Wind Shear

by Chilord

Summary

A sharp and sudden change that can have devastating effects. When a Harry Potter that didn't follow the path of the Epilogue finds himself suddenly thrown into 1970, he settles into a muggle pub to enjoy a nice drink and figure out what he should do with the situation. Naturally, things don't work out the way he intended.

Notes

Author’s Notes: Something that came about and I decided to work with. Started some time back, took me a ways to get it completed hence why you might see some information or names that are now no longer right. I don’t publish anything beyond fragments anymore until I have an entire completed book length of stuff.

In addition, this fic has been more thoroughly rewritten than any of my past fics. I hope it shows.

I have also released my first novel on Amazon. Book One of I’m Not a Super Spy!: I’m Only a Freshman! By Jonathan McCready

You can find a link to the novel on my new site http://www.chilord.com/

I will be not only promoting published novels, but other original works I’m putting together there.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Bellatrix Black tightly gripped her wand with a grin of anticipation curling over her features. Today, she was to join in her first… assignment with the Knights of Walpurgis. Today, she would have her chance to start purifying the mudborn filth that had been rotting the wizarding world.

It was a simple raid into muggle London to have their sport and bloody their wands, so to speak.

They’d found a muggle pub, not too far from the Leaky Cauldron, and with a pair of guards posted at the entrance, warding and repelling any witnesses, they’d entered in explosion of glass and wooden fragments of what had once been a door, dressed in their dark robes and skull-shaped masks.

There had been shock, and fear, and a wonderful aura of terror. Their wands had risen and they’d been prepared to unleash torment and death upon the foolish little muggles at their leisure. They hadn’t been expecting the bottle of whiskey that had smashed into Rosier’s face.

They really hadn’t been expecting the blast of an incendio spell that followed it up and set him alight.

The muggles were scrambling, panicked and shocked, even more so when one of their attackers who had arrived in an entrance of violence and destruction suddenly burst into flames.

The Knights of Walpurgis weren’t doing much better. Most of them had turned their attention to trying to put out Rosier with a variety of spells that saw him soaked, frozen and thrown to the ground. The others on hand ignored his plight to take the opportunity to either gleefully curse anything that moved or, like her, search out the source of the bottle and spell.

It gave her the warning and time to dive out of the way of the banished chairs, bottles, and table that smashed into the group.

And then she saw… Him.

Burning, angry emerald eyes, messy black hair and a look of cold, burning rage on his features as all around him everything that wasn’t nailed down to the ground or one of the muggles themselves was banished at their members as violently she had ever seen a wizard manage.

It had seemed an almost amateurish move to Bellatrix. There were oh so many more powerful spells that could be used. Spells that rotted, destroyed and flayed. Spells that could peel the flesh from a man like a grape.

Then he’d made everything he’d banished explode. Shrapnel of wood and glass rocketed into their bodies in an eruption of pain. As the screams of surprise, agony and rage filled the air, she managed to turn her attention back to him, raising up her wand and ignoring how sticky with blood it suddenly felt. She could feel the pounding in her chest, the fear, the adrenaline, pouring through her veins.
The words rose in her mind, she began to force it through her body, into her wand. Then every piece of shrapnel imbedded in their bodies was ripped free as violently as it had been implanted. A vicious summoning that pulled it all into a great, bloody beast of sharp jagged chunks of wood and claws and teeth of sharp broken glass. Their blood stained it almost to crimson in the dull, warm light of the pub’s electric lights, still glistening and fresh from the wounds they’d occupied a moment before.

With a flick of his wand the beast was set loose and it tore into them with a great and terrible glee.

Her wand and spell faltered as the pieces had been ripped out, broken by the fresh surge of pain that howled through her flesh. She could hear the screams of her fellow knights as the beast tore into them. A sickened twist of her stomach came when it was all too easy to imagine what was happening to them as they screamed and the coppery scent of blood reached her nose.

She took aim at him again, desperate now, fear and panic driving her as her hand trembled. His eyes found hers. In them she saw anger, and scorn, and disgust. From them she could see his wand already pointed towards her.

“STUPIFY!” She knew she was supposed to be beyond vocal casting, beyond stupid, childish stunning spells, but at the moment she was panicked and senseless, starting to turn and crawl away as she saw a flash of a shield catching it, before his eyes and his wand began to move closer to her.

She was going to die. She was going to die, here in this stupid muggle tavern. She was going to die crawling away some kind of wounded rabbit before the wolf.

The anger of that thought was drowned away as she watched a body fall to the ground in front of her. Another knight, clutching and gurgling around what had been their throat, trying desperately to keep their life’s blood from spilling out like a fresh geyser. She could see the blood seeping, pulsing through their fingers. She could hear the gurgling sounds of their desperate attempt to breath.

Then she could feel the spell that struck her in her back and her whole body went rigid, wooden.

All she could do was watch, frozen, as a pair of boots stepped just to the side of her head. The knight in front of her had their mask struck by a cutting curse, slashed at an angle into it, and a moment later, it fell into two broken pieces on the floor in front of her. She had just a moment to recognize the face of Rodolphus Lestrange, the man who had just begun courting her in the last year, before his face split in bloody line and one section slid forward into the ground in front of her.

“You know, I had already been having a bad day.” She didn’t recognize the voice but instinctively she knew it belonged with a pair of brilliant, cold emerald eyes. “I came in here for a bit of peace and quiet and a nice drink. I just want to be left alone.”

She watched as the blood soaked beast of wood and glass stepped into view before collapsing into a pile of simple debris.

“But… no, I had to pick the one place where you little blighters decided you’d exercise your special little brand of political expression.” The disgust was audible as she felt herself being levitated up, just enough to be flipped over onto her back and unceremoniously dropped.

“Now, who do we have here?” Her mask was peeled away and she found herself staring up into those eyes of his, watching as the recognition passed through them. “Well now, that’s interesting. Ickle little Bella-kins, hmm?”
She could see him moving back towards where Rodolphus lay and she sound of his body being lightly nudged onto its back. “Oh, and is this ickle little Roddie Lestrange? It is!”

Then she could feel the touch of his wand’s tip lightly tapping against her cheek. “Now… what to do, what to do, what to do? You’ve put me into a bit of a pickle here, Bella-kins. You see, Tommy’s not going to be very happy with you. That leaves me torn.

“On one part, I could kill you now and not have to worry about you making trouble for me later,” he stated simply, and she could feel the way the tip of his wand slowly traced down the line of her jaw in an almost sensual manner. “On the other, if I send you back… that will leave quite the impression I think.”

Slowly then he looked around and then stood, his fingers snatching her wand out of her fingers and lightly twirling it about between them as suddenly she could move again. “Take a good look, Bellatrix.”

And she did. The muggles were cowering against the walls, staring fearfully, but not at her, not at the Knights of Walpurgis. They cowered in fear from him, and the bloody, savaged remains of those knights.

Every wizard she’d arrived with was lying dead on the floor in front of her, their bodies torn into chunks and pieces.

“I’m going to guess, all of them purebloods like you, hmmmm?” He said the words simply, easily, against her ear in a hot breath as she felt the tip of his wand suddenly digging into her throat as he wrapped his arm about her from behind and she was pressed back into his chest. “All of them dead, because of a single halfblood that didn’t need to use even the slightest bit of dark magic.”

He snorted and shoved her away, letting her stumble and fall into the half pile of blood and flesh. “That is the simple truth. Pureblood spills just as easily as any other; it doesn’t make you any better, doesn’t make you any stronger. It just makes you a puffed up little fool if you think it does.”

She scrambled about, panicking, slipping against the sticky blood, the dead, unseeing eyes staring back at her. Whimpering, her voice warbling at the brink. And she heard his voice command her, “Run, little Bellatrix. Run and tell Tom Riddle his war will not be as easy as he thinks.”

Without even looking back, she scrambled over the bodies, clawing, sliding back out of the pub and fleeing in terror back into the night

Behind her, Harry Potter stared down at the mess he’d made, listening to the messy crack of apparition striking outside. “Well, this is going to be trouble.”

-o-o-o-

The end of the war hadn’t been enough for Harry. Sure, he’d celebrated. He’d even felt a great swell of relief as the weight of the wizarding world’s future had been lifted from his shoulders.

Only, he wasn’t free.

He learned rather quickly that a gilded cage was still very much a cage, and without Dumbledore there to absorb the attention being simply being Dumbledore, he was caught in the middle of it.

It was events and parties at first. Everyone wanted to invite him around, and he was always inclined to go. He was told it would be rude not to, after all.
He had become a symbol of the end of the dark days. Only they didn’t seem to be that ended. Bigotry was still rampant, dark wizards still lurked, the Ministry, despite its relatively well-meaning new Minister, was still corrupt.

When he walked through Diagon Alley, he could still see Nocturne Alley next to it, sulking smug and content to its darkness and shadows. There were still the purebloods, looking down their noses at the muggleborn and halfbloods. There was still a festering rot of superiority in the minds of the Wizarding World.

So he’d joined the Aurors. It seemed the logical step at the time. He could get out there and make a real difference.

Only they’d wanted to just wave him through, hand him a shiny badge and sit him behind a nice, fancy desk in a big office doing absolutely nothing. He’d balked, of course. He wanted to be out there, helping people! He wanted to make a difference.

So, reluctantly, it was agreed to put him through training.

He quickly discovered, though, that most of the ‘training’ was learning a number of rules and regulations. There were no special spells, no tactics, no classes in investigation. It was a bunch of boring laws drilled into his skull and reminding him again of how little the wizarding world had changed.

Then he was partnered with a more senior Auror who would take care of the rest of the training.

They then had the brilliant idea to partner him with John Dawlish.

Harry was the first to admit Dawlish knew what he was doing. He was an intelligent and skilled wizard who did his job thoroughly and without complaint. Though he taught Harry a number of ways of refining and mastering his spells, he also was a constant reminder of the way the laws of the Wizarding World had still not really changed.

For a time he’d stuck to the job as best he could. It was a commitment he’d wanted to live up to.

Then there had been the chance to help hunt down a dark wizard who’d broken one too many laws in eastern Europe. He’d jumped on it, thinking that it would be a chance to get away from the oppressive rigidity of Dawlish and the Ministry. He turned out to be right.

He also turned out to be in over his bloody head. Again! The team he’d joined had been rather infamous for chewing up young, idealistic wizards and spitting them back out gibbering wrecks that made Quirrell’s act in his first year at Hogwarts look positively calm. A reputation no one told him about until he was already stuck with them.

What no one figured was how well he’d end up fitting in with the lunatics.

Just shy of his 21st birthday they’d gone into particularly hairy situation with a dark wizard messing around with time magics, blood sacrifices, reality warping and platypi.

They never did understand the last bit.

Eventually, it had come down to the big showdown. Harry remembered a bright explosion. Then he’d found himself waking up in Wales, July of 1970. Of course, he hadn’t known it was 1970.

At least, not until he’d seen the paper and all the people dressed in the strange clothes. Then he’d managed to snag enough of the current pound notes to pay for a decent bottle of whiskey at the
He’d barely started on his first sip when the proto-Death Eaters had barged in, wands drawn.

Which lead him to his current situation, where he was sitting across from a younger Alastor Moody, bearing a number of scars, but lacking his trademark ‘Mad-Eye’ and peg leg in favor of their still natural counterparts.

“Mind explaining to me why the hell I shouldn’t have you dragged off to Azkaban?” Moody demanded as he glared back at Harry.

“Because I was just defending myself?” Harry offered before glancing around. “And I had to waste a perfectly decent whiskey on one of those idiots instead of getting drunk off of it like I planned?”

“What were you doing in a muggle pub then?” he said, frowning as he watched Harry critically. “The Cauldron’s just a bit down the way.”

“Yes, and generally it’s considered rude to put up a Notice-Me-Not charm to get people to leave you alone in a wizarding tavern. Muggle pubs don’t have the same problem,” Harry stated with a slight burl of irritation. “I’d had a bad day and those idiots stopped me from even getting one bloody finger down.”

“And you killed them because they interrupted your drink?” Moody was more than slightly skeptical.

“No, I killed them because they blew in the door and windows, then stormed in, wearing black robes, masks and having wands drawn,” Harry shot back. “When they started throwing curses at everyone in sight, I wasn’t about to just leave it like that.”

“Most would’ve just up and ran,” Moody noted, his tone a bit more neutral now.

“I only run when I have to,” Harry stated without even pausing. “They didn’t even remotely qualify as that dangerous.”

“There’s going to be a bit of outrage over this. There were some rather prominent individuals in that little pile of dead idiots you left back there. The Lestrange’s won’t be happy their heir is dead.”

“Well then, they should’ve taught their heir better than to go running about at night randomly attacking people without knowing if they can defend themselves or not.”

“If they weren’t dangerous enough to make you run, why’d you kill them, then?” Moody snapped back with a growl.

“They came at me, and those around me with the intent to kill and maim. And the rest of this lot were muggles and couldn’t do anything to defend themselves.” Harry stated simply.

Frowning Moody shifted about with a huff as he reevaluated his opinion of the young man in front of him. If it wasn’t for the bodies he’d left behind, he’d almost call the kid arrogant. Only, people that left broken piles of corpses without taking so much as a scratch in a fight tended either be boastful or, like the kid in front of him, matter-of-fact.

“What spells did you use then?” Moody half demanded.

With a slow, calm motion, he made a show of drawing out his wand by the tip, offering it in his direction. “Run a Priori Incantatos to see.”

Grumbling, Moody pointed his wand to Harry’s and ran the spell in question. Then the results
rolled back until what looked like the start of the fight he frowned and went over them.

A simple incendio to start, followed by a few banishing spells. Then there was an explosion hex, followed by a... summoning, and animation charm? Then there was an attack command spell, a shield, a body bind and a cutting curse. There were cancellation spells here and there, but not a single dark or illegal spell among them.

“Huh, a bit more simplistic than what I was expecting,” Moody admitted before glancing around. “None of the bodies showed any signs of a body bind.”

“I didn’t execute anyone if that’s what you’re wondering,” Harry stated simply. “I don’t particularly care for murder.”

“What would you call Lestrange’s head being bisected?” Moody countered back. “But, none of the muggles show signs of it, and there’s a rather interesting spot right over there in front of Lestrange.”

“Considering his throat? A mercy so he didn’t have to drown on his own blood,” Harry stated with a shrug. “As for the interesting spot, not really an auror, so…”

“Like someone was there right when Lestrange got his skull split during that mercy of yours,” Moody said pointedly. “Splatter leading up to it and around it, but nothing there.

“That’s interesting,” Harry noted blandly with a nod of his head.

“And you just happen to know nothing about it?” Moody pressed with an arch of his brow.

“Why don’t you ask the muggles?” Harry asked calmly with a similarly arched brow.

Moody scowled lightly back at Harry. “I would’ve. If I could use their damned testimonies. Or if they hadn’t been bloody well oblivated already.”

“Shame they went and did that. Imagine they could’ve given you a much better picture of things,” Harry noted with a nod of his head.

“You let one of them go.” Moody accused.

“One of the muggles?” Harry asked with a still-arched brow. “I thought there was a muggle repelling charm keeping them from the door?”

“One of them,” Moody stated as he gestured to the bodies now being collected and organized nearby.

“Now, why would I do something like that?” Harry asked, curiosity filling his voice.

“… You know something you’re not telling me.” Moody accused.

Harry looked at him for a moment before he slowly chuckled slowly. “Auror Moody, I know many, many things I’m not telling you.”

“Something I should know,” he countered back with his eyes narrowed into slits.

“You think this is the first time they’ve made a little… excursion like this?” Harry asked suddenly, a brow arching. “You think it will be the last? You think they just all happened to be together, dressed the same, working together?”
“So, what, you think this is some kind of sick little muggle baiting club?” Moody asked, his head lightly tilting to the side.

“… I think, Mr. Moody, when you find out what they are, what they seek to accomplish, and what they are not only willing, but planning to do… you’ll wish that is what they were.” Harry stated seriously as he looked into the man’s eyes. “A storm is coming, Mr. Moody. Best be prepared, or be swept away.”

“And where will you be, Mr…?” Moody asked, his eyes narrowed.

Harry shrugged his shoulders a bit. “I suppose you could call me… the storm chaser.”

Moody snorted. “That’s a load of ponced up shit.”

“Alas, a legacy of a misspent youth,” Harry responded with an easy grin.

“Sir,” a young auror, barely looking out of Hogwarts approached Moody and gestured to Harry. “What are we going to do with him?”

“Not much we can bloody well do,” Moody snapped back and gave the man a look. “It’s a pretty straightforward case of self-defense.”

“Self-defense?!” the man stated in shock, “But… he had to use some kind of… He had to have used some kind of dark arts!”

“Banishing spell on the tables and glass, followed by an exploding hex on them after they hit them,” Harry commented casually as he twirled his wand about his fingers. “Animation did the rest.”

At the Auror’s gaping face, he shrugged a bit. “What? You’re hardly being discrete and Moody here can confirm what I cast. The dark arts never worked for me. They require too much hate.”

Moody snorted, “Aye. Which makes you that much scarier.”

“Me, scary?” Harry asked, looking almost surprised. “Who would find me scary?”

For a moment, Moody looked over at the dead bodies and then just looked back at Harry with a flat look.

“I’m sure if you ask them, they won’t tell you they find me scary.” Harry insisted.

“Sir, they are dead thanks to you,” the young auror declared, glaring at Harry. “Some of these are fine, upstanding members of…”

“Please, explain to me what they were doing in a muggle pub dressed like that then,” Harry interrupted.

The man flustered and glared back at Harry, “I’m sure that they had a…”

Harry just snorted, “A reason for blowing in the windows, and attacking a muggle pub?”

“Well, it’s not like they were anyone…” the man started, only to freeze when he found himself under a pair of very cold, very dangerous glares.

“Auror Moody,” Harry noted in a coolly detached voice, “don’t you think it would be prudent to make sure that nothing important was lost when the deceased had their bowels release?”
Moody slowly gave Harry a rather familiar grin of vicious approval. “Indeed, and best not to use magic. You never know what might get vanished by accident.”

“I defer to your judgement,” Harry stated simply as he leaned back in his chair while the green auror looked confused for a moment, then quickly paled.

“Sir, surely you don’t mean…” the rookie started to protest.

“I think I surely do,” Moody stated flatly. “Get started.”

“… Yes, Sir,” the rookie acknowledge with a glare.

“Was there anything else?” Harry asked politely of Moody.

“As the damned Wizengamut doesn’t see fit to force your identification when no crime has been committed, no,” Moody stated flatly. “Keep yerself available, though. I’m sure I’ll have more questions.”

“I have a feeling we’ll probably be seeing plenty of each other,” Harry stated with a slight nod of agreement before standing up and walking out without even glancing back.

Once he was gone, the rookie turned and glared at Moody, “You’re just letting him go!!”

“Kid, how many piles of shit do you have to sort through?” Moody asked, a brow arching.

“What does that have to do with this!!”

“Because that’s how many people with wands already drawn he put down in less than ten seconds from what we can tell,” Moody stated flatly. “If we had tried to arrest him for defending himself, he would’ve resisted.”

“We could’ve…” the rookie started to protest.

“And, if you looked in his eyes, and bothered to actually look, you’d have seen he would’ve resisted,” Moody continued, ignoring him. “And we’d either have ended up dead or put down hard. We might’ve gotten lucky enough to take him down with us, that that was a damned big might.”

“He’s barely older than I am!”

“It’s not the age, boy; it’s the experience, and the power.” Moody stated flatly. “Now that shit isn’t going to sort itself, unless you really want to draw it out.”

The rookie just glared and Moody was left shaking his head.

-o-o-o-

As she stumbled into the meeting room, Bellatrix struggled to keep down the contents of her stomach as the full weight of her little adventure slammed down into her. She’d grabbed the two confused guards and ran. Well, they had apperated away, and then one of them had reminded her of their port keys.

With a tug on their navels, they reached her stumbling entrance into the room.

“What, she couldn’t keep her stomach for the initiation?” an annoyed, cold voice asked as a figure in dark robes looked coldly down upon her. “The lord will be most… displeased. Roldolphus assured us you would perform admirably.”
Just fifteen minutes earlier, those words would’ve been a horrifying, dream crushing insult to her. Now though?

“Bloody well hang his displeasure!” she said with a hissing snap. “We’re not here because I couldn’t stomach it! We’re here because the others are all bloody well torn to pieces!”

That brought the figure up short. “What? Are you saying a group of Muggles could possibly slaughter a team of the Knights of Walpurgis?”

“That was a wizard,” Bellatrix hissed angrily. “One wizard having a drink with the muggles. One wizard who slaughtered us in an instant!”

“And yet somehow you live,” the figure countered back with a sneer.

She gestured then to the blood splattered across her face and mask. “Do you see this blood? This is Rodolphus’, from where that wizard bound me in place and made me watch as he split his head like a soft melon, mask and all!”

“So, what, you were to be the messenger?” the man demanded.

His words came crashing back into her then. Her eyes contracted, grew distant as the memories suddenly smashed into her like an arctic wave. “He… knew me. He knew Rodolphus, but I’d never seen him before in my life. He told me he could’ve killed me then, but it would make more of an impression if he let me go. He told me that being a pureblood meant nothing…”

“Lies!” the man hissed, his fingers gripping on his wand.

“Because all of them were purebloods, and he had slaughtered them all,” Bellatrix continued, ignoring him, seeing those burning emerald eyes in her mind. “He said… he said to tell Tom Riddle that his war will not be as easy as he thinks.”

This brought the man up short. That name… it should not be known. Who was this wizard who sat drinking among muggles then dared slay an entire squad of the Knights of Walpurgis?

“Leave,” the man finally snapped out, glaring at her. “Do not come back.”

Her face twisting in disgust, Bellatrix pulled off the blood spattered mask and cloak and tossed them aside as she sneered back at him. “Gladly.”

And then she turned and was gone.

Which left the man with the two guards and the thought of how best to bring this unpleasant bit of information to the lord.

-o-o-o-

It wasn’t until Bellatrix returned home with another apparition that she realized she had never gotten her wand back from the strange wizard who had taken it. That brought her up short. She remembered how he’d plucked it easily about her fingers, the way he’d kept it dancing between his. She remembered the feel of his wand, warm and hard as it pressed to her throat as she was held against his chest.

She’d been absolutely helpless. She knew she couldn’t fight him, couldn’t beat him. She knew that he could’ve snuffed her out in an instant. And it had made her ache.
Her life continued only because he thought she’d make a good messenger, and she was thinking about how much she’d liked it. Morgana, she was a mess. She’d just watched her courter executed in front of her and she was fantasizing about the man who’d killed him.

And those eyes. She thought that she’d seen life when she’d listened to the Lord of the Knights of Walpurgis speak. The delight he’d taken in the casual cruelty he’d displayed to the muggles they’d brought for the night’s entertainment had seemed so enthralling, the way he found such enjoyment from their screams. But the man hadn’t.

Where the Lord had barely restrained his glee and delight at the pain he inflicted, the man had been unmoved. They weren’t worth his time. They weren’t worth his magic. He didn’t need the dark arts to hurt, he didn’t need them to kill or maim.

He used power, imagination and skill instead.

They were like polar opposites. One reveled in the obscure and the forbidden. The other raised up more commonly known spells in ways no one would really consider.

Dumbledore was powerful, and wise, and more importantly old. He almost never cast a spell where people could see him. He never displayed his skills, he never revealed the vaulted depths of ancient and obscure magics he was said to hold. He simply smiled, eyes twinkling and would dispense some random platitude disguised as wisdom. However, for all the derision, for all the disbelief, there was always something about him that would still more overt rebellion. Despite that they never saw it, it was always a point that maybe he didn’t show off his magic because he simply didn’t need to.

But, he had been old. That was the most important part of it. He was old and likely past his prime.

The Lord and the man were not.

“I had thought you were to be out later,” Cygnus Black spoke as he saw his eldest daughter standing in the hall, her eyes distant and lost. “Did things not go well with… Rodolphus?”

“He’s dead,” Bellatrix stated wearily as she glanced at her father. “Things went very, very wrong.”

Cygnus stood up straighter, eyes narrowed and fury sparked. “He did not place his hands upon you, did he?”

Bellatrix laughed then, a dark, almost broken laugh as dark black curls bounced against her cheeks. “No. Nothing like that. He took me to formally join the Knights of Walpurgis. We were to go on what I was told would be an easy, marvelous little bit of fun where we could torment and sharpen our dark arts to our hearts contents.”

For a moment, Cygnus watched his daughter warily, seeing something in her eyes that almost scared him. “But?”

“He was there when we arrived,” Bellatrix stated with a particular emphasis on the word describing the man, an almost… reverence in her voice that worried him. “He killed them all. In flash it was over and I was lying helpless and watching him granting Rodolphus the mercy of death.”

“… What?” Cygnus tried to wrap his head around the words his daughter was saying. “Who? Who killed them?! This is…!”

“He told me he was a half-blood,” Bellatrix continued, staring off into space. “I don’t know that
the Knights’ Lord could’ve killed them as quickly or as brutally as he could. They were just… things to him. His spells weren’t the obscure and forbidden dark arts. They were common… almost simple, but so perfectly executed.”

His jaw dropping, Cygnus stared at her disbelief and denial quickly written across his face. “What…?! But… A half-blood could never…!”

“He did,” she stated firmly. “I saw it. I was there. He told me. ‘Pureblood spills just as easy as any other’. It doesn’t make us as special as we try to say.”

For a moment, Cygnus just gave her a look, studying her, the light in her dark eyes and the set of her shoulders, before he spoke, “Show me.”

She was confused only a second before realizing what she meant. Nodding her head, she allowed him to lead her to the study. Once there, she waited for him to bring forth a familiar but not often used stone basin.

Waiting for it to settle, she froze then flushed brightly as she realized an embarrassing truth.

“What?” Cygnus asked, his eyes narrowed. “Have you forgotten how?”

“…” Her words were mumbled too quietly for him to hear as her head bowed in shame.

“You’re a Black girl, speak like one.” he demanded firmly.

“He still has my wand!” She angrily admitted as she looked up and glared at him, her face slightly red.

Cygnus blanched a bit, before reluctantly nodding his head. “I suppose I could understand then…”

Reluctantly, he handed her his wand, and watched as she withdrew the silvery thread from her forehead, and then carefully deposited it into the basin. Returning the wand to him, she took a step back. With a slight frown, he stepped forward and, with his wand in hand, entered into her memory.

When he emerged, he looked shaken, his face pale as he leaned heavily on the stand the pensieve rested on. Waving off Bellatrix’s motion to help him, he took a slow deep breath to steady himself. Then, he entered the memory once more.

When he returned this time, he took a moment to stare out into the distance, not quite seeing anyone there. Then, he turned his head and looked at his daughter. “What do you remember of him?”

“His eyes,” she stated instantly. “They were just…”

“He is a Potter,” Cygnus stated confidently, before frowning. “But how, I know not. Such a child would’ve never escaped notice. And yet, there he was… It does not make sense.”

“A Potter?” Bellatrix stated, as if tasting the word as she tilted her head to the side. “Mmm, I see…”

“It doesn’t make sense. I know all the Potters. Not one of them has eyes like that,” Cygnus stated with a sour twist of his lips and a mutter. “And a half-blood one of that?”

“A bastard maybe?” Bellatrix asked, clearly not caring. “It would explain being a half-blood.”

“It doesn’t matter,” he responded, though his tone was one that clearly denoted that he did not
believe it a likely explanation. “What matters is what this means.”

“He knows something,” Bellatrix stated as she recalled the Knight of Walpurgis’ reaction to the message. “The Knight of Walpurgis that we were reporting to… he was disturbed by the message.”

“Then it would seem that there’s going to be a third side to things, shortly,” Cygnus stated with a deep frown. “And this man has managed to muddy the waters. Nothing is certain anymore.”

“I’m picking him,” Bellatrix stated resolutely as her tongue lightly darted across her lips.

He looked at his daughter for a moment, frowning slightly, “You know that will not be an easy thing. He is a half-blood. Even with his power, he is still a half-blood.”

“Who slaughters purebloods without issue,” she responded back, smiling hungrily. “Proving his point. It’s not about blood; it’s about power.”

Cygnus was reluctant to agree with her, however, what he’d seen in that man’s eyes…

“We will have to find him first, and learn more,” he stated, as it was a diplomatic answer, but one that seemed to satisfy Bellatrix… for now.

-o-o-o-

Harry had no idea what he was going to do.

He was a combat specialist, not a master of the more arcane and esoteric magics that allowed one to bend and break the rules of reality. Here he was, trapped a decade before his own birth, back at the very start of Voldemort’s rise to power. All he had were the clothes on his back, his wand, a bit of pocket change, and talent that he was rather loathed to put into the employ of either the Ministry or Dumbledore.

With a sigh he glanced around the park he had apparated to. A small one in Surrey, near Privet drive. Seated in the swing, he slowly looked up into the near full moon hanging over head.

It was then that he could feel the tingle of anti-apparition wards being thrown up over the park.

Groaning softly, he quickly slid off the swing, discreetly casting a few spells on the swing set and see-saw, before another pair at the sand beneath his feet.

“Going to show yourselves then?” he asked, his eyes slowly scanning around the wooded perimeter as dark cloaked figures began to step forward, wands all pointed towards him.

“Who are you, and how do you know the name Tom Riddle?” one of the figures, face covered by a familiar mask, demanded as he took a step a little closer than the rest of the group.

“Mmm,” Harry slowly hummed as he looked around the group. “He’s not here, I see. So I take it you’d be the errand lackey. How’d you find me that quickly?”

He could just barely make out the way the figure’s eyes narrowed behind the mask, before the audibly sneering sound came out, “Did you think you could spill that much blood and not leave it on you?”

“Ah, blood tracker,” Harry pursed his lips a bit. “ Didn’t think you lot had enough brains for that.”

