She was gone before I could think of thanking her again.

“So…” I began, my nerves thinning. “About last night…”

“Yes? What about it?” Tom glanced towards me, not meeting my eyes, but bare chest.

“Well…” I suddenly felt self-conscious. “I don’t know, really. It’s just you…and I…I woke up in your bed naked.”

Tom gave a soft chuckle, one that rang through the spacious room like a muted bell. ‘So very articulate.’ “Yes, Harry. You were asleep, and I did not want to wake you from what appeared to be a decent sleep.”

“Yeah, but…” I didn’t know what to think of it all, really. It was...weird. Last night, everything seemed so different. Our emotions were high, and it all just happened. Now, in the daylight, I felt so exposed and awkward.

“What was weird?” he asked.

“Waking up in your bed. I thought I was in my bed, but then I tried to stand up. Your bed never ends. It’s bloody huge.”

“Well, yes,” Tom replied, eyes bright with amusement but face completely serious. “It is a bed perfect for...a bit of fun.”

I felt my cheeks warm. I looked down and fiddled with my fingers.

Things were going to be different between us, and I wasn’t quite sure how. Was it good? Was it bad? We were friends, but now we were...what were we?

“Tom?” I still did not look to him, but I could feel his eyes. Instead, I poked at his mind, which
opened.

“Yes, Harry?”

“What are we now?”

Confusion. “What do you mean?”

“Well, before we were friends. Now…after last night…what are we now? Friends with benefits?”

Revulsion. “Harry, that is an awful choice of words. Never say them again.”

I couldn’t help but smile. *Okay, fine. Not that. But then what?*

Tom stayed silent, but I could feel his thoughts being calculated. “Nothing had changed, Harry. We have always been the same. You are Harry, and I am Voldemort. That is what we are.”

I sat, letting my thoughts soak in his words.

*That’s…such a cop-out answer.*

Rather than reply to me, Tom changed the subject. “Ah yes, Lucius and Draco shall be coming over today. We will be discussing some very important information regarding the plans we made at the last meeting.”

*Plans? What plans?*

“No, worry yourself, Harry. If you behave properly,” he gave me a stern look, “you will find out soon enough. They will arrive in the afternoon, so you should have more than enough time to find a shirt to wear.”

*Oh. Right.* I looked down at myself, nearly forgetting that I was not wearing one. Tom stood and left for his room, so I figured I should do the same. I went up the stairs and down the hall to my room. Of course, my door was locked. I went to grab my wand from my pocket, but it wasn’t there. I sighed.

*“Accio wand.”* It took a bit, but eventually my wand came to my hand, and I unlocked the door.

Once inside my room, I decided to take a shower. I took off my clothes and got into the water, thinking I wanted the water at my usual heat. The nearly boiling water hit my body, but there was no stress to melt to melt off, only skin. It hurt more than it helped, so the shower adjusted accordingly, becoming a bit colder than normal. When I got out, I felt no different than I had when I went in, except that I was cold. I left the bathroom and saw my clothes folded on the bed, including my shirt. I dressed quickly and looked down at my clothes.

*Time for a change.*

I transfigured my dark green shirt into a red one, which made my eyes brighter in contrast, and my black jeans into normal blue ones.

I still had so much before I had to go the meeting, but I hadn’t the slightest idea what to do.

*Well, maybe I should work on those spells Tom taught me. He worked on the one I gave him…*

I began to make my way to the training room, uncertainty in my mind.

We knew what the other was trying to do. It was obvious. Tom wanted me on his side, and I was
trying to get him to my side; it was like some big, childish game and not something that the whole wizarding world depended on. I mean, of course I liked this better. It meant we didn’t have to kill each other. I didn’t want to kill Tom. And I was sure Tom didn’t want to kill me. Instead, we had checklists of things that made someone “bad” or “good” and tried to match each other to those actions or feelings.

If I was honest with myself, I didn’t care who ended up where. It didn’t really seem to matter; we would still be ourselves.

Or would we?

I couldn’t imagine myself being evil. Torturing people for fun, killing without a second thought, harming innocent bystanders, not trusting anyone; that wasn’t me. It never would be. Those things weren’t in my nature, and no amount of breaking and reconstructing me would ever make me that way.

And then there was Tom. Tom could be so much more, but he let himself be Voldemort. Voldemort was the epitomy of those things. Voldemort could never be good. He drew his strength from being as inhuman as possible. He was bits and pieces of soul, scattered about in the hopes of living forever. He was followers filled with fear, unspeakable punishments, and unending misused power. I could never hope of revitalizing any goodness from within his cold, dead heart.

But Tom was not Voldemort. Tom had the capability to be anything he wanted. He could trust, feel happiness, be charming, and probably most importantly, allow himself to be vulnerable around others. I had seen that recently, although I honestly hadn’t thought it possible until it happened.

Our intimacy was vulnerability. It could have been unfeeling and just for pleasure, but something told me it was everything but. Tom had been trying to control me, but last night he didn’t. He didn’t control me. He didn’t force me. He asked for permission, in fact. Everything about it was enjoyable, and yet so exposing. But he still allowed it.

What did that mean?

I arrived in the training room and pulled a rat from the large cage by the side of the room. It panicked and squirmed in my hand, so I placed it on the floor. It began to run away, which was making my job harder.

“Petrificous Totalus.”

I missed the first time, but cast it again and hit it right on its back. The rat froze in place.

I thought through the many spells we had gone over, looking for one I needed to perfect. All the curses really didn’t take long for me to learn. The problem was my conscience interfering. There was one curse that instantly came to mind. It gave me so much trouble because it was so evil-feeling, the guilt would eat me alive before I cast it on anything that could feel pain.

I sighed, but tried not to let my thoughts cloud me for just a moment.

“Monstinnen.”

A somewhat-clear light purple cloud sprayed from my wand onto the rat, and it inhaled it. I unpetrified it and placed it into an empty, smaller cage beside the larger one. I sat on the floor close by, watching the rat move around, a bit skittish at first, but eventually acting as if nothing had happened.
This had been one of the spells we had not used on Pettigrew. It had been awful to watch the first time Tom showed me, and every time I tried to cast it afterwards hadn’t worked. It was a horrible thing, but I wanted to see if I was able to cast it correctly, just once.

A few more awfully anxious moments went by before I noticed the rat convulsing and squeaking like mad. Then it stopped everything and fell to its side. I watched in horror as its stomach began to move. A monster made out of the rat’s own flesh and vessels ripped through the skin and exposed itself to the world, bloody and full of spiked pieces of broken bone.

I shut my eyes, my stomach churning uncomfortably. *I really should have waited until later. I don’t want to lose the only full meal I’ve eaten in a while.*

Soon, the monster began to shrivel up, its only source of nourishment dead. It, too, died.

From beside me, I heard a hiss. I turned and nearly jumped when I found Nagini’s face right beside my own, her yellow eyes trained on the dead mass of rat guts in the cage.

/*Your breakfast./ I told her, trying to hold down my own.

/Thank you./ she replied, nudging the door to the cage open with no difficulty. I turned to look away as she swallowed the thing whole.

I stood then and left the room. I wanted to be anywhere but there.

It wasn’t even lunch yet, but I made my way to the private meeting room. I had no idea what I intended to do in there, but I didn’t care. When I walked inside, Draco and his father were already seated.

“You’re both early.”

“We would never want My Lord to wait for us,” Lucius replied haughtily.

“Why are you early, Potter?” Draco sneered.

“I got bored,” I said simply. I didn’t want to engage Draco. I was so close to figuring out what Tom’s plan was, and I didn’t want to waste the chance because of Malfoy.

Lucius stood. “I shall go fetch My Lord since the rest of us are already here,” he announced. He gave a sideways glance at Draco. “Behave,” he said lightly, then looked to me. “Both of you,” he spat. Then he left the room.

“So Potter,” Draco began with a smirk,” have you been bringing your girlfriend over, or have you been sneaking out to see her?”

“What?” Where the bloody hell did that come from? I don’t have a girlfriend.

“Your neck.” He pointed. “It’s obviously not a bruise. So, which is it, then?”

*My neck?* I touched my neck where he had pointed and found it sensitive to the touch. I gently pushed on it and nearly gasped. Thoughts of last night came back to my mind: me against the wall, Tom’s kisses trailing down my throat, the pain and pleasure of his bite right on that area.

*Fucking hell. He left a mark on me…He probably noticed it, too. At breakfast. And he didn’t say anything?*

A part of me wanted to be angry, but if anything, I was turned on. But now, Draco was questioning
me about some girlfriend I didn’t have.

*Oh Merlin, what would his face look like if I told him?*

But I wouldn’t do that to Tom.

“None of your business, Malfoy,” I said, covering the mark, hoping my cheeks weren’t as red as they felt.

“Oh really, now?” He looked so fucking pleased with himself with his smug grin and blackmailing eyes. “I suppose I could just go tell The Dark Lord about it, then.”

I thinned out my lips, trying hard to mask my amusement for irritation.

“What? No.”

“Then I guess it is my business, Potter.” He folded his arms, as if he had won.


Draco shrugged. “Then I guess he’ll have your wand after I tell him.”

I balled my hands into fists, resisting the urge to challenge him. *I have to act like I’m losing. I have to act like I’m losing.*

“But, you said—”

He scoffed. “I never said anything. So who is the unlucky girl? Not that Weaselette, is it?”

I couldn’t think of a reply, but I didn’t have to. Lucius and Tom walked through the door.

*Why didn’t you tell me you left a mark on my neck? Draco’s been harassing me about it.*

Amusement (the fucking prat). *‘And what did you tell him?’*

I shook my head and made my way to the table, everyone else following my lead. *He thinks I’ve been sneaking out to see a girl. He made that assumption all by himself.*

I took a seat in the golden chair, watching as Draco and Lucius stood by their own chairs until Tom sat in his black one. I hadn’t realized that there was some form of etiquette I was supposed to be following, but I supposed it didn’t matter. I wasn’t a follower. They all knew that.

“Now,” Tom began, “let us discuss how we plan to attack The Order.”

“What?” My heart stopped, then beat twice as fast. “You can’t attack The Order.”

Tom stared at me, eyes stern and unyielding. This was Voldemort.

“Harry, it is not an option. Our original intent was to attack them and Hogwarts, but recent events have made such a plan idiotic.”

I narrowed my eyes and placed my hands flat on the table. “Why? They know about our alliance. If you need something from them, I can go talk to them.”

“We do not wish to talk with them.” Tom put the tips of his fingers on the table as if to punctuate the
statement with the tap the movement made. “They are an obstacle. We must erase them, so there no hope for muggles and mudbloods.”

I fell silent, letting that statement sink in. You and your purist bullshit… “For one, that’s impossible. You can’t kill all muggles and muggleborns. That’s genocide. Two, killing off The Order won’t help you accomplish that.”

“Both must be done. Harry. You know how awful muggles are.”

I shook my head. “No, they can be awful. But anyone can be awful. Wizards and witches are that way, too. Killing them off doesn’t stop that!”

“They are the only thing that causes us harm. We need to rid ourselves of them and keep wizarding blood pure.”

“What? How does that even make sense!” I was yelling, now, with no regard for how loud. “How are they the ones harming us? Especially when you go around killing them for no reason other than their non-magical blood.”

Tom placed two fingers to his temple and began to rub. “Enough. We are not discussing this.” He appeared tired, but I could feel the anger welling in his mind.

“Killing The Order won’t do anything! The Order was formed to oppose you doing horrible things. You can kill its members, which I might mention include Snape and I, but it’ll just get new members. Wizards see you killing innocent people and realize they need to stop it. You can’t do anything unless you plan on killing everyone on Earth!”

Lucius and Draco hadn’t said anything, but both stared at me, eyes wide and mouths agape.

Tom held his head in one hand, not bothering to meet my eyes when he said, “Then what do you suggest to stop The Order?”

“You shouldn’t need to stop it, that’s-“

“My Lord,” Lucius interrupted. I fell begrudgingly silent. “If I may offer a suggestion, we could send Harry to talk them into disbanding. They trust him, and we would not have to fear any opposition on their behalf.”

I hated the idea, but it was obviously better than the other option. I wasn’t sure how I would do it, or even why I was considering the idea. There weren’t only two options. I knew that.

Tom sighed. “I suppose that could be our first offense. But if it is not successful, we will eradicate them.”

I scoffed. They’re not pests, Tom. They’re people. My friends, actually.

I couldn’t care less what else they had to talk about next. I didn’t want to hear anymore. I pulled my wand from my pocket, disapperating from the room.

3rd Person POV:

Harry landed in his room, infuriated with Tom.

How can he just talk about killing people like that? Like it doesn’t matter? I would live through a
lifetime of guilt and sorrow for even considering it.

He grabbed a pillow and chucked it at the wall, but found no release.

He apparated to the training room. Without hesitation, he levitated a rat from the cage, petrified it, and began to send nasty curses at it, watching as it squeaked in pain, unable to move. He did not think about the terrible things he was doing, instead focusing on his anger, which bubbled inside him, begging for a way out.

He finally released the binding spell, and the rat writhed on the floor, close to death. Harry sent the monster curse at it, and waited, watching it feel the pain a bit longer before Death would grant it escape. When the monster ripped the stomach of the rat, the anger drained from Harry, and he watched in silent shock as both died. When they did, he winced at the boundaries he had just passed.

Problems to solve:

#1: I’ve just taken a big step backwards. Poor rat…

#4: Tom is going to send me to disband The Order, then kill them if I can’t.

#5: Tom…well…yeah…

Today just isn’t a good day for me.

Voldemort sighed. He was beyond irritated with Harry. He dared to ruin his meeting by arguing with him, then left. They had important details to discuss. He attempted to continue the meeting, but once more found that he needed Harry. For this plan to work, they needed information on The Order. Draco, of course, offered some, but only rumors and gossip, most of which didn’t matter. Harry would have had the facts he needed, were he willing to cooperate.

He found Harry so naïve. He chose to argue over points Voldemort did not consider would be argued. He presented them as facts, not opinions, and yet Harry continued to challenge them.

Harry and his idiotic opinions, his irritating challenges, his completely honest arguments that have no place here, that look in his eyes when he was angry and how his hair would blow around ever so slightly, that mark on his neck that marks him as mine temporarily, and the mark on his forehead that marks him as mine forever…

“My Lord?” Lucius’s question brought him out of his thoughts.

“Lucius,” he began, “this meeting is helping nothing. We will reschedule when Harry is less…temperamental.” He uttered the last word with disgust.

Lucius and Draco shared a look. Lucius then nodded and apparated away.

“My Lord, if I may, I have a private matter to discuss with you.” Draco stood tall, chin up, but his voice shook slightly.

Tom did not meet his eyes, returning to rubbing his temples. “Yes?”

“My Lord, what if I told you Harry was sneaking out of your manor?”

So he plans to inform me of Harry’s “girlfriend,” he thought to himself. Delightful…

“He would not dare.”
Draco let the smallest smirk come over his features. “Did you happen to see the odd mark on his neck, My Lord? I’m sure you did. It’s hard to miss.”

“I did. What of it?” While he would normally be amused, Voldemort was too irritated to allow himself such a pleasure.

“Don’t you wonder where it’s from?”

For a moment, he contemplated telling the young Malfoy in the hopes he would leave the subject alone and be on his way, but he decided against it.

“I did, but there was no time for me to question its origin.”

Draco let his smirk grow large and obvious. “My Lord, I believe Harry may be sneaking out of your manor to see a girl, who gave that mark.”

He knew he should play along, but he could not bring himself to. “Thank you for your knowledge, Draco.” He shooed him away with a hand.

Draco’s smirk fell. “Yes, My Lord.” He bowed and disapparated, leaving Voldemort with his thoughts.
**Voldemort’s POV:**

I had sat in my library for the past hour, a book on dark magical creatures in my lap. An hour had passed, and still I had not flipped a single page. My mutinous mind continued to wonder off topic. Try as I might, I could not focus. I was at the mercy of my own thoughts.

I absolutely, unequivocally loath being so vulnerable, so weak. I could no longer control my thoughts; it was madness. It was in my nature to control, especially myself. It should have been simple, and yet it was not. I needed something beneath me, quivering under my power, giving me that feeling of absolute strength that I craved. Yet for some time now, that feeling was growing further and further from my grasp.

There were many things that were resilient to me, but none like the stubborn Gryffindor that was Harry Potter. He was at the mercy of his own emotions, and it seemed that such a nature was contagious. With a full soul—nearly full—my focus was swept away from under me, each feeling built up until I felt I would erupt. I was angry, irritated, desperate for my old self.

But being intimate with Harry, having his feelings of pleasure at my mercy, spending the early hours with him asleep in my bed, no nightmares, no clothes…it was somehow both a feeling of victory and a feeling of vulnerability. And my mind would dwell on nothing else but that conflict.

I had never been so bare to a person before Harry, literally and figuratively. The parts of myself that I kept hidden away were parts he had seen. A part of me wanted to rip his memory from his mind, to permanently silence his mouth and blind his eyes, to forever remove the threat of his ability to share the knowledge he has acquired on me.

Still, there was another part of me. It wanted nothing more than to dive deeper into the chaos he brought, to see the parts of himself that he hid from the world, to breathe them in and lock them away. It was a part that constantly kept him on my thoughts, and that felt a small tug in my chest when he was in my presence.

*He is my last horcrux. Of course, I feel a tug. It is my possession. He is mine. No one could challenge that. Not even Harry.*

My thoughts were interrupted by the disturbance in the wards of my manor. This was nothing unusual, for it was small: the entrance of an owl.

*I am not expecting any letters. And I was not aware Harry was sending letters still…*

Curiosity and the desire for a distraction from my distraction led me to reach my mind out to Harry’s. He did not have it protected, so I kept a safe distance and kept quiet to remain unnoticed.

‘*Oh. It’s a letter from Hermione.*

**Dear Harry,**

*We really miss you. We hope you’re doing alright. Things aren’t too bad there, are they? You know we would have you out of there as soon as possible if it is. Ron is doing better, thankfully. He doesn’t want you to be alone in this, Harry. We’ve always been in this together, and it is just so different, for both of us, to sit and do nothing while you handle it. We are here for you. You know that. Take care. Good luck.*
Love,
Hermione

Thank Merlin, Ron is doing better. I should reply.

Dear Hermione,

I’m doing more than alright. It’s not really that bad here at all. I’m not saying it’s absolutely perfect here (oh far from it). I don’t agree with him (at all), and there are times when I get bored here, and I haven’t been outside in a whole week, yeah. But there are lots of things I enjoy about being here, too. Like (hehehe, no, I can’t put that.) learning new spells, and looking out this window he charmed to look out to the most amazing hills. The food is delicious. And for the most part, Tom and I are getting along (more than you can even imagine). I know you guys are worried, but I’m the only one who can do this.

I’m so glad Ron is doing better. I’ll see you both again after school starts (hopefully. What day is it? Merlin, school is going to start soon, isn’t it? I’m running out of time.)

Love,
Harry

There. That’s good.’

I nearly found it amusing. His interjected thoughts while writing were…so very him.

So, he is talking to that friend of his. The smart one. From what I can glean, the other friend, the blood-traitor, is doing better. I was unaware he was…ill? They were very vague…Harry enjoyed learning the curses I taught him…Charmed window?

The idea was confusing for just a moment before it became clear.

The window of the sitting room. He thinks it is charmed? How curious…

The other part of my mind, full of distractions, came to the forefront.

Maybe taking him outside, showing him the hills, shall ease the tension between us.

My light sense of mood darkened back to the irritation it held before. I hated the intrusiveness of the thoughts, how unwanted and uncontrollable they were, but most of all, how absolutely right they were.

The meeting did leave us in a difficult situation…

And although I did not want to admit it, I needed Harry. He was the key to my success—to our success. He would be the reason I could unleash my power and influence upon the world. I needed only to convince him to leave his humanity behind.

Of course, that was only growing more difficult when I had my own to deal with.

I stood and walked to the door, tossing my book behind me so it would put itself away. The hallway was dimming, for it was heading into the evening. I made my way to the sitting room, correctly assuming it was where Harry was.

The door was wide open. When I stood in the doorway, I saw Harry, back against the still blackened chair, half-slumped, staring at a small doe made of light trotting across the floor. Many things about
him did not look well.  

Eyes reddened, I began to note. *Unusually disastrous hair. Uneven breathing. Slightly pale.*

I took a silent step into the room.

*What is wrong, Harry?*

He turned his head in my direction but did not look at me. He seemed unfazed by my sudden arrival.

“Nothing.” He sighed then rubbed at his eyes. “I was just…staring out the window for too long. I don’t think I blinked.” *I was having a major thinking session,* his mind revealed.

*What about?*

The doe on the floor disappeared into nothing. “My friends. Family. Mostly about going there.” He pointed to the window.

*I see. “Would you like to go there?”*

Although I thought the idea would perk him up, he seemed to pay the suggestion no mind.

‘*I'd love to, if I could.*’

My brows drew together. “And why can you not?” I stepped further into the room. “It is just outside. If you wish, I can take you there.”

Harry sat up straight so he could turn and look at me. His green eyes were wide but not with surprise. His face was child-like with his large, glossy eyes, and small pink mouth.

‘*It’s just outside?*’

He glanced back at the window for a moment before turning back to me and nodding.

I went and stood before the window. It had been ages since I had gone outside, as well. I did not have such a fondness for it as Harry seemed to. Of course, I likely had more negative experiences outside than he. I was unsure what exactly those experiences were, but I did not dwell on the lack of memory long enough to question it.

I turned back to Harry and held out a hand for him to take. *Come.*

Harry stood and came beside me. He continued to stare out the window, not bothering to grab my hand. With a roll of my eyes, I grabbed his hand instead.

“*Pelure spettro.*”

I stepped through the wall, my body easily passing through. I pulled an uncertain and confused Harry after me. Once we both reached the other side, our bodies returned to their solid state, and I let us float down to the ever-green grasses below.

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**3rd Person POV:**

Dark indigo just began to color the sky, revealing tiny white stars that once hid in the brightness of the cerulean, rose, and amber vastness. The pale moon was just visible, still stalking in the leaving daylight like a cat ready to pounce. The dew on the grass glittered, as if they stood in an ocean, each
wave sleepier than the last. The air around them was golden with silence and the scent of wildflowers, drawing the peace and serenity into a bowed present they did not wish to open. Each tree stood beside its equally tall shadow, deep jade leaves, perfectly sound and still, the depth making the scene look like a living painting.

He stood in awe. A thousand times he had imagined standing in that very spot. Now that he was there, he was nearly sure he was dreaming. Of course, he knew he was not, for his dreams could never be so peaceful.

Tom watched him, expecting excitement, or even just a smile, but none came. Harry stood, staring out at the landscape, unmoving. Treacherous thoughts of disappointing Harry ran across his mind.

“Harry,” he said so quietly, it was practically a whisper. “Are you unsatisfied?”

At the break of silence, Harry’s heart skipped a beat. He took an extra second to comprehend the words that had been spoken.

“I’m…I’m more than satisfied. I’m…it’s so…amazing to actually be here. I never thought…”

His words were cut short by his own fascination with his surroundings. His only wish was to absorb every part, every detail, of this world so that he could keep it with him forever. He wanted to see it when he slept and when he woke, when he cried and when he laughed. He wanted to look out that window in the future and not just see the hills, but feel them.

Harry pulled on Tom’s hand, which was still wrapped in his own, and sat down. Tom allowed himself to be brought down, his focus on his contact with Harry. Their hands that neither bothered to separate. Their shoulders, brushing ever so slightly with each breath they took. Their minds, not just connected, but one.

Tom had not known of Harry’s enclosed childhood, but as they sat and looked around, Harry felt the freedom and remembered all the times he had not been so lucky to have it. Being outside and admiring the beauty of it all; Harry could count the number of times on his hand that he had done so. But the number of times he was forced to give up such a simple thing? He was sure he couldn’t count that high. He wanted to enjoy the small luxuries he had never had, but he knew The-Boy-Who-Lived was not allowed such luxuries, just as Boy-Who-Lived-In-The-Cupboard-Under-The-Stairs was.

Still, he wanted them.

Harry’s eyes ran over the hills once more. Disbelief was still prevalent in his mind. He was among the hills. They were just outside the manor. All the time he had spent thinking such a place was far away, or nonexistent, but there had only been a plane of glass between him and it the whole time.

A smile finally graced his lips. He was content with this life.

“Hey, Tom.”

Tom turned his gaze to Harry. “Yes, Harry?”

A curious question danced on his tongue. “The window shows that it’s autumn, but here it’s spring. Why?”

Tom looked back out to the hills. “Generations before you and I were born, an ancestor of mine enchanted the land so that it was always spring. Of course, the window does not know that. It shows the season that should be occurring.”
Harry nodded. Although his dreams of floating leaves were dashed, he couldn’t help but let his disappointment go. The sleeping wildflowers and moonlit trees were anything but disappointing. In a world of such vivid color, memories of his earlier life, so much weaker in saturation, settled somewhere in the back of his mind, temporarily forgotten.

Tom, however, grew bored of watching the hills and trees and turned his attention to Harry instead. His raven hair melted into the darkened sky behind him, green eyes shone in the moonlight like stars, pale face was half covered in shadows. He admired Harry as Harry admired the hills, and just like Harry, he found every piece absolutely beautiful.

Their hands. Their shoulders. Their minds.

He looked down to their intertwined hands and wondered how such a warmth could pass between two people with so little contact. The night air was still, but chilly, and yet Tom could not feel a bit of it biting at him. It was a kind of magic he could not understand.

Harry’s earlier question ran across his mind. What are we? It was a good question in the sense that Tom could not provide an answer right away. The more he considered it, the more he realized that he was just happy that Harry had not pushed him away. He realized, of course, that such an idea meant something, and he was irritated just a bit that he was unsure of what.

Tom wanted more of him; he couldn’t deny that. Still, the principle of control came to his mind. He did not want to have such thoughts.

I am not homosexual, he told himself. It was true enough. He did not prefer men over women; he just preferred Harry over people in general. And still, it bothered him as to why.

The pressure was building inside him. He wanted to bring Harry closer, to have him at his mercy, but also to control his urges and manage his thoughts. Both thoughts collected in his lungs, making breathing normally a chore. He felt Harry adjust their hands ever so slightly; such a small gesture, but one that shook Tom’s bottle. His emotions bubbled up, intensifying the force that opposed his self-control. Tom clenched his teeth as the urge came like a flame that his self-control put out like the world’s smallest bucket of water.

Harry was torn from his trance when he felt Tom’s hand tense. He had almost forgotten he still held it. Still, he didn’t want to let go, if that was what Tom was thinking.

A memory rose from the fog of his mind: Tom’s arms around him in the darkness, Harry’s hands gripping at his robes, the feeling of safety returning after a terrible nightmare.

He longed to feel safe again. It was another small luxury he could not afford. But as much as he wanted it, he didn’t want to admit such a petty thing to Tom. He could only imagine what would happen. Hey, Tom, would you mind holding me? Oh sure, Harry, why not? And while I’m at it, maybe I can completely change my plans for the future so we don’t have to kill any muggles. Wouldn’t that just be awful to do?

It was almost humorous to Harry. Almost.

“Tom?”

Tom pulled his mind from the internal battle he was waging.

“Yes, Harry?”

Harry didn’t know how to ask, or even if he wanted to ask. Instead, he looked back out into the night
sky and slowly rested his head on Tom’s shoulder, which tensed underneath him.

“This is nice,” he said quietly.

Tom’s heart sped up. Why had Harry put his head on his shoulder? It obviously meant something, but he didn’t know what. Was it a sign? A signal? He couldn’t be sure. And normally, he was one who calculated every move to ensure as close to a 100% success rate as possible, but through the adrenaline and confusion, he made a decision anyway.

His hand rose and gently traced Harry’s jaw until it arrived at his chin, where he lifted softly, thumb brushing against his lips. Harry met Tom’s gaze and felt his heart skip a beat. Their mouths met in the middle and caressed one another.

Tom pulled their lips apart but did not pull away. Harry rested his forehead against Tom’s, eyes closed and breathing light.

“This is nice, Tom.”

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**Harry’s POV:**

I wasn’t sure if Tom understood what I meant when I said it was nice, but then again, it didn’t seem to matter.

Tom hand let go of my chin and went behind my head, pulling me closer until our lips met once more. His tongue slipped past his lips and into my mouth, exploring it with dexterity and filling my mouth with his flavor. His hand slid down my spine, sending a chill down it, before it slipped under my shirt.

For a brief moment, I wasn’t sure I wanted what was to come, even if I wasn’t entirely sure what it was. I knew I wanted comfort and safety. I knew I wanted understanding and happiness and freedom.

The more Tom kissed me, the more our minds seemed to converge. I could feel what Tom felt; he was, more than anything else, happy, but there struggle inside him, too. Just like me, he knew he wanted this, but he wondered if he should let himself have it.

I parted our lips, so I could breathe. My eyes flew open and met crimson ones much too close to my own to see them as two and not one. There was a certain feeling when we got this close. It was a pull, a warmth in my chest. Everything was right, and it was that very feeling that both of us questioned. Neither of us had been lucky enough to feel it before. It was too good to be true.

Tom tried to remove the hand intertwined with mine, but I squeezed it, refusing to let go. He smirked at me, one piece of his perfect soil brown hair falling out of place as he leaned closer to me.

(Intent on keeping my hand?/ he hissed in my ear. His tone was soft, playful, and so absolutely sexy.

“Why do you want to let go?” I asked lightly, but the question was serious.

“Well, I suppose I can manage without letting go.”

He lifted our hands and kissed the back of mine, causing my pulse to flutter. Our hands then traveled down to my pants. He rubbed against the growing bulge with the back of his hand. I gasped at the unexpected pleasure and clasped our hands tighter together.
I closed my eyes and focused on every feeling: every stroke of his hand, the brush of his lips down my neck. His tongue traveled to the mark he had left last time and he carefully licked at it. The sensitivity made my head spin.

Time meant nothing as we laid on the dark grasses together, Tom moving us so that he was over me. We kissed and held hands that rubbed my now fully hard erection.

In an instant, my cock was released, and I felt the smooth skin of Tom’s hand against it. A rogue moan escaped from my mouth, and Tom pulled apart our kiss with a smile. I opened my eyes and found my clothes were gone, as were his. I watched as he parted our hands just enough to slip my cock between them. I felt my head fall back with the rush of pleasure that soared through me. His tongue continued to trace the raw mark on my neck, and my back arched.

I could hardly stand it. Everything felt so good.

I lifted my head back up slightly to look at Tom. His perfect hair falling out of place, shadows over his torso that defined his abs, cock large and at attention, the curves of his waist covered in moonlight.

It was all beautiful. He was beautiful.

Tom pulled his mouth off my neck and whispered into my ear. “Harry, may I?”

I was confused at first, but Tom’s mind supplied a quick answer: fantasies of him inside me, of me gripping sheets and moaning his name, of pleasure like a forbidden fruit that he had before never dared touch. My cheeks and cock rushed with blood. I nodded.

Without hesitation, he released my hand and bent my legs into position. A little red flag went up in my head. Something was wrong, but I couldn’t place why. I swallowed and tried to ignore it.

Tom carefully pushed his way into my ass, and a searing pain ripped through it, sending a wave of reflexive fear through my body. I shut my eyes, clawed at the grass, and clenched my teeth. Everything in me burned and screamed, No, no, no, no, no! A tear escaped my eyes.

Then, Tom pulled out and the pain stopped.

I opened my eyes, finding my vision slightly blurry. Tom looked away from me, his own eyes damp. ‘My god...Harry, I’m so sorry.’

My body shivered with cold. We both felt it.

Tom sat back on his heels to move from his position over me, but my hand grabbed his arm and tried to pull him back.

“I just need some preparation. It doesn’t have to hurt like that.”

Tom’s eyes stared into mine. I could feel uncertainty, although I wasn’t sure if it was my own or his. Maybe it was both.

After a moment, Tom nodded and came back. He whispered something into his hand and then pushed a slick finger into me. There was no pain, this time, just discomfort that slowly faded as Tom continued to push his finger in and out. Before long, he pushed another one in, and another one, each done only when my feelings of discomfort passed. I was getting used to the sensation, finding it was not so bad.
Tom’s fingers pressed in further, and without warning, a stab of pleasure ran over me. My head flung back, and my hips bucked.

Oh, fuck.

The hesitation and uncertainty in our mind dissipated. Tom pulled out his fingers, wrapped them around his own cock to make it slick, and then slowly pushed himself into me once more. There was no pain, no discomfort. Only Tom.

He pulled out and pushed back in, directly hitting whatever magical spot he had found. Another rush came over me, powerful and completely overwhelming. He continued to move, in and out, getting that spot whenever he could. I tried to wrap my arms around Tom’s neck, but his hand pushed me back down by the shoulder. Thoughts of his fantasy came back to our mind.

My fingers twisted into the blades of grass and gripped hard. My breathing was distressed, and my heart raced. Tom put his hand on my hips, letting him push back into me with more speed. My pleasure began to build, and small, breathy moans escaped from my mouth. Tom slowed enough to press a vicious kiss to my lips, his own moan falling into my mouth before he pulled away once more to speed up. Each feeling was so much, I was sure I was lost in them. The fresh air around us grew thick, and I began to feel it.

“Tom…” I moaned. His name was all I thought. There was nothing but him. “Tom…Tom…”

The edge was closer with every second. One of Tom’s hands released my hip and grabbed my cock and began to pump. My moans became desperate and loud.

“Tom! Oh, fuck, Tom. I’m…I’m…”

I climaxed, and the whole world was black with the sweet bliss of release. I opened my eyes slowly as the air returned to my lungs, finding Tom still leaning over me, panting just as heavily, a white sticky substance over my stomach. He waved a hand, and a cold, tingly spell wiped me clean. He then leaned to one side and laid himself down next to me, eyes closed and small smile on his face.

There were many things I admired about Tom, from the fierceness normally present in his blood red eyes to the smoothness of his tongue as it spoke in Parseltongue. He was brilliant, and although he had some moral issues, he could care and trust. That was enough for me.

I had lost so many people in my life that I cared about. Each and every one was difficult to cope with. The more I considered it, the more I realized that I didn’t want to lose Tom. I had found a world that I enjoyed, and without him, it would cease to exist. Without him, a part of me that I had lived with for my whole life would be gone. It just didn’t seem manageable. I wouldn’t be the same without him.

I came down from my high as I realized something.

Things I love in this world:

- Watching the leaves in autumn
- My friends and family (alive and not)
- Magic
- Riding a broom
Hermione’s POVs:

Each day was longer than the next while we waited for news from Harry. Ron and I sat on the couch in the Burrow, Ron messing with his fingers and I watching him with growing impatience. I was still so worried for him, and it was beginning to fester into bouts of me snapping at him unnecessarily. We were both on edge.

We both hadn’t quite gotten over Harry leaving like he had. It was a terrible feeling, knowing your friend wasn’t protected and in the presence of Voldemort all day. There was always the possibility that he could change his mind about wanting to be allies and shoot a killing curse at Harry, and then who would be there to save him? It wasn’t that I thought Harry was helpless, because I and everyone else knew he was far from it, but he was in Voldemort’s territory. All he needed to do was be caught off guard at the right moment with the right tricks…anyone would fall victim to that.

Of course, Professor Snape had assured us that Harry was fine, but that didn’t quell our doubts. It’s unusual for enemies—especially Voldemort, notorious for his cold-blooded hatred and quest to kill Harry—to just stop and try to become allies.

What is he hiding? Surely, he’s got some ulterior motive…

Ron’s fingernails made the quietest click every few seconds. There was no rhythm to it, or beat. There was no reason for it. The movement didn’t help anyone. If anything, it grated on my ears that had relied on the silence to think.

“Ron, honestly, stop twiddling you fingers,” I snapped.

Ron looked up at me, distant blue eyes coming back to the present, and lowered his hands. “Sorry, ‘Mione. I just-”

Just then, my owl, Octans, swooped in and perched himself on the table in front of us. I immediately pulled the note off his leg and read it aloud to Ron. After I finished, I let my perfect posture slump back into the couch.

“Well,” Ron started, “at least he likes some things there. I wouldn’t have thought he liked anything.”

I sighed, looking over the note one more time. Is there a secret code to break? Is Voldemort monitoring his messages? The more I looked, the more it seemed that the letter was just a letter.

“Yes,” I conceded at last, “but you know as well as I do that he’s just trying to convince us that he’s alright. He doesn’t want to worry us.”

Ron nodded slowly. “But we’ve got to let him do this. Who knows what could happen if we just walked in. We might ruin everything.”

I put the letter back on the table and began to absently pet Octans. “I know…It’s just frustrating that we’ve got to keep hoping he’s not in some sort of trap.”

A moment of silence passed, our minds whispering our darkest fears to us.

“Do you really think he’s doing okay, Ron?” I voiced.
Beside me, Ron shrugged. “I don’t know, ‘Mione.”

After another moment, I shook my head. Thinking about the worst possible situations was not going to do anything productive. I picked up my quill and another piece of parchment from off the table, dipping the tip of the quill in ink, and began to write, reading the letter out to Ron as I wrote it.

“Dear Harry, Ron and I are happy you aren’t completely unhappy there. It’s rather dull around here without you. Ron and I mostly just sit around all day waiting for you letters—”

“Oh!” Ron interrupted. “Tell him about the quidditch game.”

I nodded.

“The rest of Ron’s family is concerned for you, too, but they’ve tried to get back into their routines. Recently, they played a game of quidditch out in their yard. Ron’s team won, but he said they’d have won sooner if Bill was Chaser and not the Seeker.”

Ron sat up and leaned over my shoulder. “Tell him that as soon as he gets back he ‘ought to practice or else Ginny might have him beat as World’s Best Seeker soon.”

I smiled, my heart speeding up a bit at Ron’s closeness. “Ron says that when you get back, you’ll need to practice, or else Ginny might pass you as World’s Best Seeker.” I paused a moment, looking for things to say. I started a new paragraph. “Luna thanks you for saving her. Neville, too. It wasn’t the smartest thing to do, but we all know you’re the only one who can do this. We miss you dearly. It’s only been a week or so, but it feels like forever. It may be a bit much to ask, but would you consider asking Vold—”

I stopped mid-sentence, remembering Harry’s request to call him by his first name. I crossed out the four letters and continued.

“Would you consider asking Tom to let you visit us? Or even let us visit you? Just so we can make sure you’re alright. It would calm our nerves.”

I read the note over again in my head and nodded.


Ron nodded, the smallest smile on his face.

I folded up the note and tied it back to Octans’s leg. He flew off, leaving Ron and I alone on the couch once more. I laid my head on his shoulder.

Ron huffed. “What are going to do, ‘Mione?”

In all honesty, I didn’t have an answer that I felt was satisfying. “We’ll wait until school starts. Harry said he would be there. And even if he’s not, at least we can always ask Professor Snape to make sure he’s alright. It’s all we can do.”

We stared out the window Octans had left out of, noticing the coming twilight.

Without my noticing, Mrs. Weasley came into the room and placed one hand on Ron’s shoulder and the other on mine. Her face was tired, but her eyes were as nurturing as ever.

“Are you two sure you don’t want to sleep yet?” She asked us quietly. “It’ll be hours before Harry replies. You both need rest, and it’s late.”
I lifted my head off Ron’s shoulder and turned to face her. “No thank you, Mrs. Weasley. We really just want to wait for Harry to reply, if that’s alright.”

With some hesitation, she nodded and left the room.

With her off to sleep, the house around us fell into its normal night rhythms: the creaking of the floor, the muffled breathing and snores of the family asleep, the chirp of insects outside. A cold breeze drifted over me, and I shivered. Ron put his arms around me without a second thought, protecting me from the outer cold, but I still felt the cold inside.

It was like we were mourning for Harry. We knew he was still alive, of course, but even Professor Snape mentioned that the task was dangerous. Harry was risking it all this time: his life, his freedom, his morality. Although he hadn’t said it bluntly, Professor Snape implied that Harry could lose. I had wondered what exactly that meant ever since.

What would we do without Harry? I know we wouldn’t stop fighting, but how many others would? How many people rely on Harry as their beacon of hope? How many reply on him to beat the Dark Lord because he’s prophesized to do so? I know he’s supposed to be some sort of leader, but surely he’s not the only one. And if he does win, what does that mean for Voldemort? Will his followers lose hope? Or will they keep fighting, just as we would in their situation?

The questions were endless. We thought the situation was different now, that maybe if they weren’t trying to kill one another there wouldn’t be a battle. But all these questions made it seem like nothing had changed. Each side still fought for its life.

“What if Harry is in trouble, ‘Mione?” Ron asked, breaking my chain of thought. “We can’t do anything about it. No one can.”

I shook my head. “We have to think about this logically. If Harry was in trouble, he’d send for help. We know he’s probably not as good as he says he is, but he doesn’t seem to be in any kind of trouble.”

“I don’t know…” Ron’s arms around me slackened. “This is You-Know-Who we’re talking about. He could be stopping him from asking for help.”

“It’s a possibility, but do we have any reason to think he is? Professor Snape said-”

Ron scoffed and released me. “Snape. Everything we know about Harry is from Snape. We don’t know anything other than what he’s told us. How do we know he isn’t on the plan, too? He’s never liked us or Harry, and he murdered Dumbledore. Who’s to say we should trust him?”

I let my head fall back onto the couch. Everything Ron was saying had already crossed my mind a couple days ago. I told him the same things I told myself. “Harry said we should trust him. Harry told us to keep him safe because he betrayed V-Voldemort. Snape made him mortal. There’s no possible way that Voldemort would let that happen, or even let people think that happened. I don’t know what side Snape is on, but he at least has some sort of plan that benefits Harry in some way.”

At this, Ron sighed heavily. With no retort, Ron fell back into silence, as did I.

Ron had come a long way from the boy I had known first year. Back then, he’d have figured out some way to find Harry and bust him out of this situation. He had freed Harry from his aunt and uncle’s house second year using a flying car. He stood on an injured leg between who he thought was a murderous criminal and Harry, saying he would die before he let Harry get hurt. He trusted Harry and followed him right into a trap but fought off Death Eaters anyway. Ron was always there
for Harry, readily providing his bravery and loyalty, not caring whether or not it was necessary.

But things had grown more complicated since then. We weren’t kids anymore. The threat of death was real, not just an afterthought. We had to plan to keep our loved ones safe. There was no charging in headfirst.

The chirping of insects outside paused after a distant click rang out. I sprang to my feet as quietly as I could manage, my ears listening intently for any more unusual sounds. My heart beat in my chest, the pumping filling my ears.

Ron stared at me with confusion but said nothing for a moment. When moments later, I still had heard nothing, he whispered.

‘What is it, ‘Mione?’

‘I heard something outside.’

Without further conversation, we both grabbed our wands and went to the front door. I silenced the door to keep it from creaking as we opened it. Outside, there was nothing out of the ordinary. The grasses were undisturbed and the moon hung low in the sky.

But the silence was deafening.

I raised my wand. “Homenum Revelio!”

My spell shot out and a signifier flew into the sky from the tall plants a little ways away. I narrowed my eyes at it.

“Accio.”

A black figure was pulled forward into the shorter grasses and then just before the porch. He dusted off his robes a moment before he looked up to us, the moonlight revealing his face.

“Ms. Granger, I would prefer if you never did that again,” Professor Snape’s monotone voice said.

“Professor Snape?” The darkness made it difficult to distinguish his expression. “Why are you here? Is something wrong?”

He began to make his way over to us. “I went to check on Harry. When I arrived, there was not a soul inside the manor anywhere. Neither Voldemort or Harry were there. I sent my Patronus to Harry, but he has yet to respond. I fear something has happened, though I am not sure. Have you gotten word from him recently?”

My heart froze in my chest. “Uh…yes, we just got an owl from him today. He said everything was going fine, but that was earlier…” I looked to Ron, whose pale face and fearful eyes looked as worried as I felt. I glanced back to the professor. “What do we do?”

Professor Snape looked between us. “For one, we must not contact The Order. Do not inform your family. I fear their interference may contaminate everything. I am going to investigate. If you hear word, alert me immediately.”

“No, we’re going with you,” Ron said. “If anyone knows Harry, we do. We can help.”

“Please, Professor,” I added, desperate to do something. If Harry was in danger, I’d never forgive myself for just standing idly by. “More people means quicker searching.”
Professor Snape’s face fell into the expression it had when someone gave a wrong answer in class, but his response held none of the refusal I thought it would.

“I suppose... but you shall follow every bit of instruction I give you down to the last detail. There is no room for mistakes.”

“Yes, Professor,” Ron and I agreed in unison.

He nodded once and turned, walking away from the wards of the Burrow. We followed him until he stopped. Without any words, we grabbed onto his robes and disapperated.

3rd Person POV:

Snape, Hermione, and Ron arrived in the spacious room. The two students looked about the room in awe, amazed that such an evil person could have such a house.

“Now,” Snape began, turning towards them. “You both will search the hallway upstairs, as that is the one that contains Harry’s room. It is at the end. Every door is likely to be locked. Look for anything suspicious. The manor is typically tidy, so even a single item out of line may be a clue. If you happen to find Voldemort before you find Harry, do not attack him, but be prepared with a strong counter curse. You are allowed to apparate and disapperate, but once you leave the manor, you will be unable to apparate inside. I would strongly suggest leaving if you encounter anyone besides Harry. Use Patronus to contact me. Is that clear?”

Ron and Hermione nodded. Their faces turned to the one staircase, and they made their way towards it without hesitation, wands at the ready.

They stepped into a dark hallway, the balls of light above them barely lit.

*It seems to dull and drab,* Hermione thought.  *“Lumos.”*

The tip of Hermione’s wand illuminated the hall, revealing many closed doors and one open one.

“I’ll check the room with the door open, first,” Hermione said, voice quiet but assertive. “You go check Harry’s room.”

Ron nodded. They walked down the hall together until they reached the doorway to the sitting room. They stopped in their tracks, their hearts dropping to their stomachs. Hermione sent off a Patronus to Snape that was not quite its normal, solid form.

Downstairs, Snape had just finished checking the first room in Tom’s hallway when the vaguely otter form found him.

“Professor! There’s a room with an open door, but everything is burnt! Something awful seems to have happened!”

He rolled his eyes. He supposed he should have mentioned the scorch marks before setting them out to investigate. He quickly sent back his reply.

Moments later, the doe appeared upstairs before Hermione and Ron, both on the verge of tears.

“That was a pervious occurrence. Harry was in that room and accidently set fire to it. I was there to witness his injured state, as well as his recovery. The room has not yet been repaired.”
The doe vanished before them, leaving them confused but no longer panicked.

“This happened before…” Hermione said absently, more to herself than to Ron. “Harry recovered… this already happened.”

Ron nodded. “Alright…I’ll go check his room, then.”

His legs, a bit unsteady, carried him to Harry’s room. Hermione stood in the doorway a bit longer before making her way to the first door in the hallway to check it.

Snape had made little progress in Tom’s hallway. Several of the rooms had special wards and charms that he did not know, preventing a simple unlocking charm from opening them. He’d skipped past quite a few rooms, the frustration inside him building. He considered the idea that Harry could be in danger behind any one of the unlockable doors, but pushed those thoughts aside in favor of continuing his search.

He wasn’t as concerned that Tom was going to harm Harry (although he hadn’t ruled it out as a possibility), but more that one of his Death Eaters would, and that Tom would do nothing to stop it.

He stepped out of the private meeting room, finding nothing out of place. The only door left to search behind was Tom’s bedroom. He was sure there would be a severe amount of warding over it, but he tried a simple unlocking charm regardless. The door unlocked, to his surprise, and he stepped through the threshold into the darkness.

“Lumos maxima.”

Snape’s wand tip illuminated, brightening nearly the whole room. Tom stood before him in his sleeping clothes.

“Severus,” Tom said, voice heavy with sleep, “what on Earth are you doing?”

Snape flicked his wand, sending a Patronus to the students upstairs, letting them know where he was and who he had found.

“Where is Harry?” Snape asked immediately. “I came earlier and neither of you were here.”

A small rustling behind him caused Tom to hiss a curse. “You just startled his sleep,” he said through his teeth.

Hermione and Ron ran down the hallway as fast as they could, panic welling up inside them once more. They weren’t sure if finding Voldemort was a good or bad clue, but it was something. They arrived, standing just behind Snape.

“We’re here, Professor,” Ron said to him, although their running feet had been loud enough for the whole manor to hear.

“You invited Harry’s friends to my manor?” Tom asked, running a cool hand over his forehead. “You know I do not allow guests I do not invite myself.”

The pair both watched Voldemort. They both questioned his appearance, wondering if this man could be Voldemort. It seemed unlikely to them, and yet he seemed to be the only one there besides them.

When they realized Snape said nothing in response, they turned their attention to him instead.
“Professor?” Hermione questioned. For a moment, she entertained the thought that he was under a body-bind curse, but Snape’s slightly agape mouth moved to speak.

“Ms. Granger, Mr. Weasley, it seems there has been a…misunderstanding.” His normal monotone voice was quiet, as if uncertain of its pitch.

“What do you mean?” Ron lowered his wand. He and Hermione both stared at Tom once more, hoping he would answer their question, since Snape did not.

From the comfortable blackness of sleep, Harry rose, several familiar voices rousing him. He thought he was in a dream until his eyes opened. Blurry figures stood before him. Before he could try to reach for his glasses, he felt them land in his hand.

Snape, Hermione, Ron, and Tom all came into focus. With a confused smile, Harry pushed himself up in bed before realizing how much of a mistake that was. The sheets fell to his hips, revealing his bare torso. He was naked in Tom’s bed.

‘Damn it, Tom!’ he thought. ‘You couldn’t put some clothes on me before you let them in?’

‘I did not let them in,’ Tom thought back. ‘They barged in without warning. I only had time to stand and prepare myself for a possible attack.’

At the sight of Harry’s bare chest, Snape flicked away the light at the tip of his wand, letting the room fall into darkness once more. “There is…explaining to be done.” His eyes looked to the ground. “As soon as Harry is ready to do so, we will wait outside.”

Ron and Hermione, who could not see Harry from behind Snape, grew confused as Snape ushered them out and closed the door behind them.

Once they were alone in the room, Tom lifted a hand, increasing the luminance of the balls of light above them. “I apologize, Harry. I did not anticipate this occurring.” He conjured up some decent sleeping clothes and levitated them to Harry.

Harry began to dress himself in them. “What the bloody hell are they doing here right now, of all times?”

Tom watched Harry as he dressed, tired eyes not bothering to hide their intrigue. “It seems Severus came to look for you while we were outside. He gathered your friends and were looking for you. I assume they thought you were in danger and that my manor would offer clues.”

Harry scoffed as he struggled to put on the pants while still on the bed. ‘Yeah, and they found the biggest clue of all. Me, in your bed. Naked.’ He finally got the pants on properly and crawled off the bed. ‘Merlin, how do I explain that?’

‘You do not need to,’ Tom thought back. ‘I can easily remove them from my manor without harming a single hair on their heads. Is that what you would prefer?’

Harry sighed. “No, I’ll talk to them.” He walked over to Tom, his attention focused at the door. “They’d have found out eventually, I guess.”

Snape stood a distance from the door, expression spooked. Ron and Hermione close by, leaning on the walls, waiting for answers to their questions. When they saw Harry step through the door and into the dimly lit hallway, not a scratch visible on him, they ran to hug him.

“Harry, we missed you!”
“Hey, mate. What’s going on?”

“We were so worried. Are you alright?”

Harry smiled at his friends. He had missed them, too, but he wondered for a moment if they would even talk to him after he told them.

“Hey, guys.” He let his arms fall from the hugs, and they stepped back to look at him. “You’re… uh…not going to believe me when I tell you this.”

He could already see something dawning in Hermione’s eyes as they calculated something. He’d come out of Tom’s room in nothing but sleeping clothes. Surely that said something. He glanced over to Snape, who would not meet his gaze.

*Snape already knows,* he thought to himself. *What does he think about it?*

Of course, as much as he wished he could just let them have their own assumptions, he knew Ron was as thick-headed as a troll, at times.

Harry took in a deep breath. “I’m just going to come out with it. Blunt and straight. I love Tom.”

Hermione’s mouth dropped. Snape’s face paled. Ron’s face just grew more confused.

“What? Why?” Ron looked between Harry and Hermione, hoping their expressions would offer some help. “And what does that have to do with you being in his room…” His question slowed to a halt before he could even finish it. He began to piece things together.

Harry bit his bottom lip.

“Look, I know it sounds bad, but Tom isn’t all evil. He just…he doesn’t understand the things that keep people good. He can be thoughtful and observant, and we do have a lot in common…” he trailed off. His face was hot with anticipation and unease.

No one in the hallway spoke a word. Hermione and Ron just stared, both in equal amounts of horrified awe. To them, nothing about this situation seemed possible. They came here to rescue Harry, but here he was, sleeping with the Dark Lord. Everything they knew seemed to turn upside down.

Snape still stood further down the hallway. He stretched out one hand to hold onto the wall for support. He wasn’t sure if the world was spinning or his mind, but he needed something steady. He had never expected this to happen by giving Voldemort his soul back. He wasn’t even sure how Harry would let such a thing happen when he had such a poor experience with…sexual actions. Snape would have expected Harry to be scarred mentally, but he considered the possibility that he had overcome it. It still did not explain why Harry said he loved him. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know the full extent.

The heat from Harry’s face began to spread through his whole body until he felt uncomfortably warm. He had known this would be the difficult part, but now that he was there, looking at the horrified faces of his friends, he wished he could be anywhere but there.

“Well…” he began, voice almost too quiet, “I’m alright. You…you don’t have to stay. You can all go and…” He searched hard for words to speak. “…absorb and accept all this?” Harry’s gaze fell to the floor.

Hermione snapped out of her thoughts and nodded slightly. She grabbed Ron’s arm and pulled him
down the hallway to Snape. She grabbed his robes, too, and flicked her wand, disapperating.

Harry turned and placed his forehead against the wall. He was certain his friends hated him.

Tom stepped out of the room, then, and pulled Harry away from the wall by his shoulders.

‘Harry, come. Sleep. They have left.’

Harry shook his head, but turned and allowed Tom to lead him back to his room.

‘They’ll never see me the same again. What if they hate me? I don’t want to lose my friends.’

‘If they were truly your friends,’ Tom thought, shutting the door behind them and waving his hand to dim the lights once more, ‘their view on you would not change. If they do begin to hate you, shed them. You do not need them.’

They both got into Tom’s huge bed, making their way to the very center. As if by habit, Harry lifted his head, and Tom placed his arm under it. Harry enjoyed the coolness of the silk of his sleeping shirt on the back of his neck. It was just enough to allow the unsettling heat his body had collected to dissipate.

Just as he began to fall into sleep, Harry had one last thought.

At least I’ll still have you, Tom.
Harry’s POV:

When I woke up again, it was morning. I had slept pretty well, excluding the fact that I had woken up in the middle of the night by Snape, Hermione, and Ron, who found me naked in Tom’s bed.

Other than that, it was great.

When I looked around, Tom was gone already. I scooted for a while until I reached the edge of the bed, which took a considerable amount of effort. My ass was a bit sore, and although I hadn’t noticed earlier, I definitely noticed now. I stood, and the soreness only seemed to increase.

‘Bloody hell, Tom,’ I thought at him. ‘Could you be a bit gentler next time? My ass hurts just standing.’

Instead of an apology or guilt, Tom’s mind projected amusement.

‘Next time?’ he thought playfully. ‘So, you plan on such actions happening again? Sometime soon, I hope.’

I smiled in spite of myself. I couldn’t see his face, but I could predict the twist of his lips into a grin and the charm that twinkled in his red eyes. It was his “I just exploited a weak spot in your argument” face.

I began to make my way to the spacious room, shaking my head. ‘Caught in bed together last night and all Tom Riddle can do is flirt with me,’ I thought playfully back.

‘What? Did you expect an apology?’ Tom asked, nearly sarcastic.

‘Yes,’ I answered, stepping through the archway of the hallway and into the spacious room. ‘I did.’

Tom stood behind his chair, that same expression I had imagined still pressed in place.

‘Very well, Harry. I apologize severely for giving us both an enjoyable night of pleasure outside, amongst the hills you had so desperately wanted to visit.’

I scoffed, smile still trying to take over my expression. ‘You are a prat.’ I was halfway to my chair when I realized he was not sitting and eating breakfast as he normally did. My humor faded as confusion came over me. “Why aren’t you sitting?”

Tom’s grin turned into a sincere smile. “I was waiting for you, Harry.”

I stopped just a few feet before my chair, a heat crawling up the back of my neck. I hoped I wasn’t blushing. “Waiting for me? For what?”

“Breakfast,” he answered.

Tom flicked his hand out and my chair pulled away from the table enough for me to step forward a bit and sit in it. When I did, it pulled itself right up to the table, and Tom sat as well.

A house elf popped in and sat our plates in front of us before disappearing. Breakfast was familiar, today: scrambled eggs, potatoes, bacon, and toast. I smiled and began to dig in, finding the flavors ever more delicious that anything I had attempted to make. I was a skilled enough cook just from
experience and negative reinforcement, but there was nothing short of professional lessons that would lead me to make anything so tasty as the dish that was before us.

We savored our breakfast in silence, just content with each other’s company.

Halfway through my meal, my mind began to wonder. It didn’t focus on any events in particular, but on my life as a whole. I realized that I spent most of my life unable to enjoy it, and when I was finally able to enjoy it, I was filled with thoughts that it could be over at any moment. Both were the reasons that I did not cling to life like I should. For such a long time, I had thought that my life was nothing but something someone could use. My aunt and uncle used me to cook and clean, beat and neglect. Dumbledore used me for his own agenda, planning not only my life, but my death. At any other point in my life, I would have let death come. If it meant something to someone, who was I to argue?

But now, I didn’t want to die.

The more I considered the thought, the more I tried to reject it. It wasn’t some cheesy “I found the person of my dreams and found a reason to live” cliché. If anything, maybe it was a bit selfish. I never particularly liked the stress of having to be alive, but now there was practically no stress to it at all. Yeah, I was in love with Tom Riddle, but if I was being honest with myself, that wasn’t the reason I wanted to stay alive.

It was the life he gave me, the freedom of it, that made me realize how much my previous life had missed. Sure, I wasn’t going on death-defying adventures with friends, but I was safe. I wasn’t exactly allowed to go anywhere I pleased, but I had access to many things I enjoyed, and I was sure if I asked, Tom would provide me with whatever else I wanted.

But also, damn it, I was in love with Tom fucking Riddle.

I had always somewhat understood Tom, but being here, interacting with him without trying to kill each other, it was something else entirely. We shared our thoughts. We shared our bodies. Our experiences and differences brought us to this odd place in our relationship. There were still pieces of us that conflicted with each other, but we had something.

“Harry,” Tom said, breaking the silence and my stream of thoughts. “An owl arrived for you this morning.”

I looked up, meeting his amazingly comfortable expression.

“From who?”

His eyes glanced back down to his nearly empty plate. “I assume from your little friends who paid a visit last night.”

Oh. A wave of guilt washed over me. “Alright…Where’s the owl?”

“In your room.”

I nodded absently. I knew I still had to convince them, although I wasn’t exactly sure of what. What did they think?

Surely nothing too horrible…they are my friends after all…They’ll learn to tolerate it eventually…right?

I suddenly lost my appetite. I pushed my half-finished plate of breakfast away.
“Oh, and Harry,” Tom added, “We are having another meeting today. It shall take place in the private meeting room following dinner.”

My shoulders tensed just considering the idea. After what had happened yesterday, I wondered if he would ever have me at meetings again.

_Why not just plan things without me? He’d probably have an easier time of it. Unless…unless he changed his mind?_ 

I wasn’t sure how likely it was, but I was hopeful.

“Okay. So…what do we do until then?” I asked.

He raised an eyebrow at me. “We?”

A big, goofy smile came to my face, and I laughed under my breath. “Yes. We.”

Thoughts of the later meeting vanished from my mind, replaced with light happiness. So much had changed in our interactions, it made my head spin. We had a day to spend together as we pleased.

And judging by the growing grin on Tom’s face, he intended to spend it _ensuring_ we were pleased.

Tom pushed his plate away, and an elf popped in and took our plates away. He stood gracefully and offered out a hand to me. I grabbed it easily, and we disapparated.

We landed in a bedroom I had never seen before. The floor was a rippling blue that looked like the waves of the ocean. The large bed had a birch frame that matched its sandy silk sheets and pillows. The walls were pale blue with a couple wispy clouds floating about. On the ceiling, birds appeared to fly in the distance. It was like the bed was an island stranded in the vast ocean of the room.

I stood and marveled at it. I’d never been to a proper beach, and even if this wasn’t real, it felt just as amazing to view.

“Wow,” was all I could manage to say.

“I awoke early this morning to redecorate this spare room from the normal black décor,” Tom explained, hands folded behind his back, a proud smirk on his hardly-humble face. “I figured it would suit your tastes better.”

I glanced back to Tom, mouth hung open. “You did this? For _me_?”

He stepped closer to me, wrapping his arms around my waist and pulling me into a gentle kiss. In his arms, I felt weightless. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I deepened the kiss.

_/Of course,/ he hissed into my ear when we finally pulled apart, sending a shiver down my spine. /Pleasure is about more than simple touching./_

I closed my eyes, each S that rolled off his tongue loud and crashing, like waves on the shore.

_/Pleasure is also visual./ Tom purred, /They say that eyes are the windows to the soul, and for a soul to truly feel pleasure, it must witness the majesty of life. Before you feel anything, I want you to see it; see pleasure, feel pleasure./_

I let out a shuddering breath. I wasn’t sure I was seeing pleasure, but I sure felt like I was feeling it.

After a short second, my bearings returned, and I opened my eyes. “What greeting card did you
find *that* poem in?"

Tom gave a soft scoff but didn’t show any sign of being insulted. “No greeting card. I have never touched the things.”

“Never?” I teased, only half-into it. The more I glanced about the room, the more details I noticed: the distant island in the distance with a few palm trees, the glittering shells and rocks that lay scattered beneath the surface of the water/flooring, the depth and realism of the sky that made the corners of the room disappear. “You’ve never read the heartfelt lines of greetings cards? They truly touch the soul.”

Tom shook his head slightly, lips barely curved upwards. “I was being truly serious, Harry. Do you not enjoy the room?”

There was another door—to a bathroom, I supposed—that seemed to hold a glimpse of the curve of land covered in buildings and lights, the mainland, in the distance. The wildest thoughts in my head wondered where in the world we were. Where was there water so blue? Where was there sands so pale and seemingly undisturbed? Where was the sun so bright and unhindered?

“Enjoy it?” I asked, finally turning my attention back to Tom. “It’s perfect. Almost too perfect. Is this a real place?”

“It is, for the most part,” he answered, red eyes soft like the coral-colored starfish I could just make out under the shimmering water near our bed. “There is no island where our bed is located, but there is one there,” he pointed to the other small island with the trees, “and the mainland is that way. Although it’s hardly a main land since it is an island itself. That is Kauai, Hawaii.”

“This is Hawaii?!” I asked, incredulous. I had heard of it but never imagined I could ever see it.

“Well, technically this is the Pacific Ocean. The bathroom is Hawaii.”

I was about to ask what he meant, but instead, I found my feet carrying me to the door and pulling it open.

Inside was a world of greenery, from flowers and bushes to palm trees. They all ran together so that their leaves all seemed to be shared: one big field of green. Past the closest hill on the walls were more distant ones, just as green as the next. If I squinted my eyes, I was on the edge of the cliff, overlooking the hills, the sea at my back, an imaginary sea breeze flowing past me. It all was so close to being real. I was almost there, and it was closer than I ever thought I would get.

“Tom,” I breathed. My heart grew in my chest as if it would burst. “This is…beyond perfect.” I turned around to look at him, and he was right behind me. He wrapped his arms around me, enveloping me in a warmth like the touch of the tropical sun. I put my arms around his neck, pulling him into a kiss.

Everything after that was pure instinct. Tom’s hand ran down my back, and our tongues danced in each other’s mouths. We began to make our way to the bed, hands roaming over layers of fabric, then one layer of fabric, then pure skin. I don’t remember our clothes vanishing, but somewhere along the way they did. His hand traveled to the small of my back, and he gently laid me down on the bed, without breaking our heated kiss. I pressed my body against his, our cocks rubbing against each other, creating such an unbearable rush of pleasure between us both. Our hands explored, every touch going straight to my groin. I was going crazy, and I wanted every bit of Tom that he could give me. I wrapped my legs around his waist. He broke our kiss, murmured something that left a cold and wet feeling on me, and quickly pushed himself inside my ass, going straight for my pleasure
spot. I moaned loudly, another wave sent through my body. It was all so good, I couldn't bear it. Tom continued to hit that spot, dead-on every time. "Tom!" I moaned. My mind was full of pure enjoyment, and nothing else. I wrapped my arms around his neck again as my back arched and my face twisted. Our bodies fell in sync with one another, hearts racing together, lungs gasping for oxygen, the pressure within us building; it created a perfect rhythm. I finally couldn't stand it anymore. I threw my head back, squeezed my eyes shut, and let my orgasm loose. I released all over Tom, and he quickly followed, releasing inside me.

We panted for a moment, relaxing after such a rush. I smiled and opened my eyes to look at Tom. His chest rose and fell steadily, and his eyes fluttered behind his eyelids. He hadn't pulled out yet, not that I exactly minded; it felt good. Tom was so amazingly beautiful. I don't think I could think that enough. Tom was SO amazingly beautiful. The way his perfect dark hair fell out of place onto his forehead, how his fingers clawed at the sheets, and the soft look in his eyes when he opened them. Tom finally pulled out, used a quick cleaning spell, and lay down next to me. My arms wrapped around him, and my head rested against his warm, comfortable chest. He was so amazingly beautiful; there were not enough words in the English language to describe it, or possibly in any language. He wrapped his arms around me, and we held each other. Nothing in the world mattered. Not the ocean or the sand, or even Hawaii. It was just me, and the divine, absolutely radiant man before me.

3rd Person POV:

Hermione, Ron, and Snape had not slept all night. After the whole predicament with Harry, Hermione had apparated them back to the Burrow. They were all in shock for quite a while, but once it wore off, they each fell into their own feelings.

Ron began screaming on and on about how Harry would betray them, become as evil as Voldemort, and murder all of his friends who got in his way. He stomped and punched and grabbed at his hair. It took Hermione two hours to calm him down enough to sit and stop yelling. He sat, muttering instead. "I can’t believe that bloody bastard…” he began, his words trailing off into his thoughts.

Snape, on the other hand, grabbed a bottle of fire whiskey (from where, Hermione was not sure) and began to drink, not even bothering to grab a glass. He decided he needed some “help” to fully accept the news. The burn of alcohol down his throat, a turn-off for most but a reassurance for him, led to a freer feeling; of course, it was his competent thoughts he was freeing himself from.

Hermione sighed and sat beside Ron on the couch. She didn’t know what to think. She had mixed thought that conflicted each other terribly. As any rational person would, she attempted to organize them.

First and foremost, we walked in on a very private moment. We never should have seen that situation, even if everyone was properly covered. I understand that Harry was, in a sense, coming out to us, and that is also a very private thing, but to love Voldemort? Harry is a complete idiot for letting himself fall for someone so evil. But…is it wrong to criticize someone for being in love? Obviously, there’s something redeemable about him, if Harry even liked him enough to get to the point where he could fall in love with him. But can he love Harry back? He’s never even hinted that he’s so much as cared about others, even his own Death Eaters. She bit her lip. Harry may be in more trouble than we thought...

Snape took another swig from the bottle, lifting it high above his head until the last drops were consumed. He not-so-carefully let the bottle fall to the ground, still in his grip. His thoughts were
beyond all logic.

Of course, I’ll be there for Harry no matter who he decides to love. That’s the job. I do the brooding, he does the stupid, and we work it out. But Merlin…Voldemort? How’d it happen? They don’t even have anything in common…

Snape’s eyes narrowed, the alcohol delaying his thoughts like sap over already sticky gears.

What am I thinking? They have several connections. Their past. Their mind…How did I not see this coming?

He lifted the bottle to his lips once more only to recall that it was empty a few seconds later.

The morning seemed to arrive days later. By then, their thoughts had completely drowned them all, forcing them to come to conclusions.

Ron was furious with Harry and decided he wanted nothing to do with him. In fact, he would fight against him, personally, if it came to that.

Hermione didn’t approve, exactly, but she was sure her opinion didn’t matter. Who was she to say they shouldn’t be together? She just hoped it wouldn’t hurt him, which she supposed she would hope no matter who Harry loved.

Snape was completely shitfaced. If he had come to a conclusion, he couldn’t remember it. The freeness of the alcohol had worn into the heavy hold of a hangover. He was lying on the floor, stuck. Every time he tried to get up, his legs would get pulled back down and his arms would give way. After several unsuccessful attempts, Hermione finally just levitated him into the chair.

Ron’s face grew to match his hair, and he was ready to throw another punch at the wall. “I can’t believe that bastard would stab us in the backs!”

Hermione sighed. “Ron,” she said, a hand on her forehead and exasperation on the edge of her voice. She knew this would not be easy, Ron as stubborn as he was, but she had to try for Harry’s sake. “Harry didn’t stab us in the back. He loves someone. Yes, it may be You-Know-Who, but that doesn’t mean Harry will become evil. He’s still Harry.”

Ron’s mudslide eyes dug into hers with an untamed ferocity. “How do you know? He could be planning to kill us right now and you would still think he was our friend!”

“He is our friend, Ron. That’s how I know he’s not trying to kill us. Nothing will ever change that unless you don’t accept this.”

Snape groaned in the corner as the last effects of the alcohol wore off. Hermione’s attention fell on him, her normally perfectly postured shoulders and back slumping. She had known this moment would come, but she hadn’t had the time to prepare for it. She shook her head.

What am I going to do with these two?
Devastation

Chapter Notes

So sorry this took so long to upload. I can give all the excuses in the book, but ultimately I had to find my motivation again. Thank you all for continuing to read.

3rd Person POV:

With one hand over his closed eyes and the other hanging over the armrest of the chair, palm open, Snape waited for Hermione to get a hangover potion for him. He'd explained to her that he had several on a shelf in his potions lab. Unfortunately, she had no idea how to get there.

Of course, Hermione was an intelligent witch. She knew that if she could not find one already made, she would have to make one herself. While she would have normally been keen to learn something new and useful, the stress of the night and lack of sleep had frayed the edges of her normally well-put-together mind.

Setting up her portable cauldron on the floor, Hermione stuffed a stiff arm down into her tiny purse, feeling around for the proper tools: the familiar worn edges of her advanced potions book, glass vials for storing the potion once it was ready, a silver knife in case she needed to cut ingredients. Between trips, she chanced a glance at Ron.

He sat on the far end of the couch, arms crossed, long legs pulled in just enough so that the heels of his feet pressed into the middle of the cushions—leaving the other half of the couch for Hermione, as he always did. His pale, freckled face was pink around the ears and apples of his cheeks, clashing ever so slightly with the fieriness of his red hair. In their time together, Hermione had grown to both love and hate the color combination. She knew that Ron had a temper that, while not necessarily easily stoked, could burn for ages, but at it's base, was not likely anger at all.

Hermione absently opened the book to the proper page and began summoning the ingredients from her bag, lost in memories of Ron in the past. With flick of her wand, her black cauldron filled halfway with water, a few drops spilling onto and over the edge of the lip. Snape was lucky that the hangover potion was barely a potion at all, but more of a home-remedy imbued with magic, because Hermione's attention was far from focused.