“Answer the questions! Who are you and how do you know that name!” the figure demanded, his wand tip beginning to glow.
“You can call me the Storm Chaser,” Harry stated, it was a whim really, but he might as well be consistent. “As for how I know the name of a half blood son of a muggle…”

The glow on the tip of the man’s wand intensified even stronger as some of the figures looked at one another in confusion, while others merely kept their wands focused on him.

“I don’t think I’ll tell you,” he finished, before suddenly the sand at the edge of the play scape erupted into a wall that blocked their sight of him.

It took less than a second for a barrage of spell fire to start blasting through the sand in a variety of different colors. Harry himself dropped to the ground as the sand beneath moved out into a small earthen fortification. As soon as it reached the silt and lime-rich clay that made up the soil underneath, he began to cast again.

Beneath him, earthen wyrmes were formed out of the thick clay earth, before rising up into the sand around him and making the hole deep enough to stand in.

Once they hit the sand, the granules clung to the skin, making them appear as if solidified creatures of the fine playground sand.

It took him only a mere handful of seconds to accomplish his act. Seconds he barely had as the veil of sand fully collapsed just as the earthen animations set out.

“You will find, Storm Chaser, that we are not foolish children for you to prey upon!” the leader declared. “And your little walls of mud will not…”

His declaration was silenced as one of the wyrmes erupted from beneath him, rising between his legs to crush his pelvis between powerful jaws with rough, jagged teeth of silt fused together. As he screamed, however, the other wizards were far from idle. They did not freeze, they did not cower as their spokesman died, and instead they focused a barrage of bludgeoning, cutting and blasting curses upon the construct.

The wizard was dropped carelessly from its jaws a moment later as it collapsed back into the thick earth it was created from. That was when the others struck. They came from behind, or the side, or even the front.

Unlike the leader they did not aim for the body, they instead struck at their limbs. Legs and arms were bitten, broken and ripped off before the creatures would return to the sand. But, despite the chaos, they did not break and flee.

Instead, those that could rushed towards the small foxhole Harry had dug himself into, leaving behind their bleeding fellows to strike at the wizard behind them. One pair found themselves smashed to the ground when the seesaw turned itself on its side, and its board folded forward, snapping the wizard’s legs between it like a pair of great jaws. The others found the seats of the swings splitting, the chains snapping out like snakes, grabbing them by their necks and throwing them away with an audible cracking snap.

In the end only a pair of wizards managed to reach the base of the sand wall, then struggled to rise up it. One stumbled and fell as the loose sediment gave way too easily beneath his feet, and then fell face forward. A moment later, the sand rose up, cocooning his head, then twisting it with a sharp crack.

The other started firing blasting curses onto the walls of the hole as soon as he saw them, sending chunks of clay earth scattering down and raining violently down on Harry. Fighting down the
flinch that came when he felt some of the pieces of stone buried in the clay hit him and break his skin, Harry took aim at the wall the wizard was rising up and fired an explosive curse of his own. As the spell blasted a spray of sand up to the wizard’s mask, it also collapsed the spell that was keeping the wall of sand in that form, causing it to lose the slight consistency it had to maintain its shape.

As he began to fall forward, the wizard’s wand aimed at Harry again, a spell starting to form on the tip, suddenly he screamed and vanished as he was pulled away from the edge.

Grunting softly, Harry wiped some of the dirt and blood from his face and proceeded to cast a spell at the side of the wall, causing it to erupt and split as he started to run forward. Rising up to the revealed slope, he lunged out and rolled into a swinging sweep of his arm casting a spell that arched around him. Instantly, the sand congealed into a ring of spikes that shot out like cannon shots tethered on slender, flexible tendrils of sand grains.

They struck out, hitting into every body that remained, before flailing and tossing them about.

When they finished, he crouched there, eyes narrowed as he swept the area. Nothing was moving except for the restless earthen wyrms and the lightly twitching tendrils of sand. A quick detection charm confirmed that none of them were still alive, but a visual sweep showed that their outspoken leader was not among them.

With a faint growl, he hoped the attack had been brutal enough to be fatal and, with a swipe of his wand, he vanished the blood from his body and clothes. Moving swiftly, he moved from body to body, after checking for enchantments, charms or curses, he divested them of what he could. In the end, he was left with a few handfuls of wizarding money, some jewelry, and a number of wands.

Cleaning them all off and double checking that they weren’t charmed in anyway, he then had the wyrms take the bodies and buried them a good thirty feet below the surface, before, with a few more spells, he restored the playground to its previous condition and vanished.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Author’s notes: I have also released my first novel on Amazon. Book One of I’m Not a Super Spy!: I’m Only a Freshman! By Jonathan McCready

You can find a link to the novel on my new site chilord.com.

I will be not only promoting published novels, but other original works I’m putting together there.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

-o-o-o-

The self-proclaimed Lord Voldemort stared down at the broken body of one of his oldest lieutenants, Lestrange, with a cold detachment. The man had arrived via emergency port key, broken and dying before anyone could even attempt to save him. He had only managed two brief, gurgled, bloody words before expiring.

“Storm… Chaser.”

And then, he was gone.

It was vexing. The man had been a loyal and talented wizard, something not so easily replaced among the wretches of the Wizarding World. Further, the dying wizard had given them no clues beyond two nonsensical words as to what had happened.

It wasn’t until he found out that, not only had the lieutenant died but so had his most seasoned team of Knights of Walpurgis in addition to a group of new recruits that he had realized exactly how poorly the day had gone for him and his cause.

With that, the vexation had been cast aside and he was truly wroth. Those who had remained cowered before the sudden explosion of towering rage rolling off the usually charming and charismatic man. The rest had wisely chosen to take their leave, avoiding an illustration of the man’s wrath.

“So, at first there was an entire batch of promising recruits, slaughtered like calves before the butcher,” Voldemort stated as he slowly traced his wand along the jaw of his old friend Avery. “Included in them, Lestrange’s son, who you all assured me would prove to be a formidable asset to my cause, but was unable to handle a single wizard when backed up with an entire group of other potential knights, and lead by Dolohov.”

He clucked his tongue, his eyes narrowed into slits. “And then, you allowed Lestrange to lead a team of my best on a hunt… without informing me?”

“M-my Lord…” Avery started to plead, the fear dripping off his words like a putrid oil.

“Crucio,” Voldemort stated coldly as he seemed completely unaffected as the man began to scream his throat hoarse in agony, falling to his knees directly before where his robes pooled. “And why
exactly did you feel it unnecessary to inform me?”

He gave the man a moment to recover from the wracking sobs that slowly formed into words. “W-we wanted to f-find out h-how he k-knew ab-about T-Tom R-Riddle.”

Instantly all pretense of calm fled him as Voldemort grabbed hold of the man by the throat and squeezed down, fingers digging into the tender flesh. “WHAT!”?

Voice almost strangled out, Avery spoke, “He… told a survivor a m-message for Tom Riddle!”

“What was that message?!” Voldemort demanded, pain promised, dripping, pouring out of every little syllable as his eyes almost seemed to glow with malice.

“T-the war won’t, won’t be as easy as y-he thinks,” Avery stated, correcting himself before he accidentally implied that his lord was a man with a name so common and base.

Growling in rage Voldemort flung the man back and stalked to his seat, his robes billowing out claws into the air before settling back against his form. “Have the survivor brought to me, NOW!”

“S-she, I…” Avery struggled to find the words to respond to the demand, fear growing in his eyes as he cringed back.

“You what, Avery?” Voldemort demanded with dark, narrowed eyes as everyone present could see the way his fingers had started to dig into the arm rests of his seat.

“I… cast her out for her failure, my lord.” Avery admitted, eyes falling to the ground, unable to meet his master’s gaze.

“I don’t care, bring her here!” Voldemort snapped back, a hiss leaving his lips as, behind his throne, everyone could see the stirring coils of a snake.

“My Lord…” Avery started to protest again, still unable to meet his eyes.

“What?!” he demanded, all trace of civility and decorum shattered at the continued defiance of the man.

“She is Bellatrix Black.” Avery stated simply.

Voldemort paused, an unexpected revelation about the girl’s identity leaving a bitter taste of displeasure in his mouth as his lips twisted with a grimace. If he turned upon the Blacks at this stage he would have a rebellion on his hands. The Blacks were among the staunchest supporters of pure blood. If he struck against them… “Then approach her as if this were a second chance. If she is a Black, she will gladly take the chance.”

“I…” Avery started to say fear and hesitation warring in his eyes.

Frowning, Voldemort directed a look at him. “You disagree?”

“She… did not appear overly… upset to no longer be a part of the Knights, my lord.” Avery said carefully.

Voldemort narrowed his eyes. “Then, you had best be very persuasive, hadn’t you?”

“… Yes, my lord,” Avery agreed with a wince.

-o-o-o-
Bellatrix sighed as she leaned back in her bed and stared up at the ceiling. It seemed impossible to try and sleep, her mind a whirl with the events of the day. Everything was different; everything she’d believed was different.

She wasn’t sure exactly how that was going to settle. She could practically hear her Aunt Walburga screaming already. A part of her couldn’t help but imagine the wizard, the Potter that shouldn’t exist but did, being subject to one of her rants and his likely reaction.

A perverse giggle left her lips as she allowed herself a smile.

“And what, pray tell, has you so amused?”

Bellatrix’s eyes snapped open and she beheld her near-twin in appearance younger sister, arching a brow back at her with her arms crossed about her chest.

“Dromeda!” Bellatrix declared, blushing slightly and shifting about on her bed.

“Bella,” Andromeda Black agreed with a nod of her head as she studied her sister carefully. “I take it you… enjoyed your festivities?”

There was a subtle hint of something, disgust or disapproval Bellatrix realized, that her sister had always had when she had spoken of cleansing the wizarding world of the muggle taint. Looking back on it, she’d always had it, an aloof separation from the rest of them when it came to that matter. As the rise of the Knights of Walpurgis had increased the family’s vitriol, it had seen the subtle but steady distancing of her little sister from the rest of them.

“Not like I was planning to,” Bellatrix stated simply as she regarded her sister with a much sharper eye as she considered how much she had missed. “In fact, I rather came quite close to dying, I should think.”

“Rodolphus did, though,” Bellatrix continued as she stared up into the air above her head. “So were the rest of them. And Dolohov. We didn’t last half a minute. He tore us to pieces.”

“Rodolphus is… dead?” Andromeda stared at her sister before frowning slightly, looking worryingly at her sister. “Bella, are you all right? Were you hurt?”

“Very dead. Watched his head get sliced open right in front of me. The stains will probably never come out,” Bella agreed with a nod of her head before affixing her sister with a critical look. “You don’t believe that muggles and muggleborn should be purged, do you?”

Andromeda stilled, looking back at her sister with a carefully blank expression. “I’m not sure what you’re referring to, sister.”

“I don’t know why I couldn’t see it before,” Bellatrix responded as she stared down at her fingers. “That aloof disapproval you only barely ever showed. Didn’t want to see it, maybe? Ickle Bella just wanted to be a good little pureblood and make the wizarding world stronger.”

The sing-song quality of Bellatrix’s voice made Andromeda shift, stiff and tense as she palmed her wand, watching her sister as if she had sudden transformed into a predatory beast. “I’m still not sure what you’re talking about.”

“I know I’m supposed to be wroth with you,” Bellatrix responded as she tilted her head to the side. “But after tonight… I simply don’t care!”
“… You don’t care.” Andromeda repeated, her brow arched and skepticism high.

“It was a half-blood that felled us like the sickle does wheat,” Bellatrix continued, almost as if she hadn’t heard her sister say a thing. “It was… creative, magnificent even.”

“Magnificent,” Andromeda again repeated as she looked at her sister with that same skepticism.

“Oh, yes!” Bellatrix smiled broadly. “Absolutely magnificent!”

Carefully, Andromeda reached forward and pressed the back of her hand to Bellatrix’s cheeks and forehead.

“… What are you doing, Dromeda?” Bella demanded as she reached up and lightly batted away her sister’s hand.

“Checking to see if you are perchance inflicted by fever. And I do find you to be rather flush,” Andromeda stated simply. “I should think that would explain some of your queer thoughts.”

“I am not delirious.” Bellatrix stated flatly as she gave her sister a sour look.

“How else am I to believe when you are making such claims?” Andromeda countered back with a brow arched. “What will mother and father say?”

“Father already knows,” Bellatrix stated, her lip threatening to jut out in a petulant pout. “I showed him already.”

“And mother?” Andromeda pressed firmly with an arched brow.

“Father will make her see.” Bellatrix said firmly with a confident nod of her head.

“I hope this fever passes instead of growing enflamed, sister,” Andromeda stated quietly before slowly shaking her head. “I would hate to see you suffer the fate that would likely befall you should it not.”

Bellatrix frowned at her sister, “What could you possibly be worried about?”

“Toujours Pur, sister,” Andromeda stated with a sad smile on her face. “Toujours Pur.”

“What aren’t you telling me?” Bellatrix demanded as she looked at her sister. “What is going on, Dromeda?”

“Nothing for you to worry about, sister,” Andromeda stated simply with a shake of her head.

“I am your elder sister. It is my responsibility to worry about you,” Bellatrix stated firmly.

“Not for this, Bellatrix,” Andromeda stated firmly and looked at her sister. “To bed with you, though. After a day like that, you shall need your sleep more than usual. Shall we expect you to wake sometime before the settling of the setting sun, or would it be best to wait for supper to have you grace us with your presence?”

“Brat,” Bellatrix grunted out, allowing herself to be distracted as she pouted at Andromeda. “I am hardly so and you know it.”

“Of course I do, sister, of course I do,” Andromeda agreed, a slight note of melancholy in her voice as she returned to the door. “I bid you a good night and sweet dreams, sister.”
“And I to you, Dromeda,” Bellatrix responded automatically as Andromeda nodded and shut the door behind her with an audible click.

Once more in the relative quiet of her bedroom, she was left to the mercy of a maelstrom of confusion. What was this resignation in her sister? Her fears… and their father’s. Surely he would see the value in what this new player brought.

Wouldn’t he?
-o-o-o-

Albus Dumbledore was quietly enjoying a nightcap when the flash of his fireplace alerted him to an incoming floo call.

“Albus,” the voice was Alastor Moody’s, pulling the wizard from his drink as he turned to face the fireplace directly.

“Alastor,” Dumbledore responded with an inclination of his head. “What can I do for you this evening?”

“We have a problem,” Alastor responded, before pausing and shifting about a bit. “Actually, we’ve had a problem, but we just now found out about it.”

“Come through,” Dumbledore responded as he flicked his wand to the fireplace, allowing the floo to fully connect.

And in a flash of fire Alastor stepped out, shaking off the ash with a grimace as he glanced around in a quick, efficient survey of his surroundings. “You moved the bird’s stand half a foot and you added another stack of books.”

Inclining his head in acknowledgement, Dumbledore looked at the man. “What seems to be the problem, Alastor?”

“Got a bunch of pureblood idiots who’ve been causing problems. Torturing and murdering whole families and groups of muggles type problems,” Moody stated with a grim frown. “They’ve been bribing people to keep it covered up until tonight.”

“They decided to come into the open?” Dumbledore asked, frowning heavily beneath his beard.

“They picked the wrong fight,” Alastor corrected the man with a slightly sadistic smirk on his face.

“I take it, then, the statute of secrecy was not breached?” Dumbledore noted.

“Oh, it was,” Alastor disagreed quickly with a shake of his head, “but the bastards set it up smart enough. They threw up Muggle repelling charms on the doors and windows so none of them could run. No, that’s not why I said they picked the wrong fight.”

“Then why, pray tell, keep me in such suspense?” Dumbledore asked with a brow arched up.

“Because it’s nice to be the one that has the answers for a change,” Alastor countered back before settling into his seat. “There’s a new player, it seems. Wizard, goes by the name ‘Storm Chaser’. He was having a drink at a muggle pub when those idiots burst in, trying to kill everyone in sight.”

“And he managed to hold them off long enough for the aurors to arrive?” Dumbledore stated, his brows rising. “Remarkable.”
“Hold them off?” Alastor responded, staring back at Dumbledore before barking off a laugh. “They didn’t last half a minute, Albus. He tore them to pieces.”

“… Pardon?” Dumbledore stated, his glass almost dropping.

“When we arrived it was to a pile of dead body parts,” Alastor stated. “With the muggles scared out of their minds and a single wizard, sitting calm as you could be. And the bloody cheek of the bastard. Do you know what the first thing he said was?”

“What?” Dumbledore asked, still reeling from the explanation.

“‘You’re late.’ He tells us all we’re late of all the bloody things,” Alastor stated with a shake of his head.

 “… I see,” Dumbledore stated quietly as he leaned back, looking at Alastor with an unreadable expression on his face. “So, you came here to, what, convince me to try and lend support for him at his trial?”

Alastor burst into laughter then, guffawing as he half pointed his finger at Dumbledore.

“What, exactly, is so amusing, Alastor?” Dumbledore demanded after he let the man have his laughs.

“What trial? We had nothing to hold him on! Everything said he acted in self-defense!” Alastor chortled. “They threw the first spells, they burst through the doors, and they had already started randomly cursing people. All he did was defend himself.”

“But, his spells…?” Dumbledore spoke up before flushing guiltily at the implication he was about to make.

“He offered me his wand and let me Priori Incantos it. Worst thing in it was a single exploding curse. Just a normal, albeit powerful, one.” Alastor stated simply.

“Then, how…”?

“Near as I can tell, he started by throwing some whiskey at the one in charge, Antonin Dolohov from what we can see, followed it up with a simple incendio that put him on fire. While they were either cursing muggles or trying to deal with the fire, he banished every piece of furniture and glass near him at them. Then he fired the exploding curses at them.”

Dumbledore winced at the bloody image that brought back memories of the things he’d seen during the second of the muggle great wars. “I see… and that… subdued them?”

The feral grin on Moody’s face shot that hope down immediately. “Nope. The bastard then summoned all those little exploded pieces and animated them into something that finished tearing them apart.”

“I… see,” Dumbledore stated uneasily. “You… approve his actions, Alastor?”

“He got me looking into what’s been happening, that this wasn’t the first, Albus. This wasn’t even close to the first, and they’ve been happening more and more frequently. Someone has been building up something, Albus, and they’re starting them out on muggles to blood ‘em and get them ready to go.”

“How many, Alastor?” Dumbledore asked quietly as he stared back at his friend.
“Too many, Albus,” Moody stated seriously. “Far too many and buried in the files slated for destruction at the end of the year.”

“I see,” Dumbledore stated as he sighed and slumped in his chair. “So, it’s going to start up again then.”

“Albus, were you not listening to me? It already has started up again,” Alastor stated. “But this Storm Chaser… what he did to them, that’s going to put a wrench in the works for whomever did this. He walked away with nary a scratch, and he’s not you. They won’t be able to let that stand. And the longer he fights, and the more of them he takes down… the harder it’s going to be for whomever is behind this to keep up recruiting. It’s a lot different to talk about doing something to a muggle whom can’t fight back. It’s another to have to pick a fight with someone who’s good enough to have slaughtered a small group.”

“Assuming, however, news of this gets out,” Dumbledore pointed out. “If there weren’t any survivors…”

“Oh, I never said there weren’t any survivors,” Alastor stated simply. “I’m certain enough he let one of them go, just to send the message.”

“You are rather inordinately pleased with this,” Albus stated quietly with a hint of disapproval. “Do you not fear the escalation in response to this?”

“If you think escalation wasn’t inevitable with a group like this, you’ve gone daft,” Alastor snapped back. “Or did you learn nothing from how Grindelwald’s muggle puppet started?”

Dumbledore refused to flinch at the accusation. “What do you expect me to do, Alastor? Above all other things, I am a teacher. I educate. I am not a warrior. I fight only as the ultimate resort.”

“And if your ultimate resort had been sooner, how many more people would’ve been still alive?” Alastor stated pointedly.

The look that Dumbledore gave him was less than pleased. “And again, what would you have me do?”

“Let the warrior do what needs to be done,” Alastor stated simply. “Don’t try to lecture him, don’t try to talk down to him. You had your chance to save these men and women.”

“They were my students, Alastor. Do you expect me to simply stand by and let them die?” Dumbledore demanded.

“If they never learned what you taught, were they really?” Alastor pointed out.

“Even if they didn’t see me that way, that is how I see them,” Dumbledore stated as he met Alastor’s eyes defiantly.

“And how much blood will they have to spill before it’s enough to make you wash your hands of them?” Alastor asked before shook his head as he stood up. “They’ve left these halls, Albus. They have grown to men and women. They have made their choice. They are the ones who have to deal with the repercussions.”

“What kind of teacher will I be if I do nothing?”

“The kind that understands that life is a harsher and truer teacher than we can ever be,” Alastor stated simply as he moved back to the fire. “One who can and will end us for failing to heed its
lessons.

“Now, someone’s come along to show them that the lesson they’ve learned about power and fear
cuts both ways,” he continued as he tossed the floo powder onto the fire place. “Those that use,
revel in it, and seek power from it can and will be cut down by it when they’ve pushed it too far.”

And then, in a flash of emerald flame, Alastor Moody was gone, and Albus Dumbledore was left
alone with his thoughts.

-o-o-o-

Harry sighed as he quietly ate the meal lain out in front of him. He’d gotten a decent bit of cash for
the bits of jewelry he’d filched off of the proto-Death eater corpses at a number of pawn shops.
More than enough for a decent night’s stay and a few meals at a nice muggle place in rural
Scotland, not too far from Hogsmeade.

After a less than pleasant night, full of worries, tossing and turning, he had woken, had a meal and
then proceeded to hop around until he’d managed to get himself to the Gaunt shack. With a few
quick spells a creeping ivy was engorged and then carefully tearing the basement of the house apart
until it found the ring buried deep inside the basement. He was rather certain of the find, as the ivy
was quickly withering away even as it brought the ring back out, until it would crumble to dust just
as it reached a good ten feet from Harry.

“Well, that was certainly impressive,” Harry muttered a bit and eyed the ring warily.

The ring was, quite honestly, the most dangerous of the horcruxes, though not for the reason
Riddle had intended. He quickly fashioned a nearby stone into a box and carefully, without
touching it, closed the ring inside of it. He then walked to one of the trees and began a subtle bit of
transfiguration.

It wasn’t his forte to say the least but he was still able to open up a knot in the tree and carefully
inserted the stone container into it. That would throw Riddle off his game if he came to check the
status of his ring. And the stone should protect the tree from the withering curse while he gathered
the necessary basilisk venom to destroy it.

He already had plans for how to deal with the locket. However that and the diadem were the only
ones he really knew where to find. The diary and the cup were somewhere in Voldemort’s
possession. Without them he’d need another way of dealing with Voldemort himself.

A slightly wicked smile curled over his lips as he thought about it.

It was such a horrible, horrible shame that he’d spent so much time researching and fantasizing
ways of dealing with wizards foolish enough to condemn themselves to eternal limbo for an
extension of their time on Earth.

Still, it had been a productive day, all in all, which brought him back to his little inn and a nice
warm dinner. Then, just as he was about to bite into the nice meal, he was treated to the sight of
one Fenrir Greyback walking into the inn and walking over to the bar. And one particular couple,
one with their young children did not seem in the least bit particularly happy to see him.

He cast them a leering grin, rough, almost jagged looking teeth, stained and yellowed flashed, dark
and predatory. They in turn moved their bodies in front of their children. Then, when Fenrir
ordered a pint, they stood, left money on the table and walked out.

Harry watched Fenrir out of the corner of his eye as he continued to eat his meal. The werewolf
was in no apparent rush, drinking one pint and then another with a grin. It was only knowing what he looked for that let Harry watch the way he kept glancing out the window, watching the slow descent of the sun.

When the time was right, he paid his tab and leisurely walked back out.

Harry calmly finished the last bite of his meal and then moved towards the door.

“Excuse me, sir?” the barkeep called, visibly nervous. “You might want to head up to your room for the night. We’ve been having… wild dog attacks at night of late. Best to be safe.”

“I appreciate the concern,” Harry stated with a smile, “but, I find myself in need of my constitutional, and I’m sure that any dogs I come across will be sent off, tails between their legs.”

“Sir…” the barkeep tried again only Harry was already walking out the door. He could see Fenrir in the distance, leisurely taking his time. A simple one way silencing spell and then a scent masking spell and he was walking after him.

It didn’t take them long to move away from the houses and roads, Fenrir was apparently far more comfortable away from civilization. Unfortunately for him, while it wasn’t his preference, Harry had long since gotten used to it as well. As they went, spells were quietly shot onto stones and the earth.

Great stone jaguars began to stalk through the cold moorland at Harry’s side while beneath the earth wyrms dug and followed him in growing number.

Something people forgot when facing werewolves. Yes, their hide was magically resistant. That resistance meant that things like stunners and various other magic cast upon them simply failed to affect them in any significant manner. That did not mean that they were resistant to creations of animated stone, earth and metal beating them into bloody pulps.

That they healed back up from it without a scratch as long as you didn’t use silver just made it easier usually.

So, he followed him, until he could see him waiting at something, beginning to slowly pace about the empty air in front of him. A ward of some kind then. So the family from earlier wasn’t foolish enough to think Greyback was just there to intimidate them.

Harry watched as he cast a quick series of spells upon the nearby trees, causing their trunks to shift into a semblance of gruesome, hungry faces as their roots twisted and pulsed lightly. A softening charm made them flexible, while a spot of transfiguration gave them the look of a hungering treant. The animation charm was limiting its actions to the roots for now, adding to the subtle wrongness of the atmosphere and keeping the spell active.

It was then that Harry could see it happening, and he had to admit, he was impressed with the skill Greyback employed as he almost simultaneously broke the protective wards and set up an anti-apparition ward of his own.

And he seemed to have timed his actions almost perfectly. “Little pigs, little pigs, I think I’ll just let myself in!”

Almost as soon as he finished his declaration, the change began to overtake the wizard as his body changed and distorted into its growing, lupine form.

“Personally,” Harry stated, drawing the transforming werewolf’s attention, “I think this is more
little red riding hood than three little pigs.”

Then a banished stone cracked Greyback right on his growing snout, making the werewolf let off a whining howl of pain and anger.

“And I feel like playing the huntsman.”

Greyback was lunging for him already, moving with the speed and power that had made him feared as one of the most dangerous combatants of the second wizarding war. Harry had almost forgotten that fact as he barely had time to drop an explosive hex between them, sending up earth and stone in a spray at the great beast. It did little more than give the monster pause as it turned great, baleful blue eyed glare upon him and let out a challenging howl.

“Yes, yes, I know,” Harry stated mildly as he kept his wand at the ready. “Werewolves are strong and resistant to most magic cast upon them.”

It was then that one of the wyrms he created earlier exploded from the earth and snapped down upon the werewolf’s thigh.

Ignoring the growing bellow Harry looked back at Greyback and noted, “What they are not, however, is immune to stone and earth and a variety of other things given form, purpose and power.”

With an angry swipe of one hand Greyback smashed through the wyrm’s head, reducing it to nothing but falling, loose earth. Only to have another one of the wyrms leap up and grab onto his arm. With another howl he moved to crush the offending creation only to be knocked to the ground as one of the stone jaguars rushed forward and slammed itself into his stomach, teeth and claws tearing into any piece of flesh they could.

Still, Greyback was not one to be so easily taken down. With another howl he managed to toss the stone jaguar aside and then smashed the earthen wyrm into it until it collapsed, freeing his arm. In a blur of motion he had lunged forward and smashed into Harry, victoriously clamping down on the arm reflexively raised in front of his mouth.

Only, he couldn’t feel the cloth tearing and the flesh giving way beneath his mouth as the cloth managed to hold up easily enough against his teeth. Refusing to allow Greyback any further advantages Harry send a strong cutting curse straight into the werewolf’s groin. As he released Harry’s arm reflexively, Harry’s other hand lashed out and smashed into his throat, reducing the howl to a gurgling gasp for breath.

As he struggled to recover his breath Greyback lifted up a clawed hand, ready to slash across Harry’s face, only to find an eruption of roots grabbing hold of his arms and neck, flinging him back. Pulled onto his back he suddenly found another pair of the stone jaguars pouncing on each of his arms and then burying their teeth in his shoulders, just above his armpits. His legs were then caught by more of the wyrms, biting into his ankles and knees, trying to crush the joints and ligaments in their maws.

Greyback howled again.

Pushing himself up, Harry shook his arm and studied his still unbroken sleeve before sighing in relief, “Well, thank bloody Merlin for unbreakable charms.”

Shaking his head he stood up, stretching a bit as he watched Greyback struggling beneath the heavy forms keeping him down. The werewolf was bloodied and visibly injured as it snarled.
beneath the creatures of animated stone and earth. He might be captured but he wasn’t about to
give up trying to rend Harry limb from limb for his actions.

“Yes, yes, you’re the big bad wolf,” Harry stated with a snort as he conjured a rolled up newspaper
and smacked Greyback on his still-broken snout. “Now, quiet. The nice man is terrified enough as
is.”

And Harry then looked pointedly at the trembling father of the family he’d noticed in earlier,
barely able to hold his wand as he stared in disbelief at what he saw.

“I-is… is th-that, G-greyback…?” The man was barely able to string his words together as he
stared shakily at the werewolf struggling to get free.

“Yes,” Harry agreed as he gave another smack on the snout when the werewolf snapped his jaws in
Harry’s direction. “Nasty brute he is. Saw him and the way he was leering and figured it’d be best
if I followed him and found out what he was up to. Though, given his preferences, it wasn’t hard to
see.”

“P-p-prefer-rences?” the wizard repeated.

“Turn the kids, probably kill the parents,” Harry stated calmly. “I’m probably going to have trouble
transporting him to the authorities.”

“T-trouble?” the wizard asked as his terror started to return.

“Don’t worry about it,” Harry stated simply. “I can guarantee your family won’t have much to
worry about. Why don’t you go back and get your wards back up? I’ll be taking care of this trash.”