She could remember the same pout in his lips during his big fight with Harry in their fifth year; back then, it had been insecurity. She could remember the same stubborn fierceness in his blue eyes—like a sunny, spring day getting ready to storm—every time they fought side by side. She could remember the same darkening, almost-sallow puffiness under his eyes every time he worried about the safety of a loved one, from Ginny second year to Harry not too long ago. As she flicked her wand once more half-heartedly at her knife, which began precisely chopping a stalk of ginger root, she tried to piece together the whole picture of what Ron was feeling.

But something was also different, here. There was something new in Ron's expression, and Hermione couldn't place it.

As her hand grabbed for one of the herbs, her hand brushed the line of glass vials, sending them toppling into one another with a loud clatter. She jumped, as did her magic, sending the knife down
into a hard, sideways chop of a gnarled part of the ginger with a dull thud.

Snape groaned from behind her.

"Miss Granger," Snape's scratchy monotone snapped. "Please cease whatever tomfoolery it is that is causing that clatter."

Hermione sighed with embarrassed guilt. "Sorry, Professor," she said softly.

With her focus returning, the potion seemed to come together in no time. Ingredients flew around her, being juiced, picked, and deseeded before making their way to the boiling and churching water. After a few minutes, she recited the incantation and the brew became a potion, flitting past the lips of the empty glass vials with ease.

She picked one up and held it out to Snape in a politely quiet offer as she began to cork the others.

The headmaster took the bottle with some hesitation. In his aching skull, his mind briefly considered the possibility of the potion being brewed incorrectly. His normal mind might have reasoned that Hermione was a decent potions student (a good one, even), that even a terrible potions student could brew such a simple elixir, or that the results of incorrect brewing did not yield a harmful potion.

Instead, however, Snape downed the contents of the bottle, nothing but trust fueling the action—a truth he would never admit.

After a moment, the headmaster tentatively opened his eyes under the safety of his hand. The world did not seem to bright between the cracks of his fingers, and so he cautiously moved it away. As he glanced about the room, the dull throbbing of his head grew weaker. His tongue was no longer so dry, and his stomach no longer burned with the acidic flame of indigestion. After a bit longer, he felt the wave of relief complete, and he was back to his normal self. In a moment of weakness, he offered a sincere expression of his gratitude to Hermione.

"Thank you, Miss Granger, for your quick resourcefulness."

For a moment, the young witch could do nothing but stare wide eyed. It was the closest thing to a compliment he'd ever given her. Actually, she was sure it was a compliment. She could hardly believe that she wasn't dreaming. She nodded with some uncertainty before her attention fell back to Ron.

The last piece of the puzzle was there somewhere, she knew it. She just had to find it. Maybe, she thought, I can have some help, now.

Hermione flicked her wand once more, cleaning up her impromptu work station in an instant. She looked up to Snape, her mouth opening with intent to ask for help but lacking the words to do so properly and without protest from Ron.

Their eyes met for a moment and understanding passed between them.

The headmaster sighed. He was certain such tasks were not in his job description, and yet here he was, finding himself becoming increasingly involved in the personal matters of others. He truly hoped that soon he would never have to do such things ever again.

"Mr. Weasley," Snape began, "Miss Granger, may I suggest that we move our little..." his lips drew together in distaste before pressing into the word "party" with some regret, "to my office at Hogwarts? We have much to discuss, and we may find the privacy there may aid us greatly."
Hermione nodded. "Yes," she agreed, looking back towards the hall. "I don't think we want to let everyone here know just yet. Not until we know how to feel about it ourselves."

Ron said nothing, but stood from the couch and slipped into his shoes that had been laying on the ground nearby haphazardly from being discarded in anger. Hermione stood as well, pocketing her purse. The pair watched as Snape walked to the fireplace, grabbing a handful of Floo powder and tossing it in before disappearing into the green flames that followed. The students followed, their own batch of green swallowing them in a tunnel that ended in the plain, quiet office of Headmaster Severus Snape.

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**Lord Voldemort's POV:**

Harry and I were still entangled an hour later. I found I lacked the energy and the will power to remove myself from our current position. A weight held me fixed, making every limb heavy and leaden, and yet there was nothing atop me, only beside me. Something about how we laid was transfixed, as if by some force I could not see: magnetism, gravity, fate; each seemed as likely as the last.

Harry had fallen into a soft slumber in my arms, ever the slightest smile on his features. My eyes, barely able to hold themselves open, took in the disaster that was his hair. Anyone could have taken one glance at his raven tufts and known we had made love. Of course, that very fact is what made the view so enjoyable.

I considered, for a brief second, moving an arm to be able to run a rogue hand through it, but found that such an action was not worth ruining the moment. It was still, peaceful. Harry slept, and I knew I would be a fool to wake him for such a meaningless action. His body, although recently more rested than normal, needed all the sleep it could get. Who knew when the nightmares would come crawling back, taking prisoner his mind, and as a result, his sanity.

In the soft light of the room, a sliver of paleness shone on Harry's forehead, a crackling bolt of a scar. Such a small thing, really, and yet so commanding, always stirring my attention. I could feel its presence when Harry put his head to mine, as if it had its own magical signature.

*No, not its own. My own.*

It was the spot where we were most connected, in every sense of the word. It was a reminder of our past, of our present, and our future. It acted as our bridge, allowing us passage to one another, and our wall, keeping us apart in ways we can never tear down. How strange it was that we were in our current position when we began in such a different one.

My eyes blinked slowly once, twice, and then closed. I was lost to a thoughtful dream.

Around me, the sun was warm and bright, almost uncomfortably so. For a moment, I was alone, lying on the grass that seemed to bake beneath me. Then, a voice called my name.

"Tom!"

I turned my head, and between blades of tall grass, I saw Harry's bare feet, toes wiggling. I lifted myself up onto my elbows and looked up to his face. It held a kind smile, soft and gentle like the breezy shadow he cast over me. I watched as he got onto his knees and placed his forehead against mine, green eyes hidden under his smooth eyelids.

We held that pose, and I considered it. What was it meant as? Surely it was affection, but of what
sort? It had its own intimacy, having one's face so close to another's, yet seemed so much more casual and innocent than most other forms of closeness. This was not a kiss, which required a certain level of romantic interest, nor was it like an embrace, which could be shared with any close relationship, romantic or otherwise.

The longer we stayed, the more I thought that I would never wish to touch foreheads with anyone but Harry. The action was so peculiar. Harry himself, of course, was also peculiar. Mental connection or not, I was sure I would never understand many of the things he did.

My dream faded, and I came back to the present gradually. Slowly, my eyes opened, adjusting to the light of the room. I looked to Harry, still bare and asleep in my arms.

*What time is it? How long have we slept here?*

No answers came, of course, but time had passed, and I had things to do. I could feel the downward tug at the corners of my mouth as I realized that I would have to wake Harry.

With much effort, I pulled my arms from him, trying not to jostle him. At my movement, Harry began to move as well, rousing from his peace with a yawn.

I sat up and stretched out my arms and shoulders before summoning back our clothes into them. I stood from the bed and began to dress. As I did so, Harry sat up as well.

"That was wonderful," he said, voice scratchy with sleep, as he ran a hand through his hair. "Let's do it again, sometime."

I could not prevent the smile from growing on my lips.

"Of course. But for now, we have things to attend to."

He nodded and grabbed his clothes from my hands as I held them out to him. I watched as he pulled his legs through his pants and then his jeans, my thinking becoming distracted with vague impressions of feelings.

I pushed them away as easily as I averted my eyes.

Once Harry had pulled on his shirt, he looked to me a nodded slightly. Together, we left the room, heading up the stairs in companionable silence. Harry then headed to his room while I entered the library.

"Bring me all books on ancient curses," I commanded the room as the door shut behind me.

Two carts rolled over to me, several books on each. The first was full of books I had already read through previously, the other of books I had yet to even open. Reaching my hand out for the latter cart, I chose one book with a blue fabric cover, worn not from my use but from its age. Its paper, I noticed, was different than most others I had encountered: not the thick, yellowing pages of ancient books, but browning and incredibly thin, so much so that the words of the other side of the page were visible if one looked hard enough. Fearing damage at my hand, I used magic to turn each page.

The title made it obvious it had made a long journey to be here, since it read "罵倒する呪文". I did not understand (what I assumed to be) Japanese, of course, but as I continued onto the list of contents, I noticed that the spells were all in different languages. This book was obviously a collection of curses. I saw many different texts, from the fluid script I assumed was Arabic, to the random assortment of letters I realized was German, to the very familiar language that was English. My mind whirred with the possibilities.
I read the first spell in fluid, decorative script; "ﺪﻠﺟ:
رﺎﺛﻵا،(58,802),(939,997)
ﻒﺣﺰﻟا،
ﺪﻠﺠﻟا:
ثﺪﺤﺗ،
ﺪﻠﺠﻟا:
ﺖﺤﺗ،
ﺲﻓﺎﻨﺨﻟا،
تﻼﻀﻌﻟاو،
ﺪﻠﺠﻟا،
ﻦﻴﺑ,
ﺲﻓﺎﻨﺨﻟا،
ﺞﻌﺗ،
ﺢﺒﺼﻳ،
ﺔﻴﺤﻀﻟا،"
It all looked very marvelous and artistic, but I could not understand a word of it. I used a quick translation charm, and English words appeared in the margins of the book; "Beetles under skin. Incantation: coleopter infeste. Effects: victim's skin becomes infested with beetles crawling between skin and muscles." I deemed it a decent curse, but not very painful, mostly frightening.

Flipping the next few pages, I found myself reading another spell. "hårbotten naglar. Talade: spetsade trådar. effekter: offren hårbotten kommer att bränna och håret kommer att falla ut, ersätts med små spikar gjorda av ben." Translated as "Scalp nails. Incantation: harsvord stig. Effects: Victim's scalp burns, their hair falls out and is replaced with small spikes made of bone." Incredibly painful, that one. It was very intriguing. I continued on, reading its history and origins.

Of course, Harry would not like you to use this spell on anyone. He would think it was evil. Unnecessary.

I shook my head in an attempt to focus my thoughts. After a few moments, I realized that I had read on half a page but recalled none of the information. I sighed.

Behind me, I heard the dull scrape of a chair. When I turned to look, my chair from across the room was there, just a step behind me, waiting for me to sit. The sudden weight in my shoulders, or possibly the tiredness of my legs, drew me to oblige it.

Why is he in my thoughts? I am working.

Normally, I have command over my mind. There was not a feeling nor a whim that could ever breach my focus when I did not allow it. There was a time and place for those things, and the time was not now.

Maybe our…activities…have tired me more than I anticipated.

I ran a hand through my hand absently, letting my mind roam, for once, without my control.

No, I feel far from tired. I feel…energized. Not necessarily physically, but…in every other sense…spiritually? My spirit is invigorated. My mental capacities, as well, although not in a way I appreciate. Too chaotic, unruly…like Harry.

I knew, of course, that my thoughts would return to him. They always had, it seemed. Now was no different.

Surely Harry feels this all the time. Like his mind is always at the mercy of what he feels. It's no wonder he has nightmares.

I tried to recall what it was like to be in Harry's mind, to peer into his thoughts and to read and feel as if the mind were my own.

It was like an extension to a home—for the sake of the metaphor, my home—one that was obviously added later. The home itself was softly lit, organized and well-kept, but lived in; the walls dark and comfortable, the floor wooden and predictably creaky, but well-made; every room had functional furniture that matched a scheme, and a few decorative accents, a balance of utility and style. It was aging, but not old. It worked efficiently, and would for years to come, bar a disaster.

The extension was different and yet the same; the flooring was newer, a different grain, only lightly worn; the paint was fresher; the door not yet squeaky on its still-shiny hinges; the furniture not yet scratched and indented and stained in the ways that life does; in a fit of whimsy, a large window was
placed into the room, which captured the sun each day and held it there until it set. It was this window that set the room apart from the rest of the house, truly. Although the room was newer, the nearly constant exposure to sun had faded it. It still held its usefulness, its fresh appeal, but felt different from the comforting dimness of the rest of the house.

*We are different, but the difference works, I suppose.*

I rubbed at the back of my neck.

*Works for what?* a part of me questioned.

*Us,* another part answered. *Harry and I.*

*What? Our relationship?*

*Certainly,* the other part thought once more.

I scoffed. *Harry and I have no relationship. At least, not one that extends beyond allies.*

*That is an obvious lie,* it said. *You have been to bed together. Had sex. Shared close, intimate moments, both physically and not. Such experiences are far beyond what I would allow allies to share with me.*

*Fine then. We desire each other,* I admitted. *But that it is. We have a physical relationship. We have a professional relationship. That is the extent of it.*

*Denial,* it chided. *It clearly goes much further-*

*It does not!* I commanded. *The Dark Lord does not give into weak emotions. I have long left such sensibilities behind.*

*Hmmm…*the other part thought, starting to sound less like my own voice. *Have you, though?*

*Yes,* I stated. *I have.*

*Okay,* the voice said, taking on a disbelieving, argumentative tone. *So I feel no love for Nagini? No care for her at all? I feel nothing for her, my magical familiar?*

*My jaw set. Yes, I suppose I do. But she is-*

*I feed her, pick up her skin sheddings, make sure she is comfortable, converse and plan with her. Recall the difficult times when she slept in my bed, when she cared for me when I was too weak to do so on my own and my followers presumed I was dead-*

*Yes,* I thought begrudgingly, *I recall.*

*Do I not do the same for Harry?* It asked simply.

*I shook my head. Harry is different.*

*Do I. Not. Do. The. Same. For. Harry?*

I did. I did more than give Harry a bed and feed him. I brought him things to comfort him at night. I attempted to make him happy, to feel content in his life here. I ensured he was safe and healthy, allowed him to explore my manor, communicate with his friends. I did things specifically to please him, like decorate rooms like tropical islands. I even trusted him enough to give him his wand, to
have access to my bottled memories, to share my bed. It was undeniable. All the evidence was there.

I see...

I pondered the ramifications of this realization. The other part of me continued to think.

*I care for Harry in a way I have never allowed myself to before. I am so human now, it is not something that should come as a surprise, especially considering how similar we are. Maybe it is possible that-

I shook my head. *Enough!* I was done letting my feelings control. Conclusions had been reached. I had to make my decision using logic.

*Love is weak,* a dark part of me stated. The more voice I gave it, the more it felt foreign. *If I have feelings for Harry, they must cease. I am so incredibly close to achieving my goal. I must not let it fall through my fingers now!*

I rose and walked to the hallway, cool mask of unfeeling falling into place. I was stone. Granite. The hallway was dimming around me, signaling the arrival of the evening.

*Harry,* I thought towards the boy. *Time for dinner.*

'Alright.'

I made my way down the stairs and to my chair, standing beside it. A moment later, Harry arrived at the top of the stairs. He had changed his shirt to a concrete grey that made his jade eyes contrast brightly. Rather than take them in, and the genuine smile he gave me, I looked away. I did not need the distraction.

Harry made his way to his chair and we sat. Dinner appeared before us and we ate in silence. I did not consider anything but the meeting before us. We had plans to make. Plans of disbanding The Order. Plans of attack.

I finished my dinner just as Harry pushed his plate away. The elves retrieved the plates and we rose, making our way to the private meeting room, where Draco and Lucius already waited. We sat, and I began the meeting.

"We shall continue to discuss the factors we were not able to last meeting." I glanced at Harry, face hopeful and eyes gleaming. Like a cup overflowing, I could feel the excess of the unnamable feeling beginning to take hold of me. I would not let it win. I looked away and pushed it aside.

"Harry, you will ask The Order to disband tomorrow night. Plan your arguments now. Once they are no more, we can set into action another plan, one which we can discuss tonight."

The feeling disappeared, then. My focus was back. I had control. I had won over the petty feeling the kept me from progress. Soon, I would find myself at full power with no obstacles in my path. It was all coming together.

**Harry's POV:**

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. First, he was acting strange at dinner, and now this?

*Why has nothing changed? I thought he'd be different now. He seemed to care so much earlier... about us. I thought we could be happy, just us. Maybe he...hasn't thought about how this makes me*
feel?

My chest hurt. My first instinct was to get away, but this was Tom. He could be reasoned with.

"I can't do that," I said, attempting to keep my voice even. "The Order only exists to protect the Wizarding World, and I don't agree with you doing anything that conflicts with that."

Tom's eyes met mine, cold and hard like the night he rose from a cauldron. "I was not asking."

My heart sunk. Something was different. Something was wrong. This wasn't Tom.

"You can't force me," I said, voice a little higher and louder than I had anticipated. "I'm not your servant."

"You are my ally," he answered, tone commanding and harsh, like I was just another Death Eater, "but it would be wise for you to follow my instruction."

I stood up suddenly, mind whirling a thousand times a minute. Nothing was making sense. We had the most gorgeous day together, and now it was all falling apart. I knew Tom cared for me, but this wasn't Tom. This was undeniably Voldemort, and I didn't know how to push him away and bring back the man I loved.

"Am I your ally, Tom?" I was shouting, though I didn't mean to. Tears pricked dangerously close behind my eyes. "Tell me I'm your ally."

This isn't happening. I'm dreaming. This is just another nightmare.

For a moment, Tom did not speak. He simply stared at me, no feeling anywhere in his expression.

"You are my ally."

The words hung there in the air like fog. I almost didn't recognize them, they didn't sound like Tom at all. I knew Tom. Tom would have reached out with his mind, reminded me that we were more than that. He would have said the words with professionalism, with a sense of pride. These words were so hollow, they hardly had any meaning at all.

My mid went to our mental connection. His side was sealed off. I nudged it, in hopes that he would feel me, but after a moment, the barrier did not move.

With all my might, I pushed against it, hoping to force it open. Still, it did not budge. I was alone.

I grabbed my wand. I couldn't stand being in the room any longer. I flicked and turned, disapparating, but Tom grabbed my shirt, and so we both arrived in the room full of memory bottles.

Frustrated tears ran down my face at last.

"What the fuck, Tom?"

He ignored my words, acting as if I hadn't said anything at all. "Harry, what are we doing here?"

I shook my head. "I don't like this, and I came here to forget it." I clenched my fists, trying to hold back my fear and anger. Some part of me still hoped I would wake up. I held onto that hope now for dear life. "Nothing has changed."

Tom stared at me, fury in his eyes and something hiding behind them. "Everything has changed, Harry."
"Everything has changed?" I threw up my hands with exasperation and let them fall back to my sides. "Then why do you still expect this from me? Why are you treating me like some damned Death Eater?"

"It is simply work. It-"

"Work?!" I gave a hysterical sort of laugh. "This is more than work, Tom. You're asking me to compromise myself. You're going backwards. If things had changed, that wouldn't happen!"

"Harry, we had previously discussed this. You chose this as an alternative, and if we do not take action soon, the opportunity will slip."

"No," I shook my head, tears pouring down my face now. My stomach rolled, both with anger and unanswered questions. "We can reach a compromise, but this…ordering me to do this…it's too much. You won't do this."

His eyes narrowed, filled with a dangerous, quiet rage, the kind that I had seen in my nightmares for so long.

"And why not?"

I let out a shaky breath, the question wanting to come up like vomit. "Because of what we have. I won't do this, and you have to respect that. That's how we're going to work, Tom. I would do the same thing for you."

"I never asked that of you," the Dark Lord said. "Why would you do such a thing?"

Don't vomit. Don't vomit.

"Because I love you, Tom!"

The room grew silent. I watched as the rage drained from his eyes, turning the burning flame into cold, hard rubies. I had hoped for the soft velvet to return, so feel his barrier go down and for his presence to return to me, for us to connect, like when we made love. He didn't even seem to respond. He started at me, and I began to wonder if he had even heard. Had I even said it at all? The thought gnawed at my gut.

"I love you, Tom," I repeated quietly, waiting for his response. He didn't smile or embrace me. He didn't kiss me, like they did in the muggle movies. He didn't even move.

My lungs burned and my mind raced. Why isn't he saying anything? I know he loves me back, so why won't he just tell me? Something was wrong.

'Tom,' I whispered, hardly daring to speak the question. 'Don't you love me?'

'No,' a familiar voice in my head thought.

I…I don't understand.

"No," he said aloud. I watched his mouth move, wondering if it were really the thing speaking such cold words. "I don't love you. I only…took what I wanted."

I could feel the bile building up in the back of my throat. I took a step back. This couldn't be real.
You...used me?

I took another step back and felt something solid hit my hip, followed by sounds of glass shattering on the floor.

Instantly, ghost hands were all over me, and my ass ached and burned. Tears came to my eyes, but I couldn't scream out for help or get away. The horrible memories came back, tearing into the comfortable dark places in my memory like parasites. It all made sense, then. The reason why I didn't want that first kiss, what Snape meant when he talked about what happened when I was eight, and why I thought everything Tom and I did was so wrong at first.

And Tom knew. And he did it all the same.

No, even worse. He did the same. He didn't love me. Just used me like some whore.

My heart broke into a million tiny pieces, but I continued to look in his eyes, searching for the break, for the something that would tell me he was lying, or that this was all just a dream. I didn't want to believe it, but the break never came.

The world around me blurred, my knees hit the ground with a loud thud, sending a sharp pain shooting up my knee.

He doesn't love me...

In one last moment of clarity before the storm, I disapparated.
Harry’s POV:

Nothing made sense anymore. I thought I would feel nothing but pain, maybe sadness, anger, but instead I felt nothing. Just numbness. Like someone had splashed ice cold water over me. My senses turned off. There was no floor or walls around me, no solid ground and no light. I didn’t speak, but I had nothing to say. In my chest, I could barely feel my own heartbeat. It was lethargic, soft, as if it were numb, too. As if it were laying here wishing it could fade away, too.

Things I hate in this world:

- This bloody fucking war
- Being the boy-who-lived/Savior/Chosen one
- Uncle Vernon
- Being haunted by dead people I care about
- Being alone
- Having nightmares/dreams
- Tom Marvolo Riddle

No… no that’s not right.

Tom Marvolo Riddle

Voldemort

That was better. There was a clear divide between the two. I loved Tom with all I had, but I wasn’t sure what happened to him. I had grown to know him, to understand him. We shared moments together that I had never expected. I had not seen Voldemort in such a long time, I had almost forgotten he and Tom inhabited the same body.

I was in love in half a man, and the other half was my mortal enemy.

Does Tom even exist at all? Or was it all a ploy?

He told me he used me. That he never loved me, only “took what he wanted.”

Merlin, I’m completely useless. He was fooling me the whole time, like a joke, only to get what he wanted. I was his pawn.

Those words repeated themselves in my head. Useless. Joke. Pawn. As much as I tried to throw them off me, they stuck. At every turn in my life, it seemed, I was one of them to somebody. Now, I was all three.

I wasn’t sure I was breathing anymore. Did my blood move through my body? Was my heart still going? I secretly hoped it had all just stopped. Then it wouldn’t matter anymore.

It’s all a dream, the smallest voice in my mind said. You’ll wake up, and it’ll all be back to normal.

I could have laughed. What was normal? I’ve never been normal. It was the curse of being Harry
Potter. Even before I knew what that meant.

Suddenly, a cold, tingly feeling came over me. I lifted my head, trying to hear something, anything, nearby. There was only silence. I waited, not daring to move. The feeling came back, caressing my cheek. My eyes flew open.

My vision was blurry, at first, but grew in focus as I blinked. In a semi-circle, the stood around me: ghosts, some with familiar faces—my mom, my dad, Sirius, Cedric, Dumbledore—and other, countless strangers. They were faintly lit in the darkness, their figures vitreous and transparent.

My mother lifted her hand, and out jumped a small doe of light, brighter than any ghost around it. It ran over to me, leaving a trail of flowers behind it, falling to the ground, where it had been. It stopped before me; I reached a hand out to it, and it vanished. Along with it, my mother vanished, and my father. I gasped and pulled my hand back, but it was too, late. Sirius made as if to run to me, to reach out to me, but he, too, vanished. Cedric, eyes fearful and wide, vanished. The countless strangers behind them all vanished.

Only Dumbledore remained, that twinkle still in his eyes. He gave a small, short laugh, but his eyes were not filled with joy, but disappointment.

Rather than vanish, Dumbledore split into three other figures.

“Harry,” one of them said, voice shaking in anger, thin arms ending in fists. “How could you do this to us?”

I shook my head. “Ron,” I choked out, my voice scratchy and dry. “It’s not like that anymore. We can-”

“No, Harry!” a feminine voice said, colder and more appalled than ever heard it. “You brought this upon yourself.”

“Hermione, I thought-”

“We all know that is a lie, Mr. Potter,” a vicious monotone bit.

“Professor…”

Then, they, too, were gone.

The pain hit me all at once.

My lungs began to burn like they were on fire, as did my throat, tightening. My vision blurred with wetness, sending hot streaks down my frozen cheeks. My heart raced erratically, pounding against the cage that was my chest with panic. My breathing grew shallow and quick, as if the air hated me, too. The world around me was too fast, and I was too fast. I wasn’t sure where the ground went, but it seemed to move. I was shaking and sweating and shivering. I wrapped my arms around myself and, in an attempt to calm myself, dug my fingernails into them.

The world was growing lighter. I could feel it in my head as it swayed. Everything was surrounded by a hazy circle of black as my body finally grew calmer. I pulled my hands from my arms, finding them blurred with red. Seconds later, the blackness took over.

I awoke to the feeling of a cold breeze rushing over my face. My body ached, and my mind whirred. For a brief moment, I hoped that I had died. But I had no such luck.
My eyes opened to the midnight sky above me where a few stars were just visible. The memories of what had happened earlier came back to me like the lazy clouds that covered the moon, slow and hazy. I lied there and considered just not moving.

Nothing matters anymore. Why should I move? What do I possibly need to accomplish?

The answer was nothing.

The small voice spoke up once more. He’ll be looking for me, I’m sure. He didn’t mean what he said.

I scoffed out loud.

Aren’t you the one who said I was dreaming? This obviously isn’t a dream, otherwise I would have woken up. I mean, I did wake up, but it’s all still happening. He still said he didn’t love me. He still used me. He’s still Voldemort. Even if he is looking for me, I don’t want him to find me.

I continued to lay on the ground a moment, considering the thought.

Well, if I don’t want to be found by a man who shares my mind and knows a shit ton of tracing magic, I’m sure, I should probably do something.

I sighed and forced my sore body to cooperate as I turned and pushed it up to stand. Once I was standing, I realized where I was: rusty swings, spinning wheel, clumpy dirt with little grass; the park near Privet Drive where Dudley and his gang used to beat me up, where I would sometimes run away to and sleep. It wouldn’t be easy to find the place, but anyone who was trying to look wouldn’t have had too difficult of a time. I wasn’t sure how long I had been gone, but I reasoned that had Tom started looking for me after I left, he’d have found me by now.

Which means he’s not looking.

The thought should have reassured me, but it didn’t. Instead, I began to feel sick.

I wrapped my arms around me, finding them tender to the touch. I looked them over, seeing the scabs of where I had dug into them earlier and noticing the dried blood that covered the tips of my fingers. It wasn’t much, but it was enough.

Just enough to feel something.

I squeezed my hands around the scabs, feeling the pain again.

Feeling something is good.

Lord Voldemort’s POV:

Harry disapperated, but I could not react quickly enough to grab him once more. He had shocked me, to say the least, but I had shocked myself even further. The cool mask I had worn earlier cracked.

The words had been there, at the forefront of my mind, the back of my throat, the tip of my tongue. I had already concluded that I did love him, or at least cared immensely for him. I was going to tell him. He deserved to know, even if I did not know where I wanted such a confession to lead. Love
was never something I wanted, but Harry was something I wanted.

Those words...did I say those words?

For all intents and purposes, I had. The sounds came from my mouth, using my lips and teeth and voice, but nothing about them felt like they belonged to me. They were so foreign. A cold, harsh lie. One made up simply to further my agenda.

**Voldemort’s agenda**, I thought to myself absently. The distinction was odd. I was Voldemort. I created him from nothing. He was strong in everything Tom Riddle was not, I made sure of it. And with that strength, he was to reach for anything I wanted, to take anything I wanted, and be anything I wanted. But this was far from that.

A pain began to form at the forefront of my mind. I let a hand go to my forehead and rested the other on my table of bottles.

*This is foolish nonsense, one, dark part of me thought. Voldemort. He is a worthless boy. We should have killed him when we had the chance.*

The thought caused my stomach to drop.

*Kill him? I cannot bring myself to kill Harry any more than I could kill myself.*

*Then it is you that is the problem.*

The pain in my head intensified, as if Voldemort, my own creation, were torturing me into submission as if I was one of his subordinates.

*Problem? We were doing just well until you decided that my feelings for him were unnecessary.*

Again, the pain grew, blooming into other parts of my head.

*It is unnecessary. There is no room for others in our regime. Your feelings for the boy will only distract you, to place your trust in someone who will ultimately betray you!*

The hand on my forehead now clutched it, attempting to keep the splitting pain from becoming literal.

*Harry would never. He said himself, he loves me.*

*Do you even know the meaning? No one has ever loved you. How can you be sure he tells the truth? Why, for any reason, would he love you? Are you not the monster he fears? The one who is the cause of all his nightmares?*

The pain prevented me from thinking or doing anything other than feel it and acknowledge it. Everything was pain, from the top of my skull to the backs of my eyeballs to the sharp tips of my teeth as they bit into my bottom lip.

*The destruction of muggles is imminent. The Wizarding World will soon see. And the very peak of that destruction is the destruction of Harry Potter, prophesied savior of The Light. If he will not be your servant, he must die.*

The world around me began to dizzy with the pain. My feet attempted to steady themselves, bumping into the table. I could hear the clink of the glass bottles and, fearing their fate in the same manner Harry’s had, I reached out with both hands blindly to steady them. In my blurred clumsiness,
I instead sent them toppling over, sending them to the demise I sought to avoid.

Broken glass hit the floor and faded into memories that flashed before my eyes, one by one.

The words of the first gruesome curse I ever spoke, leaving my lips as the man who stood before me, my own father, simply stared in disturbed confusion. For a moment, nothing happened. In those quiet seconds, he scoffed.

“Look, mate, I don’t care if you’re my son. If you’re anything like your crazy mother, which you seem to be, I don’t want to see you ever again. Get lost.”

His last two words were swallowed by the sound of him gagging haggardly. His eyes grew wide with panic and then squeezed shut in pain. He gagged once more, vomiting up blood on the ground before him. He fell to his knees, continuing to gag horribly. He made a feeble attempt to crawl towards me, only managing to get close enough to vomit one more pool of blood in front of me before his stomach came out, followed by his throat, and then nothing. He fell to the ground, pale and twitching. I watched for a long while, awaiting the moment when the twitching would stop. Once it did, it was over. I looked to the pool of blood and found it had reached my shoes and just the bottom of my pants, too long because they were from the secondhand shop, worn and tattered at the hems from my wearing them almost constantly because they were the only pair I owned that fit me somewhat properly. And his blood had just ruined them.

From my pocket, I pulled the family ring out with a shaky hand. I wasn’t ready for the pain, but I was beyond ready for everything else to come.

The scene changed.

Sable and Thomas continued to point and laugh in unison, as they always did. This time, they made fun of the way Madam Sawyer had forced me to scrub the toilet with a toothbrush.

“She really hates you, you know!” Sable yelled.

“Everyone does!” Thomas added. “You’re a freak!”

“Freak! Freak!” They chanted.

I had tried to run away from them, but they continued to follow me, no matter how far away from permitted grounds I went. Tears stung at the back of my eyes, but I knew crying would only encourage them.

If I can just get away, they’ll get bored and leave me alone, I told myself. But that was never the case.

This time, I had gone further into the forest than I had ever dared before. To my left, I noticed a cave. I went to it quickly and listened inside for a moment. It sounded empty, save for the echoing of the taunts of Sable and Thomas.

“Freak! No one loves you!” loves you…you…you...

“No family is ever going to want you!” want you…you… “Everyone hates you!” hates you…you...

I ran inside, hoping the cave was big enough to hide in, but upon entering, found it was far too shallow for such a thing, only going in a few feet.

“There he is!” is…is…
“Come out and play, Freak!”  

Sable and Thomas stood at the entrance to the cave, effectively trapping me inside.

“Aw, are you crying, little Freak?”  

“Why don’t you just run home to Mommy?”

“Cause she’s dead!”

“Stop it!” I yelled, tears streaming down my face. Softly behind me, the walls echoed my sob.

Slowly, they entered. What they planned to do once they reached me, I was unsure, but I was almost certain it would get physical. It would not have been the first time.

“Mommy was a witch! Daddy was a demon!” Sable sang the song the whole orphanage seemed to sing at me. “Now she’s in a ditch and he is a free man!”

“Stop it!” I yelled once more. I could feel the panic and anger growing inside me like a ball of energy.

Their hideous laughter filled the cave with a cacophony of noise. I covered my ears, but I could not escape it. It surrounded me, made the floor buzz beneath me. It grew and grew, and I was pushed over the edge.

“Shut up!” I yelled at last, standing and releasing the power I had been building up. I hadn’t known at the time that it was magic, but magic it was.

Shocks of electricity sparked around me chaotically, as if I was charged. As if with practiced skill, I held out my hands. Bolts ran across the air between my hands in an instant, like lightning, and then again from my hands to their throats.

Sable and Thomas gasped, hands running to their throats, now blackened. The scent of burned flesh filled the air like a thick fog, and the power drained from me as my stomach churned with it. Sable opened her mouth to yell, but nothing came out, not even a sound. Both their eyes watered and spilled over. Thomas, in a fit of panic, clawed at his neck, pulling the black flesh to reveal tissue, red with fresh blood, muscles, and tendons.

They would live, but they would never speak again.

The scene changed.

I stood just before the door to Professor Dumbledore’s office. Last period had been over for five minutes, and it was Friday. Every other student, especially in my year—sixth year—were preparing for their last taste of fun and freedom before they began to cram for final exams and papers next week. I was in no rush. I had bigger plans.

At last, he opened the door, the usual twinkle in his eyes dimming as he discovered me on the other side.

“Oh, Tom, my good fellow! Come in.” He held open the door, and I walked in. He motioned for me to take a seat, but I did not.

“You asked to see me, Sir?”

Dumbledore nodded solemnly. “Yes, there was something of serious note that I wish to discuss with
you. It may not be an easy conversation.” His eyes darted from me to the chair, a silent plea for me to sit. Still, I did not sit.

“Alright.”

I watched him carefully. I knew he was the only one who suspected anything of my plans, of Voldemort and his followers. I wondered if he would accuse me outright or attempt to glean it out of me. I concluded that he seemed more like he would choose the latter. He was not one for direct confrontation, after all.

*That is my greatest strength against him.*

“Tom, if I may ask, what are your plans post-Hogwarts?”

I smirked to myself.

“I am…unsure, at the moment. I have been considering getting involved in politics. Many people tell me I could do well there.”

He nodded. “Yes, I agree. I think you could do some good there, too. You’ve an influence about you. Could prove useful to pull wizarding politics out of the corrupt dumps.”

“Indeed it could.”

He sighed, then. “But you don’t intend to use it for such things.” He looked down to his desk for a moment as he folded his hands there. “*This* I know for a fact. I have known for quite some time, although I hoped I was wrong.”

My eyebrows rose. *This is certainly unexpected…*

“Do you? How can you know it as fact if it has yet to happen?”

“Because you are not as clever an unpredictable as you believe yourself to be,” he stated, all premise of peace and cheer gone from his being. His grandfather-like appearance grew angular and sharp in ways I had not thought possible. As he spoke, my heart began to speed in my chest. “Now, you are still a student, but understand this: a threat to Hogwarts is a threat to one’s own wellbeing. I will do anything to protect this school, as will every professor here, whether they have fallen victim to your charisma or not. The day will come when your ambition will outgrow what is acceptable, and that is the day you will start on the path to your downfall.”

For the first time since the orphanage, I began to feel the sweat form on my brow. My confidence began to waver.

“Do I make myself clear, Tom?”

My fear must have shown, for he appeared to already know the answer.

“Yes, Sir. I understand completely.”

“Very good. That is all.”

I turned and left the room with haste, tears threatening at the back of my eyes out of habit. Although no one was around to see, the embarrassment and shame filled me all the same. I had not allowed myself to cry in so long. I no longer had the need for such things. I would not let the tears fall.

My diary grew heavier in my bag, as if feeling guilt itself.
The scene changed.

"Lily, take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off!"

"Avada Kedavra!"

The green light filled the cramped hallway of the little house in Godric’s Hollow, but everything flashed before him with black, like bad movie film.

I could hear her screaming from the upper floor…Black. I climbed the steps…I forced the door open, cast aside the chair and boxes hastily piled against it with one lazy wave of my wand ... and there she stood, Harry Potter in her arms. Black. My rival.

I could see her red hair. Black. Loose and wild around her face. Black. She dropped the baby in the crib. Black. And threw her arms wide. Black.

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!" Black.

"Stand aside, you silly girl... stand aside, now." Black.

"Not Harry, please no, take me,” Black. “kill me instead --" Black.

"This is my last warning --" Black.

"Not Harry! Please ... have mercy…” Black. “...have mercy...” Black. “Not Harry! Not Harry!” Black. “Please -- I'll do anything ...." Black.

"Stand aside. Stand aside, girl!” Black.

The green light. Black. She dropped like her husband. Black. The child had not cried. Black. Wand pointed into the boy's face. Black.

The child began to cry. Black. I did not like it crying. Black.

"Avada Kedavra!"

And then it was all black.

I opened my eyes to find myself, hours later, laying on the floor of the memory bottle room. To my left and slightly on top of my arm was my memory bottle table, completely overturned.

I lifted my head, finding it much heavier than I anticipated, my sore neck could hardly manage it, and that the action caused my headache to return. However, I saw that, by some miracle, one bottle remained, laying perfectly unharmed on top of my stomach, glowing an eerie, ghostly blue. With much difficulty, I lifted a sore, weak arm. It shook, but I was able to grab it, to hold it with some strength. It was cold and smooth, much like metal. I stared at it, unsure of its contents.

Although my head felt as though it would split, it was no longer plagued by Voldemort’s voice. As they had before, the feelings behind each experience drove him away, leaving only me behind. He was never one to feel. He left that job to me.

I held the bottle in my hand, considering it. It was the last blank spot in my memory. I knew that recalling so many memories at once had overloaded me, somehow. That much was obvious, especially considering I could not remember reliving many of the now recalled memories I could feel I had. To break the bottle would be foolish.
And yet, it was the last barrier; the last piece of magic that could possibly keep Voldemort away from Tom Riddle.

I let it fall.

“The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches…Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies…And the Dark Lord will mark him as equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not…And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives…The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies…"

I blinked, and it was over.

The prophecy. It was the last blank spot. I was complete.

*Almost complete.*

I was missing a part of me, connected to the boy who had just disappeared from my life. And a piece of my soul.

I shivered then, a long lost, cold memory coming to mind: Harry’s voice, warm and powerful, as Voldemort possessed him.

“You’re the weak one, and you’ll never know love or friendship. And I feel sorry for you.”

Tears pricked at the backs of my eyes, bringing a much-needed quench to the dry burn.

*Little did he know that he would be the one to make that a lie, I thought, slow and weak. Although, I may have thrown it all away.*

I understood, then. Before, I had questioned what Harry did at times. When he seemed foolish, or over-the-top, or unnecessary. He did it all with care. With love. He knew what it felt like, how to make it, and express it. It was the sunlight that shone into his room, that had never before touched my house.

*He fell in love with me, fully aware that I may never be worthy of it.*

The idea was ridiculous. And marvelous.

I had to find Harry. My manor, of course, had so many wards on it, tracing a magical signature was impossible. I would have to use other methods.

My head was still in immense pain, dully throbbing. Any sort of Legimency would be impossible, even simple things such as opening our connection.

With incredible difficulty and much soreness, I pulled myself into the sitting position.

*I will have to find him the hard way.*

With a shaky hand, I pulled my wand from my robes. It had been so long since its wood had touched my fingers. I was so used to performing simple spells windlessly, but I needed to focus my energy elsewhere.

*If I were Harry, where would I run away to?*

I carefully and slowly pulled my legs to the side and pushed myself to stand, holding onto the wall
for support.

To trusted ones, of course. His friends. Severus, even…

My head pulsed with sharp pain for a moment before it died down once more.

I will need his help regardless…I never should have rid of his dark mark…

I pushed myself off of the wall, finding I could stand somewhat steady on my own, although it proved to be more painful.

Well, I suppose there are other ways to find an ex-Death Eater.

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3rd Person POV:

Snape had been pacing practically since they had arrived in his office. As he stared out the window, he was trying his hardest to feel happy for Harry, yet he couldn’t bring himself to do it. Of course, he was never much of a happy person to begin with. He was not revolted by the idea—at least, not anymore. Harry was allowed to love whoever he wanted, and if that happened to be a Dark Lord who could very well benefit from that love, who was he to complain? Surely, he could be content with the idea. But what did “content” entail, exactly? His feet carried him across the room once more, behind his desk, in front of the mostly empty shelves that once held the many knick-knacks of Dumbledore, past the door, and back to the other window.

The action was beginning to drive Hermione nuts.

She had watched him move back and forth again, heard the dull tap of his shoes against the wood, around where she sat in one chair before the desk. She had asked several times if he was alright, but he would ignore her every time. It seemed that ignoring her was one of his talents.

She looked back to Ron, who leaned against the wall, arms crossed. They had addressed many of his underlying concerns (“He’s not putting us in danger, Ron! Nothing about him has changed. This could actually be really good. Just imagine what Tom Riddle could do if he cared like Harry can. At least give him a chance.”) and given some time to think things over. It seemed to be seeping in, though she couldn’t be sure until she asked again.

Once more, Snape crossed the floor to the first window. He pondered now about how Harry was feeling about their knowledge. Obviously, he was embarrassed, but did he feel shame? How new was their relationship? Had Harry even discussed his love? Was it reciprocated? Surely the added pressure of his friends’ possible rejection was great…

“Professor, are you alright?”

His feet carried him across the floor once more. He knew Weasley was not one for understanding easily, but surely, even his thick skull would come around for Harry’s sake. He couldn’t imagine why he wouldn’t. Eventually…

“Professor?”

Which means that only left Harry’s acceptance of their acceptance to consider. Would Harry be confident enough in them? Would he trust that they did not see him differently?
“Professor!”

Most importantly, would he trust that they saw Tom Riddle and not the Dark Lord? It would be an adjustment, but given some time to allow them to know him better-

“Professor Snape!”

Snape’s shoulders tensed a moment before he released them with a sigh. “What, Ms. Granger?”

Hermione surprised herself a bit by the forcefulness of her yell but stood by her choice to refuse to be ignored any longer.

“Are you alright?”

He rolled his eyes and waved her question off with a scoff. “I’m fine. It’s not me you should be worrying about.”

Hermione sighed and glanced back over to Ron.

“Ron, how are you?”

Ron lifted his gaze from the floor where he had been staring. His face and ears were no longer pink, and his eyes had softened considerably.

“I’m feeling better, I guess.” He shrugged. “Thinking more about what you said. You’re right, as you always are.”

Hermione smiled. “So, you understand what I meant, then? Do you know how you feel about it, yet?”

“Well…” Ron searched the air for words. “…I was bloody shocked when we found out. We already weren’t sure about him staying there with You-Know-Who. I was suspicious of him. And then we find out Harry was missing, and so was he, and then that Harry had to go to the hospital and we didn’t even know about it! I was starting to think that maybe he wasn’t letting Harry talk to us, or that maybe that fire wasn’t an accident. And then we find him…them…it was a bit…” his mouth drew into a line for a moment, “you know…”

Hermione nodded, relief filling her. Ron was finally talking about it in a rational way. “Yes, I understand completely.” And she did. She had felt the same way, hearing all those things. “But if Harry really loves…Tom” she said carefully, “…then we should try to trust Tom. For Harry’s sake.”

“Indeed.”

Hermione jumped, not expecting Snape’s deep monotone to speak.

“I’ve been considering it,” he continued, “and I’m nearly certain that Harry’s care, if not his influence, is just what Tom needs.” He paused for a moment, finding the name to leave a bad taste in his mouth.

Hermione’s smile returned, then. “That’s wonderful! Then…” she looked back to Ron, “we can fully approve of Harry’s choice?”

After a moment of quiet contemplation, Ron nodded.

“Excellent,” Snape said, turning his attention back to the window. “Then soon enough we may-”
His sentence dropped off with no hopes of concluding.

“Professor?” Hermione turned her body in the chair to face Snape. From where she sat, she could just see the profile of his face as the color drained from it, mouth slightly agape.

“Stay here,” he ordered, then. He turned sharply on his heel, black robes billowing behind him with a flourish. “I shall return.” He made for the door.

Hermione and Ron shared a look of concern before they both ran over to the window Snape had been looking out just moments ago. The sky outside was deepening into blues, but still held tightly onto pinks and oranges. In a band of light purple just over the Forbidden Forrest, however, was a bright green, neon like a flashing sign: the Dark Mark.

In an instant, the pair ran out the door, catching up with Snape in no time at all.

“I told you both to wait in my office,” he said when they were at his sides.


“We aren’t going to sit back and do nothing, Professor,” Hermione clarified. “Not if Harry’s in trouble.”

Snape rolled his eyes, but advised, “Be prepared for danger.”

“We always are,” Ron muttered.

As they exited through the main entrance of Hogwarts, they could see the spot, glowing ever brighter as they neared the singular figure that stood on the edge of the forest. They could hardly make it out, but it seemed to be growing closer.

Snape matched the silhouette with ease.

“What are you doing here…Tom?” he shouted when the figure was just within earshot.

Hermione and Ron stared at the man, piecing together the name with the appearance of the man. They could hardly recognize him in the darkening light, although Hermione wondered if it was more than that. She never would have pegged this man, one who seemed weak in his movements, thinner somehow, unconfident, as The Dark Lord.

_Maybe it’s the shadows_, she thought, though an uneasy feeling stuck in her gut.

“What’s Harry?” she shouted, then.

At last, the two parties met in the middle, stopping a couple feet apart.

Snape noted Tom’s labored breathing, as well as his lack of poise. He appeared to be weak. Something was definitely wrong.

“It is…” Tom finally spoke between his slowing breaths, “a complex story. Harry…” he paused, “has disappeared. I have no means of finding him currently.”

“Disappeared?” Hermione repeated.

“Why can’t you find him?” Ron asked, anger already edging into his tone.
“Why did he leave?” Snape asked.

Tom sighed. “We…I…” he corrected but did not continue. “There was…”


The red-haired boy’s words were not ones he was accustomed to hearing directed at him. He was taken aback, slightly.

I suppose I deserve them, he thought, then.

Tom’s eyes fell to the ground. “He confessed his love for me. And…in a moment of weakness…I told him I did not love him in return…that I…used him.”

The other three were silent for what seemed like forever. Tom could feel their eyes on him, but he dared not look up to meet them. Shame washed over him.

“Do you love him?”

The soft, quiet voice took him off guard. Not moments ago, the voice had been accusatory. Tom looked up to the red-haired boy and saw, then, the uncertainty: the caution in his eyes, the press of his lips together, the tenseness of his jaw. His entire body language screamed with concern for Harry. It was something he had seen in Harry, too. Was that what love did to people? He wondered if anyone would ever show such feeling for him.

“I…cannot say I know what love is…” he began. He was too tired for anything but honesty. Although every logical thought in his mind warned against being vulnerability, he could see the vulnerability before him, too. That was trust, he had learned. He would need to trust these people, he knew, to find Harry. “…But I do care for Harry more than I have ever cared for anyone before. If he still cares for me…I would be willing to learn…”

“To learn to love?” Hermione asked, tone only slightly cutting.

“Yes,” he answered lamely. Tom’s gaze flicked over to Snape, who had been scanning over him since he’d been able to see him.

“Why can you not find him?” Snape’s eyes narrowed. “You should have no trouble at all.”

Tom nodded absently. “I had this room of memory bottles. It was a place where I could go to forget a memory entirely. I taught Harry how to make them, as well. He chose to forget some…traumatic experiences in his life, as had I. We were in that room when this all occurred. Harry knocked over his bottles after my…well, then he disapperated. I then had my own…internal struggles and knocked over my own bottles. Harry only had a few, but I had many. I believe I have sustained a fainting spell. I have certainly been weakened considerably.”

Snape’s eyes closed with the sheer idiocy of the whole situation.

“Was one bottle the memory of when…he was eight?”

“When he was eight and every time afterward,” Tom answered grimly.

Snape gave an exasperated sigh.

Hermione and Ron only looked at one another, confusion and concern on their features. They wanted to know, but surely there was a reason Harry had not told them?
“So he…” Snape paused, a hand going to his face to rub at his temples. “How long had he forgotten those memories?”

Tom nodded again. “Since before we had…relations.”

Snape’s other hand rose and began to rub at his other temple. “And you told him not only that you did not love him, but that you used him? As in physically used him?”

“Yes,” Tom answered, voice barely above a whisper.

“For heaven’s sake,” Snape muttered. “Do you care for him at all? Are you sure?”

Tom could feel the prickling of tears behind his eyes once more. He cursed his current state, holding them back as best he could.

“I do,” he said, voice cracking despite his best efforts. He could feel it all, then: the self-loathing, the guilt, the unadulterated shame from a lifetime of being both who he was born to be and who he desired to be, all coming back to him. He had no mother. He murdered his own father. He murdered countless people. And he could now remember every single one of them, from the looks on their faces to the pain it caused him to use their death to split his soul into pieces. He could remember his mistreatment and neglect at the orphanage, the teasing and bullying at the hands of the other children, the concerned whispers of the caretakers to each and every potential parent that came in. He had tortured many of his own followers, even killed some. He’d never even so much as considered caring for any of these people.

Harry was the only person ever. And he’d ruined it in the worst possible way.

He let his neck drop his head down, and the tears fell, then, right from his eyes to the ground. It was as he had always feared: he was the same, weak child that he had always been. No one loved him. No one wanted him. No one would ever.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, then. He looked up in surprise to see the red-haired boy, eyes not quite soft but caring, face not quite sympathetic but understanding.

“Everyone makes mistakes,” he said, voice just loud enough for Tom’s ears to pick up. “I can tell you for certain that I’ve made loads of ‘em. Especially with Harry and ‘Mione. But if you really care about him, you’ve just gotta tell him.” His eyes shifted as if to glance back at Hermione, but he did not turn his head. “They’ll never know if you don’t tell them.”

With that, Ron pulled his hand away and stepped back, turning to Snape.

“So, what’s the plan for finding Harry?”

Snape glanced between the two briefly, watched as Tom dried his eyes with the backs of his hands, and then spoke.

“Well, considering Harry, we may want to check the places he frequents, then move on to places of meaning, and so on. We may enlist the aid of others to search large areas, such as Hogwarts, but ultimately, we do not want news to spread of his disappearance.”

Ron and Hermione nodded.

“Wait,” Hermione turned to Tom. “How did you know we were here? How did you find us?”

“I have an enchanted looking glass,” he began to explain, hoping he was beginning to regain his
composure, though his eyes had begun to burn with dryness once more. “It shows you a person you wish to see…theoretically. I have never been able to see Harry within it.”

Her eyes brightened. “Maybe one of us can!”

Snape nodded. “We shall try that first. Let us go to your manor.” Snape held out his arms. “Don’t bother trying to apparate in your current condition,” he added to Tom. “It’s a miracle you didn’t splinch yourself on your way here.”

Tom gave a humorless half-smirk, pulling a small object from his robes: a small, round, glass paper weight. “I used a portkey. Premade. One way.”

The other two had already grabbed onto Snape sleeves and waited for Tom to follow suit. He placed the portkey back into his robes and did so. Snape disapperated.

They arrived in the large meeting room. Immediately, Snape and Tom began to make their way up the stairs and down the hall, Ron and Hermione following their lead. With ease, Snape unlocked the third door from the end and pushed it open.

“Show me Harry,” he ordered. Nothing appeared in the glass.

“How is it supposed to work?” Hermione asked, looking it over.

“I have already told you all I know about it,” Tom answered. “You tell it to show you someone and, usually, it will show you them. I…did not take the time to ask the person the…idiosyncrasies of it before I…came into possession of it.”

“Show me Molly Weasley,” Hermione said to it. In the glass, the living room of the Burrow came into view, Mrs. Weasley flicking her wand so that the dusters would start clearing the dust from the many objects hanging on the wall. “Okay. Show me Harry Potter.” The picture faded to nothing. “Huh.”

“Maybe he doesn’t want to be found,” Snape considered.

“Never? He has a constant feeling of never wanting to be found?” Tom pressed his back against the wall, feeling the need for the support.

“Possibly,” Snape replied, though his tone was unsure.

“Show me Harry,” Ron said to it. Again, nothing happened. “Please?” Still, nothing appeared.

Hermione sighed. “We’ll have to search the old-fashioned way.”

“I know sometimes he would hide out in the fields around the Burrow,” Ron offered. “Or behind the shed.”

“He does enjoy the outdoors,” Tom said.

“I’ve found him a couple times in empty classrooms at Hogwarts,” Hermione offered.

“Or out by the Quidditch pitch when no one’s there!” Ron added.

Snape nodded. “Good. Then we can split up. I will go to Hogwarts. I can enlist the faculty. We can get a full sweep of the grounds that way. Mr. Weasley, you can check your home. I’m sure your family will be more than happy to help. Where else? Could he be anywhere here?”
Tom shook his head. “No. He’s not here. If he were, I would be able to tell. I feel so…” his body 
shivered just once, “…empty when he is not here.”

The other three looked at him but said nothing of his words.

“Then what other places could he run to?” Snape looked to the other two. “It is late, so possible 
places where he could sleep.”

“Well, there’s the Grimmauld Place,” Hermione said. “Not much, but it has sentimental value.”

Snape nodded once. “Yes, good.” He thought for a moment, considering Harry and the situation. 
With the return of his most traumatic memories, surely his past was on his mind. “We should also 
check the house of his muggle relatives. He may return there, given the circumstances.”

Tom nodded his agreement. Hermione and Ron just stared.

“Ms. Granger, you will search the Grimmauld Place. And Tom…” Snape met his gaze. He’d never 
before seen such a vulnerability in the man before, and it was beginning to unnerve him. “You will 
search Harry’s muggle home. Are you able to send a Patronus?”

Tom hissed in a way that should have been a laugh.

*I’m doubtful, he almost said. It’s a miracle I ever could.*

Instead, he pulled out his wand and closed his eyes, concentrating.

He and Harry stood before a sandy tan bed on flooring that looked like waves. He watched as Harry 
marveled over the room, his face not showing his happiness, but his wonder, his amazement. He was 
so taken with the room, with the details and the beauty of it all, that the feelings leaked through their 
connection. Harry explored the view from the bathroom, the greenness of it all. Tom could 
remember, then, seeing Harry come back to him, all that amazement and wonder turning towards 
him.

He thought Tom was amazing and wonderful.

*“Expecto Patronum.”*

A ghostly white basilisk shot from the tip of his wand, no problem. Hermione and Ron jumped back, 
startled at the large snake form that had suddenly appeared, but Snape simply gave a curt nod.

The snake faded, and Snape continued on.

“Send news with your Patronus to me once you have finished searching your location. We will meet 
at the front of Hogwarts in one hour.”

Hermione and Ron nodded, both disapperating without hesitation.

Tom looked to Snape, his happy memory fading, replaced instead with dread and guilt.

Snape placed his hand on Tom’s shoulder and apparated.

They arrived at a small house in a line of other small, ordinary houses. Snape released him, then, and 
disapperated, leaving Tom on the dark sidewalk, dimly lit with street lights whose yellow glow 
seemed to hardly pierce the coming darkness at all.

He stared at the house, many thoughts running through his mind. It would not be the first time he had
shown up uninvited to a house Harry had lived in, where he had to force his way inside. It was not the first house where something traumatic happened to Harry, something he was entirely helpless to prevent or stop. And it most certainly was not the first house whose protection Tom would violate.

He could feel it: the feeble remains of a strong blood magic. It was no Fidelius Charm, but it would have kept him at bay, had he attempted to best it, he was sure. He would not have been able to outsmart this one.

_How ironic, _he thought, _that he was being protected in a home that only sought to harm him, by the very people whose blood he shared._

He had hardly heard of an eviler thing.

He took a slow step towards the house, opening his mind slowly, carefully, only managing a slight budge in the barrier.

_Harry, _he called to it, knowing the barrier was still well in place. _I want to apologize. I have made a grave mistake. I lied, and it was foolish. Please...come back._
Harry’s POV:

I was in a white room. There was nothing there except me, wearing my grey shirt and jeans, sticking out of the pureness around me. I wasn’t even sure it was a room, really; there were no walls or floor, it seemed; it was more of a space. Everywhere I looked was white, so bright it seemed to glow. I took a step, then another. I wasn’t sure if I had moved forward, exactly, since nothing seemed to move, but I continued to take steps. My surroundings were beginning to hurt my eyes when I spotted something up ahead that brought relief to my eyes: a shadowy figure.

“Excuse me!” I shouted to it. The figure moved slightly. They were so far away; I could barely tell they had turned to face me. “Do you know where we are?”

The figure moved in an odd way. It wasn’t until it had come closer, into better focus, that I realized they were walking towards me. I could make out their silhouette now: slim, on the tall side, well managed hair, poised when they walked so that they seemed to float. They closer the figure came, the more details I could see. It was a male, dark hair, pressed clothes, broad shoulders, ruby eyes. My breath slowed, but my heart raced.

I knew that person.

But he’d broken my heart. He’d treated me like an object. I didn’t want to see him now. But there was nowhere to hide, no where to go.

He stopped ten feet away and stared at me, eyes soft like velvet.

“Harry,” he said, voice smooth, flowing into my ears fluidly, sending electric shocks straight to my heart. “Come here.” He held his arms wide, an open invitation.

I couldn’t help myself. I loved him. I needed him. I ran over to him with no inhibitions, as fast as my legs would take me, not holding back when I ran into him, wrapping my arms around his solid body with as much force as I could muster. His warmth began to seep into the cold that had begun to form around me.

“I did not mean what I said,” he whispered into my ear. “I am so sorry, Harry. Truly. I never want anything bad to happen to you. I…I love you.”

Tears fell from my eyes. The words that came from his mouth were perfect. They were everything I had wanted to hear since I realized my own love for him. And I was here, in his arms. He held me close to him, surrounding me with a safety I’d never before known. I buried my face in his shoulder.
It’s too perfect.

I knew it was, but I didn’t want to let the moment go. I wrapped my arms tighter around him.

Any moment now…

I felt fingers run through my hair. I pulled away just enough to look at him, his features gentle and full of adoration—eyes bright with happiness, lips curled into a smile that made the corners of his eyes crinkle and the apples of his cheeks perch high on his face. It was a look I had never seen on his face, but one I wished for. He pressed his forehead to mine, and we stared into each other’s eyes. We were so close, his two eyes merged into one, filling my vision with cherry red. It was quickly becoming my favorite shade of red. I would give anything to stare at it forever.

The tears continued to run from my cheeks as sorrow began to overtake me. This was everything I ever wanted, and it was that very fact that made me realize it was all a dream. My chest began to shake with sobs.

I pulled away, untangling my arms from his, shaking my head viciously, making the world spin with pure white.

“You’re not real,” I said to Tom. “You’re just a dream. A dream that’s going to be ripped away when I wake up! This is all in my head!”

Tom simply stood there, face falling into sobriety.

“Of course it is happening in your head,” he said, “but why on earth should that mean it is not real?”

And then the pure white around us began to fade into darkness. I reached out for Tom, and he for me, but before we could grab each other, the world went dark.

My eyes finally opened, but it was still dark. The surface under me was hard, and the metallic coldness was seeping through my clothes and into my spine.

I sat up with caution, careful not to hit my head on the handles of the playground’s spinning wheel. It wasn’t meant to sleep on, but it beat sleeping in the dirt. My eyes burned with dryness, all their natural tears depleted, instead staining my cheeks.

Shivering, I pushed my bare feet of the cold metal and into the dirt, finding it only a slight relief. In only my jeans and shirt, I was left feeling exposed to the biting wind of the late august night. I hadn’t considered bringing anything to keep me warm, and the thought now seemed obvious. Summer was ending. It was Autumn, practically. Nights were colder.

I felt around myself for my wand but found only metal.

“Accio wand.”

I held out my hand, and my wand flew into it in seconds. I casted a quick warming spell over myself, finding it wore off much too quick. My skin had no chance to defrost, still holding tightly onto the clammy numbness. I was about to cast another but saw no point. The warmth of the spell was artificial and temporary.

I knew what kind of warmth I needed.

I shook my head, my train of thought from earlier continuing right where it left off.
Of all the things he could have done…even an Imperious curse…he chose to use me for his own pleasure…to force it on me, make me want it…that sick bastard…

I hated the thought because something in my head screamed that Tom would never.

Making me practice curses, that voice said, that is something Tom would do. Encouraging me to hate people, maybe. But share everything we shared? Be as vulnerable as he was with me? And then reveal that he was just using me? That he felt nothing for me? He would never.

I scoffed inwardly. And yet here we are, I thought bitterly.

I hated everything he had done since I had arrived at his manor, from giving me a bed to sleep in to decorating that room for me, and everything in between. I hated that he didn’t kill me on the spot once I returned to the forest, that he extended an official offer of partnership, and later an unofficial, personal offer of partnership. I hated that he complicated everything, making me see him as a human being rather than some inhuman villain. It was so easy to hate Voldemort, to show his actions and to brand them as obviously evil. But Tom’s actions were anything but, it seemed. He had me so completely convinced that he cared about me, that I was not just his ex-enemy, or The Boy-Who-Lived, or whatever anyone else sees when they look at me. He made me feel like Harry Potter was just my name. And that was probably what I hated most.

And loved.

I couldn’t help but love him. The more I thought about hating him, the more I remembered the little things that made me love him: the way his perfect hair would fall out of place, the way he could take my breath with every kiss, the soft look in his eyes reserved for me, how he would ask for permission, and wait for me to arrive before eating meals. He could be so kind when he wanted to be. It was something he prevented others from seeing for fear that they would mistake it for weakness.

Maybe it was.

But none of that mattered anymore. I couldn’t help him. I couldn’t help the world from him. I couldn’t even help myself. If Tom was gone and only Voldemort remained, or if they were truly the same person all along, then I wanted nothing more to do with the world. My life purpose was over, I decided.

I’m so sorry, Mum, I thought, my eyes looking up to the darkened sky above me. I know you sacrificed your life to save me, but I failed. This is it. I’m not strong enough, even with your protection. I don’t deserve it anyway. My eyes burned more, a request for tears to cry.

I shivered again. Slowly, I stood, hoping my blood would move around more, heat me up. I couldn’t freeze to death.

Not yet. I had something to finish, first. I just had to work up the nerve, and the body warmth, to do it.

3rd Person POV:

Ron arrived at the Burrow, figuring everyone would be heading off to sleep, but knowing it wouldn’t take much to convince everyone to wake up and help search. He ran through the field and into the house, immediately finding himself caught off guard by the whole family sitting in the living
room.

“What’s everyone doing up?” he asked in confusion.

Mrs. Weasley stood up. “We were worried! You and Hermione just left! No note! No one wanted to sleep until you came back. Is everything alright?”

Ron sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. “Well, Harry’s gone missing.”

Mrs. Weasley gasped. Everyone else’s eyes widened.

“I’ve come here to search,” Ron continued. “Has anyone seen him?”

Everyone shook their head and glanced around the room at the others.

“Alright, then. We need to spread out and search everywhere here. He would most likely be outside, but someone should check the house, too, just in case.”

At once, everyone stood and began to bustle about. Ron led the small crowd through the doors and out to the fields, where everyone (except Mrs. Weasley, who checked the house) began milling through the tall grasses, searching for signs of Harry. Without much coordination, they seemed to split into different areas.

Fred and George finished their area first. “We’re going to check around the shed!” they announced in unison to the family.

One twin went inside and the other walked about the outside. From within, Fred exclaimed, “Oi!”

George rushed back to the door. “Did you find him?”

Fred stepped out the door, a large tin jar in his hands. “No, but I found out where our gunpowder went. We’ve been looking for this for weeks!”

George shook his head. “But we’ve been in there while it’s been gone. Where was it?”

“In the corner, just behind the box we keep the balls in,” Fred answered.

Ginny walked by with a smirk on her face. “Next time, you both should think twice before you put fireworks in my porridge.”

Both twins shook their heads.

“Unbelievable,” Fred said.

“Absolutely no appreciation for comedy,” George agreed.

“I almost put some in your underwear drawer,” Ginny said, eyes scanning over the horizon distractedly. “I thought better of it. Was going to put some in your sock drawer tomorrow.”

“Anything?” Ron called out.

“Nothing over here,” Percy said from the other side of the house. “I’ve looked twice, now.”

“Nothing here,” Bill said.

“Haven’t seen a thing,” Mr. Weasley said. “Not even a mouse.”
“Not ‘ere,” said Fleur.

Ron sighed. “I’ve got nothing, either.”

Everyone gathered and went to the house, where Mrs. Weasley had just finished checking the house.

“I’ve found nothing but a few dirty socks under the beds,” she announced.

Ron nodded solemnly. “How long has it been since we’ve started looking?”

“Forty minutes?” Percy considered, looking at his watch. “Forty-seven minutes.”

“Alright,” he looked around the room. “Well, I should go check in to see if the others found anything. Keep your eyes open. If he shows up, let me know. Patronus charms, alright? Be back late, Mum.”

Ron gave her a hug, which she refused to let end.

“Be safe,” she said.

“I’ll do my best.” Ron jogged back out to the fields and disapperated.

Hermione had arrived at the Grimmauld Place not seconds after Ron had arrived at the Burrow. She had taken two steps inside, her wand at the ready, when Kreacher appeared.

“What you be needing?" Filthy mudblood, he muttered under his breath.

“Have you seen Harry Potter here?” she asked, all-too aware of the dirty looks she was receiving.

He crinkled his long nose. “Kreacher has now seen Harry Potter in ages.”

Hermione sighed. “Alright. Thank you, Kreacher. I’m going to look around and see if I find him. Could you help me?”

“Kreacher would know if Harry Potter was here.”

Hermione nodded once. “Alright. I’ll give it a look-over, just to be sure.”

She walked around the house elf and into the house. She stepped into the dining room, which led into the kitchen. Pulling out her wand, she cast “Homenum Revlio.” Nothing happened, and so she moved on, heading up the stairs. She repeated the spell in several other rooms, getting the same result. She had one room left to check when she found Kreacher in her path once more.

“Kreacher already told ya. Master Harry Potter is not here.”

“Yes, I know. But I’m just checking to make sure he isn’t hiding somewhere.” She was trying to be nice (elves had rights, too), but this was an important matter. She tried stepping around the elf once more, but found he blocked her path.

“Please, Kreacher. I’m just looking. I’ll leave as soon as I look.”

“Harry Potter is not here,” he repeated.

Hermione was losing hope. “I’m really sorry for this, Kreacher. Petrificus Totalus.” Her spell his Kreacher, and he froze in place.
Shaking her head at herself, she hurried into the last room, casting the spell *and* looking around, for good measure. Once she finished, she left the room and quickly released the bind on the elf.

Kreacher started muttering to himself (something about blood that Hermione didn’t catch). She looked to the clock. It was a quarter till. She needed to get back to Hogwarts. She took a moment to rub at her forehead, wrinkled from all the worry she carried there, and then disapperated.

After dropping off Tom, Snape had arrived back at Hogwarts. It was quite a large school; this he knew. It would take everyone on the grounds to be able to search the whole place in an hour. He had walked through the doors and made the first turn towards his office when he saw McGonagall and Flitwick headed his way.

“Good evening, Severus,” McGonagall greeted. “What are you doing up so late?”

“I was about to ask you both the same question, but I have something much more urgent,” he watched as their pleasant expressions sobered. “Harry Potter has gone missing. He may be hiding somewhere in the school. Please alert others within your house and then begin to search. Keep me informed.”

They quickly nodded and hurried off, sending patronuses as he did. Snape sent off one to Hagrid, then another to Sprout and Slughorn for them to inform their houses and then search.

He continued walking but thought better of going to his office.

*Harry will not be hiding there. I need to be searching.*

He changed course for the Room of Requirement. It was the one place that would hide him, rather than him hide there.

Snape arrived at the wall and waited. Many long moments passed. He paced before the wall, concentrating immensely on finding a place to hide. After a bit, a door appeared. Snape walked through the doors, finding a room filled to the brim with an eccentric assortment of items, like an cluttered attic on steroids. He raised his wand.

*Homenum Revelio.*

When nothing happened, he sighed.

*Why could Potter not pick a clever place to hide?*

Snape turned and left the room, already considering more obvious hiding places. He arrived at Gryffindor Tower. The portrait asked for the password, which he gave. The portrait swung open, revealing McGonagall and a few of the other professors gathered in the common room.

She turned her attention to him, eyes not filled with anything near success.

“We haven’t found anything, Severus. Not a thread out of line. I’ve even checked the Quidditch field. Rubeus is checking the forest as we speak. Filius took the Great Hall. Helga looked through the kitchens. Horace checked the Astronomy Tower. There are still empty classrooms to check, and other miscellaneous rooms. Are we certain he’s hiding at Hogwarts?”

Snape pressed his lips into a thin line. “No, we are not.”

McGonagall let out a breath of exasperation before nodding. “Well, we shall keep searching.” She turned to the others. “Have we checked the girl’s lavatory on the second floor? The Chamber? The
secret passageways? Hogsmead?”

“Sybil and Aurora were checking the second floor, I believe,” one said.

“Do we have a map of the tunnels?” another asked.

The group began to discuss.

McGonagall turned back to Snape, who waved his hand in dismissal. “Inform me if you find him,” he called out as he stepped back through the portrait hole.

So much time had passed, but he’d hardly done any searching, it seemed.

*I waited so long for that infernal door to appear…*

He mentally cursed the wasted time, especially since the effort was fruitless. It was already nearing an hour since they had split up. He needed to get back to the others. He had not received any messages, so he assumed no one had found him yet. It was a frustrating prospect, that a boy could hide so easily from those who know him best.

Still, he wished Harry would be found. He knew he was not in a good situation. Every second felt more crucial than the last. He hoped Harry would not do anything irrational but was almost certain that the clock was ticking away until the moment he did. His feet quickened their pace, carrying him to the front of Hogwarts with the utmost urgency.

They were on a timer, and he had to make sure that time did not run out.

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**Tom Riddle’s POV:**

I stared at Harry’s muggle house for a bit longer before I finally walked up to the door. It was locked, but I unlocked it with ease, even in my state.

The plain white door swung open to reveal the rather small inside. It was incredibly plain, covered in horribly patterned wallpaper and devoid of all furniture. Each room held nothing but air and the distant smell of stale sweets.

I walked into the kitchen and found that it was smaller than my closet. The fridge was the only appliance missing, the space it left unforgivably large. It had obviously been large. I wondered, for a moment, if Harry’s relatives had been fond of food.

I left the kitchen in a few steps, making my way down the hallway. I looked up to find the stairs, and then to my left there was a door. Like a ghost, Harry’s words returned to me.

“Small room. Yeah. My room was a cupboard under the stairs. This is like a mansion compared to that…”

I opened the door and peered inside. The cupboard hardly could have comfortably fit a few coats, let alone a child. And the ceiling of it slanted up following the stairs, meaning one end one only had to couch halfway to stand up, but the other required one to be crouched on the floor to fit under.