“I… Who… who are you?” the wizard asked.

“Oh, I go by the Storm Chaser,” Harry said easily before gesturing with his wand as his creations
began to drag the werewolf away. “Do you mind if I take your tree with me? It seems a shame to
separate them at this point.”

“… Go ahead.” the wizard agreed dumbly.

“Jolly good,” Harry agreed with a nod before looking back meaningfully towards the man’s home.
“Though… family? Wards?”

“Ah, right!” the man stated with a quick nod before hesitating a moment. “I… Thank you, sir.”

“Happy to help,” Harry stated cheerfully before again smacking Greyback on the nose when he
tried to snap at anything that got close enough to his mouth.

Harry had the werewolf dragged a handy distance before he finally found a rather sizable pond.

“Well, Greyback, I’m afraid this is where we part ways,” Harry stated calmly as he looked down at
the still-struggling werewolf. “I’m sure the human part of you is thinking that you’re going to
figure out a way to get through this and then come after me.”

He paused then and then looked coldly down at the man, “You won’t. While fire and silver are the
most obvious ways to kill a werewolf, they aren’t the only ones.”

The werewolf began to struggle all the more violently at Harry’s words but the stone beasts
holding him refused to let go as they began to drag him to the pond’s edge. “And a mongrel like
The beast’s eyes widened and he howled as he felt his body pulled into the water, the roots withdrawing. Harry, however, stared back into the werewolf’s eyes as Greyback was pulled under the dark, black water. He watched as the form was completely pulled under after growing, thrashing struggles.

He waited there stone faced and patient as the animated constructs took him all the way to the deepest portion of the pond and held him there. He waited, watching as the bubbles burst forth a good number of minutes later. It was only another twenty minutes after that, that he finally nodded his head and turned away and headed back to his room.

The animation spells would release just before dawn, allowing the body to float up to the surface and be found. For the rest of the evening they would keep Greyback down in his temporary, watery grave. And both the wizarding and muggle worlds would sleep a bit safer because of it.

-o-o-o-

Cygnus Black frowned slightly as he lightly tapped a galleon down onto the stone table top in front of him in quiet contemplation in the tavern he made himself comfortable. He flipped it up, then caught it between his fingers and rolled it over his knuckles. Then he again resumed tapping it down on the table in front of him.

“I see you still haven’t managed to get that habit of yours under control, Cygnus,” a calm voice noted as a distinguished gentleman with wild, slightly greyed black hair and hazel eyes stated calmly.

“Uncle Charlus,” Cygnus stated with a nod of his head as he looked at his Uncle.

“I expect there is a good reason that you wished to speak to me?” Charlus stated as he arched a brow back at the man as he slide into his seat across from the man in front of him. “Especially with such urgency?”

“… Have you heard about what happened in the muggle pub with the group that included the Lestrange heir?” Cygnus stated with an uncharacteristic bluntness.

“Terrible business,” Charlus stated without an ounce of conviction.

“Bellatrix was there.” Cygnus continued as if Charlus hadn’t really spoken.

“Oh? I hadn’t taken that particular one of your girls as having that kind of sense to deal with those idiots.” Charlus stated with a snort and a shake of his head.

“She was there with Rodolphus Lestrange,” Cygnus stated simply as he brought his galleon coin down with a pointed tap. “She watched him die in front of her.”

“Ah,” Charlus frowned a bit as he then leaned back and regarded his nephew carefully. “Then what exactly is it you wish from me?”

“She showed me the memory of what happened,” Cygnus stated simply. “The wizard responsible was a Potter.”

That bit of information made Charlus arch a brow and frown slightly. “Oh? I’m not sure I understand what you’re saying.”
“The wizard responsible cut them all down in a matter of moments,” Cygnus stated firmly. “He was calm, brutal, efficient and most definitely a Potter.”

There was a pause as Cygnus let that sink in before speaking again, “And he was not a Potter I recognized, and he identified himself as a half-blood.”

Charlus frowned again, “There aren’t any current Potter half-bloods.”

“Nor were there any I didn’t think I knew about, not until I saw her memory,” Cygnus insisted. “He was visibly a Potter. But his eyes were a shade of green I’m not familiar with.”

“Unique?” Charlus asked with a frown.

“Visibly so. He was young, early 20s I believe, glasses, classic Potter hair, definite Potter features, slighter of build but not overly so. Used what I think was a holly wand.”

“That’s a rare one,” Charlus noted with a frown. “Have you tried checking with Ollivander to see if he’s sold one to someone matching his description?”

“Yes,” Cygnus said with a nod of his head. “He hasn’t. But he did mention a curious happening. One of his wands, a holly with a phoenix feather core one, reacted in a peculiar manner a few days ago, not too terribly long before the attack happened.”

“Peculiar in what manner?” Charlus asked with a frown.

“He wouldn’t say,” Cygnus admitted with a frown of his own. “Just made sure to state that it was most peculiar and unexpected.”

“Damned Ollivanders and their riddles,” Charlus stated with a sour frown. “So, what is it that you were hoping from me? Confirmation on who he is?”

“That and hoping you had a clue to what he knows and his motivations,” Cygnus stated. “He allowed Bellatrix to live, to give a message to the Knights of Walpurgis.”

“A message?” Charlus asked with an arched brow, before smirking slightly. “That must have left the girl thrilled.”

“She’s become infatuated with him,” Cygnus said sourly. “Hence why I was hoping you’d know something about him, anything. It’s going to be difficult enough dealing with the repercussions of her decision to pursue a half-blood. I know Walburga is going to be particularly difficult to deal with.”

“I imagine so,” Charlus agreed, before smirking softly. “Of course now I’d like to see how this half-blood Potter would react to meeting her.”

“She is still my sister,” Cygnus stated with a frown. “She’s just…”


“Yes, well…” Cygnus sighed a bit as he leaned back. “If this Potter continues to make waves, he’s going to create a third side of things just being acting as he is, and developing followers of his own.”

“A third side of things?” Charlus asked with a brow arching up and then he frowned. “… Cygnus, what’re you talking about?”
Cygnus stared at Charlus for a moment, as if weighing a decision in his mind, before speaking. “You are aware of the growing… confidence of certain … like-minded individuals?”

“You mean the blood purists like your family.” Charlus said bluntly.

Cygnus’ frown deepened before he continued, “Yes, well, there has been… an Organizing of them. A group called the Knights of Walpurgis. They were the ones behind the attack that night.”

Charlus frowned a bit as he looked at Cygnus with a critical eye, “You aren’t telling me this because they’re a group of foolish, violent thugs. There is more to it than that, isn’t there.”

“Their leader, their Lord, is too ambitious, too charismatic and determined for that,” Cygnus elaborated. “He has been training them. He has been blooding them against muggle families, using them to hone their masteries of the Dark Arts. The true Dark Arts.”

The click in Charlus’ mind was almost audible as he made the connection of what Cygnus was alluding to, “… You’re talking about a rebellion. No… you’re talking about the rise of a new Dark Lord.”

Cygnus simply nodded, “One whose cause we had, until this happened, been almost unanimously in support of. The removal of the taint of mudbloods and the subjugation of the muggles.”

“… And what makes you sure it will be turn to war?”

“Because the message that Bellatrix was given, was to ‘Tell Tom Riddle his war won’t be as easy as he thought,’” Cygnus stated simply. “This Potter knows something.”

Charlus looked into Cygnus’ eyes for a long moment, before frowning. “He scares you.”

“If he is truly a half-blood, he terrifies me,” Cygnus admitted quietly. “You didn’t see what I saw, Uncle Charlus. He slaughtered them. No hesitation, he cut them down as they would’ve cut down him and everyone else in that pub. Only, without an ounce of malice or even an inkling of the Dark Arts. He didn’t even attempt to take them alive or stun them.”

“Then there’s your second clue,” Charlus stated simply and quietly. “He’s a war veteran. Most of them are retired now, but the ones that saw enough action against Grindelwald’s forces… Veterans of heavy action don’t become so without doing away with things like hesitation.”

“He can’t one from the war against Grindelwald. He’s too young.” Cygnus insisted.

“Then he’s from a foreign war,” Charlus insisted. “Maybe in that nightmare over in Vietnam where the Frenchies kept convincing anyone they could to get their hands dirty so they could keep theirs clean. Merlin knows they were free enough with it on the colonials, though the Vietnamese’s compulsions on their reporters was a nasty bit of work.”

“If he survives and keeps up his little streak… he won’t stand for the way the Ministry and Dumbledore will approach it,” Cygnus stated quietly. “And he’ll attract people that would’ve stayed on the fence otherwise.”

“A three way civil war,” Charlus stated with a disgusted grimace.

“One which I need to have a talk with this unknown before I know where I and my family will stand,” Cygnus agreed.

“… And you know that I’ll want to know about how a Potter managed to slip under my nose,”
Charlus stated with a frown. “So you want me to help you find him.”

“Why do you think I’m being so painfully honest about things, Uncle?” Cygnus responded with a wry smirk.

“I had been wondering,” Charlus muttered sourly.

“It’s agreed then?” Cygnus asked.

“Fine, I’ll help you in your little quest,” Charlus agreed, “but only to help you find him so we can both have a talk with him.”

“Agreed.”

-o-o-o-

Chapter End Notes

Author’s notes: I have also released my first novel on Amazon. Book One of I’m Not a Super Spy!: I’m Only a Freshman! By Jonathan McCready

You can find a link to the novel on my new site chilor.com .

I will be not only promoting published novels, but other original works I’m putting together there.
Chapter 3

Author’s Note: Credit to nightelf for the Black family scene as we seem to egg each other on.

-o-o-o-

Harry stood before a familiar cliff, staring out into the wild, angry ocean that struggled, desperately to claw down the jagged stone that stood in defiance of its fury. He had been here before, once with Albus Dumbledore when they had claimed the fake locket. Another time had been to pay tribute to the last length of time he’d spent with the man.

The last, he had been to put an end to the inferni that Voldemort had left to destroy any who would disturb this particular resting place. For all his genius, Voldemort’s arrogance and narrowmindedness had always left plenty of opportunity to bypass his plans with a bit of creative thinking. He had protections against all forms of wizarding magical transportation like apparition, though had ignored the house elf.

Another example had been his sealing of the entrance to require a blood sacrifice, thinking it would weaken whomever gave it up. Then there had been the charmed boat. And the inferni.

Sadly, there had been an even more obvious solution that Harry himself hadn’t figured out until years later. A bit of magical excavation and, instead of making your entrance from the ocean side of the cliff, a tunnel could be formed leading straight down into the waiting cave. The last time he’d done it, he’d made a point to simply turn most of the rock into lava and either incinerate or bury the inferni in a suddenly capped off lake they couldn’t escape.

This time, he was being a bit more creative.

When he stepped into the cave from his tunnel, the stone had already grown out and lead to the small island in the center of the cave.

Only, he found that he had apparently arrived far, far too early.

There was no locket, there were no enchantments, and there were no inferni.

“Well, bugger,” Harry noted with a frown and a sigh as he glanced around. “That certainly complicates things.”

Tapping his lower lip thoughtfully with his wand, he then began to cast his eyes around the cave. He’d originally planned to create a small army of gargoyles to keep the inferni busy, and later destroyed while he siphoned off the potion with a simple pump. Now, though…

“Well, since Tom isn’t using it…”

Harry suddenly grinned viciously as he almost gave into his first impulse to just collapse the entrance to the cave and leave Voldemort thwarted that way.

But that would in turn mean that the dark lord would look elsewhere to hide the locket. Instead, he had the opportunity to prepare his own set of traps and tricks. He would just have to be careful about it.
Too much obvious magic would leave Voldemort knowing that the location was already compromised.

So he’d made his way to the back of the cave, to the furthest part from the entrance, and he began his work. The surface of the stone was carefully shorn off, then the stone beneath was separated into boxy stone. Each of the stones was then broken, before animation charms were tied to it, transforming it into a humanoid creature of jagged, brutal rock, that could then walk back into the hollow of the wall, and reconfigure itself back into the semblance of stone blocks they were formed from.

The wall face he’d cut out was then affixed to the closest layer of the animated creations, allowing them to return the wall to its previous, naturally carved state.

They would remain inert and unreactive until a wizard who was not Harry arrived and then had departed for a good length of time, or Harry himself activated them. Once another wizard had come and gone they would activate, sending a signal to Harry, before sweeping the cave and the lake of any inferni. Once the undead constructs had been destroyed and dealt with, they would return to their wall and resume their vigil.

It would hopefully be a small enough bit of magic and not set as a ward, so Voldemort wouldn’t take notice of it.

With that done Harry exited the cave back through his tunnel, restoring the roof of the cave to its previous condition, for a good five feet. The rest of the cave he left in place and calmly hid the entrance beneath a particularly heavy and worn looking boulder. It was an isolated enough location that he doubted anyone would be by to remove the boulder any time soon.

-o-o-o-

For all of his ten years Sirius Black had grown adept at reading his family’s moods.

It been a necessity for his own wellbeing. Blacks were not, after all, known for their great mental stability. While his mother was perhaps the most notorious of his family, Blacks were known for their hair-trigger tempers. More than once in his life he’d had to duck curses because one of the older generations fallen into a fit of anger. While none of the clan ever went for lethal curses, Sirius had quickly learned that there were fates much worse than death.

Or, at least, much stranger. The slightest tug of a smile reached his face as he thought of Mother’s last punishment on him, one she’d had to cancel early. Who knew that a dog could lick his own –

“I hereby call this meeting of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black to order!”

Sirius shook himself from the memories of being the family pet and brought his attention back to the meeting. Father was in charge, at the center of the library, his hand on a pensieve. Uncle Cygnus stood on the opposite side of the pensieve; the look on his face was one that he had never seen on any of his relatives: Fear. For a moment, Sirius wondered if Uncle Cygnus had done something to get himself cast out, but he quickly changed his mind: if Uncle Cygnus was to be cast out, he wouldn’t be anywhere near the meeting.

A set of chairs ringed the center of the library, each of the adults sitting comfortably. Grandfather Arcturus sat off to one side, a cup of tea in his hands, his dark eyes twinkling, seeing if Father would measure up to expectations. Grandfather Pollux and Great-Aunt Cassiopeia looked on with undisguised curiosity, wondering what Father would do. Mother sat at her favorite high-backed chair, her usual look of disdain shaping her face. Uncle Alphard, by comparison, looked relaxed.
and nonchalant, quietly smoking his pipe.

It was next that he looked towards the edge of the room. There his brother and cousins were waiting, seated quietly and purposely as blank faced as they could manage, though Regulus was still having difficulties keeping still for too terribly long. Children were to be seen and not heard, especially so in the Black family. With a briefly restrained sigh of disappointment, he walked over and joined them.

His father took a deep breath. “Cygnus of the Ancient and Noble House of Black has asked for this meeting, to ask for a review of a decision that the House has made in supporting a… business venture.” His face rose to meet the rest of the house, casting his features in gaslight.

“Last year, after some discussion, it was decided that the Ancient and Noble House of Black should give material support to the organization known as the Knights of Walpurgis. The stated aims of the Knights of Walpurgis appeared to match the aims of the House of Black. However, Cygnus and Bellatrix have provided information that they claim brings doubt to that decision.”

Uncle Cygnus nodded and turned to address the rest of the Black family members. “A group of young Knights of Walpurgis journeyed to a muggle pub near the entrance to Diagon Alley a few days ago, to gain practice in anti-muggle combat. Bellatrix represented the House of Black in that endeavor, as an initiate to the organization. What she encountered has cast all of the actions of the Knights of Walpurgis in a new light.”

His mother chortled, smug and sneering. “We know about the massacre, Cygnus. Surely Bellatrix’ survival of that massacre illustrates the superiority of our blood!”

“Be silent on things you know nothing about!” Cygnus snarled; after a moment, he closed his eyes, and gestured toward the pensieve. “If you truly want to see ‘superiority of blood’ in action… by all means, see its results.”

His mother sneered. “Fine!” She dove into the pensieve.

Sirius’ eyes widened at the sight. He’d already seen his father’s face after watching that memory. His mother was not going to be happy.

Cygnus looked over at Alphard. “Do you want to watch as well?”

Alphard smiled lazily and shook his head. “I don’t need to.” He glanced over at the children. “I’ve already seen its effects.”

“Anyone else?” Father asked the crowd. Sirius fought the urge to ask for permission. Now was not the time. He would ask Father later, in private.

None of the others took Father up on the offer. Father looked down at the pensieve and ran his fingers through his graying hair. “Regardless of what I decide, we will have problems. I have received a message for Bellatrix from Lord Voldemort, apologizing to her for Avery’s behavior and inviting her to rejoin the Knights. I am not so foolish as to think this is simply an ‘invitation’.”

Bellatrix stiffened in her chair. Sirius glanced over at her; Dromeda had placed an arm around her in comfort.

Father continued. “At the same time… there is this… Storm Chaser. He has identified himself as a half-blood –“

“A half-blood who could handily mop the floor with the entirety of House Black!” Father glared at Cassiopeia, daring her to challenge his leadership of House Black. “Be silent about things you refuse to learn.”

“So we’re between two powerful Lords,” Uncle Alphard opined. He blew a smoke ring into the air. “Dark Lords?”

“This Voldemort, certainly,” Father conceded. “This Storm Chaser… I doubt it, but that does not make him any less of a problem.” He looked over at Alphard. “It was apparent from our communications with the Knights of Walpurgis that they preferred a slow escalation, to train our young witches and wizards before enforcing its will on the mudborn.” He shook his head. “That is not going to happen now. I have heard that several pureblood wizards have disappeared in recent days, likely victims of the Storm Chaser. One of the Knight’s weapons, a werewolf named Fenrir Grayback, was found dead this morning; whoever had killed him had transfigured a tree and held him down under the water with it.”

Grandfather Arcturus blinked at this news. “There was a full moon last night. This Storm Chaser… killed a werewolf… on a full moon… without fire or silver?” He shuddered. “What have you gotten us into, son?”

“I don’t know, Father,” Orion glared up at his father, “but I will see us out of it.”

At that point, Mother emerged from the pensieve. She steadied herself on the pensieve and then glared at Father.

“Kill him.” Mother shook, whether with fear or rage, Sirius could not tell. “Kill this… this abomination now!”

Father looked her square in the eye. “No. I am Lord Black, and you WILL listen to me!”

Mother reacted as if slapped. Father had NEVER pulled rank on her! Father glared at her, then gestured to her chair. “Sit. Please.”

Sirius watched in amazement as Father paced around the pensieve. With every moment he could see the power burning within his eyes. This was no longer Father, the cowed husband. This was Lord Black, the imperious head of one of the most powerful and ancient magical clans.

He wondered if he would be like that one day, when he became Lord.

“As of this moment, we are to remain strictly neutral. While Lord Voldemort’s apology is to be accepted, its previous invitation by Knight Avery for the House of Black to divorce itself from the Knights of Walpurgis is also accepted. No member of the House of Black is to join the Knights of Walpurgis; no member of the House of Black is to give material assistance to the Knights of Walpurgis. Also, until further notice, no marital negotiations are to occur between the House of Black and any known member or ally of the Knights.” He glared at the members of his House, finally settling on Mother. “The survival of the House is at stake. Do not make me cast you out for this.”

Mother growled, but otherwise remained silent.

Father then turned to Uncle Cygnus. “Cygnus, you have a lead on this… Storm Chaser?”

Cygnus nodded. “It is an impossible lead, but it is the only one I have. He is a Potter; that much was obvious from the man’s features. I have made contact with Uncle Charlus; he has no clue who the man could be, but he is assisting me in the search. Hopefully, between the two of us, we can
find the Storm Chaser.”

“And you will slip a blade into his ribs if you find him?” Mother asked hopefully, maybe even a bit… eagerly?

“One would think you wanted to see your brother dead,” Father drolled. “Understand this, and understand this now. We. Are. Neutral. Unless one side or the other initiates combat with the House of Black, we are not to raise a wand against either side.” His dark eyes bored into every person there. “However, let it be known that, if either side wishes to initiate mortal combat with the House of Black, we are willing to turn all of our considerable resources against that party.” He rested a hand against the pensieve. “So mote it be.”

The family realized it was being dismissed; the other members of the family either shuffled or stormed their way out of the room. After a moment, only Father and he remained in the room – he sitting in his chair at the edge of the room, Father leaning against the pensieve, looking far older than Sirius had ever seen him.

After a minute, realizing that he hadn’t left, Father looked over at him. “What is it, son?”

Sirius pursed his lips. He didn’t want to ask, but… “May I see?”

His father looked at him warily. “This is not pleasant to watch, son. Your cousin was… forever changed by what she saw. Are you sure you want to?”

“This is for the House, correct?” Sirius replied.

Father shook his head. “Son, one day you will learn that there are wizards… and there are wizards that are head and shoulders above their peers. Wizards of such power and subtlety that the rest of us pale by comparison. Albus Dumbledore is one such wizard; that man holds the power he does because of the power he holds within himself. From what I have heard from Bellatrix, this ‘Lord Voldemort’ – no doubt a pretender – is similarly powerful.” He brushed his hand along the pensieve. “The wizard here is of the same mold. He chewed up the best of your cousin’s generation within seconds, ripping them apart without much effort.” He raised an eyebrow. “Despite all this, are you sure you want to see?”

Sirius looked at his father. He was a Black. Blacks showed no fear. He gulped, and nodded.

Father smiled gently. “You’ll make a great Lord one day.” He moved aside to allow Sirius access. “I’ll be waiting when you come back out.”

Sirius stepped up to the pensieve and looked into the imposing, silvery liquid. He couldn’t turn back now; Father expected him to do this.

He couldn’t delay it any more. He took a deep breath, and dove in.

-o-o-o-

“What?” Voldemort could only repeat the question as he stared back at the man in front of him, incredulous as he struggled to even comprehend Avery’s words.

“The… The Blacks have ac-… knewledgeed your offer, my lord,” Avery reminded him quickly, “and even thanked you for it, but they… accepted that the divorcing will be fully. They have declared neutrality, my lord.”

“Neutrality?” Voldemort repeated, his eyes narrowed into dark slits as he hissed his words. “They
“They are the Blacks, my lord,” Avery quickly reminded him. “They have stated they will give no aid towards any side. They will only act if acted upon.”

Voldemort hissed in rage and Avery was banished into the wall with a gesture from his wand. “So, not only has your incompetence cost us some of our most promising recruits, but also the support of House Black!?”

“They…” Avery struggled to breath as his head swam from the pain, “have said they will leave us what they have already donated, but to expect no more. I… They have declared that will not oppose us, my lord, only that they will offer no more support!”

“You think that this lack of support means anything less than opposition!?” Voldemort growled as he paced, his robes billowing around him like the surface of an ocean, writhing in storm. “How many know of this?”

“Of the Black? None, my lord,” Avery said quickly, desperation and assurance filling his voice. “It was a discreet meeting.”

“And that will last how long?” Voldemort wondered out loud as he glared out into the distance, his fingers visibly tightening upon his wand.

“My lord, please!” Avery begged, down upon his knees. “If we declare ourselves against the Blacks, we will have open rebellion among our ranks!”

For a moment he sneered, glaring down at Avery as if he was nothing but an insignificant bug, before he calmly forced his features back to stoic neutrality. “For now. What other news is there?”

“Alastor Moody has discovered our raids,” Avery said with a wince as Voldemort’s face twisted in anger again at this latest revelation. “And we believe he has informed Albus Dumbledore of his discovery.”

“Crawling to our dear Headmaster and hoping he’ll save them.” Voldemort stated with a sneer and a look of disgust. “Fools.”

“And we have reports that the… individual struck again last night,” Avery stated with a wince. Voldemort’s eyes again flashed, before he gave Avery a flat look, “I believe I made myself abundantly clear that there were to be no more… independent actions.”

“This wasn’t one, my lord,” Avery stated quickly. “The reports are he killed Fenrir Greyback last night.”

This time there was no immediate reaction as Voldemort processed the information, before he recalled what the state of the full moon had been like the night before. “On a full moon?”

“Yes, my lord,” Avery agreed, before hesitating and continuing in a much softer voice, “without fire or silver.”

That made Voldemort still, then purse his lips and consider the words speculatively. Fighting a werewolf without fire or silver was generally considered the height of folly. Without something to tap into the beast’s innate weaknesses, they were more than difficult to overcome. “Then how damaged was this ‘Storm Chaser?’ Has he been diagnosed as a werewolf yet?”
“He… was not injured according to the report.” Avery admitted in an almost deathly silent voice, his whole body trembling in terror.

“…” Voldemort stared at the man for a moment, his mind almost rebelling against the words, before snarling, “WHO IS HE!?"

“We don’t know, my lord,” Avery whimpered helplessly as he prostrated himself on the ground. “The only thing we know is that he has ‘messy black hair,’ ‘green eyes’, and wears glasses.”

Voldemort paced in irritation. He did not like this new unknown. He did not like unknowns period, as they made things uncertain, uncontrollable. They were more than a complication, they were a threat.

“How is it that we do not know who he is? We should know who every witch and wizard in the Isles is.” Voldemort slipped back to his seat and forcing himself back into the guise of the regal, knowing lord who resided imperiously over his court. “Wizards of this caliber do not simply ‘appear’ out of thin air!”

“We do not know, my lord,” Avery repeated that same, frustrating answer with a wince as he further wilted under Voldemort’s glare. “I have been asking, I have been looking through everything I can. I have talked to the continent, and I have even reached out across the pond. No one seems to have even heard of someone like him.”

“Then FIND OUT! This is MY destiny! This is my time!” Voldemort snarled as he dug his fingers into the arms of his chair, face distorted into an ugly mask of hatred and anger, before he suddenly held up his wand, his hand rising faster than Avery could follow.

Around him tendrils of a dark, pulsing purple miasma rose, hissing like snakes as they flashed with arcs of sickly green bolts. Then his wand flashed out and the air seemed to scream in terror as it raced towards Avery. The man lifted his wand, attempting to shield himself, to deflect the coming spell, anything, only to have the spell warp about his attempts at defense and strike up on his arm.

Then Avery began to scream. Voldemort watched, a cold, cruel smile coiling over his lips as he could see the way the wizard’s skin was slowly peeled back on his arm, then bubbling boils formed around stretches of stinking rot.

Voldemort cut off the spell and watched as each of the pustules pulsed, swelled, and then burst with a noxious puss that made Avery’s skin burn everywhere it touched, all while the man began to retch and vomit up from the combination of pain and sickness.

“Surely you knew this was coming, my dear Avery,” Voldemort stated with a slow, almost purring voice as he seemed to examine his wand, “or, perhaps you thought it would be something simple, something… direct? The Cruciatus is a very useful, even enjoyable, tool. But with all my travels, all my experiences… All the dark forbidden things I know, you didn’t think it was the worst I had did you?”

“M-my, my lord…!” Avery almost squealed out the words as he clutched at his cursed arm, his lips covered in vomit and spit as his eyes were blinded with tears. “P-Pl-please! M-mer-mercy!”

“Mercy, Avery?” Voldemort asked as if contemplating the word as he lightly tapped his chin with his wand. “Truly? Do you think you have earned such? Because of you I have lost significant footing in our plans. Because of you we have lost the Blacks. Because of you Dumbledore has been alerted to our preparations.”
Casually he strode forward, his body moving with an almost inhuman, serpentine grace. His wand found the soft spot beneath Avery’s chin and forced the man’s gaze up towards his own as he lightly twisted the slender wood between his fingers, digging it into the man’s skin. In smooth, sibilant tones, he spoke.

“Mercy has never been one of my virtues, as you should well know, Avery.”

And with a flick of his wrist the tip of the wand flicked away from Avery’s throat, and, faster than the cursed man could follow, a simple cutting curse separated the cursed appendage from the man.

As he listened to the renewed screams leaving Avery’s lips Voldemort smiled cruelly back at the man. “Disappoint me again and I shall teach you another lesson. Find out who this Storm Chaser is quickly enough and perhaps I can be convince to grant you a… replacement.”

Avery only screamed.

-o-o-o-

Charlus Potter was seated in the quaint muggle inn with a small tumbler of decent scotch and a rather nicely done rare steak with roasted potatoes on the side. The meal itself was good enough to make the trip worthwhile in and of itself. He’d have to remember to convince Dorea to step outside of her comfort zone and give it a try.

Still, when he saw the man enter into the room, he didn’t need the sudden stillness to tell him that this was the man he was here to see. He knew the face, at least, in passing; it was close enough to himself and his family that he could see why Cygnus had declared the man a Potter. But the eyes were just as he’d been told, a vibrant shade of green he’d never quite seen before.

There was little impressive about him at first glance. Even less when you caught the slighter than average frame and the typical muggle clothing he wore. But when you looked into those eyes… there was a calm certainty in them.

A look that had quickly bled into confused recognition when he met Charlus’ gaze and studied the man’s face.

Nodding back to the young man, Charlus calmly gestured to the seat in front of him. For a moment it seemed as if this “Storm Chaser” might just refuse. Or even simply leave. Then he walked forward and slid easily into the seat in front of him.

There was a momentary silence as he allowed the man to study him as he carefully cut another piece of the steak and then quietly set the knife down and looked him over in closer inspection.

Close enough to see the fine, mostly hidden scars that hadn’t been able to be fully healed over. Close enough to see some ugly prominent ones that were likely the work of some particularly dark curses. Close enough that it was easy for him to catch the cough reminding him he was staring.

“I do prefer to not be gawked at.” It was polite, though with a tinge of irritation and sarcasm.

“Merely appraising,” Charlus responded easily enough. “What scars a man wears can tell you something of their character.”

“I prefer to not be appraised either.” the man stated without missing a beat.

“On that you will find your preferences generally disregarded,” Charlus pointed out as he speared the piece of steak and calmly brought it to his mouth and chewed it a few moments before
swallowing. “Especially with what I’m guessing is your penchant for chasing storms.”