*How did he spend so many years in such a small place?*

Of course, I answered my own question before I had even finished asking it: he had no choice.
It didn’t matter how much he had wanted to leave, or how badly they treated him. This had been his
residence, and some people thought that meant the same thing as home. It was an awfully familiar
situation.

I closed the door and continued on, making my way up the stairs. Many of the steps were worn in
the middle, the most worn revealing themselves by creaking under my weight.

Surely this house is not that old?

At the top of the stairs, I could see there were three somewhat-small bedrooms.

One for his guardians. There are still two others. Why could Harry not stay in one of those? Even if
his guardians had other children, surely sharing rooms was not out of the question…

Stepping into the first bedroom, I found it a horrible mess, even without anything in it. The carpet
was stained throughout. The wall was marked and damaged. Someone had terribly abused the room.

And it smells like… I sniffed the air. Ham? I shook my head. Disgusting.

I went to the next room. There was a bare window and a hook left in the wall. The hook was not
large enough to hold anything like a painting, so I wondered what purpose it could possibly have
had. I went over to pull on it and test its strength—its looks may have been deceiving—only to pull it
from the wall with ease, leaving a sticky substance behind. The wall was undamaged.

If it was so easy to remove, why did they not take it off when they left?

I dropped the hook and moved onto the next room. It was just as damaged at the first, but many of
the stains on the carpet were a faded, deep red, like wine. It was the largest of the rooms, and yet did
not appear to have been occupied by a responsible, or careful, person.

These muggles could not care for anything if their life depended on it. I curled up my lips in disgust.
Truly revolting that they willingly gave these people a child to care for.

My mind began to buzz, then. It was such an odd feeling, like there was adrenaline collecting. It
made my emptiness feel whole once more, like I had found the key to a room long locked up.

Harry is here.

I froze where I stood.

He will find me. Then what?

I considered that maybe he would run again. I could not let him. I needed time to explain myself, to
let everyone know that he was alright. I needed to know where he was, and to never again feel so
alone in my own mind.

The door creaked open downstairs followed by footsteps.

“Bloody fucking hell,” a hoarse voice muttered. It was definitely Harry.

I took a step backward, hoping to get further back into the room and give myself time to send off a
message to the others before I was found. The floor creaked underneath my weight, and I froze once
more.

“Who’s there?” Harry called from downstairs, tone tight with anticipation.
I shut my eyes and rushed into a happy thought.

_Harry and I kissing on the hills. The grass around us is green. The air smells like…grass…and Harry._

It was hardly worthy, but it had to do.

_‘Expecto Patronum,’_ I whispered. A wisp of light came from my wand, not fully formed in the slightest, but shot off, taking my message with it.

“I know someone else is here. Show yourself!” Harry yelled.

I did not dare move. I wanted to go to him, to surrender to him and explain myself, but in that moment, I feared what he would say, what he would do. I considered, for a moment, that he would look at me with hatred, with disdain. I could not bear it. Not from his eyes.

_“Homenum Revelio.”_ A few seconds of silence passed. “I know you’re there! I saw you! Show yourself!”

With some hesitation, I took a step forward, and then another. Then, my feet were carrying me, not quickly, but with purpose. I descended the stairs and down the hallway to find Harry standing in the middle of the empty living room, a thin shadow amongst much fuller ones. In the sparse light from the barely erupting day, I could just make out the mess of his hair, the paleness of his skin, and the dark circles that had resurfaced under his cat-like green eyes. When our eyes met, Harry’s expression of anger drained into betrayal.

I put up both of my hands, palms out, at shoulder height, hoping to show him I meant no harm.

“Harry, I—”

_“Petrificus Totalus!”_ I was hit with the spell, freezing in place in an instant.

Harry’s face was fierce, but his eyes were full of sorrow. “I don’t know why you’re here, but I don’t care.” His voice was low and dangerous, like Voldemort’s when he was angry, or murderous. “You know…you put me through hell in many ways…but this was new. You made me like it. You…” he clenched his fists. “This is worse. And I…I can’t believe you actually thought to do it when it would have been so much easier just to kill me. But…” he unclenched his fists and looked around the room. “It’s done. I’m done. I…came here hoping to find my uncle, but…I guess I can’t even do that right.”

He was quiet for a long moment, the whites of his eyes growing red with irritation. He rubbed at them but seemed to find no relief.

“I was hit with the spell, freezing in place in an instant.

“Can I ask you a favor? It’s just up your alley. I need you to find a man, muggle, named Vernon Dursley. His wife is named Petunia, and they have a son named Dudley. Find that man…” he shut his eyes, tightly. “…and kill him.” He shifted his grip on his wand. ‘Please,’ he whispered.

He was silent.

He opened his eyes and looked at me. “Well think something!” he yelled, accusing.

I pushed once against the barrier at the back of my mind with all my might, waiting a moment to see if it would move. It would not budge.
Harry let go of a sound that was half a laugh, half a cry.

“I don’t even get your thoughts anymore? Am I not good enough for them? Or was that part of the plan to make me think I loved you? You get into my mind, and it’s all easy after that, isn’t it?” He shook his head. “Merlin… I still love you. Or, I love who I thought you were. Does that person even exist? Did he ever exist? Or was he all some act? Some ploy to seduce me for whatever sick game you wanted to play…”

His hands ran up to his head and pushed against it, as if he were in pain.

“I was so stupid!”

He let out a grunt of frustration. Then his hands relaxed, one going to his side and the other pointing his wand at me.

“I would let you watch, but you’d probably like that, wouldn’t you? You’ve always wanted to watch the light leave my eyes.”

Harry…no! I continued to claw at the barrier in my mind, desperate, not bothering to check for any change in the level of protection. Harry!

A small flash of light flew from the tip of his wand, hitting me and knocking me onto my back. I could only see the ceiling and the top of the railing of the stairs.

You can’t do this! Please! Give me time to explain!

“How does it feel now? You can’t see, but you’ll know.”

Harry, you can’t do this.

Harry scoffed. “Sure I can.”

There was a bright flash of light in the dim house, blinding my forcibly opened eyes. He cried out, then, and the sound rang in my ears like a bell. One by one, my senses turned off, filled with nothing but the sound of Harry’s cry and the spots that danced on my vision.

Please…I’m sorry.
Severus Snape’s POV:

When I arrived at our meeting place, Hermione and Ron waited for me there. They sat on the floor like small children, engaged in conversation, when they saw me arrive.

“You didn’t find anything, either?” Weasley asked.

“I did not, but Hogwarts, as I said before, is large. I still have the faulty searching.”

“I didn’t find anything at the Grimmauld Place,” Hermione informed me. “Just Kreacher.”

“Nothing at my house, either,” continued Weasley, “Not even with my whole family looking.”

Harry Potter, how do you manage to evade us? I sighed and nodded. “Where is Tom?”

“We’re still waiting for him to arrive,” Hermione said. “He hasn’t shown, yet, and no word about him finding Harry or not.” She paused. “Do you think he needs help getting back?” she asked, voice timidly curious, as if Tom would be embarrassed for her to ask such a question (he may have been, had he been able to hear such things).

“He may, but I will not pick him up until he sends word that he requires assistance.”

We were silent a moment. I did not find the quiet to be suffocating, but clearly Weasley did.

“It’s weird to think that You-Know-Who can cast a Patronus,” he said. “I’d’ve never thought he could be happy.”

“His name is Tom,” Hermione corrected.

“Tom, then,” Ron said. “I didn’t think Tom had it in him.”

I found myself silently agreeing with the boy. The fact went against every bit of knowledge I previously had on Tom. He had never once shown any indication of truly enjoying anything but success, but success itself was not a memory, nor was it something he had considered himself to have achieved.

How, then? What makes Tom Riddle happy?

“Harry taught him,” I explained absently, half lost in my thoughts.

“Of course he did,” Hermione said, half a smile on her face. “Harry’s taught practically everyone, it seems. Ron and I. The whole of Dumbledore’s Army. Now Tom. It makes sense. He knows just what to say, how to help people who are having difficulties with it. Who would’ve thought you could teach happiness?” She gave a sort of small, breathy laugh. Ron watched her with a smile and gentle eyes.

We fell back into silence, for which I was both thankful and worried. A glance at my watch showed it was five minutes past our meeting time. It was possible that Tom did not have a means of tracking time, but he would pride himself on his punctuality. If he thought he would be late, he would be early.

And yet we had still received no word.
I let no sign show of my concern. It would not at all help the situation. Instead, I stood and considered what would happen once we found Harry.

_Their relationship must be one that can be fixed. It seems that communication is the problem, between them. They just need to sit and discuss, but I doubt they will do so willingly. They need a buffer...maybe I could..._

“Professor!” Hermione called, pointing out towards the forest. In the distance, a flash of light hurried our way. “It...doesn’t look like his patronus. What is it?”

As it drew closer, it was easy to see it was a patronus, only lacking its corporeal form. I began walking briskly towards it, the other two following shortly after. When we finally met it, it spoke its message.

“Severus, I have found him. He is here. Come quickly.”

_At last._

I sent off a Patronus to Minverva with orders to cancel their search. In the same breath, I nearly told the other two to stay put and that I would return, but something stopped me.

Instead, I offered out an arm and said, “Let’s go.”

They grabbed my sleeve, and we apparated just before Harry’s muggle house. The sky was just beginning to lighten, but the silence of the night still fell over the neighborhood. As such, we could hear every muffled word from inside the house.

“Harry, I-”

_“Petrificus Totalus!”_

I held out both of my arms, preventing the other two from running into the situation blindly. This was obviously a delicate situation. I feared the worst for Harry’s mindset.

“Wait outside until I tell you to come in,” I whispered loudly to them. “I know you both enjoy idiotically running into battle, but this is not the time. Doing so could hurt you, or Harry.” I turned and looked them each in the eyes sternly. Slowly, they began to nod their compliance.

Turning back to the house, I walked to the door, listening, waiting for the right time to enter.

“Well think something!” Harry yelled, being met with only silence.

He made a sort of odd sound, sounding somehow both like a cry and a laugh. I deduced that Harry had petrified Tom. That seemed entirely odd for Harry, but it was obvious Harry was not in proper condition.

“I don’t even get your thoughts anymore? Am I not good enough for them? Or was that part of the plan to make me think I loved you? You get into my mind, and it’s all easy after that, isn’t it? _Merlin...I still_ love you. Or...I love who I thought you were. Does that person even exist? Did he ever exist? Or was he all some act? Some ploy to seduce me for whatever sick game you wanted to play...I was so stupid! Ugh!”

There was a pause. I wondered with bated breath whether this was the moment I should walk in. I couldn’t tell where Harry was in reference to the door I waited behind, for the sound I heard echoed slightly. I waited, still, with anticipation.
“I would let you watch, but you’d probably like that, wouldn’t you?” *Watch? Watch what?* “You’ve always wanted to watch the light leave my eyes…”

My eyes widened. *Now. Now is the time.*

I opened the door and searched the inside for Harry. I could see only Tom, frozen in place with his attention turned away from me and towards the living room to my left. A spell flew from there, knocking Tom to the ground.

*Harry’s in the living room.*

I walked around Tom, away from the living room door so I could see inside. There, Harry stood, eyes squeezed shut, wand to his head.

“Sure I can,” he said.

My wand rose then, a silent disarming spell cast before I could even consider hesitating. The spell lit the room with a considerable brightness and Harry’s wand flew from his hand. His eyes flew open with surprise, and he let out an anguished yelp.

For a moment, Harry stared at me, his shadow-cast eyes red and lacking tears. Then, he fell to his knees with a thud.

“Granger!” I called. “Weasley! Come!”

Immediately, the two ran inside, surveying the situation. They went to my side and then over to where Harry knelt on the floor, immediately surrounding him with concerned words and hesitant touches.

“Harry, we heard everything.”

“Please, never do that again.”

“We’re here. We can help you.”

“Take him away from here,” I told them. “Surround him with loved ones. I’ll send you a message when I need to speak with him.”

They both nodded. Ron took out his wand and they disapperated.

I turned my attention back to Tom, who still lay on the floor, petrified.

*“Finite Incantatum.”* 

Tom’s body finally relaxed, but I could see that some part of him was still petrified, although not literally.

“My Lord—I am going to resume calling you that, since you are not fond of your name, and I have grown entirely habitualized to refrain from using your name…My Lord, we need to talk. I assume you know about what.”

I scanned over him as it seemed to finally register that I was speaking to him. He lacked entirely all poise as he sat up; his shoulders slumped, his back was not straight, his neck hardly held his head up to look at me. He was but scattered remains of what was once a powerful, confident dark lord.

My mind ran, making considerations and calculations, rules and possible obstacles that may arrive.
I nodded to myself, crouching down to place a hand on his shoulder and apparating us to his manor, the small meeting room. I stood and made my way to a chair, but not sitting. Rather than follow suit, Tom continued to sit on the floor where we arrived.

“For this talk, I would like—are you listening?”

Tom’s attention, which had likely not been on me at all since my arrival to the muggle house, snapped to me. “Severus, what happened?

“Harry is fine,” I answered. “I disarmed him. He is in his friends’ care.” I watched as his face fell. “I assure you they will be able to keep him alive, if you were still concerned.”

“No, not at all,” he replied, voice breaking at the last word. He slapped a hand over his mouth, holding it there as it trembled slightly. He moved it a moment to say, “I thought…” but he did not finish the thought.

“You thought Harry had succeeded in killing himself?” I asked for clarification. He shut his eyes and nodded. “No. He did not. He is alive, and therefore you still have a chance to correct your mistakes, which I intend to ensure you do.” I held out a hand towards the chair beside me. “Sit. We are going to talk.”

Tom rose from the ground and made his way to the chair. He did not slouch as severely as he had before, I noticed. I hoped the trend would continue.

“For this talk,” I continued, “I would like to have some rules. Rule One: I understand that the subject matter we will be discussing is not one you would typically be inclined to share; therefore, I would like to offer…reciprocation. I will share a piece of information I would rather be kept secret for every piece of information I ask of you. If you would like to do the same, you are free to. Rule Two: Everything in this conversation must be the truth.”

Tom did not respond, simply staring at me with an unreadable expression.

“What do you understand?”

“I do,” Tom responded, shoulders pressing back subtly. “Must I participate?”

“No, but if you do not, you are left with only two options, which are as follows: I will be forced to, once again, give you Veritaserum, or you will let this problem fester and never be able to fix it. You could go back to the room where your memory bottles once were and forget it all: the attempted suicide, the words you said, any regret you feel…even Harry. Which would you prefer?”

Tom’s eyes narrowed but held none of the viciousness they normally held. Instead, they looked tired and a hair too glossy. “Neither.”

“Then do you agree to the rules?”

Tom sat back in his chair, allowing himself to slouch once more. “I suppose.”

“Good. I shall go first.”

I took a deep breath. I did not want to do this any more than he did, I was sure, but the fate of the Wizarding world depended on Tom and Harry being at peace, if not happy and in love.

“I loved Harry’s mother,” I began. “That is why I asked you to spare her.” I dared not meet his eyes, looking instead at the table before us. “Now, my question: How do you feel about Harry’s attempted
I watched as Tom sighed, defeat prevalent in his features.

“It’s my fault. I drove Harry to…” he closed his eyes, not needing to finish his statement.

“I see. Next question, then. I…I had a muggle father, whom I hated, much like you. Why do you feel guilty for Harry wanting to kill himself? Death has not guilted you before.”

Tom looked away, over his left shoulder, remaining silent. I pondered if the answer would reveal more than Tom was willing to share or if he needed time to consider it. Possibly both. Long seconds passed before he finally responded.

“Say one more secret, and I will answer.”

I let a small smirk come to my lips. **Bargaining for answers…now we are truly playing.**

“When we were students at Hogwarts,” I began, a bitter taste already in my mouth, “Harry’s father saved me from being attacked by his werewolf friend. Such an action put me in debt to him.”

Tom turned his attention back to me, scanning over me as if seeing something new. The thought rolled my stomach, but I said nothing. I did not want to acknowledge my own vulnerability. This was about Tom’s.

“It is…a long explanation. When I created Voldemort, he was a mask for me to wear, to protect me from…anything, really. Tom never left, though. He was always there when Voldemort was gone. Voldemort would perform the murder, and Tom was left with the blood on his hands. That is why I have those memory bottles. I thought if I could…if I could not remember the guilt, not feel anything at all, then Voldemort would have the true, unadulterated power I wished he could have. It was strength…I thought.” He rested his elbow on the table and then his forehead in his hand. “And then Harry came along…” He lifted his head and met my eyes. “He is more than my horcrux, Severus. He has truly…brought out the most human parts of Tom, parts I thought I had destroyed long ago. I have felt…worry. Fear. Concern. I have felt…physical need. Happiness. I had never felt happiness, whether because of others or for fear of it myself.” He let his head fall back to his hand, closing his eyes again. “I…enjoy his presence. I…I want to make him happy, to make him contented…safe. I knew this. I admitted it to myself, and yet…Voldemort came over me. He said those feelings were weakness, and he drove Harry away, in the worst way possible, and left me…The guilt I feel is because I let Voldemort in, I let him have control, I let him hurt Harry. And Harry thought it was me…”

I sat, eyebrows high on my face. Truly, I had not expected to get to far so quickly. The answer was likely worth at least ten of my own, and yet he had shared it freely with me.

**Maybe he has changed…Harry has changed him.**

I let my face relax. “After you killed Harry’s mother, I switched loyalties, working with Dumbledore and The Order of the Phoenix.” His eyes flew open and glared at me, but I continued. “I notice that you have separated Tom Riddle and Voldemort in your head. Why is that? Are they not one and the same?”

He lifted his head from his hand, sitting up a bit to really glare at me.

“You switched loyalties? Then? I had considered the fact that you were not fully loyal to me, but…” He took in a breath and let it out, nodding. “I did not spare her, though you asked me to,” he said softly, more to himself than to me, it seemed. “You loved her. It makes sense…” He sat back once
more. “Voldemort was not just a new name. He was a whole other…persona, if you will. A mask, like I said, when I made him, but he grew to have his own thoughts, his own actions. I…cannot honestly even say that I created him purposefully or if he came to be through my own subconscious desire for him. I consider him separate from myself because he is.”

I nodded to myself. I considered, for a moment, taking notes but decided against it. I did not want Tom to be aware that I was analyzing him, even if that was exactly what I was doing.

A separate persona or a separate personality? With his own thoughts? Able to control him? Pieces were falling into place in my mind.

“I understand why you created a new self. I also have an alias, although one with less autonomy. I am the Half-Blood Prince. Half-Blood, obviously, from my blood status. Prince was my mother’s maiden name. If you feel guilty for what Voldemort did to Harry, and Voldemort is separate from you, then you cannot be held responsible for his actions. Do you believe this statement to be true?”

He shook his head. “Not in the slightest. I created Voldemort. He is my responsibility.”

“My patronus is a doe, just like Harry’s mother’s. You spoke a bit on how Voldemort can take control. How do you control Voldemort?”

“What?” Tom looked to me. “I thought each person had a unique patronus.”

I shrugged with one shoulder. “If one loves someone enough, their patronus can change to match that of their beloved.”

His brows furrowed, but he did not ask any further question on the matter. “I…do not control him. I cannot. He simply comes forth when he believes he is needed.”

“You want to have a relationship, of sorts, with Harry, but that is impossible with Voldemort in control,” I stated.

He sighed. “That is neither a secret of yours or a question.”

“No. It is a statement. Here is a hypothetical question: How can you expect to allow yourself anything you desire—your happiness, Harry’s happiness—if Voldemort can take control whenever he wants?”

He said nothing in response, choosing instead to think and stare at the table, the corners of his mouth turned downward slightly, brows still furrowed.

“The elder wand’s loyalty lies not with you but with Draco Malfoy. Do–”

“Draco Malfoy?” he interrupted. Tom’s eyes were now wide, brows high, and mouth slightly agape in shock. “How–”

“He disarmed Dumbledore the night he went to kill him,” I explained.

He shook his head, his shock fading.

“Now…I know you said you did not know what love was, but do you believe that you love Harry? If not in by others’ standards, then by your own.”

He let go of a small, tired breath. “Yes. By my own standards, I love him more than I love even myself.”
Just about perfect. I nodded, standing from the chair. “I shall leave you with your thoughts, My Lord.”

I left the room, intending to do the same thing once more.

Harry’s turn.

3rd Person POV:

At the Burrow, Harry was sitting at the table, surrounded by tired, bed-clothed Weasleys, staring at a full plate of eggs, toast with jam, and beans. He hadn’t even touched the fork. He felt hollow and child-like; he had no control over himself. He thought he ought to be able to control his own life, his own death, but he wasn’t allowed. They took his wand, made him sit at this table with them, put food he didn’t want on his plate. Was he a prisoner? It seemed he was, his whole life.

The others around him ate on, chatting happily with the others, with the exception of Hermione and Ron. The pair had tried to explain that the story was a bit of a difficult one, and that Harry just needed some time to rest and be with friends before they discussed it.

It was not difficult to spot that Harry was feeling down, but the others didn’t press. They let him be, for now, throwing only short glances at Harry, not letting their eyes linger for more than a second, lest he feel them staring, wondering. Of course, Mrs. Weasley kept shooting long, concerned looks his way, mostly worried with why he wasn’t eating. She always did, since he would always eat at least a couple bites to be polite.

“You alright, mate?” Ron asked then, softly, between bites of toast. He knew he wasn’t, but he didn’t know what else to say.

Harry closed his eyes and shook his head slightly. “I’m sorry, but I really don’t want to be here,” he said, just as softly, hoping the others wouldn’t hear.

Hermione watched them from the other side of Ron, wondering what they were saying.

Ginny’s fork dropped down to her plate with a loud clink. The chatter stopped.

“Do you have better things to do?” she asked, voice loud and full of bitterness. “So busy being the hero that you can’t even spare some time to eat breakfast with us normal people?”

“Gin!” Mrs. Weasley scolded.

“He said he doesn’t want to be here!” She stood suddenly, throwing her chair back. “Fine! We only just spent the night worried out of our minds about where you were, but fine! Just leave!”

“Ginny, please, he didn’t mean—” Hermione began, but Ginny didn’t let her finish.

“He didn’t mean it? You expect us to believe that? He’s been here all summer, and then he saves Luna and disappears for weeks…”

“Gin,” Ron tried to interrupt.

“…and then suddenly nowhere is good enough? Eating breakfast with your friends isn’t good enough?”
“Gin,” Ron tried again.

“You could at least act grateful. Like you care about us, or the fact that we-”

“Gin!” Ron slammed his hands on the table and stood.

Ginny fell silent, and the table’s eyes turned to Ron.

“He just tried to kill himself!” he yelled, not caring for a moment if it was the right thing to do. “He had a wand to his head, ready to do it!”

“Ron!” Hermione shouted, astounded.

“We only just saved him!” he continued on. “He doesn’t mean he doesn’t want to be here, eating breakfast with us, he means he doesn’t want to be here at all.”

The room fell into silence once more. All eyes moved from Ron to Harry, and suddenly Harry felt singled out, alone in a room full of people.

Ron closed his eyes with regret. “I’m…I’m sorry, Harry. I…”

“It’s fine,” Harry barely managed to say. “They’d have heard sooner or later.”

“Harry…” Mr. Weasley said softly, eyes wide, “is that true?”

Harry nodded, eyes staring at his hands in his lap.

“Harry, we love you, like our own blood,” Mrs. Weasley spoke up, trying not to let the sadness in her face reach her words. “I am so relieved that you are still here with us. We were all very worried about you.”

“Do you need anything?” Mr. Weasley asked. “You can talk to us. About anything you’d like.”

“Harry, I’m sorry,” Ginny said quietly, sitting down. “I-I thought-”

“You had no idea,” Percy said, then, “No one did.”

“You didn’t exactly take the time to ask, either,” Fred said, only to get elbowed in the ribs by George.

“Neither did you!”

Then the chatter returned to the room, the Weasleys and Hermione all talking at once, to one another and at Harry. The room was filled with so much noise. It made the room feel smaller than it was and caused Harry’s head to hurt. Like a child, he slipped under the table and out between two chairs, quickly making his way to and out the front door. When he reached the front, he stopped, for he had nowhere else to go. He let his back fall against the wall beside the door and slid down to the floor.

Moments later, Ginny stepped through the door. She didn’t say anything, choosing instead to sit on the floor next to him, her back against the door so no one could open it.

“You were right,” Harry said. “I’m ungrateful. You all are practically my family, but-”

“No, I wasn’t right,” she interrupted. “You…well, you can’t really help how you feel, can you? S’not like you can wish away the depression.”
Harry nodded in agreement. “No, you can’t.”

“I’ve felt that way, too, you know,” she said, then, much softer. “Like maybe the world would be better off without me. Like no one cares.”

Harry shook his head. “No, I know people care. I know you all care, and that I have more friends that care. What I feel like…I feel like everyone just uses me, you know? I don’t get to decide what I want to do. Dumbledore had a plan for me. Voldemort had a plan for me. The Order had a plan for me. Some damn prophecy had a plan for me. I’m just some tool to use. And I keep being used. And…and there’s nothing I can do about it.”

Ginny said nothing, so Harry continued.

“The more I look at my life, the more I realize how true it is. In the grand scheme of the war, in the little everyday things…with my own body…”

After so long with dry, reddened eyes, tears finally started to fall from Harry’s eyes, and his body shivered ever so slightly.

“Things have been taken from me that I can never get back. That I-I never asked for. That they wouldn’t let me say no to. And I still can’t…”

Harry pulled his legs up and put his head on his knees, tears streaming down his cheeks and onto his pants.

“So you thought that taking your life was something you could choose? Like they didn’t use you up to drive you to that decision?”

Harry looked up at her, but she stared out at the field. “What?”

“You said they used you. Why else would they do that except to use you up? To break you down into nothing? Really, if you wanted to show them you can make your own decisions, you’d choose to live. That’s much harder, don’t you think?”

Harry said nothing, instead trying to wrap his mind around the idea.

There was a crack from the field. Ginny stood then and took a step forward, wand already in hand. She could see only dark hair and black robes, but her guard fell.

“It’s Snape.”

Harry put his head back on his knees with a groan. “Hex him.”

Ginny gave a short laugh. “I wish.”

Snape approached the house, robes billowing around him with the strong morning breeze. “I need to borrow Harry.”

Ginny lifted her brows. “Do you plan on returning him?”

One corner of Snape’s mouth turned upwards in a sort of sneer. “I will let him decide when he wishes to return.”

“Does he want to go at all?” Ginny asked, turning to Harry, who once again groaned.

“Even if he does not, I must insist,” Snape said. “He and Tom Riddle have some…business to attend
At the news, Ginny tensed, and Harry’s head flew up.

“Tell Riddle he can go to shove it up his ass,” Ginny said.

Snape’s sneer grew, but he said nothing.

Harry sighed with inconvenience, pushing his legs out and attempting to stand. “Business? Does he want to talk about his plans again?” he asked bitterly.

Snape pondered how to respond. “First, I want to speak to you. Then, I believe Tom wants to apologize.”

Ginny and Harry looked to Snape, eyes a bit wider and eyebrows high. Harry’s mind ran amuck.

“Does he really?” Ginny asked, voice full of disbelief. Snape nodded. “For what?”

Snape looked to Harry.

“He…used me,” Harry answered quietly, eye downcast.

“And who else has apologized for that?” Snape asked.

No one responded. Harry looked to Ginny then made his way to Snape, who turned and went back out towards the field. Harry followed behind, unsure of what he was getting himself into. A small part of him still had hope, though for what, he wasn’t exactly sure.

Snape placed a hand on his shoulder and apparated to the large meeting room in Tom’s manor. It was quiet and empty-feeling, Harry thought, just as it had before he left. He hadn’t placed that it was not that the room felt that way, but his mind, still cut off from Tom’s.

Snape went up the stairs, and Harry followed behind without protest. They made their way to Harry’s room. Snape unlocked and held open the door for Harry, who walked through it and promptly flopped face first onto the bed. Snape rolled his eyes and stepped inside, shutting the door behind him.

Harry turned his head, then, looking at the sheets, picking up a fold between his fingers and feeling the smoothness of the silk. He’d only spent one night away from them, but already they felt foreign to him. He’d only ever seen silk in a few colors, all of them being inside the manor. He’d seen black, gold, red, tan…

Images of tan sheets flashed to his mind, tangled around his limbs, sticking to his back, between his toes as he curled them, crumpled into his fists, sliding against his hair as he threw his head back…

“Harry, we are going to have a much-needed talk,” Snape began, snapping Harry back to the present, his mind muddled with conflicting feelings. “For this talk, I have rules. Rule one: since this talk will be quite…personal, for every question I ask, I will offer a piece of information I would rather be kept secret. This way, there will be an equal flow of information. If you would like, you may do the same. Two: We will both answer any questions with the truth. Understood?”

Harry flipped over and sat up, propping himself up with the pillows. “Yes, I understand.” If I’m going to be forced into this conversation, I’m going to make sure I make it worth my while.

“I shall start,” Snape began. He took a breath and closed his eyes. “I loved your mother. She was to.”
truly the most beautiful being I have ever known. Tell me, Harry, why do you want to kill yourself?"

Harry straightened instantly, eyes wide and mouth completely open. He knew they’d known each other as kids, and that they were friends, but he’d never have guessed Snape felt so strongly for his mom. The information was even…a bit creepy.

“Are you going to answer?” Snape growled. “You did agree to participate.”

“I…sorry. Just a moment.” Harry leaned back against the pillows and stared at the ceiling. “You were in love with my mom? Is-” he sat back up. “Is that why your patronus is the same as hers?”

“Answer my question first,” Snape ordered.

Harry’s shoulder’s slumped. “Fine. I want to kill myself because I feel used by everyone. Dumbledore. Voldemort. The Order. My Uncle. You. And now Tom. I’m sick of it. I just…I wanted to make my own choice, for once. I wanted to stop being everyone’s tool, to stop being The-Boy-Who-Lived and just be…nothing.” He paused. “So, is that why your patronus is a doe?”

Snape’s eyes narrowed. “Yes,” he said through his teeth. “Do you believe that you would have tried to kill yourself if Tom had not said those things to you?”

Harry shrugged. “I mean…maybe not. Mostly because what everyone needed to use me for wouldn’t be an issue anymore. I wouldn’t have a dark wizard to defeat, so what would people need to use me for? And…I guess Tom would…well, wait, do you mean if he hadn’t said those things, or if he hadn’t meant them?”

Snape did not move, except to say, “Whichever you prefer.”

Harry sighed. “Well, if…if he hadn’t said them, I suppose I would have, at some point, because he’d have still meant them, and I would have found out eventually, but…but if he hadn’t meant them…then I guess I wouldn’t have. I…” he paused. “I guess I felt like Tom was protecting me from being used. And then I…I fell in love with him…and trusted him, and he broke that trust in every way possible.”

He leaned back onto the pillows, finding that their silky pillowcases made them slide out from the pile he’d made to prop him up. He found himself, then, lying on one pillow, his head draping over so that he could only look at the ceiling. He found the position oddly comfortable, despite the weird angle of his back.

“Why did you hate my father?” he asked.

Snape growled inwardly. He had truly hoped that Harry would have been the easier of the two to play this game with, but clearly, he was mistaken.

“You know perfectly well why. He and his friends would mercilessly bully me. Once, your father saved me from an attack by Lupin while he was changing into his werewolf form. Do you feel that Tom is responsible for you wanting to kill yourself?”

“I knew that already, too” Harry said, instead. “Dumbledore told me that.”

Snape sneered. “I did not say the secrets had to be one the other did not already know. Answer the question.”

Harry sat up. “Oh? Is that so? Fine. No, I don’t think he’s responsible for me wanting to kill myself. I’ve thought about it for a long time. He was just the final thing that drove me to actually do it. Or, at
least try. I’m in love with Tom Riddle, the man who became Voldemort. Why did you hate your father?”

Snape’s sneer fell into a deep scowl. He hated the use of his own words against him but could think of nothing to combat them. He’d had a predetermined list of secrets he was prepared to divulge, but now he had to reconsider which ones Harry already knew. He could not bear the thought of having to come up with new ones.

He clenched and unclenched his jaw. “My father was a terrible man. He often abused his power over me and my mother. He also ensured that I was aware he did not want me around. I knew Sirius Black was innocent. How do you feel about the idea of Tom apologizing to you?”

Harry’s mouth flew open as he continued to stare at the ceiling. Fury began to build up in his blood. “You let Sirius go to Azkaban? Even though you knew he was innocent? Just because he bullied you when you were both kids?”

Snape scoffed. “You think I was the only one? Do you think Dumbledore, the very man who told you to ‘rescue’ Sirius, didn’t know? That his own family didn’t know?”

Harry sat up, ears red. “That doesn’t make it okay! He was in there for twelve years! The dementors sucked away at his soul!”

“Shut up!” Harry yelled, his hands balled into fists. “You want to know how I feel about Tom apologizing? I don’t believe it. I want to! I want to believe that Tom didn’t mean any of it. But like you said before, who’s apologized for using me before? No one! Not even you! And don’t say you haven’t. You just dropped me in this situation, told me to figure something out now that Tom had his whole soul back. What am I, some fucking chess piece?! Sorry, Professor, I can only move diagonally, or in any direction that takes me towards world fucking peace. Do you know how much pressure that is? No! You don’t! No one does! No one’s ever asked me if I want to save the world. They just assume I will. Well what if I don’t?! What happens then? Everyone gets to blame me! I’m responsible! Suddenly, it’s not some dark lord who’s murdering people left and right, or some blood purists in masks parading around with matching tattoos; it’s Harry Potter and his failure to be the hero everyone deserves.”

His anger was gone, then. His body relaxed until his shoulder fell back into their slump. All that was left was the hollowness he’d felt before.

“I thought Tom was different,” he whispered. “I thought he cared about me, not The Chosen One, Savior of the Wizarding world. Just…Harry.”

Snape was silent a moment. He never thought he’d use the phrase “productive rage,” but there it was. He’d made Harry angry, and it had worked, and well.

“If Tom was no longer Voldemort,” Snape began, dropping the pretense of the game altogether, “how do you think he would change?”

“I think we could connect better,” Harry answered, voice barely audible to Snape across the room. “Communicate better. Voldemort holds him back from those things, I think, and other things like feelings…quote, unnecessary things…I think…maybe, if he really worked at it, he could do anything he wanted. He’s got the skills, the ambition. He could become Minister, invent some new type of magic…fucking train dragons, whatever he wanted. He could…be happy. I don’t think he’s
ever let himself be happy.”

Snape made his way over to the side of the bed Harry was on. “No, he hasn’t. Not until you came here.”

Harry looked up at Snape, eyes glistening and burning, wide and soft. “I…feel the same. Not really with happiness, but with safety. I hadn’t ever felt safe, or let myself feel safe, until I came here.”

Snape nodded. “Then let’s tell him that.”

Harry’s brows furrowed in confusion. “What?”

Snape grabbed his shoulder, and they disapperated.
They arrived in the small meeting room, Snape landing gracefully on his feet as always, and Harry falling clumsily to the floor with the unexpected travel and lack of pillows to support him. Pulling himself up onto his knees, Harry scanned the room until he saw Tom, eyes locking on his. Reflexively, Harry pushed on the connection in their mind, finding it still did not budge. His hopes, which had been high and light in his heart, fell, landing heavily in his stomach.

Snape walked over to the table, taking the seat beside Tom that he had occupied earlier. “Harry, come sit.”

For the moment, Harry could only stare, wondering why. Why did Tom want to apologize? Why did his eyes look as open and vulnerable as ever, and yet his mind just as closed off?

*How can he do this? Is he acting? No one’s this good of an actor…right?*

Snape let out a huff of impatience. He was not fit for the tedious nature of these talks. Truly, he was being as selfless as he had ever been, and yet Harry still sought to irritate him. Of course, he could leave at any moment, if he wanted, although the thought was tainted by the irresponsibility of such a choice. He was regularly a selfish person, that he could admit, but leaving Tom and Harry at such a critical point would require more selfishness than he was capable of, at least at that moment.