“I suppose you wouldn’t believe me if I said that I have no idea what you’re talking about?” Harry Potter asked as he looked back at Charlus with a look of resignation on his face.

“The Wilkins’ send their thanks for your disposal of Greyback,” Charlus stated simply as he lightly sopped a bit of the steak’s juices on a piece of bread. “It caused quite a stir.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Harry responded with a flat blandness. “Greyback managed to be freed from my spell. I never saw what happened to him after that.”

“I’m not with the Ministry, lad,” Charlus pointed out and then took a sip of his scotch before continuing. “No need to dance around the truth with me.”

“No need to ever say anything self-incriminating either.” Harry responded back with a look and an arch of the brow.

“A cautious wizard,” Charlus took another sip of the scotch. “Not exactly the most common of things these days.”

“I grew up in the muggle world,” Harry stated simply as he leaned back in the seat. “But that’s why you’re here I take it? Trying to find out more about me?”

“In part,” Charlus agreed with a nod. “However there is one particular facet that matters to me in particular.”

“Oh?” Harry asked a brow arching.

“You’re a Potter.”

“… Am I?” Harry asked after a brief moment, his brow still raised.

“Interesting. You’re even aware of it.” Charlus noted with a slight frown as he frowned just a bit. “And yet, none of us are familiar with you.”

“I wasn’t exactly planning on advertising myself as such,” Harry stated flatly. “I have enough problems to deal with without having to worry about saving you lot.”

“You wouldn’t be suggesting that we’re unable to defend ourselves properly, now would you?” Charlus asked with a cool tone taking over his voice.

“Against most of those idiots? I wouldn’t be terribly worried unless you got full of airs. Against the elites, I’d give even odds,” Harry stated simply and tilted his head to the side. “Against Voldemort himself?”

Harry mulled that over a moment before looking flatly back at Charlus. “Voldemort can go spell for spell with Dumbledore.”

Charlus froze at that, noting the conviction in Harry’s voice and frowning, “And what makes you so certain of this?”

There was a pause as Harry looked at Charlus for a moment, and then shrugged, “It doesn’t matter.”

“The source of your information matters a great deal.” Charlus stated with a deepening frown.
“The source of my information no longer exists,” Harry stated with a sigh as he slumped back. “So there’s no way to verify it even if you did know of it.”

“You speak in vague riddles with an… annoying certainty.” Charlus answered as he looked Harry over. “Do you really expect to be able to keep up this… over dramatic mystique?”

“Heh,” Harry bobbed his head slightly in response. “Voldemort is a half-blood, born Tom Marvolo Riddle. There’s a whole anagram in his name. His mother was Merope Gaunt and his father Tom Riddle, a muggle aristocrat whom Merope used a love potion on, and Voldemort later murdered for abandoning him.”

Harry tilted his head to the side a bit as he watched the slight widening of Charlus’ eyes, before they narrowed in consideration as he continued. “Despite the fact that his father never even knew about him. He framed his uncle Morfinn for the murder. I’m sure you probably heard about it.”

By now Charlus was trying not to gawp at Harry as he struggled to not allow his jaw to hang open and gaping.

“What?” Harry asked with a slightly bemused smile. “I expect you to go ahead and verify all of this. Can’t just blindly trust it after all.”

“How do you know all this?” Charlus demanded finally.

“Assuming I’m right?” Harry asked, a slight smile on his lips.

“Assuming you’re right,” Charlus allowed reluctantly.

“Assuming I’m right, why would I tell a complete stranger I’ve never met before?” Harry challenged back.

And again Charlus was thrown for a loop as the boy had seemed rather forthcoming with information, and then suddenly was being evasive.

“I’m giving out information because it’s rather pertinent about the man behind the people that have been trying to kill me and others.” Harry made a point of stating. “You happen to likely already be included in those others.”

“And what, exactly, will lead to you trusting me?” Charlus asked as he arched a brow.

“Well, for starters, you could introduce yourself,” Harry stated pointedly.

Charlus stared at the young man for a moment, resisting the urge to palm at his face at the statement. Taking a slow, deep breath, he spoke again. “I apologize. My name is Charlus Potter. I happen to be the great Uncle of the woman you chose to be your… messenger.”

“Huh.” Harry tilted his head to the side as he processed that information. “I keep forgetting ickle-Bella-kins is related to the Potters that way.”

“I was asked by my nephew, Cygnus, to help find you.” It was a neutral statement as Charlus looked steadily back at Harry.

“What, to deliver me up to their waiting ambush?” Harry asked sardonically. “I’m quite familiar with the Blacks and their politics. Even more familiar with their stance on blood purity.”

“From what I’ve come to understand, to know your intentions and to declare neutrality,” Charlus
stated as he kept his eyes on Harry. “Your little… demonstration made quite the impact when the memory of it was shown. Both Cygnus and the current Lord Black, Orion, were apparently quite… shaken by it.”

“Of course they were,” Harry stated again with a look that stated ‘No, really, pull the other one.’

“They have already told the Knights of Walpurgis that they will not be granting them any additional support from what I understand,” Charlus stated simply before he took another sip of his drink. “It’s all being kept quite hush-hush, you know. I was only told of it for the contingency that I found you first.”

“Which you apparently have.” Harry said as he shook his head. “So, the Black’s are claiming neutrality.”

“Two sides of a civil war are complicated enough for the Black’s,” Charlus said in response. “A third becomes a bit much.”

“A third?” Harry asked, now visibly confused. “Why the hell would there be a third side?”

“You,” Charlus stated simply. “Most of the veterans of the war with Grindelwald are getting on in our years. We’ve gotten rusty, disorganized and have little interest in backing the Ministry in a fight. They could probably have even taken out a good number of us quickly if they struck hard and fast enough.”

“And what does that have to do with me?” Harry asked, still very much confused.

“Because you’ve already made a name for yourself. Like it or not, people are going to start following your example,” Charlus noted shrewdly. “And power like yours will draw in people to your cause.”

Harry stared at Charlus for a moment before sighing and slumping as he rubbed his forehead. “In for the pence, in for the pound, I suppose. Though I suppose after I did in those little dark munchers and Greyback. And with the ring. And…”

He paused there and groaned as he palmed his head. “Bloody hell, I went well past being happy with just the bloody pound and went for the whole bloody bank.”

“I suppose this somehow makes sense to you.” Charlus noted dryly as he looked at the young man critically.

“Just realizing how bloody troublesome this has become,” Harry stated before sighing softly. “I’ve gone and made a complete mess of things. All because of wanting one bloody drink.”

Charlus just looked at him speculatively.

“No, I’m not going to explain,” Harry stated simply and shook his head. “It would take entirely too long and involve too much convolution.”

“Well then,” Charlus stated, sensing he wasn’t going to get any further with the man. “Going to at least give me a name beyond some nom de… Whatever you wish to call it?”

“I don’t know, I rather like it,” Harry admitted with a slight smirk. “It makes me sound so much cooler than I really am.”

Charlus simply snorted and gave the man a look.
“… Fine, ruin my fun.” Harry stated with a grumble and a sigh. “Harry. My name is Harry.”

“Harry.” Charlus repeated looking back at him with a brow arched.

“It’s what my parents named me,” Harry agreed with a nod and a shrug.

“Harry what?” Charlus pressed.

“Well, you were the one that called me a Potter,” Harry countered back with a smug grin.

Charlus just gave him a slight glower while Harry grinned unrepentant.

-o-o-o-

It wasn’t too much later that Cygnus Black found himself facing an eruption of green flames from his floo as Charlus’ face appeared in it.

“Uncle Charlus,” Cygnus stated with a canting of his head. “So good to hear from you.”

“Nephew,” Charlus stated simply, his face visibly irritated. “Let me through.”

For a moment Cygnus considered insisting upon propriety. Then he took another look at Cygnus face and simply opened the floo. “It’s open, Uncle.”

And in a flashing pulse of flames, Charlus appeared. Steadying himself on his feet, he straightened up and gave Cygnus a look. “I found him.”

Cygnus blinked at that. “Already?”

“It wasn’t terribly difficult once I talked to the family he saved from Greyback,” Charlus stated as he slowly began to pace back and forth. “He’s a cheeky bastard, I’ll give him that.”

“If you can find him so easily, the Knights won’t likely be too far behind.” Cygnus pointed out, unsure of how to feel about that.

“With all the extra wards the Wilkins’ have thrown up, there’d be plenty of warning.” Charlus stated simply and shook his head. “Unless one of them happens to be less thug and more of a honey tongued charmer than I gave them credit for.”

Cygnus let the statement pass without challenge as he looked at Charlus. “Well then, Uncle?”

“We talked.” Charlus stated as he looked back at the floo. “Or, I should say I asked questions and his answers gave me more questions than I already had before.”

“Such as?” Now Cygnus was both intrigued and annoyed at the evasiveness his uncle was putting forth.

“He told me the Knights’ Lord, Voldemort I believe, is in fact a half-blood.” Charlus stated flatly, watching the way Cygnus’ eyes almost seemed to pop out. “He gave me what he claimed was his true name, and the names of his parents. Do you remember the muggles that Morinn Gaunt was supposed to have murdered?”

“No, not particularly.” Cygnus admitted.

“Of course not,” Charlus muttered sourly and then shook his head. “According to your Storm Chaser, he was memory charmed. By his nephew. Who was the son of one of those muggles.”
“… Who is Voldemort.” Cygnus finished staring at Charlus.

“Supposedly.” Charlus agreed with a nod.

“… We supported a half-blood.” Cygnus continued, before palming his face slightly as he groaned. “This…”

“Oh, you’re forgetting the best part.” Charlus stated with a smug, vicious grin.

Cygnus stiffened at that and looked at Charlus expectantly.

“If true, that means that all three side. All three of the most powerful, are all half-bloods.” Charlus stated simply with a smirk. “This Storm Chaser, that Voldemort, and Dumbledore.”

“…” Cygnus stared at Charlus, his face slowly going pale as he felt his knees going weak. “But…”

“Of course, it could turn out to not be true,” Charlus agreed. “We’d just need to do some research to find out. Starting with Voldemort’s supposed real name. Tom Marvolo Riddle.”

On a whim, he remembered what Harry had told him, about the anagram, and casually he wrote out the name in the air between them with his wand. Then he rearranged the letters to spell Voldemort. What was left was “maoridl” another bit of a flic and he had “Lord Voldemort” and “mai” left over. It was rather obvious when he then looked at Cygnus.

“Rather pretentious, don’t you think?”

Cygnus stared.

“Yes, quite.” Charlus agreed with a nod. “So, nephew, do you know what you’re going to do now?”

“… I need a drink.” Cygnus stated simply.

“We need a drink,” Charlus corrected succinctly. “I was the one that had to deal with it directly from the bloody source. You just got it second hand.”

“Yes, Uncle Charlus.” Cygnus agreed woodenly with a nod of his head.

“And make sure it’s the good stuff, won’t you lad?” Charlus added.

“Yes, Uncle Charlus.”

“Excellent.”
Bellatrix Black shifted about in her seat as she stared at the pages in front of her. They were various proposals of courting and even full out marriage that had been arriving since news of Rodolphus’ death had become publically confirmed. Her father had given them a look over and then snorted and shaken his head.

Her mother, though… Her mother was insisting upon at least considering the proposals. So here she was, looking boredly over overly flowery and pompous posturing. Each of them was trying to convince her that she should allow herself to consider their potential alliance.

Thankfully, for her at least, she had been able to smugly cast aside the ones from families she knew already supported the Knights, or had reasonable reason to suspect were. Orion’s declaration had been good for something, after all. It had also led to more than one fuming rants from her mother and Aunt Walburga.

Her aunt wouldn’t even look at her anymore, wouldn’t talk to her, wouldn’t even mention her. Honestly, Bellatrix was finding it refreshing. At least until Walburga had tried to move her attention onto Andromeda and Narcissa, apparently with her mother’s approval.

It had been short, sharp and brutal for her mother and her Aunt when they had attempted to subvert Orion’s declaration through Bellatrix’s younger sisters. Andromeda, of course, was already far beyond their influence, not that the women could see it.

She looked at the women with a cool and calm detachment, meeting their eyes and their words with simply an arched brow and a glacial reminder that they were treading on thin ice in regards to the declaration of the family’s head.

They hadn’t listened and moved onto Narcissa. Young, impressionable Narcissa, who had already started to be groomed as a partner for any of the young potential knights. A young, uncertain Narcissa who hadn’t really understood what was going on when she’d been confronted by both her mother and her overbearing aunt.

Bellatrix remembered exactly what she’d walked in on.

“… And as such is it your duty as a daughter of The Most Ancient and Noble House Black to insure that you properly comport yourself in all things.” Mother was stating as she loomed over a visibly uncertain Narcissa.

“Including making sure that you have anything more than nothing to do with those filthy half-bloods and mudblood trash,” Walburga continued, looming over the girl. “Such worthless pieces of filth should be burned out of our society. Forbidden from polluting our great and proud heritage! And those worthless blood traitors striving to stand against the noble goals of those gallant purebloods willing to stand up and sally forth, doing what needs be done them!”

“These are the ones you must make absolutely certain you do not even passingly fraternize with. They are… unseemly individuals. You are a daughter of Black and as such you will only associate with such individuals as understand the right and proper view of our society.”

The words were familiar. She’d grown up with them after all. Ate them up as gospel. Until they’d been shattered by a half blood wizard who ground them beneath his heel.
“Narcissa,” she spoke up clearly and calmly as she made her presence known. “Come here, please.”

Seeing an escape, Narcissa did just that, quickly rushing over to her elder sister and hiding behind her back.

Walburga’s eyes burn as she spoke her name acidly. “Bellatrix.”

“For all your flaws, I did not think either of you had grown this foolish,” Bellatrix stated as she narrowed her eyes and looked at both women. “Or have you already forgotten that all Blacks are to take no sides? And for you to try and convince Narcissa of all people to get herself thrown out of the family?”

Her mother flinched at that but her Aunt, her Aunt was another story. “We are Blacks! Our shoulders should be standing proud and true with the Knights! Purging that filth from the earth they pollute with their mere presence! We are not blood traitors! Those filthy, muggle-loving sacks of excrement should suffer the same fate as the filth they defend so with their poisonous words and sweet venom! And you! You should be thrown out! Blasted off of the tapestry for your filthy blasphemy!”

“If you want to claim we’re Blacks then you should act like it instead of flinging spittle like a mad hag.” Bellatrix could feel the anger boiling up inside of her. The hunger, the want, the fury. To split this woman open and watch her bleed, screaming as she drowned in her own blood. “We have been declared as neutral on pain of banishment from the family, or worse. And what do you do?”

“Orion will never cast me out!” Walburga declared in rebuttal as she forced her head high and challenging.

“From what whispers have reached my ears, you will find that a truth no longer, niece,” a calm, cold voice cut in.

Walburga froze before twisting around to find herself facing Charlus Potter, looking at her with cold hazel eyes and an unforgiving set to his features. Behind him, Cygnus stood, looking at his sister and wife with a look of clear disapproval. Still, he seemed content to stand and watch the show.

“You.” There was no lack of hate in Walburga’s voice as she responded. “How dare you darken the House Black with your dirty, venomous blood traitor lies.”

Bellatrix had known of Charlus Potter. The husband of her Aunt Dorea Potter Nee Black. He had been, until recently, a rather taboo subject around the house. A pureblood. A blood traitor, if you went so far as to listen to Walburga or her own mother.

But Dorea had never been cast out of the family for her marriage to him. She was still acknowledged, though grudgingly, and accepted. Until things had happened with the Storm Chaser, she had never wondered why. Now, though…

Nothing that was, was any longer.

“I was invited,” Charlus stated drolly as he looked down his nose at the woman. “Which puts me in a position of actually being wanted in this household, currently.”

The words unsaid made Walburga’s eyes practically burn in fury. “The Knights and their Lord will burn you and yours, Potter. They will extinguish every one of you traitors along with the filth you protect!”
“If you wish to run to the bastard son of a muggle pretending to be a lord, please, do feel free,” Charlus stated with a cold, cruel smile curling over his lips. “I dare say I even applaud you for your hypocritical irony.”

Now that was enough to make all of their eyes turn to him.

“Filthy LIES!” Walburga declared, her eyes wild, spittle flying.

“Tom. Marvolo. Riddle.” Charlus stated with a grand relish. “That is his name. He went from being the top of his class at Hogwarts to working at Borgin’s and Burke’s. You should be happy, though; he started his practice of murder at a young age. Murdered his muggle family and blamed it all on his uncle.”

Charlus paused a moment before he just smiled at Walburga. “You do remember Morfinn Gaunt, don’t you, Walburga? And all those rumors they told about the reason he supposedly did it? Because of his sister’s utter fascination with the muggle?”

“No!” Walburga did indeed remember the rumors. The glee she’d taken in them. The delight in hearing that Morfinn had done to those filthy creatures exactly what they’d deserved. “LIES!”

“It took a bit of doing to find the records,” Charlus continued. “Thankfully young Mr. Riddle was so focused on exorcizing his muggle heritage that he never learned how they kept their records. But I did find the birth record of one Tom Riddle. Born to a Merope Riddle Nee Gaunt.”

Walburga had brandished her wand, trembling in her grip as fury boiled across her face. “You LIE!”

“No, niece. I have no need to.” Charlus responded back with a shake of his head disregarding her wand contemptuously out of hand as he looked back at her without the slightest show of fear. “But I imagine such thing becomes a truth beyond what you can accept and you will fail to accept it, won’t you? It was bad enough that Dumbledore had a muggleborn mother. Even worse when this new Storm Chaser came, declaring himself a half-blood without hesitation… but now, the very Lord you had placed all those hopes in is just the same. Worse, he pretends to be something he’s not. And he fooled you.”

Bellatrix had wanted to stare. Beyond the family meeting, she had never seen someone stand up to her Aunt Walburga before. Not without even an ounce of fear, hesitation or worry. And what’s more, she could easily see why her father had called the mysterious Storm Chaser a Potter.

She had expected her aunt to begin to throw spells at Charlus. When none came, she looked from the calm look on Charlus’ face to her Aunt. What she saw there shocked her.

Fear.

It was half hidden by rage, but the hesitation, the fear as her wand trembled in her hand was visible. She couldn’t tell what it was fear of, though. Was it fear of the man, or what he had said? Bellatrix couldn’t tell.

And without a word Walburga turned and left.

“I trust, Druella, that we won’t have a repeat of this?” It was her father’s turn to finally speak as he leveled her mother with a look. “You don’t have the luxury of being the wife of the head of our house.”

Bellatrix’s mother paled dramatically at that as the words sank in. She took one moment to look at
Narcissa, still hiding fearfully behind Bellatrix, before she herself fled.

“… You are going to have to tell Orion.” Charlus stated simply as he turned is head and looked at Cygnus.

“I know,” Cygnus stated quietly. “We shall see how seriously he takes this stance of neutrality.”

“I would advise clinging tightly to it,” Charlus stated simply, his soft voice eerily ominous. “While he still can.”

“Merlin forgive us for this madness we shall be subject to.” Cygnus said quietly as he shook his head.

Narcissa had clung to her for some time after that. She’d never asked her what she should do, what she should say. She’d merely clung to her while keeping a great deal of the awe directed towards Charlus.

Apparently their great uncle had left quite the impression upon her.

Sighing, she looked back at the correspondence once more and shook her head. They were all so… boring. Yes, she would need to marry. But more and more selecting a “proper” husband seemed to be a less than enticing proposition.

However, on the other side of things, that meant that she would need to find herself a profession until such time as she decided to marry.

She would not work for the Ministry. The only position that even remotely appealed to her was that of an Auror or Hit Wizard. But those positions were simply too… restrictive. Boring. Mundane.


And it would not be found among these simpering fools.

With a growl of frustration, her wand swept across her desk and the correspondences all leapt into the air and then burst into flames.

“You do realize that in one act you have thrown insult onto most every neutral house and hold among those still acceptable to our sensibilities, yes?."

She turned her head to find Andromeda looking at her with that cool, guarded expression she now wore more often than not.

“Mother already had me make a list of who was offering what,” Bellatrix stated with a grimace of disgust. “Merlin, some of these were for men older than Father!”

“The price of proper pureblood propriety,” Andromeda stated with a sarcastic drawl. It was, Bellatrix noted, more emotion than she had heard from her sister in sometime.

“Bollocks to that.” Bellatrix stated defiantly.

“My, Bellatrix Black using such language?” Andromeda stated, her brow arching up. “Such defiance. A curse word that wasn’t mudblood or blood traitor.”

“And when did Andromeda Black resort to sarcasm as her wit of choice?” Bellatrix responded back as she turned and looked squarely at her sister.
“Sometime before people resumed paying her any mind other than to assume she would be the
good little pureblood daughter like her sister Bellatrix.” Andromeda stated simply as she crossed
her arms about her chest and stared back at her sister. “I wonder how long this vaulted neutrality
will last.”

Bellatrix looked at her sister for a moment, studying her, before answering. “Likely far longer than
some would prefer, and closer to what others would wish.”

“Ah, soon back to business as usual then.” Andromeda stated with a snort and a shake of her head.

“The Knights are taking our stance with ill-concealed poor grace,” Bellatrix stated simply. “I
imagine that they will soon reach more… overt actions.”

There was a hint of hunger in Bellatrix’s voice, an anticipation at the promise of action and
violence.

“And this pleases you, sister?” Andromeda demanded, a hint of anger breaking through her cool.
“The thought of Narcissa, of myself, suddenly coming under assault for our neutrality? To try and
drive the Blacks back into the fold? Is this a thought that pleases you?”

“Of course not!” Bellatrix declared with swift outrage as she stared back at her sister. “Why would
I ever wish harm upon either you?”

“You think I do not see the lust in your eyes at the promise of violence? The hunger for them to
give you an excuse to strike back?” Andromeda demanded as she glared back at her sister. “And
when we who wish no part in it have to pay the price for your appetite, what then?”

“It will not come to that,” Bellatrix declared firmly. “The conflict is with myself and the adults, not
with you and Narcissa.”

“Then you are a poor student of history, sister.” Andromeda said with a shake of her head. “Or a
woman too self-assured.”

“Nothing will happen to you.” Bellatrix insisted angrily.

“I pray you are right, sister. Though, my heart finds it more than doubtful.” Andromeda stated
before turning and walking away.

Bellatrix was left more than slightly perplexed.

-o-o-o-

“So.” Harry looked at Charlus as they again sat across from each other in the muggle pub. “I find
myself reluctantly forced to ask you two questions.”

“Oh? That is a nice change of pace,” Charlus noted as he sipped his scotch. “I do, however, reserve
the right to give you a vague, cryptic response like you enjoy giving.”

Harry grimaced a bit. “One, do you know of a way for me to get into Hogwarts? Voldemort has
something hidden there that I need to retrieve.”

Charlus pursed his lips and arched a brow. “Technically possible. And the second?”

“Know where I could find work?” Harry asked with a sigh. “I’m almost out of the funds I’ve
managed to accumulate. And with the idiots behaving there hasn’t been much in the way of
“What skills and references do you have?” Charlus asked neutrally as he studied Harry.


Feeling a slight bit of irritation as the lack of further information Charlus asked, “Surely you have more references than that.”

“Well, you could ask Bellatrix… Black,” Harry stated with a pondering look on his face. “Other than her, most of the others who might have testified as to my work are a bit… well, unavailable.”

Charlus pondered the words, before suddenly smiling as he looked back at Harry.

Immediately Harry gave him a look. “No.”

“You don’t know what I was going to say.”

“I’m trying to avoid Dumbledore. I’d rather not be stuck in the position of Defense Against the Dark Arts directly underneath him.” Harry stated flatly.

For a moment Charlus stared at him before his mouth opened. “How the bloody hell did you know that I was going to suggest…?”

“Because I mentioned needing to get into Hogwarts and needing a job,” Harry stated flatly and then sighed. “Ugh. I had truly hoped to not have to go through that. I suppose you don’t know of anywhere to acquire basilisk venom?”

“The Defense against the Dark Arts class has only had trouble with maintaining staff for the last few years. The position isn’t even publically known. How did you know there would be an opening?” Charlus demanded. “And what the bloody hell do you want that for!?”

“The item I need to retrieve is responsible for the jinx keeping the post empty after a year,” Harry stated as he rubbed his temples. “I need basilisk venom to destroy it. Only other thing I know of that would work is Fiendfyre and I don’t like that spell.”

There was a sudden, horrified fascination on Charlus’ features. “What manner of item could you possibly be talking about that would require such lengths to destroy?”

“A horcrux.” Harry twisted his lips into a grimace of disgust. Seeing the look of incomprehension on Charlus’ face, he continued. “One of the darkest magics. Splitting your soul in order to maintain your physical presence in this realm after death. You end up stuck in limbo if they’re destroyed, and if you die… well, let’s just say that you have to be either supremely desperate or supremely arrogant to make one.”

“I… see.” Charlus frowned slightly. “And you say that this Voldemort has made one?”

“Several,” Harry responded with a grimace. “I only know where two of them are.”

“Of which, one of them is at Hogwarts.” Charlus stated as he stared back at Harry.

“Yup,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head and a sigh of irritation. “So, basilisk venom?”

“Impossible,” Charlus stated flatly. “It’s illegal to even own a basilisk. In the rare cases when it does come on sale, it’s always on the black market, and gone before anyone else even knows about
“I was really, really hoping you weren’t going to say that,” Harry stated with a groan. “Really, really hoping.”

“Do you not have an alternative?” Charlus demanded.

“Alternative source,” Harry stated softly as he rubbed his face. “But that requires going to Slytherin’s Chamber of Secrets.”

“… Are you sure you’re right in the head?” Charlus asked as he looked at Harry critically.

“Unfortunately,” Harry stated with a sigh and a wave of his hand. “It exists. Sadly, Riddle found it when he was a student at Hogwarts.”

“The Hagrid incident,” Charlus stated as horrifying pieces fell into place. “How can you possibly know all of this? This is…”

“Unfortunately, I’ve had to spend some time in Tom’s head.” Harry absently stated with a grimace. “ Thankfully, when it was happening, he didn’t know about it. And I am never willingly going to do it again.”

“But, but…” Charlus struggled to try and wrap his mind around Harry’s statement.

“He’s a damned good Legimens, but not as good as an Occlumens.” It was all Harry was willing to say on the topic.

“I… see.” Charlus swallowed as he slowly stared at Harry. “And the Chamber of Secrets…”

“Holds Slytherin’s basilisk,” Harry stated simply. “The best thing would be to get a goblin-forged blade to stick in the venom, honestly.”

“Taking on the property of the venom.” Charlus finished for him as he sighed and slumped. “Thus, if you have to destroy more of them, you have something to do it with.”

“Indeed,” Harry agreed with a nod. “Plus, they make for nifty cursed dark object destroyers.”

“Imagine that,” Charlus stated dryly as he shook his head. “Commissioning the goblins to make such a weapon wouldn’t be too terribly hard. However, it would cost. For which, you will need money.”

“Hence, my search for gainful employment.” Harry stated simply. “No offense but I’d prefer to have something like that falling into anyone else’s hands. Basilisk venom is not a pleasant thing to experience.”

“… You’ve been poisoned by basilisk venom?” Charlus stated incredulously.

“Well, yes and no,” Harry admitted as he rolled up his sleeve to reveal a large and faded scar. “Got bit once. It’s also how I learned about the wonderful properties of Goblin made blades. Killed the basilisk with it. It was an unpleasantly similar situation to this in fact.”

“… Do I wish to know?” Charlus asked worriedly.

“It involves a dark wizard who spent most of my younger years trying to kill me, his horcrux and a lot of bloody luck on my part.” Harry said with a grimace. “He was obsessed with me. Kept escaping and going into hiding too. Took me years to finally put him down permanently. It’s why I
know so much about those damned things.”

“Then why are you here, now, without anything to your name then?” Charlus demanded as he looked back at him. “Where is your goblin forged blade imbued with basilisk venom? Where are your resources, where is anything of yours?”

“Gone,” Harry stated quietly as he stared out into the distance. “They’re all gone. Everyone I knew, everything I had. Wiped out. As if they were never there. After it was over… Well. I had nowhere else to go. So, I ended up in merry ole England. And after a number of cascading events, here I am.”

“There would be record of something like that happening. It would be all over the press.” Charlus said. “Even if it wasn’t, I would have heard about it.”

“No, it just made it as if they never happened,” Harry stated quietly. “It was… it was bad. Forbidden magics on a level I don’t even want to think about. Every one of my friends, gone. Every person I knew. Gone. My family. Gone. As if they were never there. Except for me. Because I was there, somehow I wasn’t affected. I don’t even know how other than it violated so many laws of magic and still happened.”

And then something clicked. His eyes wide, he just stared at Harry. “… You are a Potter.”

“As I believed we already established.” Harry agreed with a nod.

“The reason you don’t exist…” Charlus stated and horror covered his face. True, absolute horror.

“Is because my parents no longer exist.” Harry stated quietly. “Wiped out as if they never were.”

It made a terrifying sense to Charlus. There was never a doubt that Harry was of Potter descent. And he had been hitting wall after wall trying to find out how it could be. There had been absolutely nothing he could find about the man.

Because there was nothing to find. If everything had been wiped out, then there was nothing to find. And this man…

The horror only grew as he couldn’t help but ask, “How many? How many were lost to this? How much family did we lose?”

“Too much,” Harry stated simply as he shifted uncomfortably. “I… would prefer to not say more than that. They are gone. And the only person who understood enough about what was done went with them.”

“I…” Charlus stared at him. “Then when you came to Britain…”

“I have nowhere else to be. Nowhere else to go. If they hadn’t attacked me in that pub, I would’ve probably just drifted into the muggle world and stayed away from the Wizarding World entirely.”

“And the reason you were in this Riddle’s head without him knowing, it because it’s been wiped away?” Charlus asked, pressing for more information.

“Yes. But it’s not perfect information, I’ve already found that out,” Harry stated with a sigh. “With the changes… I only know a bit of what I would’ve if things were unchanged. Because of it there are three horcruxes I don’t know where they are. I’ve already looked.”

“Then this Voldemort is truly unstoppable?” Charlus demanded, anger starting to swell up in him.
“There is no point to this?”

“I did say I had learned quite a bit about how to deal with these wizards, didn’t I?” Harry responded back as he gave Charlus a look. “I’m going to destroy the horcruxes of his I can find. Then I’m going to destroy his body. When his spirit tries to flee so he can reincorporate himself, I’m going to catch it, bind it and then I’m going to trap it in a deep, dark, hidden place he won’t be found and won’t be able to escape.”

“Incarceration?” Charlus stated, as if mulling over it, glad for something else to think about. “That seems a bit… lenient for what he’s attempting to do.”

“Killing him would be the lenience,” Harry stated flatly. “He will be trapped. He will not be able to move. He will not see anything but darkness. He will not hear anything but silence. He will not feel anything. There will be nothing to smell. There will be nothing to taste.

“He will be trapped in the hell of nothing but his own mind consuming itself. By the first half day he will be begging for oblivion. By the rest of it his mind will be damaged beyond what can ever be healed. After a week of it?”

Charlus stared at Harry, his face again graced with horror. “That… that is monstrous.”

“A monstrous fate for a monster. And trust me, Voldemort is a monster. If he could manage it, he would make Gellert Grindelwald look like Albus Dumbledore in comparison.”

Pale faced and shake, Charlus asked warily. “Are… are you sure of this?”

“Each horcrux requires the cold blooded murder of someone and then the forcible divorcing of a part of their soul. Voldemort has for certain made four. He plans to eventually make seven parts of his soul. But Grindelwald had morals; as twisted as they were, he did. He did what he did not because he wanted the world to suffer but because he thought he was building a better world on a bloody foundation.

“Voldemort wants to make the world and everyone in it suffer. He wants it to hurt, to grind, crush, it beneath his heel. He wants to be able to indulge his whims, his desires, to exercise his power unrestricted and unstoppable.” Harry stated simply. “He does not have allies; he does not even truly have followers. He has slaves that do not yet realize what they are.”

Harry had said those words without a moment hesitation, his eyes locked on Charlus as he spoke. The truth of them, the conviction and honesty of them striking deep into the older man as he drained the glass of scotch in one go and poured himself another. He had almost considered asking how Harry knew this.

Then he remembered that the man had been inside this Voldemort’s head. And he drained the second scotch in another quick gulp.

“If you’re going to go to war on this…” Charlus stated uncertainly. “You’re going to need an army.”

Harry winced visibly. “I’d really, really prefer to not get anyone more people involved than I have to. That’s what the Ministry is for, right?”

“People won’t fight for the Ministry. Not the ones that you want fighting,” Charlus stated simply. “The Ministry is a bunch of fat bureaucrats looking to make as much of a profit for themselves as they can without inciting a revolt against them. And they’ve already been compromised by this Voldemort. How much of a true defense they can mount?”
“Then what about…” Harry started to say as he began to gesture.

“Dumbledore is neither a soldier nor a warrior,” Charlus stated sternly. “Contrary to what people think, he did not single handedly win the war against Grindelwald. Most of the fight, driving him back, leaving him vulnerable… Dumbledore was safe in Hogwarts for. It was only when we had Grindelwald pinned and trapped that he arrived to fight him.”

Charlus stared down into the glass for a long moment before speaking again. “But, I will admit, none of us could have defeated Grindelwald. Not in a duel like that. It is called the greatest duel in history for a reason. But it was just that: a duel. It was not a battle. It was not a war. It was a duel.”

Harry slumped down and sighed before he looked at Charlus and opened his mouth again.

And again Charlus cut him off. “I am not powerful enough. We need a Lord. Someone as strong as Dumbledore and this Voldemort are. Someone that can stand against an entire group of wizards and leave them broken at their feet without a scratch on them.”

“Why does it always have to be me?” Harry asked with a grunting grumble. “Oh, hey, there’s another dark wizard out there! Time for you to go and get rid of him.”

“Everyone has their talents.” Charlus stated with a slight smile.

“… Bloody hilarious,” Harry stated flatly before sighing in defeat. “What were you thinking?”

“Well, I can get in touch with the old guard, the veterans from the war against Grindelwald. But we need younger recruits too.”

His face grimacing into disgust Harry gave him a look. “And you want me to recruit from Hogwarts.”

“What do you think Voldemort is doing?” Charlus countered back. “And with Dumbledore in his Ivory tower…”

Harry’s shoulders slumped down beneath the weight of that statement.

“Of course, if you can think of someone else who could train these children to survive better than you…” Charlus noted.

Harry’s resigned slump turned into a sullen glower.

-o-o-o-

“That man will make a drunkard out of me,” Charlus declared as he slumped into the seat he’d been offered, his eyes flicking for a moment to register Orion seated across from him, next to Cygnus. “Orion, I suppose this does warrant your inclusion.”

“Charlus,” Orion noted as he inclined his head with a nod. “You have found something out?”

“Every time I talk with that man, the more reason I have to drink.” Charlus stated with a sigh as he pinched his nose. “And every answer leaves me with exponentially more questions.”

“What have you learned?” Cygnus asked as he settled back into his seat.

“I found out why none of us have heard of him before.” Charlus stated quietly as he stared away, looking into the distance.
“Something unpleasant then,” Orion noted with a pursing of his lips.

“He is a reminder that magic is a wonderful and terrible thing.” Charlus stated. “What would you do, Orion, Cygnus, if you learned that at least an entire branch of your family had been wiped away? Their lives, their accomplishments, their legacies, their children. All gone, as if they had never existed, to the point where even you no longer even recalled they once were?”

Neither man reacted much, beyond a slight canting of Orion’s head. “You are… sure of this?”

“He is a Potter. A Potter that we cannot find any evidence ever existed. A Potter that knows things that he could not possibly know. Who is skilled in a way that could not escape notice. And yet, he is.” Charlus stated softly as he looked back at the men. “I looked into his eyes as he told me this. Tell me, Orion, what would you do if you were the only one who remembered your family, your friends, almost everyone you’d ever known?”

“I see,” Orion stated simply and gave a slight nod of his head. “I suppose he has reason for being so?”

“He was there at the center of it, trying to stop it.” Charlus stated simply. “Something he seems to have a talent for. Being at the center of trouble.”

“I suppose if the caster was trying to make it so he was the only one who realized it and someone intervened…” Cygnus stated leadingly.

“Quite,” Charlus stated succinctly before he took a slight sip of the drink he’d been offered when he first arrived. “He also told me that Voldemort has created something called horcruxes.”

That got a reaction out of both Orion and Cygnus; their backs straightening as they stiffened in their seats. Affixing Charlus with a sharp look Orion spoke. “You are sure of this? He is sure of this? And he definitely stated a horcrux?”

“Splitting his soul with a cold blooded murder and placing the piece in an object.” Charlus stated before frowning a bit. “He said he knew that Voldemort had created four. With plans to create seven.”

“Merlin,” Orion stated, his face pale and his fingers digging into the arms of his chair. “What kind of foolish monster did we try and tie ourselves to?”

“That is…” Cygnus stated as he reached up and rubbed at his nose. “Horcruxes are beyond foolishness. Yes, they can extend your life. But what you extend it as… You are not human anymore. And eventually, when the horcrux is destroyed? You are trapped between life and death.”

“A ghost?” Charlus asked. Harry had alluded to something like this but had not gone into great detail.

“Worse. In the limbo between this world and the next. Trapped and unable to either move on, or haunt the world,” Orion stated simply, sucking in a breath. “It is not something anyone who understood them would ever dabble in. It is something we are taught about as to make sure we know what it will truly do to you.”

“Like Basilisks, they were developed by Harpo the Foul.” Cygnus stated. “They were his greatest mistake.”

“Well, he knows where two of them are.” Charlus stated simply. “And he apparently knows how to
“destroy them. However, there is a problem.”

“Where are they?” Orion asked as he looked back at Charlus with a piercing look.

“I only know that one of them is at Hogwarts,” Charlus responded. “And that it is responsible for what is apparently a jinx keeping the Defense Against the Dark Arts class without a teacher at the end of the year.”

“What proof does he have?” Cygnus finally asked as he held up his hand. “And, no, I am not calling you or even him a liar, Uncle, but this is a claim that is not to be made lightly. How does he even know this?”

“… You can ask him that himself,” Charlus stated with a shake of his head. “If it is truly as foul as all three of you have stated, I want nothing to do with it. As for how he knows… apparently before things happened, he had been inside of this Voldemort’s mind.”

“Still. Hogwarts,” Orion stated with a grimace. “We cannot take even the possibility lightly.”

“Not with our children either enrolled or to be in the future,” Cygnus agreed with a nod. “Has he at least shared with you how he plans to destroy them? They are notoriously difficult to dispatch.”

“A goblin forged blade imbued with basilisk venom,” Charlus stated simply as he waited for their reaction.

“… As wonderful as that sounds, exactly how does he plan to obtain a goblin forged blade imbued with basilisk venom?” Orion stated flatly. “While we might somehow be lucky enough for some to reach the markets…”

“The price alone…” Cygnus stated with a shudder.

“He knows where the find the Chamber of Secrets,” Charlus stated simply. “And Slytherin’s basilisk.”

“Even if he does, we do not have a parseltongue to help us gain entry,” Orion pointed out, though it was only halfhearted. “I doubt Slytherin would have left it sealed by anything less than such.”

“That… I did not ask,” Charlus admitted. “However he seems quite certain that he can get in.”

“Then what, exactly, was it that you wanted to propose?” Orion asked as he arched a brow.

“He needs employment. He needs access to Hogwarts.” Charlus stated with a shrug of his shoulders.

Orion frowned. “We can’t help. You know this, Charlus. We are neutral in this.”

“You know neutrality won’t last forever,” Charlus stated softly as he looked at the man. “Men like this Voldemort… eventually his patience will end. And he will declare House Black his enemy.”

“Be that as it may, we declared neutrality,” Orion stated again with a frustrated release of breath. “We cannot do anything else. Already my family borders on rebellion as it is.”

“Even knowing that this Voldemort is a halfblood?” Charlus pressed as he looked at Orion. “And knowing that he has created horcruxes?”

“You know Walburga tried to get my youngest, Narcissa, to violate our neutrality, circumspectly.” Cygnus reminded Charlus. “Do you think she truly cares about that? She would just state that we
“And the horcruxes?” Charlus asked.

“She wants to believe that she is right. That he is what she, we, have been waiting for,” Orion stated with a tired sigh as he slumped back. “And yet, in the face of the facts…”

“Uncle Charlus, you need to understand,” Cygnus stated quietly. “Three Lords. Three halfbloods. If we choose a side, we lose who we are.”

“Will you truly sell your pride so dearly?” Charlus demanded. “Do you truly believe it worth your future? Your lives? The lives of your children?”

“What would you have us do!?” Orion smashed his hand down on the chair of his arm as he glared back at the man across from him. “To cast aside generations of history, of pride?! To forget what it is to be Black!?”

“When your pride is forcing you to ignore the truth in front of your eyes? Yes!” Charlus stated with a hiss of anger in his voice. “Would you truly prefer to be thrown under the yoke of a monster, to be eventually extinguished for some slight or failure?”

“… If he has made horcruxes, Orion…” Cygnus spoke up as he looked at his brother-in-law.

“Do you know what this would do to our family?” Orion demanded. “What I would have to do to my wife!?”

“She is my sister!” Cygnus snapped back with a hiss. “You think I don’t know this? Do you think I don’t realize that the same might have to be done to my wife!?”

Charlus looked at the two before finally speaking. “The one we call Storm Chaser. Harry. He does not want to lead. He does not want your service. I imagine he will even fight against being titled a lord.”

“And what are you suggesting then?” Orion snapped as he would glare at Charlus. “That we follow after someone foolish enough to deny what he is?”

“I was going to suggest that instead of talking about being in his service, you should consider instead being allies.” Charlus stated simply as he shook his head. “Have the generations addled the pride of the Blacks so much that the only role you can imagine to a lord is on bended knee?”

Both Blacks stiffened at that, glaring angrily at Charlus.

“Perhaps you have forgotten but Potters do not bend knee. It is why we have never served a Lord and why we always defy those that would make us.” Charlus stated simply. “We will rally to a worthy cause. We will ally with a worthy lord. But we will not become theirs to do with as they will.”

With that Charlus set his drink upon the table and stood. “Perhaps it is time that the House Black looked again at what it considers pride and consider what the word truly means. Is their pride that of men or of the pride of the servant?”

With that said Charlus gave them each a curt nod. “Gentlemen. I will see myself out. I hope that you find your pride as men. But should you not, I wish you luck with what is to come. May Merlin have mercy on us all.”
Charlus turned and left, leaving Cygnus and Orion to stew in his words.

“… Do you remember when it was all so simple?” Cygnus asked, rhetorically. “It was the might of pureblood that would reign over all others. Purebloods were the greatest, were the strongest.”

Orion growled as he glared at Cygnus. “What would you have us do? Acknowledge some filthy halfblood as our equal? What next, mudbloods?”

“When was the last time we had a pureblood lord? Grindelwald?” Cygnus asked rhetorically. “Who was cast down by a halfblood?”

Orion glared back at him.

“I do not like it either, Orion,” Cygnus stated as he slumped down, looking, feeling so very old. “But you saw what I did from Bella’s memories. You’ve heard what I have of Voldemort. You know what Dumbledore is capable of.”

With a snarl Orion took his glass and threw it, watching as it exploded in a shower of glittering shards as it hit the wall. “I KNOW! We are losing! And Horcruxes! Of all the things, horcruxes! Horcruxes and what we learned of how he treated his own flesh and blood to condemn his own family to Azkaban... and even if he was a filthy muggle, to slay your own father?”

“Voldemort has proven to be someone we cannot turn to,” Cygnus agreed with a nod as he looked at his own glass for a moment. “And Dumbledore... his accomplishments aside, he has proven... undesirable.”

“And this last one is any better?” Orion asked as he paced about the room. “And do not let your daughter’s infatuation speak for you!”

“He is ruthless,” Cygnus stated as he looked back at Orion. “That cannot be denied. But he is not bloodthirsty. He is dangerous. But he has acted only in defense of himself or others.”

“Is that strength or weakness, though?” Orion pointed out. “He sets himself against Voldemort. But he does not actively seek out allies.”

“Confidence or ignorance?” Cygnus asked as he looked into the distance. “We won’t know without actually meeting him and taking his measure.”

“And if we meet with him, that could just as easily be construed as ending our neutrality then and there.” Orion reminded him.

“If we met him while he was doing something like interviewing for the open Defense position at Hogwarts?” Cygnus suggested. “We would have to be there for the other interviews as well, but easily doable, if tedious.”

Orion sighed as he rubbed his face. “Damn that Potter. Do we have any choice?”

“Yes,” Cygnus stated quietly. “We do nothing. We go into hiding. And we wait for either the world to right itself, or to be hunted down. Either way, we lose any say in what the world becomes.”

“… That is not a choice. That is a death sentence.” Orion stated with a growl.

“And that seems to be the choice we have. Life and potential prosperity or death and pride?” Cygnus stated quietly as he looked at Orion. “What shall it be, my lord?”
And Orion slumped forward before giving his answer.
Chapter 5

“My lord.”

There was a silence before eyes opened and locked upon the visibly sweating form of Avery. “Speak. And best to not disappoint me.”

“We… we have discovered that the initial interviews for the Defense Against the Dark Arts position are going to be held at Hogsmeade this week.” Avery stated with a half stammer.

“I do not care who gets that position, Avery,” Voldemort stated coldly. “Whomever it is will find themselves losing it at the end of the year in some way or another.”

“… We have learned that one of the applicants is this… Storm Chaser.” Avery stated as he bowed his head quickly.

Voldemort froze for a moment before turning his head and looking at Avery with a cold, unreadable face. “Truly?”

Inside, Voldemort could feel his thoughts racing. Why was this infernal man applying for that position? Why now? What was his plan?

Another, far more traitorous thought began to gnaw at the back of his mind. Could his jinx actually remove him? Was this man strong enough to resist it? To break it?

There was a reason the jinx targeted the Defense Against the Dark Arts position and not that of the headmaster. Beyond creating a whole mess of Hogwarts’ general teaching, becoming dependent upon inept governors, he wasn’t sure it would work. For all his own power and skill, Dumbledore was still considered a more than competent, even dangerous, foe. One who was, he reluctantly admitted, almost his equal.

Could this Storm Chaser be one as well?

“How have you confirmed this, Avery?” Voldemort demanded, his mind still trying to play out the possibilities, positive and negative of this information.

“Horace Slughorn,” Avery stated simply. “You, my lord, know how… talkative he can get when excited, and looking to trade gossip for favor.”

Voldemort inclined his head in the barest of acknowledgements. He knew all too well how it was possible to get Slughorn to tread the conversation onto topics he shouldn’t. After all, a young Tom Riddle had managed to get the man to discuss horcruxes.

This was…

Voldemort did not frown, though his eyes narrowed slightly.

It was an opportunity. But, was it a good one? Hogsmeade was close to Hogwarts. This meant close to Dumbledore.

A strike powerful enough to insure the wizard’s demise would become open warfare. He wasn’t sure he was quite ready for that. Especially not with the issues the so called Storm Chaser had
inflicted upon them.

Membership was shrinking. Not quickly, but it was. Recruitment had dried up to a trickle, with only the more desperate and unsavory types joining. They were thugs, pure and simple. He needed warriors, people who had the skills to help take down the upper echelons of those defending the status quo.

Protecting pathetic, worthless wastes of flesh like muggles? Indeed.

But, thanks to the sudden and violent rash of disappearances…

They were starting to fear this newcomer more than they believed in him. They feared that wizard more than they feared him. So, it came down to a gambit.

Did he move in force and strike down this… usurper? Did he bide his time and keep building up his forces with patience and guile as he had been for so very long? Could he afford to let this Storm Chaser continue to do even more damage?

None of his options were particularly favorable. None of his options were without serious risks and less than adequate rewards. And, unfortunately, they were his only options.

Tapping his finger down on the arm of his chair, he considered. Finally, he spoke. “I need Dumbledore suitably… distracted. There will be a Wizengamut meeting that day, yes?”

“Yes, my lord.” Avery agreed, his voice barely above a whisper.

“See to it then. The Chief Warlock is needed for the whole session after all,” Voldemort stated as a cool smile started to curl over his lips. Yes, perhaps he might just be able to turn this around after all.

-o-o-o-

Harry tugged at the collar of the tailored robes Charlus had insisted he wear with a sigh of irritation.

“Don’t fidget,” Charlus admonished simply as he gave Harry a look. “It’s unbecoming.”

“I hate you,” Harry stated flatly as he gave Charlus a look before gesturing down at himself. “And I hate this.”

“Of course you do,” Charlus agreed dryly as he carefully adjusted his own robes.

“Why do I have to go through all this?” Harry asked with a groan as he looked down at himself.

“Because all the applicants do.” Charlus responded with an arched brow. “What were you expecting? That I would say something to Albus Dumbledore and you would magically have the job?”

“…Yes?” Harry asked as he looked back at Charlus uncertainly.

“Funny,” Charlus stated flatly and shook his head. “No. You will have to go through the hiring board like everyone else.”

“Hiring board?” Harry asked, frowning. “I thought…”

“Dumbledore has final approval, yes, but he does not have the time to personally interview all of
the applicants.” Charlus said. “As such a hiring board is put together. Hogwarts is a prestigious institute, after all.”

Harry grunted at the comment and again tugged at his collar. “Then how am I supposed to do this then? I can’t exactly give them references or papers.”

“Thankfully this position can have some things… fudged,” Charlus said simply as he looked away. “What you need to do is be confidant and knowledgeable. That way we can clear you to Dumbledore.”

“Confidant and knowledgeable?” Harry repeated before giving Charlus a look. “At what? The best ways to put down dark wizards? To disable a transformed werewolf? How to drive off a swarm of dementors? Kill a basilisk with only a sword?”

Charlus blinked slightly. “… Do I even want to know? A swarm of dementors. Of all the…”

“It was that or be Kissed,” Harry said with a shrug. “Well, it also involved a time turner and not wanting to create a paradox.”

Harry’s eyes went distant for a moment and he frowned. He’d altered so much already, irreversibly so in only a few moments that had vanished in a flash. Since then he’d done his best to keep moving forward. A part of him mourned what he’d lost, what had been destroyed by his own actions.

Another part of him was absolutely thrilled. This was a world where The-Boy-Who-Lived never happened. This was a world where he wasn’t known as a boy hero, an icon that could never live up to the idea they’d crafted for him.

Here he was a man without a past and without expectations beyond what he’d established for himself. And he was now the Storm Chaser.

…Which, he had to admit, could sound kind of corny at times.

Still, he was going to have to be confidant and knowledgeable.

He could do that, right?

-o-o-o-

Orion Black fought back a sigh as he was forced to listen to the fop trying to pass himself off as competent. So far the various applicants had been a more than mixed bag of diversity. They ranged from self-aggrandizing fools to the few with a cool confidence, but so far, still no Storm Chaser.

“Are you sure he’s actually going to be here?” Orion asked quietly so only his brother-in-law could hear while he shifted a bit and gave Cygnus a look. “If he fails to show…”

“We will still have gained a measure of respect for showing interest and restraint in how we’ve approached this,” Cygnus stated simply as he gave Orion a look, his voice equally quiet. “While not as… fortuitous as getting the measure of the man himself, it is still a gain. Besides, Uncle Charlus assured me that he would be here.”

Orion grunted sourly as his eyes narrowed for a moment then he forced himself to relax. “That man…”

“Is who he has always been,” Cygnus interrupted quietly. “Only this time he had something
shocking enough that we actually had to listen.”

For a moment Orion glared back at the man, who simply gave him a calm pointed look in response. “I do not like it.”

“Neither do I,” Cygnus admitted quietly with a nod of his head. “However the world does not cater to our wants and preferences. It presents us with the situation how we respond to it and view it is up to us.”

“I do not prefer to view it this way.” Orion answered as he continued his glare.

“Then don’t.” Cygnus said, causing him to blink. “I think he made a valid point. Did you not notice how we speak of lords? Whom we shall follow. Not whom we shall side with.”

“That is…” Orion started to say before frowning as his lips pressed together.

“Exactly.” Cygnus agreed. “But, is it what’s best for the family?”

“It is what we have always done,” Orion stated flatly. “It is tradition.”

“It is pride,” Cygnus argued as he leaned back in his seat. “A bitter one that has carried itself long since past when it still serves us. Uncle Charlus had a point. We need a new kind of pride.”

“Is there something you gentlemen would like to discuss with the rest of us?” the arch voice of Augusta Longbottom cut in as she gave the two men with a withering glare.

“A topic of family tradition that came up momentarily,” Orion stated simply, giving the woman a steely look that refused to be intimidated. “We apologize. We shall try to keep the topics relevant to the current task at hand.”

“And the latest applicant wasn’t even worth the parchment he submitted his application on,” Edmund Bones stated dryly as he shook his head. “So I hardly find their need to come up with a way to keep their minds focused surprising.”

“Edmund!” Augusta declared with a frown and a glare.

“What? If I had to keep listening to that fool much longer, I was worried his banal incompetence might just become contagious.” Edmund responded with a shake of his head. “Merlin knows how he even managed to dress himself for the interview.”

“It is our place to render a reasonable list of potential professors to Albus Dumbledore, not to sit around gossiping like ill-mannered reprobates!” Augusta stated with a frown. “Now, the next applicant is… Harry Potter? Strange. I thought I knew all the Potters.”

Immediately both Blacks stiffened and directed their attentions to the still closed door as Augusta read from the application.

“What? If I had to keep listening to that fool much longer, I was worried his banal incompetence might just become contagious.” Edmund responded with a shake of his head. “Merlin knows how he even managed to dress himself for the interview.”

“It is our place to render a reasonable list of potential professors to Albus Dumbledore, not to sit around gossiping like ill-mannered reprobates!” Augusta stated with a frown. “Now, the next applicant is… Harry Potter? Strange. I thought I knew all the Potters.”

Immediately both Blacks stiffened and directed their attentions to the still closed door as Augusta read from the application.

“Let’s see… Former Dark Wizard Hunter. References… Restricted?” Augusta stated with a blink and a frown. “Skilled in Charms and Transfiguration and a variety of tactics for combatting both dark wizards and dark creatures. Knowledgeable in various tactics of combatting the dark arts without resorting to the dark arts…”

“Ah, yes. Charlus recommended him,” Edmund agreed as he noted the name on his own copy of the information. “Something about his previous experiences being a necessary secret.”
“Most improper,” Augusta stated with a frown. “How are we supposed to render appropriate judgment about the truthfulness of his skills?”

“I imagine we ask him questions to see how he answers,” one of the other members asked dryly. “Still, that’s a bit exciting. Restricted information? He could even be that wizard who dealt with Greyback.”

“And why would someone like that apply for a position at Hogwarts?” Cygnus asked arching a brow. “I find that to be… well, really. How many people that are capable of those things have a desire to teach? And Defense Against the Dark Arts of all things?”

“You never know. Look at Albus Dumbledore,” another member pointed out.

“Because there are so many like the great Lord Dumbledore.” Orion stated with a slight bite to his voice before shaking his head. “Shall we move on with the interview?”

“Yes,” Augusta stated succinctly. “Send him in.”

A flick of a wand and a spell shot out. A moment later, a young man with glasses stepped in, wearing well cut and tailored robes that he seemed oddly out of place in. As Orion studied him, a trickling realization hit him about just what he looked out of place.

It was not the look of a young man who didn’t know his place in the world, or was uncomfortable with who he was. It was the look of a dragon forced into robes and clothes that he wore with only the most tedious agreements. He looked very much like someone who did not wish to be there. One whom they should not make feel particularly inclined to show them how much he did not want it.

When he saw the eyes, he knew that this was the man from Bellatrix’s memories.

A glance at Cygnus confirmed that he too was of that opinion. As he looked through the board he saw both apprehension and dismissal. While Augusta and Edmund took in the look of the man and found reason to pause, most of the others saw the obvious discomfort and saw weakness.

“Mr. Potter?” The voice that spoke was bordering on condescending as it looked back at the visibly young man.

Orion noticed the sharp narrowing of Harry’s eyes behind his glasses before the man spoke in a calm collected voice. “Yes. And whom am I addressing?”

That was not the reaction that was expected as the speaker took a moment to collect himself. “We are the Hiring Board. We will be deciding whether or not you will be among those eligible to be presented to Albus Dumbledore for determination of who will be the new Professor of the Defense Against the Dark Arts.”

“I see,” Harry stated simply as he then tilted his head to the side. “And does this position automatically come with an inability comport yourself with manners and decorum, or is that merely your own personal deficiency?”

The man who’d spoken had his face turned crimson, his fingers reaching down towards his robes at Harry’s response, only to find the young man staring back at him, unflinching and visibly unimpressed.

“How dare you-” the man started only to be cut off by a glare from Augusta Longbottom.
“Be silent.” The woman’s stern voice was steely and cold. “Mr. Potter is quite correct. It is our responsibility to act with the manners and decorum that should be associated with individuals in our position. To do otherwise is an insult to both our families and Hogwarts herself.”

“Or, you could draw your wand on him and we could see firsthand some of his qualifications.” Edmund ventured with an arched brow.

“He insulted me!” the man protested.

“I treated you with the same courtesy you treated me with.” Harry stated flatly. “And as my being here is the result of the recommendation of Charlus Potter, that in turn tells what level of courtesy you have shown him.”

Orion fought back a slight smile of approval as the man suddenly turned quite pale as he realized exactly how far his insult would travel.

“And, in turn, your behavior reflects back on Charlus Potter.” Augusta stated as she looked firmly back at Harry.

“And, Madam, have I acted in a way he would find inappropriate?” Harry responded back with a bland monotone.

Augusta sighed at that as she leaned back in her seat. “I see. A Potter indeed then. I am Augusta Longbottom. I will be chairing this interview.”

“Madam,” Harry agreed with a respectful nod of his head.

“Edmund Bones,” Edmund stated next as he watched Harry with bemused eyes.

And so the introductions went, including the now far more contrite individual whom had made the initial introduction. Until they reached Cygnus and Orion.

“Orion Black. Head of the Black Family. And my brother-in-law, Cygnus,” Orion stated simply as he stared back at Harry.

“Sirs,” Harry responded with a nod of his head, before looking at them carefully. “An interesting sight to see such… distinguished individuals in such a setting.”

Orion narrowed his eyes for a moment before answering back. “Cygnus’ daughter brought us most… interesting facts about the current state of the Wizarding world. Ones that we would be remiss in not considering.”

“Ah. An interesting thing then. I suppose someone must have made quite the impression upon her,” Harry stated simply with a nod of his head.

“Memories can go a long way, Mr. Potter,” Orion agreed, before steepling his fingers together. “But, I believe we have an interview to conduct?”

“Indeed we do,” Augusta agreed with a nod. “I have to admit, you have a most… obscure application, Mr. Potter.”

“It is as complete as it can be at the moment,” Harry stated simply. “If you have questions on the subject I will answer them to the best of my ability and if you require a demonstration…”

He paused there and suddenly smiled at the man who had been so rude earlier. “That I can easily
arrange as well.”

Even the more dimwitted of them took notice of that. It was starting to trickle into their minds that they were no longer at the top of the food chain there. For some, Orion imagined, it was a very, very tough thing to accept.

That he knew because it was hard for him to accept himself, and he had actually seen the man in front of him at work.

“What are the uses of the Patronus spell?” It was a simple enough question about one of the more obscure and less used spells that Aurors tended to learn for its messaging purposes.