“Harry,” he said, sterner this time. “Come. Sit.”

The tone snapped Harry out of whatever trance he had been stuck in. He stood, then, gaze falling and getting stuck to the floor as he made his way to the table. He sat across the table from Tom in the black chair he usually chose to occupy during meetings. Harry tried to pretend that it didn’t smell like Tom.

“I have another talk for us,” Snape began. “A game, if you will. Of course, there are rules to this one as well. First, when it is your turn to speak, you will apologize for something you are shamed of, or guilty for. It can be anything, from any point in your life. Second, these apologies must be honest, and as such must have some explanation to them. Third, there will be no skipping turns, although I will allow you time to think and consider. Is that understood?”

He looked between the two, finding they gave meager, defeated nods. He supposed it would suffice.

“I will go first,” he continued. “I am terribly sorry that I could not have helped your mother more, Harry. I never wanted to put her life at risk, and I fear my long-held grudge against your father drove me from a position that could have been more beneficial to saving her. Your turn.”

Harry shrunk a bit in his chair. *Why did I agree to this again?* “I, uh…apologize for trying to kill myself. I…I-I was looking for…an easy out. A way to…take control. But it wasn’t control. Not really.”

Snape looked to Tom. “Your turn, My Lord.”

Tom had taken to glancing about the room, looking at anything but Harry. The guilt was eating him alive; he could feel it in the quake of his stomach and unnecessary tension in his slumped shoulders. “I apologize for mistrusting you, Severus. You betrayed my trust many times, and as such I considered that you were attempting to…usurp me from my position of power. I see now that such is
Snape nodded. He knew this would be a long process. “I apologize for betraying your trust, My Lord. I only did what I thought was best for Harry.” He looked to Harry.

“I’m sorry for thinking you were a terrible Potions professor,” Harry said, his gaze only vaguely looking in Snape’s direction. “And Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. And headmaster.”

“I have not been headmaster for more than a few months,” Snape said through his teeth.

Harry’s eyes went back to his hands. “I know, but that didn’t stop me from thinking it…and I’m sorry for it.”

Snape rolled his eyes.

“I apologize for being uncooperative, both earlier today and at any point before then,” Tom said. “I am not one for showing vulnerability.”

Harry’s eyes narrowed, then, as he threw a glare at Snape. Earlier? Did…did Snape play 21 questions with Tom, too? He felt betrayed, for just a moment, as he realized Snape was not trying to make Harry feel better but manipulate them both. Then, his mind wondered what sort of questions he’d asked Tom. Surely, they were the same nature as his…what did he answer?

Seeing the look on Harry’s face, Snape figured he’d caught on to his plan, but he could care less. “I am sorry for treating you so poorly in class, Harry. I realize that I have abused my power as your professor.”

Harry was realizing he was running out of things to apologize for, but Merlin be damned if he was the first one to fall into the trap Snape was setting. “Apology accepted.”

He twiddled his thumbs, the rest of his fingers intertwined in his lap. His brain was going at a hundred miles an hour, only thinking about how badly he wanted to beg Tom’s forgiveness, though he’d really done nothing to Tom. It was Tom at fault, not himself.

Snape cleared his throat, and Harry looked up at him, realizing he’d been silent for too long.

“I’m sorry for…burning your sitting room,” he said at last, not bothering to meet Tom’s eyes, say his name, or even elaborate further. He focused on his thumbs once more.

Snape raised his brows slightly. It was progress, albeit small.

“I apologize for not warning you of the fireplace’s charm,” Tom replied, his eyes tracing the grains in the wood table. Each line was interwoven with the others, which was so fascinating when one was trying to avoid other things.

Yes… Snape thought. We are certainly making progress. Reciprocal communication. Faster than I anticipated. Now if only he could get them to look at each other.

“I apologize for hating your father, Harry. It was nothing but a childhood grudge and jealousy.”

Harry did not look up, but stopped his thumb twiddling a moment. He’s sorry for that? I thought he prided himself on that. “I’m sorry my father bullied you. Truly. I can’t speak for his childhood, but I’m almost certain he was a good man. Maybe he would apologize, too, for the way he acted.”

If Snape had the capacity to feel touched, maybe he might have. But he didn’t. At least, that’s what
he told himself. He definitely did not feel touched at all.

Tom racked his brain. He had a long list of apologies, most of which were far past due. Did apologies have expiration dates? He’d never bothered to inquire before. “I apologize for being terrible towards the other children at my orphanage. They only parroted what they heard. They were but children.”

Harry froze in place. He’d never thought that Tom would have apologized for anything he did pre-Voldemort, or even mention his childhood. Had he heard correctly? That was most definitely unexpected. So what did that mean?

“I apologize for calling your mother a mudblood, Harry,” Snape said. “It was a moment of anger, and I lashed out at a friend. It was completely warranted that she cut me out of her life from that point on.”

Harry noticed that Snape was running out of not-too-personal things to apologize for, too. Soon, he’d bet Snape would be apologizing for things he didn’t even know about. He hoped he could play this game for that long. “I…uh…I’m sorry I made enemies with Draco first year.” Harry wrinkled his nose. “Don’t tell him I said that.”

Tom shook his head absently, his mind running through so many things. He could play this game for the remainder of his life and still not say everything he wanted to apologize for. He killed people. He tore apart families. He manipulated and imposed. He was widely feared and crazy with his power. He pushed people away and forced them into submission. All because he was a childhood outcast with no love, no freedom, and no home.

But of course, he didn’t dare ever speak those things out loud. Not in front of anyone. Not even to himself, alone in a room. So he decided to remain at surface level with his apologies.

“I apologize for forcing you to learn curses.”

Harry began to fidget once more, growing more restless with it. Things weren’t adding up in his head. Dark lords do not apologize for forcing people to do things, or curses, and definitely not forcing people to learn curses. Was Tom tricking him? Was he lying?

“I’m sorry for ever doubting you, Harry.”

His train of thought was burst by Snape’s confession. “You doubted me?” he asked aloud, not meaning to do so.

Snape shrugged with one shoulder. “Logically, you never stood a chance. But logic does not account for luck.”

Harry nodded. That was true enough. He couldn’t even explain how he’d accomplished many of the things he had. He had always been “just Harry” for as long as he could remember, but “just Harry” would never have done half the things Harry Potter had done.

“I’m…sorry for ever thinking Sirius was trying to kill me. I mean, that’s what everyone told me when he escaped, that he wanted to kill me, but I didn’t question it. I mean…maybe there wasn’t much I could have done, given what little I actually knew, but that doesn’t stop me from wishing I’d never saw him that way at all, as a murderer.”

Tom was thoroughly bored with looking at the table. He looked around the room, really wishing he had not gone with such plain décor. He would have to redesign this room. To match with the table, the bottom half of the wall could have mahogany wood, and the top halves could be green, black,
grey, and gold to match with the chairs, or would that clash? Possibly he could work in some sort of pattern involving the colors. A mural on the ceiling, maybe, so that bored patrons would have something interesting to view, to appreciate. Of course, maybe that would be a terrible idea, considering this was a meeting room. People were not supposed to be looking around the room, bored, when discussing important matters. Maybe something only he could see? For whenever he grew bored in meetings…

“My Lord, it is your turn,” Snape said once more, tone growing snappy with impatience.

Tom’s head snapped back to the table, caught off guard. Words spilled out of his mouth before he could consider them and the game being played.

“I apologize for murdering your parents, Harry.”

He realized his misstep almost immediately, but suddenly found that, just maybe, some of the guilt on his conscience was lifting. Rather than return to his thoughts or the lines on the table, he looked to Harry for his reaction.

Harry’s intertwined hands tensed. He could feel Tom’s eyes on him, burning holes through him. No apology would ever right the wrong that was his parents’ murder; Harry knew this. At the same time, however, he felt the ever-slightest hope that, just maybe, it was a start.

Snape nearly let himself have a full grin. Yes, the two were being very difficult in this game of his, but they were breaking. It was only a matter of time, now.

“I apologize that I could not convince Dumbledore to remove you from your muggle home, Harry. He was convinced it was for the best and would not see reason.”

Harry clenched his hands and shut his eyes for a moment. How was he supposed to take in all these apologies directed at him all at once? Especially when that house was mentioned. How was he supposed to stop the flood of thoughts that ran to the forefront of his mind? The negligence, the indifference, the violence? The more he tried to shake it off, the more hatred he was filled with. He did not think revenge would make him feel better, but he was certain that it would not hurt him. He would make his uncle understand the torture he put him through. “I’m sorry I tortured all those rats.” I wish they were him.

Tom shook his head again. He dared not utter another apology, for he feared what would come out next. Would it reveal his utmost regrets about his past? Or would he be groveling at Harry’s feet to take him back? Neither seemed an enjoyable choice. “I’ve nothing else.”

Snape smirked. “Are you sure?” He pulled a small, clear vial and his wand from his pants pocket and placed the vial on the table before him to display. “Are you absolutely certain?”

Harry just stared at the vial. Had they reached the edges of the trap already? He would admit that he was very ready for this whole thing to be over with. He hoped Snape would use the potion on Tom already to stop his lies.

“I just remembered another,” Tom said. “I apologize for kidnapping your friend.” He looked to Harry, hoping for the slightest chance of catching his eyes. Maybe it would help their connection? If they looked at one another and pushed…then he could know…and Tom wouldn’t have to utter a word.
“Harry, instead, gave a sideways glance at Snape that said, “If you’re going to do it, do it now.”’’ Snape caught it. The idea was tempting. It would certainly speed things along. What downsides would there be? Tom would be angry, sure, and he’d have to brew another Veritaserum for his emergency case, which meant he’d be without for a while, but that was hardly an issue.

“Petrificus Totalus,” Snape cast under the table at Tom.

Tom was bound in place, the beginnings of irritation frozen onto his face. His glare could have burned right through a block of ice.

Snape stood and opened Tom’s mouth just enough to swallow the potion. “I apologize for using Veritaserum on you once more without your consent. I know you have warned me not to, more than once, but you have forced my hand.” He sat once more, releasing the spell but keeping his wand pointed at Tom just in case.

“Severus,” Tom said, tone dangerously quiet. “What on-”

“My Lord,” Snape began before Tom could finish his statement, “what all would you like to apologize to Harry for?”

Tom literally bit his tongue to keep himself from talking, but the potion was strong. It would let him out so easily.

“I apologize for being such a fool. I never meant to hurt you, Harry. I apologize for taking advantage of you, though I did not do so as much as you think. As I have...as I have admitted to...” he was fighting but losing incredibly. “I apologize that I made you want to end your life and for trying to end your life myself all those years. I apologize for being so terrible with expression, and for treating you as a threat or a pawn because of it. I apologize that I cannot trust fully; it is not in my nature, though I want with all my heart to trust you. I apologize for making your life worse at every turn, no matter what I try to do. I apologize that it would take hours to explain it all—my vices and shortcomings, their consequences—and that I will never be able to have that conversation. I apologize for the words I said in the room with the memory bottles, and for hurting you yet again. Most of all, I apologize that I do not know love and that I may be the worst reciprocator of such a feeling, if not the most undeserving of it.”

Harry’s breath was gone. His throat was dry. He could hardly believe his ears. It all sounded like more lies, but that was Veritaserum in that vial, he could tell. If it was all the truth...what then?

At last, Harry looked up at Tom, searching for some indication that he was acting, that this was all some elaborate trick. Instead, he found sincerity in those red eyes. It was then, he realized, that it was not the first time, either.

“Why did you tell Harry that you did not love him?” Snape asked. “Just, for clarification purposes.”

Tom didn’t bother fighting any longer. He knew it was a lost cause. And Harry was looking at him now. He pushed against the mind barrier, finding that it was not as strong as it had been previously.

“I let Voldemort into my mind. He took control and said those things because he finds love weak. It is a vulnerability. But I am not Voldemort. I regret those words entirely. But in my shock, I knocked over the memory bottles I had, and all my regrets returned to me. Voldemort has not been around since.”

His last words sounded more like a plea. Harry just barely caught it, though he wasn’t sure what to make of it. He could nearly swear he was dreaming, but he’d never have been able to imagine Tom
saying these things. Not in his wildest imagination.

“How do you think Harry feels about you?” Snape asked.

Tom pushed again on the mind barrier. “I think he hates me. To him, I am no better than his uncle. In fact, I am likely worse. I broke him. I used him. I led him to believe that I was capable of being something that I am not. And for that, I believe I deserve that hatred.”

*Can this be real?* Harry thought. He pressed against their mind barrier, hoping to see the other side, wishing that it would show no deceit, no lies. He wanted it all to be true.

Snape nearly yawned. He was nearly at the point where his job was finished, and he was starting to consider the last time he’d slept fully through the night. He could not recall.

“My Lord, how do you feel about Harry. Please explain to the best of your ability.”

He could feel Harry pushing on his mind barrier now, too, and with a renewed urgency, he sought to tear it down. “I feel so much, I am not sure I can even properly label it all. I feel concern. I feel happiness. I feel absolute devastation and regret. I feel guilt and pain. I feel attraction. I feel an unbreakable connection that has nothing to do with our minds or my horcrux. I feel excitement and nervousness and interest. But most of all, I feel something so strong in my being that I do not know that I could ever completely mask it ever again. I think it might be love.”

Harry’s eyes grew wet. *Merlin this can’t be real. Tell me it’s real.* His mind slammed against the barrier, clawing at it and using all the force it could muster.

Snape looked between them in confusion. He thought this would be the part for the happy reunion, but instead they simply stared at one another again, Harry with sadness and Tom with frustration. Was there something he was missing? “Harry?”

Harry shook his head, trying to concentrate, but his mind was chaotic with overwhelming feelings. The barrier was moving, he could feel it.

Tom pushed against it once more, feeling Harry’s push milliseconds afterward. He was trying to match Harry’s rhythm, but it was erratic. He waited a second and pushed again, finding he was further apart from Harry’s push. He pushed again, and again, getting closer and father and closer again. At last, he pushed once more, perfectly in time with Harry, and the floodgates opened.

Harry could feel his words, his feelings, his truth. There were no lies, no tricks. Tom’s mind spilled into Harry’s, and Harry’s pilled into Tom’s. They felt each other’s fears and secrets, their hesitations and regrets.

At once, Tom’s eyes began to water, too, as he absorbed and processed Harry’s feelings. He found it odd and laughable all at once that he lived his life avoiding crying and one uninhibited taste of Harry’s mind drew tears out of him like blood to a wound. Midst their tears, both laughed, shaky and whole and full of understanding.

“I love you, Tom,” Harry said.

“I love you, too, Harry,” Tom said back. And Harry could feel that he meant it.
Harry’s POV:

I smiled as wide as my mouth could manage. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Snape send off his patronus (to Merlin knows where).

“Well, my work here is done. Please, inform me if you need my services again…” He looked with disdain between us. “Do not need my services again.” With that, he turned with a crack and disappeared from the room.

At the same moment, Tom and I stood, making our way away from our chairs and to one another. I wrapped my arms around his neck and buried my face into his shoulder, my tears wetting his robes and his wetting my hair. Our embrace was comfortably tight and warm.

Don’t you ever do that to me again.

‘I promise. Never again.’

His arms were around my waist, his nose nestled on the top of my head. Absolute relief swelled in us, spreading throughout bodies like a calming draught. We could breathe easy. We could feel each other’s comfort. That was all that mattered.

I lifted my head and pressed a kiss to his lips. It was sweet and passionate, full of love. He parted his lips and my tongue moved into his mouth, tasting and exploring. It felt as if ages had passed us since our last kiss. I craved his mouth like it was a rare treat, savoring, relishing, already hoping the next time would be soon. And he’d told me he loved me, so maybe it would be. There was nothing to stop us.

We broke from our kiss for air. He picked me up and sat me on the table, pushing the chairs out of our way as his mouth trailed kisses down my jaw and neck. My heart picked up speed as his hand traveled up my shirt, touching the bare skin of my stomach and chest. A finger flicked over a nipple, and I let out a soft gasp. His lips returned to mine, a new fervor to their movements. I ran my fingers through his perfect hair, hoping it would fall out of place onto his forehead. I wanted to be so much closer. I wasn’t sure we could ever be too close.

He pulled his lips off mine and removed his hand from my shirt, leaving both feeling cold for lack of his body warmth. His mind pulled away, too, just enough so that I could once again distinguish my thoughts from his.

‘Are you sure this is what you want, Harry? Now that you have your memory back?’

Apprehension. Hesitation. He didn’t want to use me. It made my chest both full and tight.

I gave the question some thought. True, I had conflicting feelings surrounding sex. I want nothing more. I know I love you. I trust that you’ll never do anything I don’t want to do. Not ever again.

Tom pressed a chaste kiss to my forehead. ‘The only things I will ever force upon you will be sleeping and eating.’

I smiled, small and yet so full of all my love for him. I can accept that. But I can’t say I won’t fight back.
He chuckled, light and soft. `Fair enough.'

He lifted my chin with his thumb and forefinger, bringing my lips to his. My hands brushed down his robes, which then vanished along with most of his clothes, leaving him in only his boxers.

“Mmmm,” he hummed into our kiss. `What a neat little trick. Very useful.'

I smiled against his mouth. Very.

His hand clawed at my shirt, and it, too, vanished. His hands trailed down my bare back, sending pulses of hot blood pumping to my groin. I moved my hand down to his boxers, kneading the growing erection there, and those vanished, leaving him bare and exposed. I let my hand continue to touch his cock as my other hand explored the muscles of his back, lean and flexed. I could feel his breathing speed up and his heart race.

Everything was different from before. Nothing in the air was thick or suffocating, but light and intoxicating. I had no guilt or red flags. We were slow and loving, and I allowed myself to be fully comfortable, fully exposed, fully vulnerable, as he did in return.

Tom tugged at my pants, and they disappeared. We were both naked, in every sense, and enjoying one another.

Tom's hand rested on my back, and I slowly lowered myself onto the small table. It was cold, and my head was only halfway on it, but I didn't care. He was on top of me, his hands in my hair and on my chest. I hugged his neck and pulled him closer. Our skin barely touched. My head was spinning, and I was lost in the moment. Tom kissed my lips, and then my neck, down to my chest. Every touch was like heaven. He trailed his soft lips down my stomach, and finally placed a kiss on my cock. My head flew back, almost off the table. There was nothing in this world but Tom and I. He kissed it more, then gently placed his mouth over the tip. My heart raced in my chest, threatening to jump out of my chest. Every second was more amazing than the last. I was with the one I loved and Merlin he was making me feel good.

Tom took my entire cock in his mouth twice, then removed it, leaving it cold and needy. I picked up my head only to see him pulling his own cock. I blushed. He looked back up at me and smiled, making my inhale into a backwards sigh. He lifted one of my legs and placed it on his shoulder, and I eagerly awaited. He licked a finger and pressed it into my ass, making me hold in my breath and clench my teeth, then another, stretching me.

He removed his fingers and leaned down to whisper to me, “tell me to stop if you change your mind.”

Then he slowly pushed his cock inside me and hit that glorious spot. I arched my back and let out a moan.

"Oh Merlin, Tom. Keep going."

He pulled out just as agonizingly slow, then pressed back in, full speed. I grabbed the edges of the table on either side of me with impressive strength. Every sensation was so fucking incredible, it was hard to believe. He continued to press in and out, slow at first, then gaining speed. There were no doubts, or regrets. We were letting ourselves enjoy every second.

"Harry," Tom moaned.

Our sounds made beautiful music I had missed; this was, of course, my favorite song. The world blurred, and I closed my eyes, feeling every touch more, hearing every sound better. Our bodies fell
into sync, and everything moved in a much-anticipated rhythm. I was climbing so unbelievably fast, and I could feel myself come closer and closer each moment. My nails dug into the table, probably leaving marks. I was breathing so fast my lungs could barely get the air before it was pushed back out again. Then my vision went white, and a large, intense wave of pleasure rolled over me, and I came all over Tom. He trailed shortly after, moaning my name the whole time.

I closed my eyes and smiled. My breathing calmed, and Tom quickly cleaned us with a spell. He leaned over me, and gave me a quick kiss before backing away, and summoning some of our clothes.

“I’ve your shirt and pants, Harry. If you would, I would like my robes.”

I smirked. “You mean, you’re not going to wonder around like? I think you look absolutely stunning.”

His lips curled into a smile the broke to show his teeth ever so slightly. “Not with Severus popping in and out when he wishes.”

I gave a fake huff. I suppose I see your point. I sat up and looked around for a bit. I wasn’t quite sure what I had done to vanish them—it was a spur-of-the-moment thing. “Uh…how do you get things back?”

“Well, to where did you send them?”

I opened my mouth with a click then closed it again. That’s a good question. I looked around the room again. Bloody hell, what did I do with your clothes?

Tom laughed, full and true. The sound caught me off guard, as I’d never heard him laugh like it before. It was warm and silvery, filling the room with a tangy kind of sound.

He snapped his fingers and new robes and clothes fell into his other hand. He began to put on his clothes and as he did, I noticed the robes glint dark green in the light, rather than his normal black. When he finally pulled them onto himself, his skin had a glow to it like he was made of quartz.

I hopped off the table and got dressed, too, and we left the room hand in hand. It was early afternoon now, as the hallway made obvious. I hadn’t slept last night, but that felt like so long ago. For the moment, I was practically vibrating with energy. In my fantasies, I felt like I could run about chasing leaves all day, Tom by my side and not a care in the world. The thought was marvelous, if not absolutely tempting.

We had reached the table in the spacious room, ready to eat lunch.

“Tom,” I asked, my mind coming back to the present, “what are we-”

“Hold on a moment, Harry.” Tom’s brows furrowed as he extended his arm out and a strange-looking owl, somewhat familiar in appearance, landed on his arm. Parchment and a quill appeared in the air and began to jot something down quickly. When it was done, he grabbed the quill and brought it down to stab the palm of his hand without hesitation, causing me to jump. He pressed the tip, now bloodied, to the letter. The blood disappeared, and his name signed itself on the bottom. He folded it up and sent it away with the owl.

I stared incredulously at him. “What was that about?”

He sat down and gestured for me to do the same. Our lunch plates popped into existence before us, which I paid no attention to.
“I have scheduled an emergency meeting at noon. All the Death Eaters will attend. I have business to…straighten out.”

Panicked thoughts ran across my mind, but I forced them down. “How…how in the world did you schedule a meeting with only one letter?”

Tom gave me a small smirk. “That specific owl has a charm over it which sends letters to all specified recipients.”

I nodded. “Right. And the blood thing…that’s-”

“To ensure they know who the letter is truly from. It is a signature, of sorts.”

I continued to nod absentely. “Right…” There was a cold lump in the pit of my stomach. I almost swallowed my next question down with the first bite of the crusted chicken (or was it pork?) that I took, but anxious thoughts brought it back up like bile. “And the business, what business is that?”

Tom looked to me while he finished chewing whatever bite of food he had begun on. The silence was deafening, full of anticipation that made the room feel like it held the static of a lightning storm.

“Harry,” he began, eyes falling back to his plate as he cut up his food, “I want you to know that I have truly changed. I want there to be no doubts in your mind that I am the man you consider me to be. Most importantly,” he placed down his silverware and looked deeply into my eyes, “I want you to understand that there is nothing in this world that I would not do for you, and you alone. What happened between us…the terrible fight…it happened. Although I can regret it, I cannot change it. I can, however, prevent such a thing from ever happening again. As such, I have made the decision to get rid of the Dark Lord.”

I nodded and returned to my food. The words made it to my ears and to my brain but didn’t process for a few moments because of how casually he seemed to say them. Midst a bite, it clicked. My mouth hung open, peas spilling back onto my plate.

“What?!”

Tom gave me a quick sickened glance. “Harry, I do not typically mind your table manners, but please keep your food in your-”

“Just getting rid of the Dark Lord?!?”

Tom’s brows furrowed. “You are…displeased with the news?”

“What? No. Not at all. I’m…thrilled. It’s just…how can you say something like that so casually? That’s…monumental news, Tom, not…chatty lunch conversation.”

Tom’s brows relaxed but the remainder of his expression did not. “Should I have waited to inform you?”

“No, I just…” I huffed. “Your tone. It was your tone. You made it seem like it was nothing, like it was an everyday decision. But it’s not. Not even close.” I reached out my left hand and placed it gently on his wrist. “Give yourself some credit, Tom. That’s an amazing and…I’m sure, difficult decision. I’m…I’m proud of you, Tom.”

He looked at me, face blank and eyes confused. “Proud of me?” he murmured. “Whatever for?”

“I’ve been in your head, Tom. I’ve seen your memories and your feelings. I know what you’re like
better than anyone else. I know what Voldemort meant to you. I know he was your strength, your power. Your shield against the world. Like a security blanket. That’s not an easy thing to give up. I know that. But… you’ve made the decision. That takes strength and power and will to do so. I’m proud of you.”

Tom did not move. He sat like a pale marble statue in his chair. I wasn’t even sure he was breathing for a moment, and when I realized he was, it was only ever so slightly, shallowly. He was worrying me. With my mind, I pushed out to his, finding it with no trouble.

Shock. Disbelief.

I almost laughed. It was almost ridiculous that he was shocked that I was proud of him, but the more I considered it, the more I realized that it was because no one had ever been proud of him, let alone told him so.

I let him see my pride, to feel it in his own mind, consider its genuineness. After a moment, the shock faded and gave way to warmth.

“Tom,” I said softly, my mind and heart filled with love for him. “I think I have an idea of what we can do after that meeting.”

He raised his eyebrow suggestively. “Again? So soon after this morning?”

I laughed. “No, not that. Although that does sound nice, I had something else in mind.”

He picked up a bite of food with his fork. “And what is that?”

I smiled. “You’ll see.”

We finished our lunch peacefully, and I began to make my way to my room to prepare for the meeting, mentally checking off the last of the problems on my list.

#1: Convert Tom to "The Light" before he converted me to "The Dark": DONE!

#2: Tom wouldn't spare Snape's life: Solved

#3: Torturing Pettigrew, check. And would I do it again? Fuck yeah.

#4: Tom wouldn’t tell me what happened in the meeting: Fixed

#5: Well…I guess this is all worked out now. Pretty sure.

And now for some new problems (of course).

#6: What would everyone think about me and Tom?

Well, maybe if they see Tom isn't evil anymore, then they will be alright with it (assuming they accept the fact that I like blokes).

#6: Show public Voldemort is dead.

#7: My bastard of an uncle still lives.

That can easily be taken care of (once I find out where he is).

#7: In progress.
#8: School starts in a week and a half.

...bloody hell...

#8: Buy books and things as soon as possible and have Hermione catch me up on anything we might have to know before school starts.

That’s it, I think.

I arrived at my door and opened it. I figured the hooded robes would be laying on the bed, but they were nowhere in sight.

Tom, where is my cloak for the meeting?

‘You will not need it, Harry. I am going to introduce you to them all.’

My heart began to race in my chest. A room full of Death Eaters and Harry Potter was just going to show up. Yeah, because that went so well last time.

‘Harry, trust me. Nothing will happen to you. Just as with last time, I will protect you. Every one of them will either accept you and these changes, or they can rot in my dungeon.’

I nodded, my heart hardly slowing at all.

3rd Person POV:

Harry found the owl he was supposed to receive a while ago from Hermione in his bathroom nibbling at the tips of the tub faucet. He pulled the letter off and turned the sink on a light drip and the owl lapped up each drop. Harry figure the note was likely stale, so he did not bother opening it, but he would send the owl back with something, of course.

Dear Hermione,

I still had your owl. I never read the last note, but I don’t really think I need to. Things are much better here, now. Tom is going to change the way he is doing things and completely rid of the Dark Lord. Snape really helped us work through some stuff, both individually and together. We’re pretty happy with the results. I would tell you to explain us to everyone else, but I’m afraid Mrs. Weasley would have a heart attack if you don’t convince her Tom isn’t evil anymore first. So if you think you can manage that, I’d appreciate that. I’ll handle the rest. I’ll definitely be back at school when it starts. Write back soon.

Love,

Harry.

He tied the letter to the owl and walked out the door with it on his arm. It took off as soon as he reached the first door in the hallway. Amongst the flap of its wings, Harry could hear the soft, reverberant chatter from the spacious room that signaled that Death Eaters had already arrived. Of course, he understood the best plan was for him not to be down there when everyone arrived, but it hardly seemed like it would make much of a difference. He knew they would be ready to attack him at a moment’s notice. Tom said he would protect him, but he was one (albeit powerful) wizard. If everyone threw a spell at Harry, could Tom stop even half of them? Could Harry and Tom stop even
half of them?

He was suddenly very aware how suddenly he switched from wanting to kill himself to not wanting to die. He supposed it was progress.

He stood next to the arch, just tucked away from view of the spacious room where the meeting had begun. There, he waited for Tom to call him down.

“This guest that I have is most certainly not a secret to some of you, but for others, I warn you,” Tom’s voice grew low and sharp, but full of heat, unlike the cold threats of Voldemort, “If you as so raise your wand at him, you will suffer through pain you could never even imagine. I do not care of your thoughts and opinions. I do not wish to see you lift a finger in the wrong direction.” ‘Harry, you may come down now. Have your wand at the ready. I fear they still do not expect you.’

Harry pulled his wand out of his pocket and took a deep breath, preparing himself for dangerous, possibly fatal spells to be cast at him. It wouldn’t be the first time. Of course, maybe he hoped it would be the last.

He turned and took his first step down the stairs, eyes trained on the many faces below him. There were several gasps and many surprised faces.

“Expelliarmus!” Someone Harry could not recognize from such a height stood at the table.

“Finite!” He’d just managed to make out in time, even with his skilled reflexes and level of alertness.

“Theodore,” Tom growled, “I will have your head on a plate.” He knew, he told himself, that he should never have let Nott bring his son in as a Death Eater. He may have been clever, but this was not the time.

Tom’s tone, full of emotion and rage, seemed to throw everyone at the table off guard. No one could agree on where to look; Tom, Harry, or Theodore.

Harry let his wand fall back to his side and continued down the stairs, eyes glued to the table. No one seemed to be moving. Everyone seemed too shocked to do anything. It calmed his nerved a bit. He did feel bad for Theodore, though.

“He was only relying on his instincts, Tom. Don’t punish him. It wasn’t even a dangerous spell.”

Theodore was still standing, not only shocked at seeing Harry, but being defended by him. To the Dark Lord. And he called him Tom? (Was Tom his real name? He wasn’t sure.) He was certain Harry was braver than anyone else in that room at that moment.

Tom said nothing but continued to fume in silence. When Harry finally reached his chair and sat down, he stared down Theodore until he, too, sat down. Once everyone was seated, himself the exception, he glanced around the table and began to speak.

“This, as you may remember, is Mr. Serpens. Only now, his true identity is revealed. Do not be alarmed. Or hasty. I realize you have seen him as the enemy, but we aim to change that. I have seen…error in my way. We will be correcting that.”

Tom looked to Snape, who sat to his right. Snape nodded and stood as Tom sat, turning to face the rest of the table.

“We have proposed a new tactic completely. We will end this on-coming war. We will work, instead, in the Ministry to ensure we have proper laws to enforce to further muggle-wizard relations.
Magical children born to muggles will be properly handled. Muggle-wizard and muggle-witch relationships will be regulated to a certain degree to ensure that magic will be kept properly secret. Our cause will not longer be to destroy muggles and unpure magical blood, but to prevent the harm of future witches and wizards.” He sat back down.

There were a few faces around the table who suddenly appeared angered, such as Bellatrix, that they were no longer going to be murdering muggles, mudbloods, and bloodtraitors. More of the table seemed confused, if not relieved, such as the Malfoy family. They understood exactly what that meant and found it shocking and rather nice.

“There those who oppose this change,” Tom called out, tone strict but not harsh, “may leave now without any consequences.”

Immediately, Bellatrix stood and disapperated, followed by Travers, Alecto, and Amycus. A moment of silence passed.

“Anyone else?” Tom looked around pointedly at a couple of others. “Go on. I will not try to find you. Please. I insist you leave. There will be no changing your mind later.”

Fenrir, Thorfinn, and Antonin disapperated.

“No one else?”

The rest of the table was unmoving.

Tom sat back in his chair. “Then let us continue.”

The rest of the meeting was easy for Harry. They talked about other laws that should be passed, and what actions they should take instead of attacking. He was quite surprised to find that not all of the Death Eaters were as insane about blood purity as the ones who had left. He had completely based everything about Death Eaters on the stereotype set. And although there were definitely some stereotypes that were correct (namely all of the ones about the Lucius and Draco), he was glad that most of the people present seemed to be relieved to be doing something different. Not one person at the table would be so bad to be associated with politically, and Harry figured that was why they were there.

After the meeting, Harry was relieved himself. He sat in his chair as the last of the people talked a bit more about the meeting to one another before they, too, left. Only Harry, Snape, Lucius, Narcissa, and Draco remained—a round of faces he was used to. They all made their way to the private meeting room, where the adults discussed things about plans and future action. Harry was delighted, but he was not allowed in. This meeting was not for him, they decided, because Harry was not yet a political force, himself, though they planned to make him into one soon. Until then, he stood outside, leaning against the wall, Draco sitting beside him.

Draco, just as bored, took to his favorite pastime: pissing Harry off.

“So Potter,” he spat, that irritable I’m-better-than-you smirk on his face. “How are things going with your little girlfriend since I told the Dark Lord about her?”

Harry turned to stare at him for a moment. Much to Draco’s confusion, Harry began to laugh.

Draco’s pale brows joined on his forehead, wrinkling his nose, and his lips puckered. “What? What’s so funny?”

If only he knew... Harry thought to himself. He decided he was going to have some fun with it.
Harry slid down the wall and sat to look Draco in his irked eyes.

“Well, Malfoy, I’m going to be honest with you. It’s going great.”

Draco’s confusion and annoyance grew. “What? Potter, I’m not stupid. I know for a fact he’d have your head for sneaking out to see your girlfriend.”

“Who said I was sneaking out?”

“Actually, you did, Potter. When I asked last. When you had that hideous mark on your neck.”

Harry shrugged. “I lied, then. I haven’t left this manor without Tom’s knowledge.”

Draco scoffed. “You’re bringing her here, then?”

“And whoever said it was a she? I certainly never did…” Harry looked away from Draco with a sly smile.

“You…like blokes?” He asked, incredulous. He’d gotten it into his head that Harry had a thing with the Weasley girl. Never had it even crossed his mind…

“Are you shocked? Honestly, was it really that hard to see?”

“Merlin, it’s…it’s not Weasley, is it?”

“Uh, no.” Harry said instantly. That was kind of a sickening thought. “He’s my friend. And you and everyone else know he and Hermione have a thing.”

At this point, Draco was getting a little sick himself. He really hoped he wasn’t finding any interest in him. He knew he was handsome, but he didn’t want to attract anyone but girls. Right? At least, that’s what he’d keep telling himself. “Who then? One of your other loser friends?” he asked, but all the bite was gone from his tone.

“You’d never guess it. Not in a million years.”

Draco racked his brain in a panic. He didn’t want to be thinking it, but all that ran through his mind was all the times he and Harry had been at each other’s throats. He’d thought it was all truly anger. They were supposed to be enemies, after all. He considered, now, that maybe Harry had other feelings.

“Potter, tell me or I’ll hex you.”

“If you hex me, Tom will have your head.” Harry was trying to hint, but it just wasn’t getting through.

“Not if I tell him your bringing a bloke over here.”

“Nope. He’d still be angry at you and not me. He never gets angry at me.”

Merlin, Harry was going to make him ask, wasn’t he? He definitely did not want to do that. But did he have a choice?

“It’s…it’s not me, is it?”

Harry’s smile faded as he rolled his eyes. “It is unbelievable how full of yourself you are. No, it’s not you. You irritate the hell out of me.”
Draco let out a breath. “Thank Merlin. You irritate me, too. I know I’m pretty, but I don’t want to attract the likes of you.”

Harry shook his head. “You are insufferable. Trust me, Malfoy, no one is attracted to you. Not even girls.”

Draco smiled then. “Are you sure about that? Because I—”

“No. I don’t want to hear about it.” Harry held up a hand between them. “We’re not friends.”

Just then, Lucius, Narcissa, and Tom stepped out of the private meeting room. It had been a productive meeting, discussing not only plans but also Harry and Tom. The Malfoys were surprisingly unfazed. In fact, Narcissa was almost excited by the story (“Wow!” she’d said. “It sounds like you both are living in a storybook. What a love story”).

Lucius nodded his goodbye to Tom and gathered his family together to disapparate. Draco took the opportunity to turn in Harry.

“My Lord, Harry has been bringing a bloke here. It wasn’t a girl.”

Again, Harry laughed. Tom, he doesn’t know about us, and I just don’t have the heart to tell him now. It’s so fun to joke with him.

Draco was sure Harry was just trying to play it off as a joke, but he knew it wouldn’t work.

Tom merely smiled. Harry was not even able to finish his laughing fit before he was pulled by the arm into Tom’s embrace and pressed into a heated kiss. The laughter died between their joined lips. Harry got lost, forgetting momentarily that he had even been messing with Draco.

Draco’s eyes bugged before throwing their gazed to the floor, a fierce pinkish-red blush all over his face. Then, he and his parents left.

Tom released him, and Harry smiled. “I tried to tell him.”

Snape walked out of the room last. He had been taking some notes for a new potion they’d decided they need in their plans. He found Harry laughing (very typical) and Tom smiling beside him (highly unusual). He didn’t even try to question what was occurring. He was sure he did not want to know.

“My Lord, I have the ingredients that should work. I will have to test them, of course. I shall be in my lab if you need me.” Tom nodded, and with that, Snape disapperated.

Tom looked back to Harry. “Now that we are alone, what is it you would like to do, Harry?”

Harry’s laughed softened until it left altogether, melting into a large grin on his face. Thoughts of dancing leaves and trees filled his mind, but quickly vanished. With it, the smile faded. “Well, there’s something I want to talk about, first.”

Tom could sense the change in mood, but was at a loss for what it had changed to. Did something plague him? “Then let us discuss it. What is wrong, Harry?”

Harry took a slow breath before he answered. “It’s about a favor I asked of you.” Harry’s eyes went as cold as the gem they resembled. “I want my uncle dead, and I can’t do it alone.”
Sour Revenge

Tom Riddle's POV:

"Come on! I want to show you something." Harry tugged at the sleeves of my robes, an unadulterated joy in his eyes. It was this look that brought something out in myself, something that I never thought I had before.

A small laugh passed through my lips. "I am just behind you. What is the rush?"

He turned to me, lips parted in a large smile, showing the whiteness of his teeth, the pureness of his happiness. "I've got you show you. Really bad."

He practically dragged me up the stairs and down the hallway into the sitting room, my feet only barely keeping up.

"Yes, this is the sitting room," I said to him. "What is there to show me?"

"Watch," he spoke, softly now, as if he might awaken some invisible thing.

I watched as he cupped his hands together, a look of forced concentration growing upon his face. While he did this, I took a few glances around the still-destroyed room; I was still working on a spell to attempt to reverse burns on silk, although it was far more difficult that I had originally believed. Soon enough, his hands moved apart. In them was a misshapen ball of light. I watched curiously as Harry began to move his fingers around it, smoothing it in some places, but not all. Finally, he held his palm out so I could see the full lump. It was smooth on top with some bumps at the bottom. If he was attempting to make a circle, he was far off.

I looked at him. His eyes were distant, now. The childish joy from before was gone, replaced now with something I certainly understood but may never be able to explain. It was a soft feeling, vulnerable in every way, not quite sad, but definitely not happy.

He smiled, still, and gently pet the lump. It moved ever so slightly, and I assumed I had imagined it until it wriggled, and a head popped up. It was clear now: it was a doe laying curled up, green specks of light for eyes. We watched as it pulled its legs from under it, attempting to stand. On its first two attempts, it could not manage much but a fall. Its final attempt was far more successful, as it stood proud and strong. It leapt, then, from Harry hand and trotted about the room, leaving little lights almost like sparkles in its wake.

"It's my mother," he whispered, answering my thoughts before I could even think them. "Snape told me her Patronus was a doe. The more I watch this doe, the more I feel like she's here. Especially with its green eyes. Everyone who had ever known my mother told me I have her eyes."

For a moment, I understood. He missed her. He never knew her. This made him feel closer to her. And suddenly, emotion built up in my throat that I could not swallow down. Pins pricked at the back of my eyes, and I realized that, no, I was far from understanding. He had his mother's love and memories of her, stories of her. He had her, and she was taken away. I would never understand what that was like, and for once in my life, it hurt.

The little lights that the doe had left behind then bloomed into the tiniest flowers. The doe ran about them, frolicking without care.

"Snape also told me how, when they were children, my mother could make flowers bloom all year
'round. That's how she found out she was a witch."

An unintentionally shuttering breath came out of me. "Harry, I-"

"Tom, it's alright," Harry interrupted. "I know you've changed, and that's what matters. You've already apologized, and I've already forgiven you-"

Harry's words cut themselves off as he looked to me and saw my state. I could hardly get control of my breathing, it was as if it had its own mind. My eyes struggled to withhold their tears, and my face was distorted into some unnatural expression of forced withholding. It all made my chest feel tight.

"Tom? What's wrong?" Harry's hands came to me, gripping my arms. "Open up your mind. Let me in."

Harry's mind pushed on mine, and it all came rushing out of me: tears, sobs, gasps for breath between. I shut my eyes, yet the tears still flowed. The world around me spun and my knees hit the ground, one hand hardly steadying myself in time to save my head from the same fate. For the first time in an incredibly long time, I let myself cry over my first murder: my mother.

She was a woman I had learned little about, other than she was thought to be a squib. Her pureblood family thought she was a waste of magical blood and treated her as such. She charmed a charismatic muggle man using a love potion, and when it wore off, she was devastated that he left her, did not really love her, let her carry me to term on her own. She was a woman with nothing in the world, and the first thing I did with my life was take hers. Many times, I told myself that it was a sign that I was stronger than her, that I was destined to become Voldemort from that moment. Now, I understood that I was a monster since the beginning, there was no changing that.

"Hey, hey," Harry's comforting words and arms wrapped themselves around me. "Don't do that to yourself. You did not murder your mother. You were a baby. You didn't have control of anything that you did."

"I took my mother from me," I said between shaky breaths, the tears nearly spent. "I took your mother from you. Countless others as well, I am sure. But it all began with her."

"Stop," Harry said forcefully, startling me into opening my eyes and looking at him. "Your mother chose to die. She had magic. She could have healed herself, but she didn't. Her father and brother were terrible to her before they went to Azkaban and left her alone. Your father, the love of her life, decided to leave her, even after learning about you. She was depressed. She was looking for an escape, and she found one. It wasn't right to leave you in the world on your own. Don't blame yourself for a choice she obviously made."

I stared at Harry, completely baffled. He certainly had a way of sharing his own convictions. I believed him, without doubt, but years of convincing myself of my guilt did not go away.

Just then, an odd light came into the room. It was an otter, bearing a message for Harry.

"We're happy to hear everything is going well, Harry. You've always pulled through for us. Ron and I convinced most of his family that…" there was a slight hesitation in the vaguely familiar feminine voice, "…Tom isn't evil anymore. Only Ginny and Arthur are having a hard time with it. It does make sense, I suppose, but we're working on that. We haven't even touched the subject of you both just yet. And, if you're going to get to school on time, you better get your books as soon as possible, and read chapter 9 of your Charms book. I'm happy you both are doing well. Please respond." The otter vanished.
The mood of the room had not changed, but I needed it to. I was not yet ready to confront this idea Harry had given me: that my mother had abandoned me on purpose. This would be distraction enough.

"You told your friends already?"

Harry, who had been crouched beside me, let his weight shift from leaning towards me to back on his heels. "Well, yeah. They're my friends. They already knew about us anyway, so why not just keep them up to date? I wouldn't want them thinking you could still kill me at any time." He smirked as if it was a joke, but it was not even slightly humorous. It certainly did not make me feel better. "I suppose I should send my patronus back, then?" Harry pulled out his wand and poised it. "*Expecto Patronum.*"

A white light came out, but instead of morphing into a stag, it became a beautiful, albeit small basilisk. We both stared at it for a moment, confused, before Harry turned to me with a smile on his face.

"Look what you've done," he said playfully. "I'm a bloody snake." He sent it off, shaking his head, lips just barely turned up into a smile. He leaned back and let his bottom fall onto the floor, legs crossed before him. "I'm a bloody snake," he repeated quieter.

I moved to his side and wrapped my arms around him, placing a small kiss on his head. My heart was full; that was probably the largest compliment I had ever gotten.

"Harry, Love," I said quietly into his ear, "you definitely should have been in Slytherin."

Harry laughed and placed his hands on my arms, keeping me to him. "I don't think there are many Slytherins who will do as many stupid things as I have done. Only Gryffindors do that kind of stuff."

I let an amused huff of air pass through my nose. *Very true,* I thought at him. I place my nose on his head, filling my face with his unruly black hair that smelt of water and fresh fall air. The moment was far from perfect. Life—as I had known for a long while, but was just beginning to come to terms with—was not perfect. But if there was ever a moment that I would ever want to return to, it would be this one. Harry and I were so simply ourselves, and we were still in love with one another, and that was the most amazing realization in the world.

"Tom."

Harry's tone had grown far more serious than I was ready for.

"Yes, Harry," I whispered. "I know how late it is. But please, let us enjoy a few more minutes of this."

Harry nodded. After a moment of silence, he whispered back, "I love you. So much. Nothing you do or have done will ever change that."

I pressed my forehead to him. "I love you, too. More than I could ever hope to express and beyond all reason."

We sat, pressed together, for much longer than I had asked for. Long enough for me to breathe it all in, and to convince myself that, regardless of my sins, I deserved this.

*Severus Snape's POV:*
The feeling of accomplishment was not easily won, and yet it still rolled through my body like Felix Felicis. It had not gone quite to plan, but these types of situations hardly did. Sitting in my potion's lab, among my ingredients, I reflected on it all.

It was unusual that Harry always seemed to inch towards his death with every obstacle that Voldemort places in his way, but this one, it seemed, would be the last of those times. It was also unusual that Harry's actions had unintended results that led to things working out for the better. Harry was simply unique that way. He was caring to a fault, risking it all to save even his supposed nemesis. The thought appalled me, but then again, I was not much like him, if at all.

The fate of the Wizarding world looked brighter. Our previous meeting had gone over well, and I had my guidelines for how to reintroduce Tom Riddle into the world of magic. We had plans for magical children and for mentally ill witches and wizards. We wanted to assure that the problems that Harry and Tom Riddle had would become ones with solutions, assessable and manageable.

I was tasked with creating a potion that could be given to the parents of magical children which would be able to pass a discreet amount of wizarding knowledge to their minds and be viewed at will, similar to a pensieve but inside their minds. Such knowledge would allow them to cultivate their magical children properly and prevent many problems, from obscurials to small magic mishaps. I had to invent to potion, of course, which required testing and experimentation, but it would be incredibly useful.

I finished preparing my cauldron and gathering the ingredients I would use for my first attempt at making the potion. Of course, inventing a potion meant I had to consider many variables. How much of each ingredient would this require? How long did it need to simmer, and at what temperature? What type of knife(s) did I need to cut the ingredients? Or did they need to be ground? Or whole? I assumed it would take a few days to reach full maturity, but that was the only thing of which I was absolutely certain.

I sat in my chair, waiting for the first ingredient to settle into the brew. What would happen now? Harry and Tom would not only be working together but would be together. Would their relationship be something to hide from the public? Harry was barely of wizarding age and underage in the muggle legal system, and Tom was...visibly older than him by a few years and technically older than him by a considerable sum. Would such details contaminate their political intentions? If I hadn't mended their relationship myself, I would say such a relationship was inappropriate. Harry was young. He was caring and overly trusting. Easy to take advantage of. But Tom Riddle was as honestly smitten as I had ever seen him. It allowed me to overlook the age gap, but would others be able to?

I sighed, hoping that a few ignorant people would not take away from our success.

Just as long as he and Harry refrain from doing anything people would frown upon...it may just work.

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**Harry's POV:**

This house was vaguely familiar to me. It was probably some relative's house that I had been forced to visit. Tom was by my side. My wand was in my hand. Nothing could touch me. Not without my permission. Never again.

Tom and I had planned this well. He had used a special spell on my wand that would allow it 24 hours of untrackable spell casting. We were putting a silencing charm on the house, we had a plan for framing someone else, and Tom had his wand in his pocket in case I needed back up (or had one
of my guilty Gryffindor moments). My skin felt electric and my blood buzzed. I was beyond ready.

We walked up to the door, Tom using an invisibility spell, and I knocked on the door. There were a few moments of muffled yelling coming from inside, and then some shuffling about, and finally the door opened. Dudley stood in the doorway, his eyes surprised to find me standing there.

"What are you doing here?"

As much contempt that I held for him, he wasn't worth anything I could lash at him. I knew what I was there for, and I was not about to get sidetracked.

I grit my teeth. "I'm here to get something of mine."

A familiar round and pink face came to the door, her hair two shades too dark from her roots. "We don't have your bitch of a mum here. So, you little delinquent, leave."

I smiled at Marjorie Dursley with all the contempt I could manage. "Aunt Marge. Lovely to see you again. I really do need to grab something of mine. I'll only be a minute."

Marge gave me a sneer but stepped away from the door. "Come, Dudley, let the boy figure out where to search on his own."

But Dudley did not move. Instead, he stayed in the doorway and stared at me. When I looked into his eyes, my anger for him vanished. They were large and wide, slightly too wet, and knowing.

"What are you here for, Harry?" he asked quietly, just loud enough for us both to hear.

I said nothing.

He nodded. "Harry…” he took a breath. "I know what I did to you was wrong, and I know what I didn't do for you was even more so. But when you left…” he took another breath, shakier this time. "When you left, he started…I…"

For the first time in a long time, I really looked at Dudley. He was must thinner than he used to be, probably unhealthily so. He had soft purple rings under his eyes that were exacerbated by the shadows of the evening. I could barely just see silvery pale lines of scars on his wrist, mostly hidden by his long sleeves, that held the door open. All at once, the pieces fell together.

"He replaced me with you? His own son?" The questions left my lips in such a hush, they were hardly said at all.

His lips pressed together, his head ever so slightly nodding. He turned to back into the house and yelled out, "Dad! I'm going out for a walk!"

He stepped forward and let the door close behind him. He placed a hand on my shoulder, giving me another knowing look before he let go and walked on, going down the street and not looking back.

I held my fists at my sides, clenched with as much force as I could muster. I was angry before, but it was nothing compared to now. Vernon was not just a rapist, he was a fucking monster. Who rapes their own goddamned child?

A hand placed itself on my shoulder. I turned and saw nothing, but I knew it was Tom.

Focus, his mind told me. Your anger can wait until we have him where we want him.

I nodded and pushed open the door without any further delay.
I walked into a disgustingly pink room. It was honestly worse than Umbridge's office. Instead of china plates with moving cats on them, the room was decorated with pictures of pink people: Vernon, Marge, some others I didn't know, but mostly Dudley. I could see in them his change over time. There were younger ones of him, husky and smiling with stains on his shirt, as I had remembered him before. As he ages, the smiles become more fake, his eyes duller, his bony edges a bit too sharp.

_Merlin, what has he done to my cousin?_

"Harry," a voice called from the couch. I turned to look and saw him there: Vernon Dursley, watching TV like he hadn't a care in the world. He looked just as pink as I remembered, just as sickening as I remembered. "I didn't expect to see you here." Something flashed in his eyes, that revolting hunger that never seemed to be satisfied. Not with me, and not with Dudley, apparently. The thought caused my stomach to roll.

"I came here to get something I should have gotten a while ago but didn't. Maybe…maybe I was scared, then."


I let myself have a bitter laugh. "Maybe you think the answer is you, but it's not. I have been scared of many things in my life, but you have never been one of them, you sick bastard."

From the other side of the room, Marge, obviously body-bound, was dragged forward into the room with us. Vernon's eyes widened when he saw her.

"What is this?!

"It's justice, asshole."

I didn't want to give him an easy death. There was no Avada Kedavra here. I cast every excruciating curse I knew at him, watching his fat pink face scream for help. His body froze from the inside, and then his blood boiled, and then he seized. His nose grew bloody, as did his mouth, and he started choking on his own blood. From behind me, Tom cast a quick spell to clear his throat, and I cast my spell list all over again. We didn't want him to die too quickly. I wanted to see him in pain. I wanted him to fear for his life, to hear him beg and plead like he never let me. I sent the Cruciatius curse at him, the red light filling the darkening room with an ominous hue.

This was nothing like torturing Pettigrew. With Pettigrew, I just wanted him to get back at him. I didn't want to kill him, I didn't want to teach him a lesson. It was purely selfish and indulging in it felt good. Watching Vernon being tortured was beyond frustrating. I could never get back at him. I could never teach him a lesson or get him to understand what he did to me, to Dudley. I could kill him, stop him from ever doing his horrible deeds ever again, but it would never leave me satisfied. I knew this.

"Harry, you can—cggh—can't do this," he forced out of a melted throat. "I took you in—cggh. I saved you from—cgghcggh—that evil man. You—cggh—should be thank—cggh—thanking me."

I shook my head. "The only evil man was you, and you never saved me from him. You made my life a living hell. And look what you've done to Dudley! You deserve everything you get. You should be thanking me. For allowing you to live so long. But maybe you don't want to live much longer."

He said nothing.

"Or, I could continue, if you prefer to live."
"No!" he choked. "Cggh—please."

My wand arm fell back to my side. "Please what?"

"Please—cgghh—kill me."

I raised my wand once more. "Avada Kedavra!"

The green light was there and then gone. When it faded, Vernon was dead.

Tom sent a spell to him, fixing up his body, making it look as un bloodied and pink as it had before. Then, he released the bind on Marge.

"What in God's name-"

"Obliviate," I cast.

Marge's face went blank, staring at the pink wall. A knife floated from the kitchen, stabbed Vernon a few times, and then landed right on her hand.

"You killed him," I said. "Call the cops and admit it."

Then, we made our exit.
Hermione Granger's POV:

Ron and I sat outside in the field on a blanket Mrs. Weasley gave us. It was a bit torn at the edges, but the longer I stared at it, its complicated moving pattern of green and blue and purple, I found myself thinking of home.

We waited for a Patronus reply from Harry. It was all so important, lately. We had to break the news to Ron's family—which had been, and still was, difficult—and then we had to consider Tom and Harry and where they were heading now, not to mention school beginning soon. It was one thing to focus on after the other, and yet I was still so terribly distracted by thoughts of home.

The blue and green pot holders that littered our dining table, the ones that my mother kept from her mother. The green and yellow leaves on my mom's living room plant, which she watered and fed fruit scraps to on occasion. The purple and silver flower stickers I'd once put on the back of my dad's sitting chair. The plaid blanket that lay folded on the back of our living room couch, the one we used when we had movie marathons, with chewable mint candies instead of popcorn and herbal tea in mugs with knitted cozies on them.

I hadn't been home in so long, it felt like. It was best, of course, so they didn't get hurt being mixed up in all this mess, but now the mess was over. With school starting so soon, I began to wonder if I would get to see them before the holidays came around. It seemed so awfully far away.

"'Mione? Are you alright?"

"Hmm?" My mind popped back to itself. "Yes, of course."

Ron's lips pursed in disbelief. "You've been staring at one corner of the blanket for five minutes straight now. What is it?"

I sighed. "It's...it's just that...Well, we got Snape's update that Harry was okay and that Tom and Harry made up, and we got Harry's update that Tom isn't evil anymore, and we've told your family, and I've only just finished our summer reading, and-"

"'Mione..." Ron's face was relaxed, but his voice was firm and serious.

"We've just been doing so much, and it's finally all over, but school is starting soon, and I miss my parents."

"Merlin, Hermione," Ron said, shaking his head. "You don't have to put your family on hold just to make everyone else happy."

"No," I started, slightly irritated. "I had to do it to keep them safe. We were planning on hunting horcruxes and fighting Death Eaters. The only reason we didn't was because Harry didn't know where to start looking, and then he did that trade thing...Ron, I haven't seen my parents since...holidays last year!"

We were silent a moment. I didn't know what else to say. Maybe Ron didn't get it. He was always around his family. It was difficult sometimes to fit a muggle family into the magical world, but that didn't mean I didn't want to try.

"Do you want to visit them?" Ron asked quietly. "Before school starts."
I took a deep breath. "I don't know, Ron. I...we are needed here. I don't want to leave you here by yourself trying to convince your family that Tom isn't evil, and to break the news to them that he and Harry are together."

Ron nodded. "I appreciate that...How in the bloody 'ell are we gonna do that?"

"I haven't the slightest."

Ron was silent another moment before he shrugged. "Maybe we could bring your parents here to visit. You'd still get to see them, but you can still be here with us."

I smiled, not with happiness but with soft sadness. "Where are they going to stay, Ron? Your house is crowded as it is, with me and all your brothers staying here."

"We could...give them my room. I'll sleep on the couch."

I sighed once more and turned to Ron, looking in his blue eyes. They were soft and caring. I know he was trying to help, but it all seemed much more trouble than it was worth.

"My parents aren't going to let you sleep on the couch while they stay in your bed."

Ron sighed, letting his shoulder lean into mine ever so slightly. "We'll think of something, 'Mione."

"I sure hope we do," I answered back quietly.

I didn't know how it would be possible, but the idea of hope was nice. Ron wanted to help, so maybe I didn't have to wait until Christmas.

"So what do your parents do, again?" Ron asked.

I gave him a small smile. "They're dentists. They work on people's teeth. Clean them, help protect them, fix them when they get bad."

He nodded. "Right. Dentists. Do they...uh...have to put their hands in people's mouths to do that?"

I chuckled. "Well, yes, but they put on plastic gloves so that they don't have to actually touch their mouths."

"Oh good. And do they...clean teeth better than a teeth brushing spell?"

I hadn't really thought about it before. "Hmm. I'd like to think so, but probably not by much. I figure that manual brushing is probably the worst, and then magical brushing, and then a dental cleaning. See, my parents use this special tool that cleans one tooth at a time, and it gets into the cracks and gum line better than a normal brush ca-

Something across the field caught my eye, and I stopped mid-sentence to point. It was glowy and white but quite small for Harry's stag patronus. It moved quite oddly, too. It didn't gallop, although from this distance, I could hardly tell what it was doing.

"What is that? Can't be 'arry's Patronus, can it?"

"I don't know, Ron. It doesn't look like it."

We both watched the form get closer and closer until we could make it out.

"Bloody 'ell! It's a snake!"
I racked my brain, trying to match this Patronus to someone. "Whose Patronus is a snake?"

It should have been close enough now to make out details, but it moved so fast that we could hardly make out anything until the snake stopped in front of us and began to speak.

"I know this isn't my normal animal…" it was Harry's voice, tentative and a bit embarrassed-sounding, "but I have an explanation. You remember how Tonk's Patronus changed into a werewolf because she loved Remus? Well, I think the same might have happened to me. So, don't have a heart attack; it really is me, Hermione. Thank you for sparing them the shock and managing to convince most of them Tom is good. Tom announced to his followers that he's done, and then made some plans for laws and other Ministry stuff. Most of his followers were on board. Some of them looked relieved, actually. We all want to help magical children. There are so many ways they can fall through the gaps in the current system, so we'd like to fill those gaps. Stuff that will make sure there is never another Tom Riddle. If you'd like to help, or find someone who can help, that would be great." He sighed. "I'll get my books as soon as I can, but I won't have time to read that chapter. Just fill me in when I get there. Tell Ron I said hi."

And the snake was gone. I blinked my eyes a bit, trying to take all of that information in. There was a lot of it. Harry's new Patronus was a snake, Tom Riddle wanted to help magical children, they said we could help. I looked to Ron, his face twisted into confusion with wide eyes and thin lips. It was a cute look on him, although I'd never admit that out loud.

I pulled out my wand and was beginning to send off another Patronus back, when Ron snapped out of his confusion and put his hand on my wand.

"Is it…is it alright if I send the message this time? I feel like I haven't talked to Harry in-"

"Oh! Yes, of course. I'm…so sorry, Ron." Guilt washed over me. "I've been talking with Harry this whole time and haven't even let you have a word."

He put a hand on my shoulder. "It's alright. It's all been business and that. But now I feel like I can say hi back without feeling guilty about it."

He took his hand off my shoulder and pulled out his own wand. "*Expecto Patronum.* We watched as the little dog scampered off and disappeared.

Beneath my now fading guilt, my mind still worked. "Do you think your dad would help Harry? Maybe give him a chance to speak with some people in the Ministry? Maybe even the Minister?"

Ron's brows joined together, and he leaned back, one arm propping him up. "He might help Harry, but he won't help Riddle. He'd think you were mental for even asking."

I nodded. "That's enough, I think."

I stood and began to walk back to the house. Behind me, I could hear Ron gathering up the blanket in a haste to catch up with me. He was at my side then, the blanket a jumble in his arms, bits of dirt still clinging to it and others falling off of it. We were about to walk back inside when I stopped just before the door. From inside, I could hear Mrs. Weasley's vacuuming charm.

"What?" Ron asked, looking at me curiously, like he missed something. Which, of course, he did.

"She's vacuuming. Don't you hear?"

His puzzled look grew. "Yeah. And?"
"And you're carrying a blanket with bits of dirt falling off it. What do you think she'll say?"

He looked from me to the blanket, his confusion melting. "She'd have a fit, saying that I was dirtying her newly clean floor."

I nodded. "Exactly. So shake it out first."

"I don't know the spell," he said simply.

I rolled my eyes. "Then do it by hand."

Ron grabbed one end of the blanket with both hands and let the rest fall. Just that movement seemed to cause most of the dirt bits to drop off. He gave it a few good shakes, and while it didn't look quite clean, it was at least unlikely to track in the house.

I turned to go open the door, but it was already open wide, and Mrs. Weasley stood in it with a smile on her face.

"Thank you, Ron, Dear, for doing that," she said over the sound of the vacuum as it grew weaker, heading into another room. "I really do appreciate it. Don't forget to wipe your feet, too."

Ron carried the blanket inside, stopping to wipe his feet on the mat before stepping in. I followed suit, Mrs. Weasley softly saying, "You are a little blessing," to me as I did so.

Once we were both inside, Mrs. Weasley asked, "So, did you get Harry's reply?"

"Yes, we did," I answered. "He explained how he and Tom want to help magical children. Tom Riddle had a pretty bad childhood, so I imagine he doesn't want that to happen to other children. Do you think Arthur would help them? Or at least Harry?"

She raised her eyebrows. "I…suppose he would. The former Dark Lord wants to help children? How odd…" She made her way to the kitchen, where the regular clanking of metal seemed to reveal that she was doing the dishes.

I glanced back at Ron. "Is your dad at work?"

Ron shrugged. "I don't think so. He's usually home. Probably upstairs working, though."

I nodded and started up the stairs. I hoped he wasn't too busy. I didn't want to disturb him. I knocked on the door.

"Come in," he said.

I walked in just as he was tying a letter to an owl.

"Hermione. I can honestly say I didn't expect you. What can I help you with?"

"Mr. Weasley, can I ask a favor of you?"

He smiled kindly. "Of course. Just a minute." He released the owl out the window and turned back to me. "What is it?"

A nervous energy came over me. "Well, it…it really isn't for me. It's a favor for Harry. He…in his
last message to us, he said he wanted to prevent any more dark wizards from rising, so...he has some ideas for some laws to propose to the Minister."

Mr. Weasley placed a hand on his chin and raised an eyebrow. "Hmm. I see. What kind of laws would stop that?"

I took a deep breath, but it felt all too short. "Well, you see, Tom Riddle had a terrible childhood. I...don't really know the details, but it caused him to develop a hatred for muggles. Harry thinks that if the Ministry could help more children, they could prevent that."

He pondered a moment, brows knitting together and eyes going distant as he got lost in thought. After a long moment, he slowly nodded his head.

"Yes, I think I may be able to get some people to listen to him, as well as the Minister." He released his concentrated look and picked up a smile. "Harry's always doing good. He really is looking out for others. Oh, I'm sure I could arrange a private speaking. Not too private, though. I'm sure he'd like word to get out about his proposals. Inviting the right journalist may be in order..."

He grabbed another piece of parchment out of his drawer and picked up his quill. I watched as he jotted down some words, stopping a few times to read over it and nod to himself. At last, he folded it and placed it in an envelope, pulling out his sealing kit and stamping an elegant red seal over it.

He looked back to me. "You don't happen to have an owl, do you? I just sent mine off."

"Yes! Of course. Octans!"

After a moment, he flew up through the window. How he had gotten outside again, I will never know. He was supposed to be in his cage. Maybe Ron let him chase mice in the field again...

Mr. Weasley handed the very official letter to Octans, who took it carefully in his claws and flew out the window. "Thank you."

I smiled. "Thank you, Mr. Weasley. I'm sure Harry will be quite happy about this."

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**3rd Person POV:**

Harry and Tom had been chatting in the still-burnt sitting room when they received *another* Patronus. The first had been from Ron, and now, it seemed, they were getting another one from Hermione.

"My, you are popular with your friends today," Tom commented. "Although, I understand why, it is...slightly annoying."

Harry scoffed and waved Tom off as the Patronus began to speak its message.

"I spoke with Mr. Weasley about helping you with your law proposals. He owled some people in the Ministry, and they got back to him immediately. They would like for you to speak about it, publicly, to garner support through the general wizarding population and, therefore, support in Ministry officials. We've only been in the planning stages, but it looks like a lot of the Ministry wants to be in attendance, maybe half so far. We will have journalists attend, but only good ones. Rita Skeeter will not be attending, in any form. They'd like to have it in the next few days, so let me or Mr. Weasley know when you will be available. I'm so certain this will help, both you and Tom."

Harry's eyes went wide. "She what?" His voice was higher than he anticipated.
Tom nodded to himself for a moment before grabbing his wand and casting a message off, mumbling to himself, "Yes, this is good" repeatedly.

"You're not going to stop it?" Harry asked, directing his incredulous look towards Tom.

"Of course not, Harry, this is a far better plan than we had managed. We can use your high popularity within the Wizarding World go get our laws through." Tom stood, fingers steepled together. "We won't need to infiltrate the Ministry at all. Well, not any more than we had initially planned."

"You're both mental!" Harry said, throwing his hands in the air. "I can't speak in front of half the ministry. In front of newspapers and people. I just wanted help getting the word out!"

Tom turned to Harry and smiled at him, sitting back down beside Harry on the couch and placing a comforting hand on his back. "Harry, Love, this is the best help we could have received. This is a wonderful opportunity. I have no doubt in my mind that you will do tremendously."

Harry shook his head. "I'll look ridiculous. I'll sound ridiculous. I don't even know what I'm supposed to say or talk about. What if I mess up? What if they completely reject my ideas?"

Tom sighed. "Harry, you sound ridiculous now."

Harry huffed and pushed himself up from the couch. "I'm being serious, Tom! Why do those people care what I have to say? A few years ago, they thought I was evil, trying to kill my classmates, or whatever nonsense. Who's to say they won't just laugh at me? Or not even bother showing up…"

Tom placed his elbow on the top of his thigh and pinched the bridge of his nose, taking a deep breath before he stood and grabbed Harry firmly by his shoulders.

"Harry, look at me." His tone was serious, firm but not harsh, like his grip. When Harry met his eyes, he continued. "I want you to do nothing but listen to me as I say this because I will only ever tell you this once: you have an incredible amount of power in the Wizarding world. If you so much as said you wanted the grass to be blue and the sky to be green, wizards would come from all around the world, casting spells day and night, to give you just that. The reason fabricated lies like what you mentioned sold newspapers is because everyone put their faith in you, and that faith was based on nothing but rumor, or some prophecy no one is even sure is true. They worry that their faith is misplaced when times are difficult. When I wanted to get everyone to turn on you, it wasn't a difficult thing to do, but you always managed to bring them back around. They are loyal to you, still, and likely always will be. I can promise you, Harry Potter, any policy you propose at the Ministry will have some opposition but will also have a greater following."

Tom released his shoulders, but they continued to stare at one another. Harry's eyes were large but no longer in confusion or panic. In his chest, Harry felt a warmth beginning to bloom, a strength that he'd underestimated. It never failed him, not even once. Tom knew that better than anyone.

Harry nodded and broke eye contact. "Yes, alright. I'll do it."

Tom smiled. "Excellent. Then, I suppose it is time for a trip to your friend's house."

Harry looked up at him again. "What? But, we haven't even fixed the wards ye-"

"I can manage. Tell Ron that we are on our way."

Harry took in an exasperated breath but pulled out his wand and sent a quick Patronus to Ron. "How are we even going to explain you?"
"No need. I'm simply a means to an end, for the moment."

Harry sighed and shook his head. "Fine, then."

He grabbed Tom's arm and apparated. When they arrived, they could see Ron just coming out of the house. He waved and ran over.

"Harry! Wasn't expecting you so soon. We haven't fixed the wards."

"I know, but coming over just seemed easier, since I was talking with both you and Hermione through Patronus." Harry gave a thin-lipped smile before it melted into a real one. "It's good to see you, Ron."

Ron smiled, too, and hugged Harry. "It's good to see you, too, mate." When he let go, Ron laughed a bit to himself. "It's nice that it's not an emergency, either."

Harry laughed a bit, too. "Yeah. A normal visit, for once."

Ron looked to Tom, a bit unsure. "And uh, thanks for agreeing to help…Tom."

Tom gave a cordial smile. "Of course. Anything for Harry's family."

Ron smiled then, too. "Well, I'm not sure if it will be easy, but it'll be helpful, for sure. We always have too many people and not enough room." Ron turned back to the house. "Wait here a second."

Ron ran back to the house, opening the door only to yell in, "Hermione! Mum! Harry's here!"

He waited a moment. Soon after, Hermione was running down the stairs.

"Are you mad?" she whispered angrily at Ron. "What is Tom doing here? Mr. Weasley and I could see him from the window. He asked who it was."

"What'd you say?" Ron asked.

Hermione shrugged. "I said it was his new boyfriend. It's not a lie. He seemed a bit surprised, but he went with it."

"Isn't…" Ron let a puff of air out of his nose, "isn't that supposed to be Harry telling him? You can't just go around telling people for him."

Mrs. Weasley came out from the other room with a smile on her face. "Sorry! Had to finish in the loo. Harry's here?"

"Yeah, and he's…" Ron looked to Hermione and then back to his mom, "…brought someone. We need to fix the wards, so he can come in."

Mrs. Weasley shooed them out the door. "Don't keep the door open so long, Ronald. You'll let the dust in." She let the door close behind her and stood on the porch staring at Harry and the man next to him. She was a smart woman, but as she did the math in her head, she made sure not to let on.

"Who'd he bring? A friend?"

"Er…of sorts." Ron said. "It'd be best if Harry told you." He gave a pointed look at Hermione.

Mrs. Weasley pulled out her wand and did a few quick movements. When she finished, she called out, "Come in, Dears!"
Harry was the first to move forward, no hesitation as he made his way into the wards of the Burrow. Tom, slightly behind him, moved slower, with more uncertainty. He was aware of the fact that these people were not exactly fans of his, but the idea that they might feel under attack because of his presence had just settled in. His heart rate spiked ever so slightly.

"Harry!" Mrs. Weasley held her arms open, an invitation for a hug, which Harry took with great pleasure. "How have you been? We've missed you, here."