For some reason it made a look of amusement cross Harry’s face before he spoke. “Well, the classic answers are the repulsion of dementors and lethifolds. There is a variation that can be used to carry messages, and there are other uses, if the caster is creative enough.”

With a gesture, suddenly a magnificent stag of pure, glowing silver erupted out of his wand, standing tall and proud as it regarded them with a calm grace before it lightly butted its head against Harry’s shoulder.

Smiling, Harry lightly stroked against the guardian’s head before gently dismissing it. “I have experience training a number of individuals in how to cast that spell, to the extent of enabling them to cast a fully corporeal patronus in several cases.”

It was, Orion had to admit, an impressive display. It was one that firmly cemented the fact that this Harry Potter was not a dark wizard. A very cunning play indeed.

“Impressive,” Augusta allowed with a slight nod of her head. “Most wizards have difficulty with that particular spell.”

“I had a very good teacher when I was younger,” Harry admitted with a slight, mysterious smile on his lips. “He helped me learn how to cast it fully due to an incident I had with undesirable dark creatures.”

“What would be your primary goal in teaching the children of Hogwarts?” one of the other members asked.

“How to stay alive,” Harry stated simply, letting the words sink in before continuing. “One of the basics I’d like them to understand is how to find, or make, an exit.”

“You want them to run away?” one of the members stated angrily.

“I want them to survive. Not everyone can be a hunter of dark wizards or dark creatures,” Harry corrected succinctly. “And even those who are, on occasion, need to be able to get out of a situation where they’re outnumbered, or when facing a superior enemy.”

“What, you expect them to just be attacked in their homes or on the street?” It was an angry member of the board now. “Here on the isles, we are perfectly safe! There are no dark wizards running about trying to torment people and I won’t stand for the idea of someone trying to drum it into people’s heads!”

Whatever Harry was going to say was cut off in a violent explosion as the wards protecting the room were violently shredded and one of the walls exploded in a shower of debris.

While most members of the hiring board had thrown themselves away in a half mad scramble,
some had cast shields and moved to their feet.

Harry had cast a spell on the floorboards at his feet, causing them to curl back into a makeshift wall and protecting him from the debris that swept his way. With a cloud of dust still obscuring the field of view beyond the now-destroyed wall, it was impossible to see exactly who or what had caused the explosion. Streaks of magic then blasted through the dust, each one aimed at the brightly glowing shields that the quicker witches and wizards had cast.

The instant they hit the shields, the shielding spells violently shattered, sending the casters who hadn’t already moved or avoided the spells flying backwards.

Orion was fortunate enough to have already started moving away, he and Cygnus were merely thrown onto the ground. Edmund Bones was not as lucky as he was blasted back into one of the walls, cracking of his head against audibly as he slumped unconscious. Augusta had been the only one beyond Harry Potter whom had not used a charm shield, preferring instead to conjure up a slab of solid rock, and she, like Potter, had not been the target of one of the spells.

Frowning, Harry cast quickly, summoning the large amount of debris from around the room, before animating it into a felinoid creature. With a gesture, it quickly stalked to the edge of the wall, hiding just out of sight before another spell from Harry suddenly grabbed hold of the cloud of dust and it pulled back, abandoning the hole entirely.

Orion recognized the robes and masks, though most of the others didn’t, as he pushed himself back to his feet, gripping his wand and gritting his teeth. At his side Cygnus was performing a similar action as his eyes narrowed into slits. It would seem that their neutrality would be ending earlier than they had originally thought.

“What is the meaning of this?!” Augusta’s voice, strong, proud and angry, demanded.

“Ah, Augusta Longbottom,” a man wearing a mask far more intricate than the others almost seemed to purr out. “I suppose I should’ve expected your presence. No matter. Today, our issue is not with you, but with a certain… applicant you were interviewing.”

“All this work, for me, Mr. Riddle?” Harry’s voice carried out as he stepped out from behind his makeshift cover and surveyed his opponents. “And my, so many guests you’ve invited to the party.”

The man in the mask, now identified as the mysterious Tom Riddle, or Lord Voldemort as he preferred, stiffened at the name and his eyes burned as he glared back at the young man in front of him. “The infamous Storm Chaser. I was expecting something… more.”

“We all have to deal with our disappointments,” Harry stated simply. “After all, think of all the disappointment poor Merope has to deal with.”

An inarticulate blast of magic was thrown Harry’s way, only to be intercepted by another makeshift wall rising up. The instant the spell splashed upon it, the wooden floorboards began to rot, decay, and then turned to ashen dust before them. Harry clucked his tongue and gestured, sending the dust floating away as he again beheld Voldemort, trembling in rage in front of him.

“Be silent on things you know nothing of!” Voldemort demanded.

“Nothing?” Harry repeated as he twirled his wand lightly. “Really, Tom, I’d honestly be quite happy knowing just a fraction of what I do about you.”

“I am Lord Voldemort!” Voldemort declared, glaring at Harry before throwing out a string of dark
curses towards Harry. “You will not address me by some common muggle name!”

Harry gestured and ripped the table the hiring board had been using into the path of the spells with his own magic, keeping the pieces moving as they continued to catch the incoming spell fire that cut, exploded, burned, rotted and froze. A number of twisted dark spells clung to the debris that churned and twisted in the air.


Voldemort screamed in rage as a torrent of dark fire blasted out of his wand and into the cloud racing towards them.

The cloud, in turn, twisted, catching the fire, transforming from a twisting miasma of dark residue into a toxic cloud of magical ash and fire that greedily reached out towards the group of dark wizards.

It was then that Voldemort’s followers realized that their leader was focusing his attention solely upon his foe, ignoring their safety entirely. With startled oaths they began to cast themselves. Banishers hit the debris and pushed it back, at least for a moment. Blasting curses thinned the cloud but spread it further. Cutting curses meant nothing to it.

Then, Harry sent the beast he’d animated earlier charging through the cloud. It immediately began to burn and rot as the tainted ash from the cloud clung to it. When it emerged, slamming into the first one of Voldemort’s followers, it looked as if it had been born fresh from a nightmare.

Wreathed in sickly flames and putrid decay, it was starting to rot even as it tore through the throat of the wizard it had caught and then pounced towards the next nearest victim. The wounds it inflicted carried the still-hungering residue of Voldemort’s spells, spells that quickly and eagerly went to work as the residue was left behind in the wounds of the beasts’ victims.

“My lord!” one of the wizards tried to call out, only to find Voldemort was paying little to no heed.

Instead he cracked his wand down and a sudden, crackling heat exploded into the air. A slick, glowing serpent of hungering flame rose out from the tip of his wand. Fiendfyre, bound tight by Voldemort’s will, rose up, and began to ignite the building they were in.

As soon as the first spark of flame has begun to take shape, Harry had been casting into the stone and earth beneath the floorboards he’d warped and torn up for his walls.

When the gigantic serpent had taken shape, he spared a glance towards the members of the board who were staring with terrified awe at the scene in front of them.

“You may want to run away now.” And then the ground had started to shake.

It was not a light unsteadiness of the earth. No, it was a violent, angry thing, forcing everyone, even Voldemort, to struggle to keep their footing. Then, before the great serpent of fiendfyre, the floorboards of the building exploded out, sending debris flying in every direction. In its wake, a great draconic head of earth and stone rose up as a wyrm of size and girth equal to the fiendfyre rose, bellowing roar of challenge and defiance.

The serpent twisted back against the roar before Voldemort visibly flinched as he felt the dark, hungering flame pull against his control, hungering to respond to the direct challenge.

And then the great earthen dragon lunged forward, smashing into the almost solid flames, and
seemingly tackling the serpent of animated flame to the ground.

A good portion of Voldemort’s followers were crushed, burned, or both as they knocked down another wall of the building and a piercing scream informed them that their little fight had just spilled out into the public.

Only, Voldemort visibly didn’t care as he clamped down on his will and focused on controlling the serpent as it battled against the dragon.

Earth burned and stone melted as the dragon forced the fiendfyre creation to roll into the street. Bit by bit pieces of it snuffed out, buried and suffocated beneath the great beast.

As molten stone dripped into the streets with an angry hiss, it pulled together, shifting and shaping into lupine-like drakelings that immediately turned their attentions back towards the Knights of Walpurgis.

When the first one launched into one of the dark wizards, still glowing hot, his scream drew the attentions of the others. When they trained their wands on the other creatures born from the falling drops of melted stone of the great dragon, a cloud of dust descended upon them and forced itself down their throats. As they descended into fits of helpless coughing, struggling to breath, they found themselves set upon by the burning stone creations.

Through all of this Voldemort focused, his will absolute as the fiendfyre was rolled back and forth. Bit by bit it was being suffocated. But still, the dragon was melting and burning with it.

So focused was he on keeping his creation under control and strong, he failed to notice the decayed form of the felinoid beast, still wreathed in the dark magics eating at its body, until it slammed into him.

He was not left stunned and locked in surprise, though; a gesture with his wand and the creature was banished back, flying into a wall where it’s weak, decayed frame finally broke into a falling mess of debris.

Turning, he bared his teeth and glared back at Harry, who stood there in front of him with a cold, penetrating glare.

“You think you’ve won, boy? You think this mean anything?!” Voldemort demanded as he flicked his wand and the glowing stone drakelings were frozen by a howling arctic wind. “You think you know Voldemort?! You know nothing!”

Then the frozen stone figures cracked, and exploded, spraying across the ground and digging into bodies of the fallen Knights of Walpurgis without care.

“I know that you should’ve kept control of your fiendfyre.” Harry responded simply as he looked back into Voldemort’s eyes unflinchingly.

He could feel the brief, violent force of Voldemort’s legimency slamming into his mind, and then the dark wizard stumbled back when he was violently repulsed.

Shaking his head, Voldemort turned for a moment and saw as the torso of the dragon that had been fighting his fiendfyre cracked open as it seemed to expand out, looking as if it was inhaling a great breath. A hollowed out section grew in the area of its chest, glowing hot red from the fiendfyre’s heat. Then it clamped down on the diminished and now wild snake of fiendfyre and forced it into that hollow.
The glowing, burning, melted earth slammed shut, trapping the cursed fire inside of the dragon as it turned its attention fully onto Voldemort, its maw opening as the burning heat of the trapped fire could be seen down the hollow of its throat.

The bulging chest then contracted and suddenly the great dragon of animated stone and earth released the trapped fiendfyre inside of itself in a torrent of hungry flame that almost immediately made Voldemort’s body vanish beneath the onslaught. Then the flames were followed by a stream of molten stone, falling down upon where Voldemort had stood. When it finished, the now emaciated-looking dragon lowered itself back to all fours, and watched the weakened flames coiling about a pile of melted rock.

Suddenly the rock darkened and a cracking sound filled the air before it suddenly exploded out into a storm of glittering shards of obsidian, revealing a cocoon of frigid, inky darkness. Then, the shield seemed to melt away, revealing a slightly sweating and angry Voldemort, his robes slightly singed. With a gesture, he was again impeccable and he turned his head to regard Harry angrily.

“I already told you, I am…!”

And his voice trailed off as it registered in his mind just what he was seeing.

The moments where he’d been trapped and forced to focus entirely on keeping up his shield, his opponent had not been idle.

Stone and earth circled him as all manner of beasts, eyeing him from every direction. Some small, some large. Each of them moving with an almost unearthly grace as he then turned his head and snarled back at Harry.

“Here’s the thing, Tom,” Harry stated simply, wand held at the ready as he stood, flanked by a pair of earthen wyrms, each with maws of jagged obsidian stone glinting in the fading fires of the dying fiendfyre. “I know that you’re strong, you’re smart, you’re ruthless, and that you’re cunning.”

Voldemort preened slightly at the words, but his eyes narrowed into wary slits. “If you know my power, you should know you stand no chance of defying me.”

Then Harry had the audacity to laugh a full belly laugh as he shook his head and reached up, wiping at his eyes as tears threatened to spill forth. After a moment, he recovered and looked back at him, still chuckling. “You’re also arrogant, selfish, and foolish.”

With a hiss of rage Voldemort swept his arm in an arc and a full quarter of the circle of beasts exploded into jagged shrapnel. “You think I’m afraid of these little toys of yours? They are broken and destroyed beneath the slightest exertion of power!”

“Ah, but you see… from destruction, creation,” Harry shot back as he flicked his own wand and the creatures reformed, only now, instead of smooth, heavy stones, they were interconnected, almost nightmarish creatures of sharp, jagged rock and stone. “Everything you destroy, all it takes is a little creativity to turn it into something to send back against you.”

The broken shards of obsidian stone that had formed from the melted mass of stone Voldemort had been trapped in pulled back together. Lean, humanoid forms with sharp, jagged claws and faceless heads of shards stared back at Voldemort. Broken timbers and stone came together into hulking brutes, stepping towards him.

The remains of the dark magic-tainted ash and dust lingering, eating at the ground, rose up, encased by broken glass and stone, trapped in the chest of a great monstrous bull, its eyes glowing
with the dark eldritch power of Voldemort’s own spells, nostrils flaring as it pawed hungrily at the
ground.

“Come on then, son of Merope Gaunt. Come then, kin slayer, kin betrayer!” Harry stated as he held
his wand ready, his voice carrying as he stood firm and unyielding. “Bastard son of a muggle who
tries to wipe away his past with blood, death and misery.”

Voldemort’s face went past anger, past rage, as the words hammered into him. Pure, violent,
virulent hatred dripped in the air, made palpable by the twisting, coiling of his magic. “You.
DARE!?”

“Come then, Voldemort, born Tom Riddle, after the father you murdered, a deed you were too
craven to claim credit for so you laid the blame on your own Uncle,” Harry stated as, finally, the
calm seemed to break, as anger started to burn in his eyes. “Come then, monster who would rule us
all. Let us see just whose dreams will turn to ash.”

And he did.

In a blur of motion Voldemort showed that, despite Harry’s words, he was far from weak, far from
helpless.

Dozens of spells were cast in a single breath; twisting, dark, forbidden magics born of the darkest
arts. Spaced between, two of the Unforgivables, as Avada Kadavra lit up the air and invisible
Crucios. Stone and earth exploded, rotted and decayed. It was a whirlwind of death that even the
most experienced of wizards would have been hard pressed to match.

Harry rose to the occasion.

Battle honed instincts took over. Stones and boards blocked spells, seen and unseen. Cursed residue
turned into roiling clouds of miasma that began to race towards Voldemort like serpents as swift
stone creations darted in a random, jagged line towards him. From every creation he destroyed,
another was born from its remains.

Both men were sweating, glistening, pushing themselves as neither refused to give even an inch.
Everything that came close to Voldemort was stopped, banished or crushed by the last moment. All
the spells that raced towards Harry found themselves deflected or simply dodged, and the remnants
of their destruction fed into new creations sent back at Voldemort.

No one could properly gauge the time. Not the combatants, not their impromptu audience.
Everything was a blur of unstoppable, impossible battle.

And then a stone spider, with sharp, jagged legs, dropped from the air above Voldemort, tearing at
his face with an unnatural screech as it dripped toxic dark magic residue directly onto Voldemort’s
eye as it tore into his flesh.

With a scream of rage he tore the creature from his face, only to be slammed in the chest by the
hard stone head of the bull that breathed dark magic miasma. Enough of the force was absorbed by
the magic in Voldemort’s robes that he only fell back a few feet, driven to his knees instead of
having his entire rib cage crushed. As he dropped to a knee, Voldemort snarled and the bull
suddenly fell, split into two equal portions straight down the center of its body.

Harry snapped his wand towards Voldemort and, in an instant, every one of the stone creatures
rushed straight towards Voldemort.

And then, in a flash of phoenix fire, Albus Dumbledore appeared… directly in the space between
the two combatants.

“Enough!” the man commanded, anger burning in his eyes. “What is going on here!?”

Seizing upon the momentary pause in his opponents assault and realizing he was in a dangerous position, Voldemort hissed out, “This isn’t over, Storm Chaser!”

And in a sudden blast of dark magic, he rose into the air and vanished in a flying trail of black smoke.

Harry growled and his eyes turned, burning onto Albus Dumbledore. “I had him! What the bloody hell do you think you were doing?!”

“Look around us, and you ask me why?” Albus demanded as he looked back at Harry with a look, a spark of anger in his eyes. “How many people were injured, how many were killed because of this duel!?”

“Duel?” Harry repeated, staring at Dumbledore before standing to his full height. “You’re the one that needs to look around then! This was never a duel! Everyone who died here died because Voldemort, Tom Riddle, decided that he would come and attack a bloody hiring board, in the middle of this bloody village! This was their choice! Is it yours that our place is to lie down with bared throats for them to rip out when they come for us?”

It was then that Orion Black made his presence known with a pointed cough. “You know, as much as I loathe to interrupt this, are you often in the habit of enabling the escape of dark wizards who attempt to murder a sizable number of upstanding wizards in broad daylight, Chief Warlock Dumbledore?”

That drew Dumbledore up short as he then turned his gaze towards Orion, about to speak, when Augusta Longbottom cut in. “For Merlin’s sake, Dumbledore, what were you thinking?! The boy had that mad man! Who knows what he’ll do now!”

“It was…” Dumbledore started to state before a series of cracks filled the air as red robed Aurors appeared, Alastor Moody at the head.

“What in Merlin’s name…?” Alastor declared before looking around and, catching sight of Harry, groaned, his shoulders slumped a bit. “… You again. What happened this time?”

“I was in the middle of a nice, quiet interview when we were attacked,” Harry stated simply, gesturing towards Augusta and Orion. “I even have witnesses this time.”

“Ones that aren’t the cooling corpses?” Alastor asked with a grunt as he lightly kicked one of the bodies over to look at its face, taking in the half melted mask. “Branched out a bit this, I see.”

“That was Voldemort, actually,” Harry stated with a shrug, his eyes still angry as he turned his eyes towards Dumbledore. “Whom I almost bloody well had if a certain someone didn’t decide he was going to bloody well bollocks it all up!”

“Aren’t these Voldemort’s followers?” Alastor demanded before finally getting a look at the scene and sucking in a breath. “Blood and ash, boy. What the bloody hell happened here!?”

“What happened, Master Auror,” Orion Black stated with a frown, “is that someone just made a public declaration of war, one that they then found that they were not as equipped with overwhelming force as they thought they were.”
“Everyone he kills from now until he’s put down, is on your head, Albus Dumbledore,” Harry stated grimly as his eyes locked on the Headmaster and he growled angrily.

“There’s bloody dark magic everywhere,” Moody muttered with a hiss. “I haven’t seen this much since…” He paused and grimace before shaking his head. “It’s been a long time.”

“I was using wood constructs from the walls and wreckage of what he destroyed at first. He decided to throw out a lot of rotting curses,” Harry stated simply with a shrug. “It is the kind which sticks around for a bit, so if you get some of that dust from it on you, it starts rotting you, too.”

Alastor took another look around and noted the various constructs that seemed to be constraining churning masses of dark magic and then stared back at Harry. “… And you bloody well turned it into a weapon to use back against them.”

Harry just shrugged in response.

“It was one of the most impressive and creative uses of animation charms I’ve ever seen,” Augusta Longbottom admitted as she stood up straight. “And after the initial assault, that mad man was far too focused on the young Mr. Potter here to pay the rest of us any mind.”

Then her eyes narrowed into shrewd slits. “I take it that was intentional?”

“Potter?” Alastor repeated as he looked at Harry for a moment with squinted eyes before his shoulders slumped again. “Of course you’re a Potter. Should’ve seen it to begin with.”

“I knew things about him that I knew he wouldn’t like me talking about,” Harry stated simply. “It wasn’t really that hard to keep hitting the right buttons to keep him focused on me.”

“I see,” Dumbledore stated as he swallowed, realization of just how badly he’d misread the situation sinking in.

“No, you don’t.” Harry corrected succinctly. “And if we’re all lucky, you won’t.”

“You do realize you’re going to need to drop those animations so most of that stuff can be repaired, yes?” Alastor stated as he tried to change the subject.

“As soon as Voldemort’s spells expire,” Harry agreed with a nod. “I’d rather not have people have to be treated at St. Mungo’s for contact with it.”

As Dumbledore opened his mouth to speak, Alastor gave him a look. “As you can see you’re not currently needed here, Dumbledore. Why don’t you make sure everything’s right with Hogwarts?”

“Now, Alastor…” Dumbledore started to protest.

“Best to keep in mind what we talked about last time, too,” Alastor reminded him as he gave Dumbledore a look.

Dumbledore slumped slightly as he recalled the man’s words before looking slowly around the devastated area. So much destruction. So much loss of life.

“They made their choices, Albus. When they did, they stopped being yours to save,” Alastor stated simply. “Now let me try to make sense of this.”

“Will this take too much longer?” Orion asked blandly. “I have information about this I need to… disseminate.”
“It will take as long as it takes.” Alastor stated simply as he looked at Orion. “No more, no less.”

“Of course, Master Auror,” Orion agreed before sighing as he resigned himself to a rather lengthy… interviewing.

Still, despite the disaster of the day, and despite the violation of House Black’s neutrality, he had learned at least a portion of the measure of both the Storm Chaser and Voldemort. It seemed that Charlus Potter might have a point after all.
Chapter 6

“Well, Albus, I have to say, you still do things larger than life,” Alastor Moody stated as he slid into a chair and gave Albus Dumbledore a long look. “A man who attacked some of the more prominent names in pureblood society, on both sides of the divide, and you single handedly managed to enable his escape.”

“I thought…” Dumbledore started to protest before letting it die on his lips as he saw the look that Moody sent his way. “How bad is it?”

“This was the man who was responsible for the attacks that I told you about before.” Alastor stated flatly. “If the witness statements were to believed, someone the Storm Chaser, who happens to be named Harry Potter, apparently, accused of murdering his own father.”

Dumbledore slumped down as he stared at the desk in front of him as he let his body hunch back into itself. “How many is he responsible for killing?”

“Estimates range from a few dozen to past a hundred,” Alastor stated flatly as he shook his head. “And, by all accounts, until you blundered your way onto that fight, this Potter had him almost defeated.”

“It looked like a duel gone out of control,” Dumbledore stated quietly. “There were bodies and dark magic littering the area. What was I supposed to do?”

“Make sure that no bystanders were hurt while checking with the people that were there to find out what was going on,” Alastor stated simply. “Of course, that might just be the fact that I don’t have the bloody power and skill to interfere in a duel like that and walk away in one piece.”

“And I am, as you so eloquently pointed out to me before, a teacher,” Dumbledore stated as he finally raised his eyes and looked back at Alastor. “And what does a teacher do when he sees a fight getting out of control?”

“When he’s in his school? Intervene,” Alastor agreed before pressing back. “When he’s not? Find out if he should intervene.”

“I have long accustomed myself to the idea that most of our society was still a part of my school.” Dumbledore stated with a quiet sigh and a shake of his head.

“Well, it’s not,” Alastor stated simply before sighing and shaking his head. “Perhaps you should be taking a sabbatical.”

“… From?” Dumbledore asked warily as he looked back at Alastor.

“Hogwarts.” Alastor stated simply.

“But… why?” Dumbledore’s face was cloaked in confusion.

“Do you know why the Storm Chaser, why Harry Potter, was there to begin with?” Alastor demanded with a look.

“I... do,” Albus admitted, a frown of displeasure crossing about his features. “He was there
applying for the Defense Against the Dark Arts position.”

“And what did he demonstrate? In front of the entire hiring board?” Alastor asked leadingly as his face held flat look as if the answer was the most obvious thing in the world.

“They can’t be seriously considering…” Albus started to protest.

“He did good work,” Alastor started off, a grudging respect as he . “Clean, efficient, kept the noncombatants out of harm, kept the threat contained…”

“That area was practically soaked in dark magic!” Albus cut in.

“None of it his,” Alastor informed him sharply with a glare. “In fact, he made a point of collecting and containing the bloody stuff. Never even thought it was possible, but he did it.”

“Then please, Alastor, explain to me the dead wizards with signs of dark magic damage,” Albus stated with a calm, cold voice.

“He contained it.” It was a simple response and a shrug. “How hard was it for him to turn the residue back against them?”

“And how does this make them any better than they were?” Albus demanded, anger again leeching into his tone. “So what if he didn’t cast the spells himself! He still inflicted it upon living wizards!”

“Living wizards that had attacked Hogsmeade in broad daylight. Living wizards who were responsible for those curses to begin with,” Alastor responded as he shook his head. “Those rules you cling to, Albus? They stop applying to people who break them to start with.”

“Just because someone else breaks the rules, it is suddenly permissible to break them yourself?” Albus gave him a cold look. “That is not how society works.”

“That is how war works,” Alastor stated quietly as he then looked fully upon Albus’ face.

“We are not at war!” Albus protested, though to his own ears, his voice sounded weak.

“What do you think this was? What else would you call a mass attack on a pub with so many innocent bystanders and some of the most influential individuals in Britain?” Alastor almost barked out his words in anger as he glared back at the man. “What do you think those attacks, those kills, have been? We are very much at war, Albus. This was just the formal declaration of it.”

“Surely after what happened…” Albus started to protest again, even as his words died off and his shoulders slumped with the weight of realization.

“Not so easy to play it so high and mighty without looking the hypocrite, is it, Albus?” Alastor stated with a shake of his head. “He treated it as it was; a declaration of war. He showed them exactly what it will mean. And from what I guess, it wasn’t what they were expecting.”

“I won’t have my students turned into killers, Alastor.” Albus declared with a hiss.

“I had the opportunity to speak to the board about the incident. They had only barely gotten started on the interview when they were attacked,” Alastor stated, as if he hadn’t heard the other man’s objections. “What they told me was fairly… interesting.”

With a look of long suffering resignation on his face, Albus gave Alastor the question he was prompting. “How so?”
“The first thing they asked was about the Patronus spell. A nice bit of obscure trivia to throw people off their game. He answered it without hesitation, produced a fully corporeal one and then explained he was experienced in training people in its use.”

Albus stared at him.

“The second was even more telling,” Alastor continued as he gave Dumbledore a look. “They asked him what he’d teach them. He told them how to escape and survive. Then someone asked what they would need to know about that, when they wouldn’t be attacked like that in Britain. Irony being, it was then that this Voldemort attacked.”

Wincing as the image came together in his mind, Albus slumped back in his seat. “If I fought this…”

“Longbottom and Bones would help the Blacks crucify you,” Alastor told him flatly. “And that’s not counting the enemy you’d likely make out of the Potters.”

Albus winced. The Potters were not known for being the most civilized of families. They could act the part when it pleased them, of course, and they weren’t known for being dark wizards and sadists like the Blacks. No, they were simply known for ignoring the niceties of decorum, restraint and manners when it came to confrontations.

And for being more than a little recklessly headstrong.

For one of their own to demonstrate he was obviously the most qualified in such a spectacular fashion, and then be denied?

This was shaping up to be an incredible headache.

“My advice? Again, take a sabbatical,” Alastor repeated his earlier advice as he gave Albus a look. “Otherwise this is likely going to get messy.”

“You say it as if I won’t be able to control myself.” Albus said with a mild, reproaching look.

“You like to meddle. It’s what teachers do,” Alastor stated simply. “Sometimes, even when they be better served by not.”

Albus sighed and leaned back as he contemplated those words.

-o-o-o-

“Charlus.” The voice was weathered but strong as it spoke, its owner a man of perhaps a decade older than Charlus himself, his hair a full steely grey, but visibly related. “I am going to trust that you actually have an explanation for this.”

Charlus did not wince though he did incline his head in acknowledgement. “It’s a bit… well, to be perfectly honest, it’s entirely bloody terrifying.”

Charlus did not wince though he did incline his head in acknowledgement. “It’s a bit… well, to be perfectly honest, it’s entirely bloody terrifying.”

“Who is he?” the man demanded as he gave Charlus a look. “And why wasn’t I told about him?”

“It started out as a favor for my nephew,” Charlus admitted. “Then things, well… it honestly rather snowballed, Lucius.”

Lucius Potter sighed as he slumped back in his chair and rubbed his temples. “There is no Harry Potter that I’m aware of, Charlus.”
“He is a Potter,” Charlus stated firmly. “That much I can assure you of… and his explanation…”

“What of it?” Lucius asked warily as he looked back at Charlus.

“He is a Potter, a Potter of Lord level might and skill. A Potter that we have never heard of. That no one has ever heard of.” Charlus continued as he looked back at Lucius. “What does that tell you?”

“Assuming he is really a Potter?” There was the slightest hint of sarcasm in Lucius’ voice. “I wouldn’t know; it shouldn’t be possible.”

“Exactly,” Charlus agreed quietly. “But, here he is. And his skill and power have been publically demonstrated.”

Lucius grunted softly as he leaned back in his chair and then arched a brow expectantly at Charlus.

“He describes it as…” There was a pause as Charlus collected himself. “There was a dark wizard, one that had delved into insane and forbidden magics. He was there to stop him. He was at the center of a massive insane spell instead of the caster. When it was over…”

“When it was over?” Lucius asked as he kept his brow arched up.

“… As he put it… it was made as if everyone he knew, everything he had, was gone. Wiped out. As if they were never there. As if they had never happened.”

“…” Lucius stared at Charlus for a moment and then arched a brow. “And you believe him.”

It was a statement, not a question.

“I was looking into his eyes as he said it, Lucius. He has nothing left.” Charlus stated simply and quietly.

“Then why would he even care about all this? Why get involved?” Lucius asked more pointedly. “If he truly lost so much, why is he even here?”

“Do you recall where he first appeared?” Charlus asked. “Where he first fought them?”

“A pub,” Lucius stated with a snort. “Your point?”

“A muggle pub,” Charlus corrected. “He never had any intention of getting involved. He was planning on avoiding the wizarding world entirely.”

“… And then they just happened to stumble across him.” Lucius stated with more than a small amount of skepticism in his voice.

“I’ve seen the memory of the only survivor of the attackers.” Charlus said quietly. “It was Cygnus’ daughter, Bellatrix.”