Harry smiled. "I know. I'm sorry. I've missed you all, too. And missed it here." He pulled away, and Mrs. Weasley released him begrudgingly.

Mrs. Weasley gave a polite smile to Tom. "And Harry, who is this friend of yours?"

Tom's stomach began to turn to ice. He had just met this woman, but he could tell that she was a quick one. Her face may have been pleasant and smiling, but her body language was otherwise. He noticed that she still held her wand in her hand, and it twitched ever so slightly as he looked at it. Her feet were in a sturdy position, now, unlike when she had hugged Harry. She looked strong; she looked ready. She knew who he was. She hid it for Harry's sake. He understood that. He would do the same, were he in such a situation. That was something, he supposed, they could agree on: Harry first.

"This is..." Harry glanced at Tom for a moment, before looking back to Mrs. Weasley, "Tom."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione watched with anticipation. Mrs. Weasley's eyebrows rose.

"Tom?" she asked. She looked to Ron and Hermione for verification. "Tom?"

"Yes," Tom said, voice smooth as silk but heart racing. "Tom Riddle, for now. I hope it is still acceptable for me to visit."

Mrs. Weasley looked him up and down, her earlier smile now gone, replaced instead with pursed lips. For a moment, she stood like that, then, she held out a hand for him to shake.

"If you're with Harry, you're welcome here," she said, but her smile did not return.

Slowly, so as not to alarm her, Tom raised his hand and shook hers. "Pleasure to meet you."

They released hands, and Mrs. Weasley's calm and kind demeanor returned. "Well, it's not that I don't love your visits, Dear," she looked back to Harry, "but why have you come? To stay for dinner, I hope."

Harry released a breath he had been holding in and smiled. "We'd love to, if there's room. But, actually, we came to help with something. Ron told us that Hermione was hoping for her parents to visit before she goes back to school."

Mrs. Weasley looked back to Hermione, whose cheeks were beginning to pinken. "Minny, Dear, you never told me this. Oh, of course you miss your parents." She lightly hit her forehead with her hand. "If you'd like we can move people around to make some room. I'm sure Charlie wouldn't mind the couch for a few days."

"Actually," Ron piped up, "I asked if Harry and Tom could help make our house a bit bigger. You know, so we could fit everyone in it without needing to use the couch."

Mrs. Weasley's eyes bugged. "Oh, Ron, I don't know about that. I'm not sure how much higher we can go before we topple over."
"Underground, perhaps?" Tom asked, careful to keep his tone light and helpful.

"Yeah, we could have a basement," Ron pulled at the hem of her sweater, as he had for his entire childhood when he needed to implore his mother. "Pleease, mum! Imagine having us all here. Dad can talk to 'Mione's parents about muggle stuff, and they can meet the family."

Mrs. Weasley moved her gaze from Ron to Hermione. "What do you think, Dear? Do you think your parents would like that?"

Hermione nodded. "Of course. I'm sure they miss me as much as I miss them, if not more. I'll call them right away."

Mrs. Weasley nodded. "Alright. Then it's settled. We're making a basement!"

Ron and Harry cheered. They all pulled out their wands and began to discuss what exactly "adding a basement" meant, magic-wise. They all needed to help, because it would take a lot of magic to make a basement, especially since a house was already on top of it.

Tom, who was most experienced with magical architecture, suggested that he first do a spell that would ensure that the house is supported sufficiently before they began digging. After that, Harry and Ron could begin some digging spells, and Mrs. Weasley and Hermione could work on building the room above ground. The idea was to build it, shrink it down, place it under the house, and then carefully grow it until it fit.

Of course, it all worked perfectly in theory. Hermione and Mrs. Weasley finished the room and shrunk it down before Harry and Ron had even gotten halfway done with the digging, and so had to help them dig for a while. Then, they put the shrunken room in and grew it, only to find that they'd (Harry) had placed it slightly crooked. The corners were not in the proper places, so when the room got close to the size they wanted, the walls began to creak from the bending of the wood.

They shrunk it and tried again with Hermione aligning the room. It grew and fit perfectly into the space, but when Tom released the stability charm, the room began to creak again, and the house to tip ever so slightly. Tom quickly recast the stability charm and righted the house. Hermione got a muggle level from her purse and placed it on the room, finding that the "flat" floor they thought they had was actually leaning to the right.

They shrunk the room again and dug just a bit on the left side to even out the floor. Hermione triple checked every corner and side with her level before even allowing them to grow the room again. When it did grow, it was, thankfully, in place, but their extra digging had made the hole slightly too deep for the room, so its ceiling didn't touch the house at all.

Rather than start over and build a bigger room, Tom and Molly chatted about how best to stretch the walls up. The dilemma was that, in one option, the walls would be spread literally, therefore making them thinner and weaker; in the other option, Tom would have to, in a way, duplicate the wood/nails pattern to create a sort of ceiling with the tops of the walls connected to it, but the problem was that Tom was currently occupied with keeping the house steady. He could try to do both at the same time, he offered, but both spells took much concentration, and even he was not sure he was capable of that.

Harry, Hermione, and Ron were all sitting on the dusty ground, listening to them and thinking of their own solutions. After a moment, Harry voiced his.

"I'll hold the house, Tom."
All eyes fell on him.

"Harry, I know you want to help, Dear, but this is some delicate magic," Mrs. Weasley said with a sad smile. "Even I am a little rusty."

"It's not even something you can practice with without causing the whole house to collapse," Hermione added. "Even if you could do it for a bit, you'd have to hold it for as long as it takes to make the ceiling, which isn't likely to be quick, with how Tom was explaining it."

Harry didn't look to anyone but Tom. Tom's face was smooth, eyes crinkled at their far corners as he considered the idea. The others didn't know about their mind link—at least not how extensive it had become. Harry could easily perform the spell and hold it, for Tom was able to, but in doing so, would they raise question? It was absolutely a spell that Harry should not be able to perform and hold—it took practice, precision, concentration, and certainly a great amount of magical strength. The whole predicament seemed to be without solution until the oddest thought occurred in Tom's very own mind.

What if Tom and Harry just told them about the mind link?

It was the truth, and the truth was hardly anything Tom had used before, but it seemed worth a shot. Although the last thing Tom wanted to do was lend his trust to more people, these were people Harry trusted. They would never betray him or do anything to harm him. They will protect him to their graves, and that was enough for him.

"It will work," Tom said, then. All eyes previously on Harry looked to him. "The spell is not too complicated for me, so by extension, Harry can perform it as well. We continue to have a connection in our mind, although it is much more powerful than it once was. Harry will simply borrow the experience from me."

Harry's eyes widened at the confession, but the corner of his lips curled up ever so slightly.

The air around them fell silent for two beats, Hermione being the one to break it.

"That…explains a lot." Hermione looked back at Harry. "You mean to tell me that we could have been using Tom's experience this whole time and, instead, just let you dig a big hole?"

Harry laughed, and everyone seemed to join in. "Yeah, that's exactly it. Guess it just didn't cross my mind until now."

"Well, come on then, Harry," Mrs. Weasley said, unease only present as tense shoulders. "Hold the house while Tom finishes the basement."

Harry stood and brushed the dirt off his bum before he opened his mind to Tom, finding Tom's already open to him. At the forefront was the spell he was casting, holding the house up. Harry could feel the great power it took. His magic had to be strong enough to hold it, but everything else he could borrow from Tom. He pulled out his wand and hesitated for the slightest second before Tom's previous words returned to him.

You have an incredible amount of power in the Wizarding world.

He hadn't meant this type of power, but the more Harry considered it, the more he realized that his magic was powerful. He cast a Patronus in his third year. He had countered every spell Voldemort had thrown at him with a power even to his own. He'd cast an unforgivable curse at Bellatrix, and it worked. He was powerful enough to hold up a house. He was sure.
He cast the spell. As his magic welled up underneath the Burrow, Tom's receded. When Tom's magic was gone completely, he felt the weight of the house. It was heavier than he ever could have imagined, but his magic did not falter. In fact, he could feel his magic better, this way. Under the strain, it had a different feel to it. He was mesmerized by the feel of it, like a buzzing in his veins, not sharp but textured. It was an energy he'd never focused so clearly on before, and it was intoxicating.

'Be careful Harry,' Tom's mind purred at him, seeing the feelings growing in Harry's mind. *There are other people here. We do not want any unsightly distractions.*

Harry was confused for only a split second as he realized there was a warmth beginning to pool in his groin. He didn't know how to stop it, but when he looked over to the others, it seemed they were all watching Tom build with great interest. Only Mrs. Weasley seemed to be making occasional glances his direction, but his back was mostly to her. He felt his pants grow tighter, but not terribly so. He was thankful.

He redirected his attention to the house. He could see, from his angle, why the Burrow looked the way it did, sort of topsy-turvy. Each level of the house, while not exactly leaning severely, was slightly angled. The top level the least so. Or most so. He supposed it depended on how you the house was put together.

"Alright, Harry, I am nearly finished."

Harry turned to see that the ceiling was in. All it needed was some stretching on the walls and it would fit perfectly. He watched as Tom did just that. Tom looked to Harry and nodded. Harry released the spell, and everyone watched. There was a slight creaking noise, but then silence. It seemed that they were successful.

"Wonderful! I think we've done it," Mrs. Weasley cheered. "Now all we've got is the furnishings."

"Yes," Tom agreed. He looked over Mrs. Weasley. He'd noticed the stress in her shoulders since he'd mentioned their mind connection. Maybe she needed sometime for Harry to explain things. He'd make sure they had some time. "Stairs being the first and foremost piece. I'll get on them immediately. I will need some aid from below. I would ask for Harry's help, but that spell is tiring. He needs some rest, maybe a snack." He looked at Ron and Hermione. "Would you both mind helping?"

Hermione smiled. "Not at all. Thank you for this. I appreciate it."

"Well, it was not my idea." Tom smiled at Ron. "Come then."

When they left, Mrs. Weasley let the happy façade fall. "Harry, are you alright, Dear?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah. The spell was nothing, really. I feel fine. Although, I do think we'll stay for dinner. I'm famished."

Mrs. Weasley walked over to him and held his shoulders. "Of course, Dear, but that's not what I mean. He's in your head. Surely that can't be easy."

"Oh," Harry looked down, "that's what you mean. I-It's not as bad as you think. Not bad at all, actually. I always know if he means well. He can't hide anything without me knowing. And he does. Mean well, I mean. He...cares about me. We understand each other. Better than anyone else, I think. I mean, it was a bit difficult when Voldemort was around, but he's gone, now. And even if he wasn't, I know Tom doesn't like him. That he's *nothing* like him. And I just...we've been through a lot, together."
Mrs. Weasley's mouth grew a smile as he finished. "Come on, then. I'll make you some tea and you can tell me all about it."

Mrs. Weasley began to walk towards the door, and Harry watched her with eyes wide and brows knit.

"Tell you about it? About what?"

Mrs. Weasley held open the front door. "About what's happened while you were gone, of course. I want the whole story. No skips or censors."

Harry made his way to the door, an unsure feeling in his gut but a good one in his heart. He suddenly found himself smiling.

"Oh Mrs. Weasley, you won't believe how much progress he's made since the Luna incident."
Harry's POV:

With my legs shaking under me, I took cautious steps forward into a room entirely too filled with people, sitting in their chairs in rows, or standing off to the sides of the room. There was a podium I was to stand at and speak, off to the left from where I stood, looking small and meek amongst the crowd. The only reason it stood apart was because no one was near it; the entire room was filled with people except for this small empty circle around the podium. Everyone in the room chatted amongst themselves, not even aware of my arrival in the room, as I blended in. I had to push my way through, make my path to the podium, through the sea of dark suit jackets and professional dresses.

When I finally reached the podium, I stood at it and scanned the room. It was then that the lights darkened, and a spotlight shone over me, bright and glaring. I could hardly see anything but vague silhouettes. I had to shield my eyes.

"Harry Potter," a voice from nowhere spoke, "please explain to us, what are these laws you want to pass?"

I swallowed a lump in my throat. "Well, see, there are a lot of ways that magical children-"

"Is it true that you were abused as a child?" another voice interrupted. "Neglected in your muggle home?"

I tried to answer quickly, to keep pace with the questions. "Uh, well, yes, and tha-"

"Is it true that you've begun plotting with the Dark Lord?"

"What? No. Well, it's compl-"

"Are these laws ones that you want to pass or that he wants to pass?"

"Me! Both of us! We-"

"Have you officially gone dark side? Have you renounced your role as Savior of the Light?"

"What?"

Question after question rolled in, then, all talking over one another. I could only catch bits and pieces of each one.

"Is it true tha-"

"-can the magical-"

"-outrageous laws-"

"STOP!"

The room fell silent as the booming voice over powered all others. My heart stopped, and my breath fell short. Across the room was Tom, standing tall and proud amongst the people sitting in their chairs. His red eyes were glowing with rage.

Just as his lips opened to say something, I felt a familiar cold air, almost like breath, begin to creep
down my neck and back. I looked down at the podium and saw frost growing around the edges like unruly vines. When I looked up once more, dementors floated about the room. There were maybe five or six, but they all began to home in on Tom.

My hand went to my pocket, but my wand was not there. I patted my other pocket, finding it was not there either. I searched around me, desperate for my wand.

"Please, no! Let him be. *Please!*"

One by one, the dementors began to sip away his soul, one bit at a time, circling around him like vultures. He was helpless for once. I looked around the room, desperate for a kind or familiar face, but none were there. They were all strangers. None of them cared. Their eyes were as cold as the air in the room. I was all he had.

I leapt from the podium and towards Tom, shoving people aside, forcing myself through, forming a path to him. He was so far away, and I was taking too long to get there, but I had no choice. Everyone didn't want to budge, holding their ground firmly, preventing me from getting where I needed to go. My arms began to ache, and my legs were weary by the time I made it to him.

It was too late.

He fell back limply to his chair as the dementors finally stopped feeding from him. A little light escaped from his mouth, then, floating into the air.

Tears flowed down my face. I tried to grab it and push it back into his mouth, but I couldn't touch it. It went through my hands every time. Instead, the ball flew higher and higher until one of the dementors inhaled it. Then it was gone. And everything went dark.

I awoke with a start, tears on my face and the pillows. Something came up my throat, feeling vomit-like. I held a hand over my mouth, trying to keep it in, but it escaped anyway: a violent sob, loud and unforgiving. Another followed it, and another, until I was lost to the sobs. They overtook my breathing, making it shallow and fast. My whole body shook with them.

And then warm arms wrapped around me in the darkness. A calm voice spoke, and although I couldn't hear it, I knew what it said. I turned and buried my face in them. We laid back down together, and as my sobs began to subside, we fell back into sleep.

When I woke again, I was still wrapped in Tom's arms. The room was now light enough to see around, which meant the morning had arrived. I was thankful that I didn't have another nightmare. Today was a big day.

The moment I tried to move, the arms around me shifted. I turned around to face him and found his eyes were now open.

"Morning, Tom," I said. "Sorry I woke you last night."

Tom closed his eyes and held me tighter. I relaxed into him and let my own eyes close. It was nice, this moment, but something was off about it. I wanted anything but to spoil it, but it nagged on me. Something was wrong. It hung over us both, heavy on the air.

"Tom," I whispered, "what's wrong?"

Tom made no effort to move, but I felt his mind nudge against mine, asking for entrance. I let it in, letting his emotions flow over me.
Anger. Stress. Depression. All horribly familiar. All mirroring my own.

He'd seen my nightmare.

I sighed, tears building up behind my eye lids. "I would never let that happen, Tom," I whispered. "They'd have to go through me, first."

Tom didn't respond. More anger burned inside me. I felt so stupid for letting my fears not only get to me, but Tom, too. It was one thing for my mind to ruin my life, but this was going too far.

"I'm sorry," I said quietly. "I love you."

"I know, Harry," Tom said, voice soft. "I love you, too. And...you have opened my eyes to see the truth...No matter how much I renounce my ways, my past will always haunt me. The public will never be able to forgive me."

Fear. I felt it, strong and dominating, filling Tom's mind and mine. We were both scared of what was before us. It was the unknown, and we were going to be taking risks.

More than that, I could feel Tom. He shook, like a leaf. And just like that, it all clicked.

Tom was scared of dying. He made so many horcruxes and looked for any way out he could—the Philosopher's Stone, the Hallows—because he feared death. He clung to the very edges of life, an existence many consider worse than death, begging to be brought back, doing anything to avoid dying. It was his greatest fear, and I'd just shown it to him in a dream.

"The public doesn't have to forgive you. They're never going to see you. You're going to stay safe here, and I'm going to go talk to the Ministry." I pulled away from his arms, rolling over to look at him. "Then, when we get to the hard stuff, we're going to make you a new identity and then it won't matter. You'll never be in danger again. I'll make sure of it."

Tom's eyes were soft, red, and slightly watery. There were dark purple rings under his eyes, and his gaze was dull. The more we looked at one another, the more I wondered if he'd slept at all since my nightmare.

I took in a loud breath and let it out. The day was passing around us, and I had a speaking engagement. As much as I wanted to stay, I knew I couldn't. It hurt to press a kiss to his forehead and leave the bed, but I did. I got ready without paying much attention to anything but my hair, which was unruly as always. I put on the robes Tom had picked out for me yesterday, a nice emerald color that he said would bring out my eyes. It was all done, but I didn't feel ready. I hardly felt awake.

I stepped back out into the room to see that Tom had not only stayed in bed but buried his face in the pillows. I was about to say something, but Tom's muffled words came before I could.

"It is nearly lunch time. You are going to be late."

"What?" I opened the door to the hallway and found the lights were blindingly bright. "Fucking hell...uh, I'll see you later, then. I love you."

I pulled out my wand and I apparated, arriving in the Ministry. People around me walked in all directions, busy to get wherever they were going. All at once, I realized that I had no idea where I was going.

"Mr. Potter!" someone called out rather loudly. I looked their way. It was a woman who was
gesturing to her right. I nodded and began to walk towards her, but then others began to recognize me. Rather than continue to walk past me, they stopped to talk to me.

"Mr. Potter, it's so nice to meet you!"

"Harry Potter! Oh my! To see you in the flesh!"

"The Boy-Who-Lived! It's really him!"

A crowd began to form around me and condense until I couldn't see the woman any longer. I tried to push my way through, but the crowd only seemed to get tighter. I thought I was trapped for sure until a voice called out, "Excuse me! Mr. Potter has a speaking engagement to get to! Let him through! He's already late!"

The crowd parted, and the woman reached her hand out, grabbed my shoulder, and pulled me through. Once I was through, she wrapped her arm around mine, and we walked towards where she had gestured earlier.

"Hilda Blue," the woman said. Her tone was cordial, although firm. "Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Potter. I'm the event coordinator here at the Ministry. It's my second week on the job. The last EC, as we call it, was fired for running late too often. Also, for skimming off the top of the charity event profits, but that's beside the point. I do not want to follow that precedence. We are starting this event on time if it kills me."

Her steps were going so fast, I could hardly keep up. I was jogging just so I didn't lose my arm—I had no doubt that if I had stopped, she would not have hesitated to take my arm to the engagement and not the rest of me. It kept up like this for a while longer than I was hoping before we finally made it to some door. She released my arm and whispered 'Good luck' before she left me alone on that stage.

"Alright. You're on."

"I'm what?"

Without warning, she grabbed my arm again and pulled me through the door alongside her. Inside, there was a room not filled to the brim with people, but empty around the edges. There were a few rows of chairs, most of which were filled save for a few in the back. The people at the very front had notepads and quills floating in the air beside them, all of which began to scribble down words as they saw me.

*Tom was right,* I thought. *The first thing they note is what I'm wearing.*

I was thankful for his input on the robes, but the feeling was short-lived as I finally stood before a podium on a small stage. Hilda released my arm and whispered 'Good luck' before she left me alone on that stage.

Honestly, I was hoping I'd have had some sort of introduction, so they either did not give me one, or I was late and missed it. I was standing in front of a crowd of people, all staring at me, some taking notes, waiting for me to speak. I looked down at the podium and realized there was no microphone. As I looked around the room again, I wondered if I even needed one. The room was small enough, maybe, for everyone to hear my voice, at least, if the room was as silent as it was now.

"Sorry," I said, at a loss for how to begin. "I hope I'm not too late. I…uh…got stuck out there in a crowd of people who were fans. Hilda," I turned and gestured to her just off stage, "saved me and
got me here on time. Thank you."

I turned and looked back out to the crowd. It stayed quiet, which was both a relief and a stressor. I
didn't have to speak over people, but I was also responsible for every moment of deafening silence.

"And thank you to all of you for coming. I…honestly don't know how to start this, so maybe I'll start
with the basics…"

I glanced around the room, at all the eyes staring into mine. At once, I felt like I did in my dream,
when Tom was getting the dementors' kiss and everyone was trying to stop me. They were silent and
unmoving, looking at me, daring me to move, to do something. It was terrifying, but I fought past it.

"The one and only Dark Lord has turned. He has promised to stop his attacks. He will no longer
murder or hunt muggles or half bloods or blood traitors. He is no longer a threat."

Eyes were wide. People began to murmur, and the room was filled with a quiet buzz.

"I know it might sound too good to be true, but it's not. He is not dead, but he is not evil. He…
simply is. It was not easy, but I convinced him to do this, that this was the better choice, that I could
make sure that there would never be another child who would suffer like him again. And he took it,
and that's what I intend to do.

"As our first act of reform—I say 'our' because the Dark Lord was the true inspiration for these laws
—we have some ideas to regulate the care of magical children."

As my words fell silent, one of the journalists in the front raised their hand. I pointed to him, and he
stood to ask his question.

"Already, you've begun to paint a picture of You-Know-Who as someone who can be reasoned
with, who is a victim. We've all known him to be…well, a monster. What I mean to ask is, why
children? Why would the evilest wizard in all of history give up in return for a promise to help
children?"

I nodded. "Thank you for the question. See…" I thought of how to best explain. "The monster you
all know…he started out as a boy named Tom Riddle. His mother was abused by her pureblood
family because she didn't show signs of magic. She fell in love with a muggle, used a love potion on
him, got pregnant, and then decided that she wanted him to really love him. She stopped using the
potion, and he abandoned her. In her despair, she let herself die in childbirth and left her child to a
muggle orphanage. There, Tom Riddle was ridiculed, bullied, neglected, taught that he was a freak,
that his mother was weak. It was there that the monster was made. No one loved this child. No one
cared for him. He held it all inside, but sometimes he let it out. He was angry. He was obsessed with
his own strength, with his abilities, even before he knew he had magic. Then, he went to Hogwarts
and thought he'd found a home. He wanted to stay there, to never go back to that horrible place, but
they had no choice but to send him back. Again, and again. That was when the monster became him.
He used it to protect him from the world.

"Now, I'm not saying that he isn't responsible for his actions. He is. He will be spending his time in a
prison far worse than Azkaban as punishment. But the circumstances that shaped him; those can be
changed. I promised him that no other magical child would ever face the choice he did: suffer or
become a monster."

Another journalist raised their hand. I pointed at them. Her notepad and quill were going furiously
beside her as she stood.
"How does one even manage to get close enough to You-Know-Who without being killed? And not just anyone, but you, Mr. Potter, his nemesis in every sense of the word."

I smiled. "Well, it wasn't easy. To be honest, I was kind of his prisoner at the beginning. He kidnapped one of my friends and ransomed her for…well, me. I figured he'd kill me on the spot, but he didn't. I'm not sure what he intended, really: maybe to kill me publicly, or try to get me on his side, but I just…did what I do best, I guess. Which, to clarify, is annoy him with our similar backstories until he just…wasn't annoyed anymore. We connected, I think, in a way he never had before. I can't say that I condone his choices, but I do understand them. From there, it wasn't hard to show him his own humanity. He realized that he had been a monster and that it wasn't what he wanted."

More journalists raised their hands, the whole first row, it seemed. I pointed at one at random.

"You mentioned that you and You-Know-Who had similar backstories. Could you elaborate a little more on that?"

I pressed my lips together and nodded solemnly. "You all think you know me, too, right? Voldemort was just a monster," they all cringed at the use of the name, "and I'm some kind of golden child, right? I mean, yes, my parents died at his hand, and yeah, there's some stupid prophecy that says, 'neither can live while the other survives.' The thing is, it's not all that simple.

"When my parents died, I was sent to live with my muggle aunt and uncle. The aunt was my mother's sister, and she had always been incredibly jealous that my mom had magic while she didn't. They knew that I had magic. They knew what happened to my parents. Still, they lied to me about it. They neglected me. Abused me verbally, emotionally…sexually…They taught me that I was nothing. That I meant nothing and was worth nothing. I found out the truth about my parents when I learned I had magic, and it all started to piece together for me. That they way they were treating me was wrong and spiteful and cruel. I went to Hogwarts and didn't want to go back…but they sent me back anyway. I tried to escape, many times. Sometimes, I was successful, especially with the help of my friends, but somehow, I always ended up going back. And now I'm old enough that I don't have to but imagine how much I could have been spared from if there was some law in place to help."

Again, the hands of nearly the entire front row went up, but I also noticed a hand go up in the back, sort of hidden behind some people. I pointed at them. The hand went down and up stood Tom, eyes brown instead of blood red. My breath caught.

"You stated that you and You-Know-Who had some reforms in mind, and you hinted a bit at some theoretical laws, just now. What might those laws be?"

His tone was casual, curious as those of the journalists had been. Some of the crowd looked at him but did nothing. No one screamed or cried out for the dementors.

"Because no one knows what he looks like now, I realized.

I took in a deep breath, trying to force myself to answer his question as if he wasn't the former-Dark-Lord-turned-my-lover.

"The laws are still in the process of being written, but they will focus on removing magical children from abusive homes, educating muggle families to properly care for and educate their magical children, and streamlining the process of witches and wizards adopting magical children."

He nodded. "Yes, excellent, those ideas. But, if I may bring up another idea, one which has been controversial in previous conversation, both in the muggle and wizarding world…"
"Oh…" I scrambled for words, "o-of course. Just…go on."

"Another prong of these laws, in addition to streamlining magical adoptions, should also be to maximize the amount of magical adoptions, and in order to do that, the Ministry should allow all couples to adopt, especially…same-sex couples."

The look in his eyes said a million things, the most prevalent being, "I love you. Let's adopt a child together."

I was speechless. At first, I wanted to panic. A child? I was hardly more than a child myself. But the more I considered the idea, the more appealing it sounded. Tom wanted to start a family. With me. He wanted to be with me, to grow old and to pass our love on to a child who could've turned out to be like us in all the worst ways. It was a future I could imagine myself in. It was a start.

The room was murmuring again, but I didn't care. I was lost in my own thoughts. Hilda came up and announced it was over and thanked everyone for coming. Everyone in the room left, and Hermione and Ron came in and finally snapped me out of it.

"Harry, I nearly lost it in there when I saw Tom," Hermione whispered at me harshly, swatting my on the arm. "What were you thinking?"

"Ow," I said, rubbing my arm a bit. It stung just enough to hurt. "I didn't think anything. I didn't even know Tom was going to show up."

Ron let out a breath. "Honestly, mate, we were both scared half to death."

I nodded and gave a breathy, shocked laugh. "Me too."

Their eyes looked at something behind me. Just as I was about to ask what they were looking at, I was grabbed from behind. Pulling me back, and apparating.

When we landed, the beautiful hills surrounded me, the trees swayed in the breeze, and the grasses smelt fresh: the hills outside Tom's manor. A large, goofy grin came over my face.

I turned and there he was; Tom wore a soft smile, his brown eyes fading back to red.

"You're an idiot," I said, no meaning behind my words. "I could have given you away. Why didn't you tell me?"

Tom held out his hand to me, and I grabbed it. He pulled me gently to him and wrapped his arms around me, enveloping me in a warmth that felt not far off from a delicate sunbeam. I could feel whatever anger or frustration I had melt away in an instant.

"I refused to trouble you. Especially after last night. I will admit that it was a foolish thing to do, but…it was something that has been on my mind. Just recently."

I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him into a chaste kiss. "Tom, I do want a future with you. Don't misunderstand that. But I don't know if I'm ready for a child. I'm barely of age. I've never even had a consistent father figure in my life to draw from. How do I know that I'm even cut out to be a father?"

Tom chuckled, planting a kiss on my forehead. "I was not excepting you to want a child now. I have similar fears, and we have just begun our relationship, truly. But never before have I ever desired a family until now. It does not matter how distant in the future it is. I wanted you to know."
"Okay." I said simply. I didn't know what else to say. I sighed and pressed my head into his shoulder, and he let my arms slip under mine so that could hold me comfortably around the waist. I was content there, just being held, breathing in the fresh air and the scent of Tom. It was comfortable. It was everything I never knew I wanted: someone to love me back, someone who understood me without fail, somewhere comfortable and without judgement, a place where I could see a future for myself. It was love without all the bells and whistles, and that was fine with me.

Tom chuckled softly. "Harry, Love."

I pulled my face from his shoulder. "Hmm?"

"You are just like your mother."

I looked at him with confusion before noticing that he looked at the ground just behind us. I turned and saw little patches of flowers blooming, from little white daisies to bright red pansies, and purple wildflowers. They were still spreading, little buds fading onto the grass and blooming slowly, reaching farther and farther out. My heart sped, and my face grew warm. As I watched them, the flowers started to become watery, and I noticed I had tears in my eyes.

"I guess I am," I whispered in quiet awe.

Tom held me tighter. His mind reached out to mine, and I let him. Our minds meshed together, and a feeling of wholeness came over me.

Things I love in this world:

- Watching the leaves in autumn
- My friends and family (alive and not)
- Magic
- Riding a broom
- Tom Marvolo Riddle
- My new future with Tom
Harry's POV:

It was finally done. My final year at Hogwarts had gone off without a hitch. It felt bittersweet, leaving a place I had always considered to be home. In the end, I think I knew I'd see it again sometime. It wasn't goodbye forever.

I looked around a crowded King’s Cross, platform 9 ¾, seeing so many people I recognized, but not who I was looking for. There was a nervousness in my chest and stomach that was building. I'd had an unfortunately large breakfast, which wasn't helping.

"Calm down, Harry," Hermione said from behind me, a supportive arm on my shoulder. "Breathe. You'll be fine. He'll love you."

Also behind me, on my other side, was Ron. "Oi! Found them. Over there," he said, pointing to our far left.

I search the crowd there for a moment and found Tom, easily taller than most walking about the station. He had on his disguise, which gave him a darker complexion, dark-brown-almost-black short and straight hair, dark brown eyes, and bit of a thicker nose, and thick brows. He went by the name Sai Anand while he looked like this, and although I preferred his perfect brown hair and red eyes, this look suited him fine. It got the job done, but it always took me a second to realize it was him.

Hermione, Ron, and I all made our way there, slowly, pushing through the crowd. It took longer than it should have because Ron and Hermione were holding hands. It had taken all Ron had in him to admit his feelings to her a few months ago, and they'd been together since, just as I imagined they would. It wasn't weird or anything, although it did make me miss Tom.

Snape had let him visit, in disguise, twice a month or so. It wasn't just to visit me, because we had to have meetings to plan out laws and political platforms. But he always gave us at least a couple hours of extra time, just so we could see each other.

But he was here, now.

We finally arrived before Tom, and the crowd seemed to part around us to finally reveal the little boy whose hand he was holding.

Tom smiled softly as the boy began to bury his face into his robes.

"No need to be shy, Love. These are friends. The ones who sent you the special candy the other day."

The little boy peeked out from behind Tom's robes. He looked to be maybe four or five, but Tom had told me that he was six. His skin was peachy, with a slight redness growing on his ears. His light brown hair stuck out in tufts every which way, and I could just barely see a hint of one hazel eye looking at us with uncertainty.

Tom crouched, careful not to jostle the boy holding onto him. He pointed at us. "That is Hermione. That is Ron. And this is Harry. Harry is the one I told you about." Tom looked to us. "This is Nanda. He is a bit shy, but as we have discovered over the past few days, he has an affinity for sweets and frogs."
"Oh, then we should have sent a chocolate frog!" Ron said, smile on his freckled face as he looked at Nanda. "I hope the Sugar Quills were alright. We weren't sure what you'd like."

"His sister suggested Bernie Bott's Every Flavor Beans," Hermione added, her eyes lingering on Ron just a moment longer before she looked to Nanda. "They mean it when they say every flavor. There's even bad flavors, so we passed on that."

I crouched, trying to make my eyes level with his. "It's nice to meet you, Nanda." I pulled a small bag from my pocket. "I've got a pumpkin pasty. Would you like it?"

Nanda's face emerged further from behind Tom's robes and nodded. I un wrapped it and held it out to him, and he cautiously came to grab it. He was munching on it when a voice rang out from behind us.

"Ron! Minny! So good to see you!" Mrs. Weasley came over and hugged them both, Ginny in tow. She looked to me as if she was going to greet me, but then saw Nanda. "Oh, is that him? He looks just precious." She placed a hand over her heart with an adoring look. "Hello, Dear. I'm Mrs. Weasley. Ron's mum. I hear you like sweets?"

Nanda, still munching on his pasty, nodded.

"Well, then. You'll have to come over to my house, then. I'll made you whatever you want. How does that sound?"

Nanda smiled and nodded.

"Good! Good." She looked to Tom and I. "Beautiful family. Let me know when you're coming over. We're planning a big feast sometime next week to celebrate, but I'd like Nanda to meet the family, first, so he isn't so startled." She smiled and waved. "It's good to see you all. Congratulations."

We waved back. She turned and walked on, Ginny following suit, and Ron, too, after giving Hermione a kiss goodbye.

Hermione waved, as well. "I ought to find my parents. I'll see you all later."

"See ya," I said as she disappeared into the crowd. I stood and looked to Tom, who stood as well. "Hello, Love."

"Hello, Harry," Tom said, arms wrapping around me. "I've missed you."

I smiled. "I missed you, too." I gave him a kiss on the lips, not caring who saw. We weren't out yet, officially, but I couldn't think of a better way to show the world than with a picture of this moment: Tom picking me up from King's Cross, his new son with him, happily watching us with his mouth covered in sticky pumpkin and crumbs.

Tom chuckled as we parted. "People will talk."

I smiled. "Let them. I love you and I want everyone to know, not just my friends."

Tom picked up Nanda, crumbs and all. "We better get back home, hmm?" He said to Nanda. "I bet there's something that Harry would love you show you."

Nanda's eyes lit up and looked to me.
I smiled, my heart slowly melting with the sight of Nanda's unbridled joy. "Do you like leaves? Or maybe rolling down hills?"

Nanda nodded giddily.

"Then I have the perfect place we can go."

"Hold tight now," Tom said to Nanda.

We arrived in the sitting room, finally fixed with all new paintings and furniture that wasn't burnt. I looked to the window, seeing the grass glisten in the soon-to-be-summer sun. I pointed.

"There."

Nanda's face scrunched up in confusion. He pointed his now empty hands at the window, too. "But there's glass."

I took a step forward and pressed a hand against it. "Not for long." With the help of Tom's mind, I cast the spell that made my hand go right through the glass. I held out my hand to Nanda, who's face was surprised and excited all at once. "Are you ready?"

Nanda squirmed in Tom's grip, forcing Tom to release him. He landed and hurried to my side, grabbing my hand without hesitation. We stepped through together, feeling the sun begin to warm our faces at once. We landed in our little haven, surrounded by wildflowers. Nanda pulled his hand from my grip and ran about, carefree and happy.

At once, I knew it. It didn't matter if I was ready to be a father or not, because I was ready to love this child, to do anything for him. Just being in our home made him happy. It was all I ever hoped for as a child, and Tom as well. It was the best gift we ever could have given him.

Tom stood beside me, then, watching Nanda run about, too. He felt it too. We were a family now, in a place where we felt like we belonged. It wasn't an easy road, and it wouldn't ever be, but it was worth it. We could finally breathe. We could rest and trust and let ourselves be true.

We were home. And it was full of everything I loved in this world.

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