“And it could still be an elaborate set up.” Lucius answered back, unmoved.

“Not with the things he knows. Things he couldn’t possibly know if he was anything other than what he claims.”

Lucius reluctantly allowed the point as he recalled some of the things that Charlus had told him about what the young man had said. “A point. Then, again, why didn’t you tell me?”
“Things tend to… snowball with Harry. Quite rapidly. As I said, I started this out as a favor for my nephew. And, quite honestly, I ended up getting so involved that, when I wasn’t bloody well drinking myself stupid from even thinking about the sheer headache this situation gives us, I was waist deep in it.” Charlus explained.

Grunting sourly, Lucius still glared at Charlus somewhat. “And do you know the shear headache you’ve inflicted upon me? The bloody Blacks knew about this before I did!”

“Well, in their defense, they have been in the middle of it longer than even I have,” Charlus said with a shrug of his shoulders before brightening visibly. “I even got to terrify my niece Walburga because of it.”

Lucius sighed softly. “At least you got something worthwhile out of your nephew. I still struggle to comprehend how my sister found Abraxas Malfoy of all people a suitable match. Let alone what possessed her to name their son after me.”

“Because until little James was born, he was your heir presumptive,” Charlus pointed out with a bemused little smile before glancing towards the door. “Speaking of whom…”

Lucius sighed audibly and gave the door a look. “Come out, James.”

“No Jameses here.” The reply was muffled. “Just us puffskeins.”

As Lucius pressed his face into his palm, Charlus smirked at the man then shrugged his shoulders. “Well, if there’s no James there, then I suppose I’ll be keeping this James present until I see one.”

“Well, wait, there might be a James here. One mo.”

There was a soft rustle of feet before the door creaked open and a ten year old boy pushed his head inside. “Hello? Did I hear cousin Charlus?”

“Puffskeins, really, James?” Lucius asked with a sigh as he gave his son a look.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, father,” James said as innocently as he could before looking at Charlus eagerly. “Did you bring me a present?”

“Spoiled brat,” Charlus stated with a sigh and an exaggerated shake of his head. “Why would I have a present for you?”

“But you said…!” James started to whine quietly.

“I thought we were talking to puffskeins?” Lucius couldn’t help but ask as he looked back at his son.

James froze, his eyes wide as he tried desperately to come up with an answer to that. “Um, ah…”


“Yes, father.” James stated with slumped shoulders, moving back from the door, before pausing. “… Father?”

“Yes, James?”

“Is it true that the Storm Chaser is a Potter?” James asked, eyes wide and hopeful.

Lucius cast a foul look at Charlus, whom merely smiled back at him with an innocent curl of his
lips before speaking. “According to Charlus, yes, he is.”

“Then can I meet him?!” James asked, sticking his head back through the door, eyes shining hopefully.

Charlus visibly smothered a laugh as he looked back at Lucius.

Lucius in turn gave Charlus a merciless, predatory grin. “It will depend on your dear cousin Charlus here. We’ll see what he can do.”

For a moment, Charlus blinked, then looked back at Lucius. Then he looked at the eager face on James and shook his head. “We’ll see. Harry isn’t very big on socializing.”

“Please, Cousin Charlus? Pleeeeeeese?!” James asked, eyes wide and pleading.

Charlus was not moved in the slightest. “We’ll see.”

-o-o-o-

Voldemort screamed.

There was pain in it. There was agony. There was anger.

But most of all, there hate. It was a venomous hatred swallowing up the sinking pit of cold fear that had settled into his stomach. A twisting, angry thing.

He turned his gaze around onto his followers, revealing an angry, milky white orb set in a blackened, shriveled socket. The spell had been cancelled. It had been his to begin with, after all, but the effects could not be so easily reversed.

The Dark Arts were hardly forgiving.

“WHO IS HE?!” Flecks of spittle shot out of his mouth as he spoke. His fingers clenched about his wand, feeling the way it seemed to almost shudder against his grip.

No one had an answer for him.

He had spent decades preparing for this. Training for it. Learning every little thing he could to become unstoppable.

But this man, hardly more than a boy, had practically bested him in their fight. And what was worse was that he had done it in public. He owed his continued existence in this form to Dumbledore of all people.

It seemed impossible. For the longest time, the only stumbling block to his plans had always been Albus Dumbledore. Dumbledore had everything; a reputation, Hogwarts, unmatched political power, awe inspiring magical prowess. All in the form of a foolish old man who was too weak to make use of his own might.

Now, however, there was another. One younger than both of them. One with power, skill and a ruthlessness that Voldemort did not know how to respond to.

With Dumbledore, it was simply striking, hard, fast and brutal and vanish like the mist when the old man finally left the vaunted security of Hogwarts. Whittle away at his spirit, at his position. Make him look useless and maybe even make the man himself think that.
If they did happen to fight him, Dumbledore would always duel. There was mercy and hesitation to exploit. He would try to capture them above all else.

This Storm Chaser, though…

He struck without pause or mercy. He destroyed without hesitation. He went for the killing blow every time.

And he was good enough to pull it off.

Reluctantly Voldemort looked over his followers. He could see in them a growing fear. Only, the fear wasn’t just of him.

Most of it was, of course. His fury meant their suffering. But still, he could see it.

The glimmer where they were considering whose fury they feared more. His, or this Storm Chaser’s.

Yesterday, there would have been no hesitation in it being his fury that terrified them more.

That was before he had returned alone and visibly wounded. Cursed scarred and half blinded. Before they could have written off this Storm Chaser as a fluke, as lucky.

Now…

He had to act swiftly.

He forced himself into the appearance of calm. Years of practice smoothed his features and stilled the sneering his lips into a thin line. Tom Riddle came to the forefront once more as Voldemort stepped back and let the mask fall into place.

“It would seem that there were grave… miscalculations made about our new foe.”

His voice was smooth, cultured and precise as he calmly smoothed his robes and looked at them with an outward calm he didn’t feel inside. But the fools needed calm, needed reassurance. Someone to soothe away their terror and remind them of their purpose.

Or, at least the purpose he wanted them to believe they served.

“And yet, I am still here. Both Albus Dumbledore and this Storm Chaser were there. And still I am here.” It was a slight embellishment, but that was allowed. “I have been wounded, yes.”

It made him queasy just to say it, to admit even the slightest bit of weakness. But, it would serve a purpose.

“But I still live. My power undiminished. My skills unmatched.” He paused there before lifting his wand up, slowly gesturing to his milky white eye as he lightly traced around the shriveled eye lid. “This? A reminder. A price we pay in blood to free our world of the filth plaguing it.”

The tip of his wand began to glow, a pulsing, angry crimson, like blood, boiling and ready to drip down its length.

“Perhaps you look at it and see weakness? Hmm? Look at it and think me maimed? Weakened?” He bared his teeth then, letting a flash of Voldemort shine through as he set his jaw before pushing the tip of his wand into his ruined eye.
With a snarl he drowned the pain in anger, hatred and fury. With one savage tug there was a gruesome eruption of blood as the useless organ was ripped out of the socket. Then, with a blank stare, he looked at it, lifted it up for them to see as blood began to slowly pour down his cheek.

“This. You see something lost, cursed, broken, ruined,” he said, the words tinged with a hiss of anger, contempt, before flicking his wrist up. The eyeball shot into the air, hung there, caught in an angry crimson glow. “You suddenly doubt the power of Lord Voldemort so easily?”

And with growl he began to cast, magic flowing out of the tip of his wand and connecting to the suspended eye like a writhing serpent. Veins of dark, pulsing shadow followed it, wrapping it up, veiling it from sight. Then another squirming tendril of magic reached out and connected back to his bleeding socket.

“I. Am. Voldemort!” he declared as another angrily burst of magic poured out of his wand and flowed into the circuit as the air seemed to grow colder, the shadows around them darker.

“Behold!” And with that a final surge of magic splashed from the tip of his wand into the pulsing cloud of magic that surrounded the eye, before it drew itself back into his face.

For a moment, his features were half consumed by the cover of the spell before they condensed, pulling back further and further until at last they revealed a once more filled socket.

Only, the eye that stared back at them was not the eye that had been.

The white sclera was a deep, bloody crimson, the iris as black as shadows, and the slitted pupil an almost glowing bright red.

“What they think they can take from me, I can simply remake, I can restore!” he declared, his voice carrying over the room as he glared back at them. “They think that they have won a victory here, that I, we, have been defeated!”

He flicked his wand and the drops of his blood that had fallen on the ground burst into greedy black flames. “Instead they have only strengthened my resolve! We will show them that we will do what it takes. Whatever it takes to drive out this filth that contaminates our world. We will make it pure once more, we will make it strong again!”

There was a cheer from the crowd, though he could see there was still some hesitation, some doubt. It made the anger inside of him burn even hotter.

“I will see them broken, bleeding and begging for the mercy of death before I am through with them,” he stated with a hiss. “That, I can promise you.”

And he would. Unfortunately, though, he would first have to find more… allies to help them. Fortunately there were plenty of dark creatures and creations that could be unleashed upon this Storm Chaser. All one had to do was know where to find them.

Something he most certainly knew.

-0-0-0-

Orion Black was staring at the family tapestry as he held a glass of scotch in hand when Cygnus found him.

“Well, you’ve met him.” Cygnus stated as he watched Orion carefully.
“Met him, Cygnus?” Orion repeated quietly. “I’ve heard a few words, answers to a handful of questions, and prompts for dozens more.”

“And you’ve seen his power,” Cygnus added quietly. “Both of them.”

“Of that, you are quite right,” Orion agreed as he lifted up his glass and sipped his scotch. “And our neutrality has been violated.”

“And your thoughts?” Cygnus asked, keeping his face carefully neutral.

“That I ill like the choices in front of me,” Orion stated flatly and shook his head. “And that my wife is going to force me to cast her out of the family.”

Cygnus had only the barest of winces at that and slowly sighed. “You are certain?”

“I know my wife,” Orion stated simply as he stared at the tapestry. “Already you have seen how she tried to subvert me with your daughters. She tries it with our sons daily.”

“I had hoped…” Cygnus began, only to sigh as he looked back at the Tapestry. “The world is changing.”

“In ways I do not particularly care for.” Orion stated with a grimace as he sipped at his scotch.

“You say it as if I don’t find it particularly distasteful.” Cygnus stated simply as he looked back at Orion.

“You do not act it.” Orion stated flatly as he turned and gave the man a look.

Chuckling softly Cygnus stared at the tapestry for a moment, letting the pause in conversation draw out before responding. “What am I to like about the situation? I either sacrifice what we have been taught it means to be a Black, or I watch as my family goes extinct. You’ve seen the memory. Surely you could see how close he came to simply ending Bellatrix then and there.”

And indeed he could. Orion remembered the detached consideration in Harry Potter’s eyes when the man had held Bellatrix at wand point, weighing the life by things he couldn’t quite determine. What had been clear was that Bellatrix’s life had only slimly won out over her death.

“And now she is besotted with him,” Cygnus continued as he grimaced. “She ignores the offers of upstanding and acceptable wizards in favor of the hope of pursuing him. A half blood. But a half blood capable of crushing us all beneath his heel.

“So, I have looked at the scenario. I have looked at our choices. I do not like them but I have learned to accept them,” he continued as he shook his head. “Because what else can do we do? As my uncle stated? Cling to our pride and be laid low for it? His words rang of a truth painful to hear, but a truth none-the-less.”

Orion took a harsh swallow of his scotch, scowling angrily as he stared back at the tapestry. “I know. By Merlin do I know. That fight… I have seen men like this Voldemort before. Never of such power and skill, but I have seen their like before. Your Storm Chaser was adept enough at stripping away his mask of civility, his pretense of humanity.”

“The blind volley of curses was less than friendly as well,” Cygnus agreed with a nod of his head. “We were fortunate that his attention was so quickly diverted and focused.”

“As I said… power and skill,” Orion stated, shivering at the memory. “To throw about those curses
so quickly, so easily…”

“And to see them negated so handily,” Cygnus added calmly. “And those animations…”

“Indeed,” Orion agreed with a nod of his head as he sipped again at his scotch.

It was then that Walburga Black approached her brother and husband, a look of vicious glee upon her lips. “Well, brother, husband, I just heard the most… enlightening news!”

Both men glanced at one another before Orion took another drink of scotch. Sighing at the unspoken statement, Cygnus looked at his sister. “And what would be…?”

“That the precious Storm Chaser that you have us skulking away from our duty encountered Lord Voldemort at Hogmeade.” The vicious, triumphant grin on her face spoke volumes as both men noted it and then glanced at one another.

“And your point?” Orion asked as he studiously set his attention upon the tapestry in front of them.

The flat dismissal in his tone made the confidence in Walburga’s smirk crack for a moment before recovering. “Voldemort nearly bested him before that fool Dumbledore saved him. Now do you see? This foolishness is at an end! We should take our place in his service!”

“… Is that what they’re saying?” Cygnus asked blandly as he looked back at his sister.

“Yes!” Walburga declared. “I just heard it from…”

“We were there.” Orion stated flatly, still not looking at his wife.

“Then you should know firsthand the might of…!” Walburga began to state before her husband turned to her and she beheld a look that froze her to the core.

“What I know is what you heard was a lie. There was a fight between them, yes,” Orion stated flatly. “The one saved by Dumbledore was not the Storm Chaser.”

“… You lie!” Walburga hissed with only a moment’s hesitation.

“We were there, sister,” Cygnus responded back. “He attacked not only the Storm Chaser but us as well.”

“Then where was your vaulted neutrality?! There was a note of triumph in her voice as she smirked viciously back at them.

“We had been there all day, long before the Storm Chaser arrived,” Orion said simply, still not looking at her. “We were a part of the hiring board for the opening at Hogwarts, to try and insure that the applications who made the initial cut had at least some idea of propriety.”

“The interview with him had barely started with your precious Voldemort attacked us all.” Cygnus noted as he didn’t quite look at his sister.

Walburga was staring at them, her mouth half hung open, before clouding over with a furious scowl. “NO! You will NOT ally us with that like blood traitors! We are not…!”

“Be SILENT!” Orion cut her off as he turned upon her, his voice striking like a flash of steel. “You have ignored this for too long, Walburga! I have tried warning you. I have tried reprimanding you, but still you do not listen!”
Cygnus looked away as he stared purposely at his sister’s name on the tapestry.

“And now, now you seek to dictate what I will and won’t do? The decisions I will make that you are too blind and foolish to understand?” Orion loomed now, anger burning in his eyes. “You think I know not how you tried to poison our sons into breaking my declaration?”

Cygnus blinked slightly at that. He had assumed his sister had moved to his own daughters because she knew better than to attempt such an overt action against her husband’s wishes. To have fallen so…

“And what’s more… you try to drive us into the service of a thing so foolish and arrogant as to make horcruxes?!’” Orion’s eyes burned with fury. “Not simply horcruxes, but horcruxes made from the murder of his own family?”

“We are…” Walburga began, drawing herself up straight and proud, only to find her husband stepped forward to loom over her.

“We are Blacks.” Orion stated for her as he glared down at her. “And it is time we had more pride in that fact. I will not whore out are family to serve as the boot lickers of a monster simply because he says and declares what you want to hear!”

“And it is better to prostitute ourselves to a piece of filth who follows the ideals of the blood traitors? To turn our backs on everything we’ve stood for?!” Walburga snapped back, her whole body trembling with rage.

“That is your ignorant presumption, and why we are changing who we are.” Orion responded with a growl. “We will serve NO ONE! We are An Ancient and NOBLE House! What power is it we would have if we swore ourselves to anyone’s service? None! Any power we had, any prestige, any influence? All of it would be attributed to the one we follow.”

Her mouth hung at that as she struggled to come up with a proper response.

“What, did you think that following your Dark Lord would grant us influence? Power? All it would do would give us an excuse to kill muggles and end up sending our society into a civil war. Do you think your Dark Lord would share power, hmm? Do you think he would come to us, allow us a say in how the world should be?”

“We would be…” she started to say, only to again be cut off by her husband.

“We would be favored chattel. He cares nothing for his followers. If he did, he would’ve saved them instead of ignoring them to rot and die while he practically frothed like a mad dog at the Storm Chaser.” Cygnus stated quietly as he shook his head.

“So, instead we will choose to ally with the only one that showed some interest in individuals other than himself,” Orion stated flatly as he gave his wife a look. “Because he can at least be reasonable, perhaps even be manipulable. Either way we can insure the prestige and influence of our family far more standing beside him than we can following behind this monster Voldemort.”

When she looked as if she was about to protest further, Orion gave her another cold look. “This is not a debate, Walburga. Try to subvert this in anyway and it will be your last act in this family. It will not be tolerated any longer.”

Her face flushed and her eyes widened as her nostrils flared with rage. Only, he did not back down. He did not apologize, he did not diminish in the least. He stood firm, proud, and angry as he glared back at her.
“We shall see,” she finally hissed out before turning and stalking away.

“Well, that was bracing,” Cygnus noted once his sister was gone.

“And now I must prepare my sons to the concept that their mother is not to be listened to, trusted, or even relied on.” Orion stated sourly.

“And I get to tell my wife that if she keeps falling in with my sister’s plots, she will suffer the same fate.” Cygnus noted with a twist of his lips and a sour grunt.

“The price of finding a way to make the best of this madness,” Orion stated with a shake of his head.

“Though I imagine Uncle Charlus will find your use of his reasoning most… illuminating.”

“Be silent, Cygnus,” Orion said as he gave the man a mild glare, receiving only a thin smirk in response.

-o-o-o-

Harry stood in front of the serene looking pond and lightly rolled the handle of his wand between his finger and thumb. Then he lifted it, holding it more like a conductor’s baton than a wand. A breath was taken, drawn in and held before in a rush it left his lips and he began.

A trail of ripples stirred across the pond’s surface, making a slow counterclockwise turn. His wrist was loose, making long, exaggerated movements that kept the tip of his wand in an ever steady motion. Gradually the tip began to glow, collecting a small corona of light.

On the pond, a shape formed, indistinct with a rippling twisting and turning as it tried to take on definition and distinction.

It failed, revealing a misshapen quadruped form struggling to step out of the water. And for a moment, it looked like it would. One foot settled onto the pond’s shore and at first held firm. Then it wavered, wobbled and finally collapsed in a wet splash.

“After hearing how you fought Riddle in Hogsmeade, I’m surprised to see you struggling with something like this,” Charlus stated as he eyed Harry critically while making his presence known.

“Water’s always been something I’m not quite comfortable with,” Harry stated. “After Hogsmeade, I figured I should start working on it again. Never know when you might need it.”

“Still surprising,” Charlus stated simply. “I never found the elements to be too terribly difficult to manipulate…”

“Then you’re doing it wrong.” Harry stated flatly and shook his head.

Charlus blinked slightly, taken aback by Harry’s words. “… What?”

“Changing the earth’s shape, moving it around, that’s not manipulating its element,” Harry stated simply as he crouched down and then lightly tapped his wand against the ground, causing it to suddenly shift as a draconic head rose up and butted lightly into Harry’s hand. “Actual manipulation… you stop using spells. You infuse your magic into it. You give it purpose and direction.”

He lightly stroked the top of head before looking back to Charlus, who looked confused and more
than a little skeptical. “You change something into something else. What happens when it comes into contact with more magic?”

“Depending on the spell, one generally cancels out the other.” Charlus allowed carefully.

“But mine can cage dark curses, even fiendfyre, while maintaining their movements and actions. Why?”

That made Charlus pause as he blinked at that. “I had merely assumed the spells cast upon them were strong enough resist the other spells.”

“… Animation spells, able to just resist fiendfyre?” Harry asked with an arched brow and a deadpan voice.

That again made Charlus pause, then frown. “… Then what was it then?”

“At its base, its animation, I suppose.” Harry allowed before chuckling a bit. “It actually started out as a prank spell.”

Charlus stared at him.

“Yup. My father and his friends were great pranksters in their youth,” Harry stated nostalgically. “I ended up stumbling on it.”

Harry slowly gestured to the head. “Animation charms… well, they have limits. What I do is impart my will on what I’m shaping. A strong enough wizard can still disrupt the shapes, but if you practice enough, it’s easy to reform them.”

“… Your will.” Charlus repeated as he looked at Harry.

“Yes,” Harry agreed with a nod and a sheepish grin. “At least, that’s how I think of it. I don’t really know how else to describe it.”

“… I suppose,” Charlus reluctantly allowed. After all, the whole basis for silent casting was intent and will.

“Water, though… I have trouble with,” Harry admitted as he focused on the pond again. “I can’t seem to get the right feel for it.”

“I see,” Charlus said in a tone that indicated he clearly didn’t.

“Everything has a certain feel to it. A way it interacts with your magic,” Harry stated simply. “How it handles being infused with it.”

He gestured as some of the pebbles at the pond’s edge rose up on a slick serpent of mud. “How earth reacts is different from stone. Mud is different from earth, and different from water. Wood is different from both. Everything is unique in and of itself. You have to learn to get a feel for it in order to direct it.”

“And dark magic traces like you were said to manipulate in Hogsmeade?” Charlus asked bluntly.

Harry laughed softly at that. “I wasn’t. I was manipulating something else that in turn manipulated it. That allows my magic to shield things from it. Or at least blunt the effects.”

“… You do realize you’re absolutely terrifying, yes?” Charlus asked as he looked at Harry critically.
“I am as I am,” Harry stated simply with a helpless shrug. “I ended up hunting dark wizards not long after I finished school. Tried being an auror. Too much bureaucratic nonsense.”

“I… see,” Charlus stated as he stared back at Harry. “What’re you going to do?”

“Pretty sure I just picked up the gauntlet,” Harry stated simply as he looked out onto the pond and tilted his head to the side. “Won’t matter where I try to run now, he’ll come for me anyway. Might lead him on a nice little chase, though he’d end up killing too many people trying to hunt me down to make it worthwhile.”

“… You don’t think you can defeat him?” Charlus stated as his brows arched up in surprise.

“I know I can beat him,” Harry said with a faint chuckle. “And I know he could beat me. If he was smart about it. I’d rather do what I can to stack the deck in my favor so it doesn’t come to that.”

“I would advise you to not make such statements where the average witch or wizard can hear you,” Charlus stated warningly. “They won’t take the time to actually listen to the full explanation.”

“I know,” Harry said with a tinge of bitterness in his voice. “Oh, do I know. Have you had much luck talking to the ‘old guard’ you’ve been telling me about?”

“They’ve been reaching out to my cousin, Lucius, more since the revelation that you’re a Potter has come out.” Charlus stated simply. “He, in turn, has been reaching out to me. Wondering why I hadn’t mentioned that little fact to him previously.”

“Ah,” Harry allowed a small grin of bemusement to cross his features. “Are you in trouble?”

“No, not particularly,” Charlus responded with a slight shake of his head. “Though his son, James, is quite eager to meet the infamous Storm Chaser now.”

“… Oh?” Harry blinked a moment, then reached up and pinched his nose. “Really? Already?”

“What already?” Charlus asked, though with a slight amusement in his voice.

“Fanboys,” Harry said with a shudder. “A horrible condition, one that turns normally even tempered and intelligent wizards into drooling, babbling idiots unfit to tie their own shoes.”

Charlus just smirked at him.

“Oh, shut it,” Harry stated with a sour mutter. “Until you’ve had to put up with them… It’s not pleasant, at all. One good thing about hunting dark wizards full time, most of them would leave me bloody well enough alone.”

“Of course,” Charlus stated agreeably.

Harry gave him a look before rubbing his temples. “I need a flawless quartz and someone good with wards.”

“Why?” Charlus asked curiously.

“To catch the bastard when I kill him. The quartz to trap him, the warder so I can make the prison I have for him vanish.” Harry stated simply.

“… you already have a prison?” Charlus asked, blinking in surprise.

“Yup, one of his old hang outs, in fact,” Harry stated with a dark grin. “Out of the way, hard to find
and, with a bit of spell work, not likely to be found by accident. I’m going to trap the bastard in that
gem and then I’m going to leave it in that deep, dark hole and forget about him.”

“Ah,” Charlus stated quietly before slowly nodding his head. “And Hogwarts then?”

“I still need to get rid of the Horcrux in Hogwarts.” Harry stated simply. “Otherwise, the jinx will
never be lifted.”

“Very well,” Charlus stated with a slow nod. “I will talk to Lucius. I’m sure he should be able to
help us acquire the gem. As for the warding… Orion Black would likely know best.”

“… Really?” Harry’s face twisted in distaste. “I don’t suppose you know of anyone else?”

“He would be the most expedient one. Do you have something against the Blacks?” Charlus asked
with an arched brow that rose with a dangerous warning.

“… I honestly was more hoping to stay as far away from Walburga Black as I could.” Harry said
blandly. “Foul little hate mongering bitch.”

“She is my niece.” Charlus stated dryly.

“And this changes what I said?” Harry asked as he gave the man a look.

“Oh, it doesn’t,” Charlus agreed with a nod. “I had great fun reminding her that she was pushing
past the bounds of what was acceptable. My great nieces deserve better than her venom.”

There was a pause before he suddenly smirked almost predatorily at Harry. “And speaking of those
great nieces… you made quite the impression on young Bellatrix.”

“… what?” Harry asked, staring Charlus as if the words had not quite been in the Queen’s English.

“Yes,” Charlus said simply. “She has been quite the adamant defender of you to her family.
Very… vigorous in making her case. Extremely passionate.”

“… What.” Harry repeated again stared at Charlus. “… Bellatrix?”

“Quite,” Charlus agreed. “Her mother is quite put out. She’s not taking a single one of her new
courtship offers seriously. Has her sights already set on someone.”

Harry just stared at him.

“She is an attractive young woman,” Charlus stated. “And you are, by your own admission, an
unattached young man.”

“… Bellatrix?” Harry repeated again, just staring at Charlus.

“Most men would find that to be a rather intriguing thought,” Charlus noted with a frown. “You do
like women, don’t you?”

“I like women,” Harry agreed with a slow nod, “but… how the hell did that happen? I distinctly
remember doing my best to put the bloody fear of Gods’ wrath into her. And judging by my
recollection, doing a damned good job of it.”

“Well, I suppose she was never the most… stable of girls.” Charlus admitted as he never lost the
look of amusement on his face.
“… Bloody hell,” Harry stated with a groan. “I… Bloody Hell. Can’t I ever have things be simple?”

“As a completely unbiased observer, I’d have to say… you probably bring it on yourself.” Charlus stated with a chuckle.

Harry just glared back at him.
Chapter 7

“So, what’s this about then?” Harry asked with a deceptive calm as he looked at the small, simple building that in a few decades would house Fred and George’s pride and joy.

“It is a club,” Charlus stated as he nodded to the solidly built door with a rather ornate knocker. “Of a most particular variety.”

“I can and will hex you,” Harry stated simply as he gave Charlus a look that promised that obfuscation would be met with pain.

“No one appreciates the art of conversation anymore,” Charlus noted almost mournfully and shook his head. “It’s a club for the surviving veterans of Grindelwald’s war.”

“Most everyone else calls it World War two,” Harry noted with a slow shake of his head, though his tone had shifted more towards the curious now.

“Yes, well to us it was always about the magical side, not the rest of it. We had muggle chaps for that bit.”

“Of course,” Harry stated sarcastically as he affixed Charlus with a mildly scathing look. “Because the two wars had nothing to do with each other, and were totally and completely separate.”

Charlus winced slightly at the statement before shrugging his shoulders. “It is what it is. It’s hard to equate the wars being the same, when they weren’t joined the same. We didn’t serve with the muggles. We didn’t fight with them. We didn’t fight against them. The only forces we fought were Grindelwald’s.”

Harry sighed and shook his head, his eyes searching over the familiar building that looked so alien. So many things had changed and yet he could still imagine the shop this would become. He could almost close his eyes and remember the smell of sweets, the sound of laughter, the sight of wide, wondering eyes.

Another little thing. So close and yet so far away. A reminder of what he had lost.

“So what exactly do you expect me to do?” Harry asked quietly.

“Well, I rather imagine you’re going to have to put a number of distinguished gentleman promptly upon their arses,” Charlus noted with no small amount of ill-concealed glee.

“… You do realize,” Harry started to say as he slowly drew his eyes to Charlus’s gaze, “that to do that, it will likely require me to demolish a great deal of the surrounding environment, yes?”

“… Exactly how much is a great deal?” Charlus asked, shifting his hands with certain amount of nervousness as a pit of dread sank into his stomach.

“I could, potentially, leave the building standing.”

“… That would be preferable, yes,” Charlus allowed nodding his head again. “Even more preferable would be to keep the damage to a minimum.”

“But Charlus, I’m a young man full of vim and vigor,” Harry responded with a predatory smile that
flashed coldly into his eyes. “Don’t you know, we aren’t known for our self-control.”

“I have a sinking suspicion, one of auspicious dread, that within your mind looks a certain… malice that might, by chance, be directed upon my person,” Charlus observed with a sudden nervous energy to his stance. “You wouldn’t feel that way towards family, now would you, Harry?”

“Remind me to tell you about my aunt and uncle on my mother’s side, the ones tasked with my care and upbringing after my parents rather grisly murder,” Harry never let the smile slip from his lips. “They too were family.”

“Right then,” Charlus coughed and then glanced at the door with a kind of nervousness. “Perhaps… Well, no. I can’t ask you to leave the talking to me. One, because then they wouldn’t respect you, and two, I bloody well doubt you’d let me.”

“Now Charlus, I do believe you’re starting to learn!” Harry noted dryly as he shook his head. “And all without me resorting to doing something horribly violent.”

“… I wonder if this is what it’s like to have to deal with a Potter for someone else,” Charlus muttered loud enough for Harry to hear him before shaking his head and sighing softly. “I suppose this could be magic’s revenge upon me.”

“Have you done something in particular that magic would want vengeance upon you for?” Harry asked with a blink as he looked more fully at Charlus as he arched a brow.

“Well, obviously I’ve done something. After all here I am and you stand there, eagerly and happily tormenting me,” Charlus declared with a long, weary sigh before straightening his back. “I would prefer that the building remains standing and stable, though. It is a nice place and one of the few where we don’t have to worry about those damnedable blood supremacists.”

“At least until they decide to target it,” Harry agreed with a faint nod of his head as he imagined now how such a building had lain dormant for the twins to make the purchase.

“Must you be so bloody cynical?” Charlus asked before shaking his head and walking up to the door and pointedly tapping on the knocker with his wand.

For a moment, there was no response, before slowly somewhat ornamental wooden door with brass fixtures folded in on itself, revealing a second door, this time of gleaming bronze, wrought with glowing arcane runes and set with a particularly malevolent looking red orb resembling an eye.

Charlus merely looked back at the orb. A moment later the door seemed to disassemble itself much in the same manner the brick wall entrance to Diagon Alley did. When it finished, a distinguished looking gentleman in sharp cut robes could be seen.

“Mr. Potter,” the wizard stated simply. “Should I announce you?”

“And guest,” Charlus stated as he nodded towards Harry before frowning a bit. “Though, I’d advise them to keep the more exuberant personalities restrained.”

“I’m sure they’ll be delighted, sir,” the wizard stated politely and nodded his head. “You have explained the rules, yes?”

“Mr. Smythe, I’d be more afraid for our members than my guest,” Charlus stated blandly and shook his head. “Which is why I requested the restraint.”
The man arched a brow, turning his attention to Harry for a moment, who gave him back a thin, bland smile that never reached his eyes.

For a moment the man merely searched Harry’s face before curtly nodding his head and stepping back out of the way. “Very well, Mr. Potter.”

Harry shook his head a bit, but none the less stayed almost silent as he followed after Charlus, his eyes wandering around with an almost bored laziness.

Finally, after they came to a sitting room, he looked once more about and then back to Charlus, a brow arching upwards. “Awfully posh.”

“You were expecting us to languish in poverty and mediocrity?” Charlus asked with a sound of incredulity. “We come here to relax and get away from the rest of the world. Why would we want that to be in anything but the best when we can afford to indulge in such?”

“Never really much saw the appeal, honestly,” Harry admitted with a slight shrug of his shoulders. “But, then again, most people I knew with the wealth for it tended to flaunt it and use it to bully people around, so that probably taints my point of view.”

“An interesting perspective,” another voice commented, drawing their attention to a seated middle aged wizard smoking peacefully upon a cigar, a glass of brandy decanted on a stand next to his deep, high backed seat. “You don’t often bring in young bucks like this normally, Charlus.”

“I don’t ever bring in anyone like this,” Charlus corrected with a shake of his head. “Harry Potter. Martellus Longbottom.”

“Charmed, I’m sure,” Harry drawled out with a faint amount of cheek coloring his tone.

“Impertinent one too, I see,” Martellus noted with a slight frown as he took a draw of his cigar. “I suppose you’re going to inflict the reason you brought him here upon me then, Charlus?”

“He’s the Storm Chaser,” Charlus stated with a slight drawl of sarcasm. “I imagine that comes with a natural impertinence.”

“True,” Harry admitted with a nod of his head. “Of course, it might just be the Potter side of things, too. That seems to be a popular theory among certain individuals.”

Charlus glowered back at him for a moment while Martellus barked off a soft laugh. “Oh, he’s certainly got the Potter cheek of it. Glib and offsetting. I can see why Charlus requested restraint from us.”

“I rather like this social club and would hate to see my investment turned to shambles,” Charlus declared as he gave Martellus a look. “I have seen enough of our members in action to know little of this place would survive an unrestrained confrontation.”

“I’m going to guess you’re referring to the overly exuberant gentlemen of… distinguished age?” Harry asked as he decided to at least try to be polite.

“He’s calling us old, isn’t he?” Martellus asked with a note of irritation in his voice.

“That does seem to be the case, yes,” Charlus agreed slowly before pointing out. “But he’s at least being polite about it.”

“Right. Of course,” Martellus repeated with a trace of sharpness in his tone. “Because all that
matters is manners and decorum, hmmm?"

“… I think I should point out that Martellus does not have the best of tempers,” Charlus noted with a weary sigh. “You do realize we’re here to talk about fighting others, not him, yes?”

“It’s the principal of the matter!” Martellus declared angrily as he glared back at Charlus and Harry. “I am still in the prime of my life! I…!”

“Don’t look at me,” Harry reminded him with a shake of his head. “This was all your idea, remember?”

“Yes, well, I didn’t think you’d be so purposely antagonistic!” Charlus rebuked with a huff.

“I’m a Potter; what were you expecting?” Harry shot back with a roll of his eyes.

“Yes, Charlus, what were you expecting? Someone that is somehow less insufferable than yourself?” Martellus asked as he took another long draw on his cigar before sipping at his brandy. “You should know by now that’s highly unlikely.”

“I swear, somehow you have conspired against me on this. I know not how, yet, but I know you have, Harry,” Charlus declared with a look of absolute loathing on his face.

“Why would I need to do that? You do it plenty on your own without any input from me.” Harry responded simply before sighing a bit. “But, as much fun as it is to poke at Charlus, that’s not why we’re here.”

“Do tell,” Martellus asked as he puffed again on his cigar. “You have certainly made waves but what brings you here, now?”

“As he apparently wants to keep dancing around it, I suppose it’ll come down to me explaining it.” Charlus exclaimed with a sigh and a glower back at Harry.

“It was your idea to begin with. I’m still a bit leery of it,” Harry told him flatly as he shook his head.

“Oh, dash it all, fine,” Charlus stated in resigned frustration before turning his attention Martellus. “We have another Grindelwald. This one actually British of all things.”

“… You’re certain? Not just a group of over eager little children looking to follow his ideals without understanding them?” Martellus asked, though in his voice they could hear he wasn’t rejecting their position.

“You heard about Hogsmeade. Merlin’s crotch pox, Martellus, your wife was there to see it firsthand!” Charlus stated with a flat look and a growl.

That almost made Harry start as he reexamined Martellus more closely and this time saw a few faint echoes of the man Neville Longbottom had grown to be. He had wondered what had happened to the man but, after things with Neville’s own parents, he thought it best to not push. And now here he was apparently standing in front of that grandfather.

“Yes, well, some things can get conflagrated at times,” Martellus reminded him with a sip of brandy.

“Shall we tell Augusta you thought that?” Harry asked blandly, hiding a smirk when the man began coughing up his drink.
“Dirty pool, my boy,” Charlus stated with a sound of faint approval in his voice. “I like it!”

“You would,” Martellus stated sourly as he glowered at Charlus and Harry before sighing and slumping down into his seat. “How much do we know?”

“Lord Voldemort,” Harry started, earning a snort from Martellus. “Born Tom Marvolo Riddle to Merope Gaunt and a muggle nob she fancied enough to keep under love potions until she either ran out or ended up delusional enough to think he actually loved her. He threw her out, she died in child birth and Tom went to an orphanage.”

Martellus twitched slightly at the statement. “I see. And you can prove all of this?”

“Shouldn’t be that hard for someone to go looking for it. If I just gave you the information, how could you trust it?” Harry responded back easily enough. “He is running low on his Knights of Walpurgis, though. For some reason the lads keep finding themselves falling into gruesome and unpleasant fates.”

“Isn’t that the name of those little blood purists running around, trying to act all menacing?” Martellus clarified as he frowned a bit as the name triggered a memory. “The ones calling for the purge of muggleborn and halfbloods?”

“Ah, you noticed the hypocrisy right off the top, good for you,” Harry noted dryly as he seemed bemused. “They’re too busy being caught up with the novelty of someone of Riddle’s power preaching their ideology.”

“And you’re now looking for someone to help you fight him,” Martellus stated flatly as he frowned back at him.

“Well, the way I was looking at it, Charlus, in his infinite wisdom, has managed to convince me to take the role of the Defense Against the Dark Arts professor at the esteemed Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,” Harry stated with a drawl of his voice. “Wherein I can do my best to at least help the children learn to keep themselves alive.”

He paused before he looked meaningfully at the man. “And with my attention so focused, I will be unable to work to track down and... remonstrate with these misguided knights. While they’re not exactly something wholly dangerous at the moment, if they begin to apply themselves to subtler tactics, then they can whittle away at those who would come together to rebuke them.”

“You think they’re going to start targeting those of us who would fight back.” Martellus stated with a slow, hard frown and a look of bubbling determination that Harry had seen more than once upon his grand child’s countenance.

“For everything that he is, Riddle is not stupid,” Harry stated bluntly. “I forced him to reveal himself earlier than he wanted because his idiots kept running across me and dying messily. He needed to put me down in front of everyone to make up for it. Instead, he was saved by Dumbledore.”

“Must you give me a headache?” Martellus asked with a sigh as he drank deeper from his brandy. “I suppose you have some insights into how this Lord Voldemort’s mind works then?”

“As I had the unfortunate experience of being in it, yes,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head and a sour twist of his lips. “He will not let it go. And since he now knows that fighting me is not a sure victory like he thought it would be, he will try to stack the game in his favor. Which means attacking others who might support me, or oppose him.”
“Dash it all, I was hoping that all of this was just another bit of foolishness,” Martellus stated before gesturing with his wand and refilling his glass. “I suppose that we would fall into the category of those who would oppose him.”

Harry snorted softly, “I know if he had his way, no one would even know about anyone opposing dark lords that are not a name too grand for him to destroy, someone like Dumbledore. In that particular case he just has to find a way to be written as the one to overcome him.”

“Delightful,” he stated with a sigh before shaking his head. “I suppose then we’ll have to get the lads together and have them see what you can do. Merlin knows we won’t follow Dumbledore again after the way things went to bollocks with Grindelwald.”

Harry blinked slightly at that but decided to say nothing, merely keeping his lips pressed together and his eyes slightly narrowed.

“He’s not going to take the bait is he,” Martellus noted with a slight almost pouting frown of disappointment.

“You don’t want him to take the bait,” Charlus countered back as he shuddered at the thought before perking up a bit. “I am, however, looking forward to the sight of him wiping the floor with the lot of you. It shall be a treasured memory for my pensive long, long into the future!”

Harry fought down the desire to twitch at that. These men, the both of them, had not originally survived the war with Voldemort. For good reason he was now starting to realize. While his grandfather and his wife had been felled by Dragonpox, he was quite sure that such natural causes weren’t the fall of these men before him.

Sighing a bit, he shook his head. “I’m not exactly sure how I feel about beating up a bunch of pompous old men but I’m sure that when the time comes, one of you will certainly do something to withdraw my reservations.”

“Ha! He’s certainly got spirit. We’ll see if he can back it up,” Martellus stated with a broad, eager smile.

Harry could already feel the headache starting to grow behind his eyes before shaking his head as he turned to Charlus. “This was your idea so you organize it.”

“I suppose have that coming,” Charlus admitted with before nodding his head. “It shouldn’t take long; a bit of cajoling, some implied insults, playing on copious amounts of pride. Making a few bets…”

Harry considered that before narrowing his eyes at Charlus. “We’ll be talking about that later.”

Charlus had a sneaking suspicion he was going to end up making a significantly smaller amount than what he was originally.

-o-o-o-

The men assembled on the otherwise empty dirt ring had the look of crotchety irritation on their faces. They all stood tall and proud and their eyes filled with a muted wariness. In part they reminded him of Mad Eye, though their caution weathered down by a life of peace.

The other part reminded him of the retired members of his team that liked to drop in on him when they were in town, to swap stories and share drinks with the only others who really knew what it meant to be one of them.
It made him smile slightly at the familiarity, even if the faces themselves weren’t ones he knew. These were men who had been tempered in the fires of war before and had come out of it stronger. What would his world have been like if these men had lived beyond Voldemort’s reign?

As he looked from one of them to the next, he couldn’t help but feel the answer was ‘very’.

And he was going to have to fight them all at once to drive in the point about just how dangerous both he himself and Voldemort were.

He smiled at that thought. Some things never changed. Men like these would only listen if he proved he was worth listening to. Charlus and Martellus’ words had been enough to get him a shot, along with the rumors of his fights against the Knights of Walpurgis and their Lord.

They were curious but more than a little wary of him. Dumbledore and Grindelwald has left them with no small amount of wariness when it came to stronger wizards, even if it was for different reasons. And now here they were, with another pair of wizards supposedly of the same caliber.

If only they knew that one of them wanted to be so much worse than Grindelwald was ever willing to be. But they were about to learn one very important fact: He was no Dumbledore.

“Gentlemen,” he spoke softly enough for them to hear, the subdued conversations falling instantly silent as their eyes locked upon him.

“Well, you lot at least have an inkling of why you’re here,” Charlus cleared his throat and addressed them when it became obvious Harry was going to let him at least open things up. “Specifically the actions of a certain group of individuals titling themselves Knights of Walpurgis.”

“As ponced up a name for a bunch of thugs as Grindelwald’s call for the greater good,” one of the men stated with a growl and a spit off to the side.

“True enough, but as some of you heard from Hogsmeade, they’ve got a lord backing them,” Charlus agreed with a nod of his head and an exaggerated grimace. “And this one’s apparently lacking anything resembling restraint or decorum. He’s willing to toss around dark curses and unforgivable without even pausing to think about it. In fact, they seem to be his go to choices.”

“Bloody hell. A true Dark Lord?” one of the men stated, looking both perturbed and appalled. “Why hadn’t we heard about him before now then?”

“He was forced to make his grand reveal before he was really ready,” Harry noted quietly as he spoke up again. “Likely he was going to originally wait until he had quietly picked the lot of you off one by one before finishing the last of you off as his great reveal to leave the rest of them quaking in fear and the only one they’d have to turn to Dumbledore.”

“… That’s likely to have been a more effective plan than the bastard thought,” one of the men noted with a grimace. “Once you wipe away the next coming of Merlin off of the man’s reputation, he’s worse than ineffective.”

“Not that Riddle realizes that. He just wants them to put all their hope into Dumbledore so he can whittle away at it and him,” Harry stated simply and shook his head. “So he can just start killing everything and everyone he wants.”

“And you’re supposed to be the remedy to that, hum?” one of the more jaded looking men asked as he gave Harry a long look, that visibly showed his opinion that the man was wanting. “Some sort of Chosen one?”
There was a time when Harry would’ve flinched back from that title, filled with fear an insecurity as the responsibilities set on his shoulders since he was a child weighed down upon him. That was not who he was anymore. Instead he snorted in disdain.

“Do I look like some sort of wide-eyed idiot who would just walk around hoping things work out for the best?” Harry snapped back with a glower. “I’m the bloody wanker that, when shit’s thrown at him, turns around and buries those fucking shit throwers in it.”

“Well, he’s got a bit more attitude than Dumbledore.” one of them noted with a grudging nod.

“Means all of jack shite if he’s just a bunch of talk.”

“Well then, gentlemen, by all means, let’s find out!” Charlus stated happily. “But, before we do, can we get some gentlemanly wagers or are you all too craven to back up your disdain with actual cold, hard galleons?”

That got their attention as they looked from Charlus to Harry and then back again with narrowed eyes before one of them spoke up. “I smell something foul about this.”

“Aye. Charlus is a might bit too eager for it,” another one of them agreed with a frown. “Even if he is a wastrel of a lout…”

“Oi!” Charlus protested with a glower and a glare. “I am not a wastrel! Nor am I a lout!”

“You made your fortunes at Monte Carlo,” one of them stated flatly, glaring at him. “Lucius is the respectable one in the family. He at least invented something to make a profit off of.”

“A slaughter really,” another one of the men agreed with a look of frustration. “Damned bastard and his hair care products. You don’t want to know how much of my money has gone to him because of my wife and daughters.”

“Gentleman,” Harry interrupted them with a drawl of amusement, “As much as I approve and encourage the mocking of Charlus’ character,” he ignored the way Charlus made various sounds of protest at that, “or lack there-of, I believe he was going to offer a wager on the outcome of the entirety of you against myself.”

That made them blink as they looked from Harry to Charlus and back.

“In addition, should he win, he will then have to wager at least half of his winnings against me in a one on one bit of fun.”

“Wait a moment, I never agreed to that!” Charlus quickly protested, his eyes wide and worried.

“Then you shouldn’t have insulted me with such a low cut of the winnings,” Harry drawled back at him.

“You weren’t the one staking the money to begin with or making the bet!” Charlus argued back at him.

“I’m just the one agreeing to take on a group of war veterans all by my lonesome just to prove I can,” Harry countered back with a roll of his eyes. “And you are trying to profit off of my hard work.”

“You know, it’d be worth it just to see Charlus finally getting what for and having to work for his winnings for a change.” one of them noted with a thoughtful hum.
“I can set up the anti-apparition and port key wards as well so he can’t just run away,” another one added with a nod of his head, causing Charlus to frown, either from the affront at the suggestion he might run or from his plan being thwarted already. Harry couldn’t tell.

“We could just skip the middle man entirely and pay the man the amount just to duel Charlus and show us he can back up his claims.” another one pointed out.

“Oh, I rather like that one.”

“You’re all trying to take the fun and profit out of this for me!” Charlus accused with a hearty glare at them.

“You expected differently?”

Charlus opened his mouth but then shut it again and glowered back at them. “I wasn’t expecting this mutiny and insubordinaton! You’re supposed to at least humor the officer and wait until his back’s turned and he can’t hear you before you start mocking and disparaging him!”

“That’s only when you’re still enlisted and the officer can do something like put you on latrine duty,” one of them reminded him. “Now you’re just like the rest of us and you weasel enough money out of us as it is.”

“… The burdens of command,” Charlus stated with a dramatic sigh. “How they weigh upon me. With churls and uncultured barbarians, uncouth and ill mannered. How, I wonder, did I manage to keep you lot alive again without burying each and every one of you in one of the Grindy latrines?”

“Your Sergeant was a saint and kept you from getting the lot of us killed and kept the lot of us from doing you in!” another voice chimed in with a laugh.

“No, my Sergeant was a goddess, which is why I married her as soon as we were discharged and left the rest of you jealous ever since.” Charlus declared with a sniff and a huff.

“… And this is how you know the Lieutenant wants the argument over with,” one of the men noted. “He plays the Black card. Dirty pool. Dirty, dirty pool.”

“Almost thirty years later and still they hold it against me,” Charlus stated proudly, a beaming smile on his face. “That, Harry m’boy, is how you know you’re blessed.”

“I’m still taking the offers to duel Charlus after this is over,” Harry reminded the lot of them. “Minimum buy in is 5 galleons, front row seats will run you 10, particular humiliations, as long as they aren’t too extreme will run you 20-30, depending upon their severity.”

When their eyes all gleamed and Charlus’ face paled, Harry beamed back at Charlus. “And that, Charlus m’boy, is how you then play someone else’s blessing to your advantage.”

“… This, this is why I stay away from the rest of my family most of the time,” Charlus lamented with a long sigh. “I keep forgetting we’re entirely too clever for each other’s good.”

Harry however, was too busy taking payments and notes to answer him.

-o-o-o-

Books had long been coveted by Tom Riddle. In them one could find information, knowledge, and ideas. All different words for the same underlying thing. Power.
Everything was power if one could find the right way to use it.

But now he was finding himself dealing with something his books were little help with.

What the Storm Chaser had done should have been impossible. It defied what he knew about magic and left him with a feeling of inadequacy he didn’t particularly care for. The idea that someone so unknown, someone without any apparent past, any history had managed to discover it… It was impossible.

Animation should have broken, shattered against his spells. The idea of Fiendfyre being captured, contained, turned back upon its master? The spell’s control could be broken easily enough for weak, lesser wizards to have it wrestled away from them. But he was not lesser wizards.

But that thing had still managed to take it from him.

And he could find no mention of such a thing ever being attempted before.

“How was he doing it?” he hissed softly, his new eye burning angrily as it churned around in his thoughts.

The man had turned his greatest weapons back against him. The curses he had drawn forth from forgotten and forbidden tomes. The secrets he had unearthed, the terror of the past and that which lesser wizards had tried desperately to erase.

All of them brushed aside at best and at worst, like his fiendfyre, turned against him.

His mind still rebelled at that very concept. Fiendfyre of all things, being consumed by a pathetic animation. It made no sense!

He almost threw the book in front of him away in rage, hissing in anger. It made no sense. None of it made any sense. What this blasted Storm Chaser, this Harry Potter, doing made no sense at all!

There was a dark part of him he struggled to ignore, whispering to him that somehow, this one knew more about magic than he did. That he understood secrets he didn’t. That this man had already reached heights he couldn’t imagine.

Then he remembered the things he had said to him, what he had called him. How he had taunted him. The way he had inferred things was… How could the man have known those things?! Not even his closest confidants knew those things.

He had done his best to make sure no one could find that information. That he was removed from it. He had hunted down every piece of reference to that existence among the wizarding world and destroyed it.

But, somehow, that was not enough.

If it had been Dumbledore, he might’ve been able to accept it. The old man had been in power for long enough, had lain his foundations before he was even born. He had built himself into an unassailable position of power.

However much of a fool the man might be, Voldemort could grudgingly respect the power he had slowly built up. The tendrils he had all throughout Britain. He would not deny the power he held.

Just that he was too foolish to use it.
And it galled him so, to see all that power, languishing and almost unused. The things he could have done with it; the heights he could have achieved. The things he would do once he buried the old man and this newest complication.

Which brought him back to his problem. How was he supposed to deal with this newest complication? He wasn’t sure he’d be able to keep the man power he’d need to fully harass the wizarding world into submission with the way that bastard Potter had been whittling away at his forces.

He needed something new. Something that they weren’t going to expect. Something that they weren’t going to be prepared for.

He needed a nightmare. A horror beyond the realms of sanity to crush their spirits and to break their will. Something aberrant to their sensibilities.

It was then that the idea came to him.

It was then that a cold, reptilian smile curled over his lips.

A nightmare. Or, more precisely, nightmares. All he needed was a way to make them real.

And he remembered something so very promising in that regards.

-o-o-o-

Looking around himself, Harry slowly seemed to ponder the groups of men who had split themselves into smaller squads and arrayed themselves at different points in front of him. It was, he had to admit, a rather good formation, keeping them just far enough keep any of the more common area attacks from catching them all and yet close enough that, if they needed to pool power, one or two of the squads could quickly come together.

And the varied angles and distances would allow them to cover each other. This, he decided, was going to be tricky. And probably rather painful for him.

Cracking his neck from one side to the next, he held his wand almost delicately between his fingers as he took on a loose, ready stance.

They immediately put him on the defensive, not waiting for a sound to begin as bunker shields rose up while heavy spells were slung out towards him from every position in front of him. Immediately he began to move, jumping, twisting, dodging across the field as their spells tore it to pieces all around him. Repeatedly pieces of shrapnel hit him, bounced off his clothes and skin, leaving small bruises and abrasions.

The old men were, in essence, controlling the entire tempo of the battle in a way that seemed to leave Harry scrambling to keep up. And then he was thrown through the air by an explosive curse landing right at his feet, throwing him back through the air. And the men didn’t rest on their laurels at that as spell fire quickly followed him.

Only, as he landed, rolling on his side, the debris around him seemed to collect and roll with him, until it suddenly formed a sharp, angled wall between him and the wizards he was fighting.

Their spell fire slammed into it, tearing it to pieces within moments to reveal nothing be empty earth where Harry had been just moments before.

“Detection!” one of them called out, and one of the men went to work as the rest watched the field
with wary eyes and ready wands.

All around them they could see the pieces of earth and stone they’d churned up began to rise up, pulling together into rough, brutish forms that the wizards wasted no time in trying to blast apart. Only, their spells only seemed to make them stumbled back for a moment. The chunks and pieces of their bodies freezing in mid-air before pulling back into themselves.

“What the hell kind of spell is this?!” one of them demanded as a spell blew off the thing’s ‘head’, only for it to stumble back maybe a step as it quickly reformed in a slightly different configuration.

That was when the wizard running through detection spells suddenly felt a tapping on his shoulders. Feeling a sudden surge of dread running down his spine, he turned about to find a rough approximation of a giant hand waving at him before grabbing a hold of him and pulling him roughly down to his chin in the earth.

“He’s coming from behind!” the wizard managed to call out before a much smaller hand reached up and slapped over his mouth.

Immediately the wizards closed ranks, pulling together as they prepared themselves to be caught in a pincer attack.

Then another hand appeared in front of them, immediately being blasted to pieces before it reformed, pointing to a position above their heads. Where they found themselves suddenly caught up in a massive shadow as a hand formed above them, fingers curling down like claws before it fell down upon the assembled men.

They caught it with shields and spells, fighting against an almost irresistible force as it bore down upon them. And as they fought against it, suddenly they found the ground around them rising at all sides, like they were in the palm of another hand rising to cup them between the two palms. With a startled shout the first of them tried to apparate away and failed.

“Anti-apparition is up!”

“Portkey ward is up too!”

It was then that the hand above them suddenly seemed to liquefy, turning from solid clumps of dirty into clay and mud and dripping down upon them.

“Bloody hell!” one of them noted before narrowly ducking from where a muddy tendril tried to smack him. “Watch out! They’re animated!”

“Merlin’s Nimue-born crotch mites!” someone swore as an attempt at an explosive hex at one of the mud tendrils turned it into a nest of snakes on the ground around them. “What is this?!”

It was that that moment that the earth beneath each of them suddenly exploded into earthen tendrils that wrapped about each of them and the mud ceiling above them collapsed fully upon them. A moment later they were all buried in mud, unable to move with their heads sticking up above the ground. Centered between them all, Harry stood, bleeding slightly from a few scrapes and looking more than a little worse for wear, but still standing with them at his mercy.

“How the bloody hell did you do that?!?” one of the man demanded.

“Practice, apparition, and levitating and disillusioning a few tonnes of earth and mud above your head before all of this even started.” Harry stated with a tired smirk on his face.
“You bloody well cheated!” one of the particularly sullen looking men accused.

“I knew the time and the place this was happening, I knew I was going to be outnumbered however many to one,” Harry started to list off. “I got here before the rest of you louts even thought about dragging your lazy arses out of your nice, comfortable beds. You bloody well bet your old, saggy bollocks I prepared the battlefield to my advantage. It’s you lot’s fault for letting me.”

“Now do you old mouthy bastards see what I was talking about?” Charlus asked smugly as he leaned back in his seat where he’d been watching the entire time.

“Besides, I had to keep you lot alive and relatively unharmed,” Harry continued as if Charlus hadn’t spoken, lightly scratching the slight stubble on his chin. “Can’t really do that much with a lot like you without a good bit of preparation. Would’ve been easier to just grind ya to bloody pulp when the whole thing started.”

“And how exactly do you think you’d do that?” one of them demanded, only to blink as suddenly a stone wyrm erupted from the earth he was still buried in, with a mouth full of shattered, jagged rocks opened directly about his head. “… Oh.”

It was then that the mud and dirt receded enough for them to climb their way back to their feet, swapping cleaning spells one to the other as they made themselves presentable.

Once they finished, Harry suddenly grinned at them predatorily. “Now that we’ve finished with that, I do believe now its Charlus’ turn, isn’t it?”

It was at that time that Charlus realized that the wards against apparition and port keys had never been removed.
Chapter 8

There was a lingering silence to the air as Harry stared at the waiting gates of Hogwarts and felt a sense of trepidation he could only remember feeling once before in association with the school.

It wasn’t quite fear. Not fear like he remembered experiencing when he was a child. This time it was more of a resigned wariness.

Albus Dumbledore was not the pseudo-grandfather figure he remembered. This Dumbledore was still twenty years younger and twenty years less experienced. This Dumbledore hadn’t lived and fought through ten years of Tom Riddle’s war.

This Dumbledore most decidedly did not like Harry.

And if he was honest with himself, Harry wasn’t sure he particularly liked this Dumbledore. The look on this face when he’d placed himself between himself and Riddle, it sparked something in Harry, something deep, angry and very ugly.

He rolled his fingers lightly about the handle of his wand and considered his approach as he tried to center himself. So far he hadn’t had too terribly much luck with it. His thoughts were too wild, too charged with emotions for him to form a coherent train of thought.

It was home. But, at the same time…

He glanced around and so very much was different than he remembered it. The castle was of course much the same, but the grounds… there were trees that weren’t, a minor decorations here and there. Some plants that he couldn’t ever recall.

Enough of a distortion faced him that his memories insisted quite adamantly that this wasn’t real.

Sighing softly, he shook his head only a moment before finally steeling his nerves and setting forward. He had faced things far worse than an annoyed and ill-tempered Albus Dumbledore. Though, he had to admit, in some ways they were even worse.

A younger but still surly Argus Filch stood at the gates, glowering at him as his fingers tightened on the cool metal. “Well? Hurry up then! I don’t have all day!”

Apparently even as a young man Argus Filch has been neither pleasant nor well mannered. Another distortion that his memories protested again, leaving him to wonder for the umpteenth time why he was doing this. And still, every time the same answer waited for him: because he had a job to do.

Harry just shook his head at the man’s antics. This was not what he wanted to be doing right now. Being in Hogwarts, dealing with Dumbledore, when he could be hunting down Riddle.

Unsuccessfully, probably, he admitted to himself, but still it would’ve been less frustrating than what he had a feeling he was about to have to deal with.

The familiar doors came and went and, once inside, most of the incongruities had faded into the background. Hogwarts, for all intents and purposes, did not change as easily as the rest of the world did. But still, he didn’t feel the comforting embrace of his childhood home when he stepped in.
No, the air was uncertain, alien and wary.

If it stayed this way, he wasn’t sure he’d be able to actually do the job anyway. Coming home and finding home wasn’t… It wasn’t really home, he knew, not his home, but still.

And he could feel his heart starting to beat, to pound as the adrenaline ached to course through his body. With a sharp force of his will he pushed it back down. This battle wouldn’t be one he could win that way.

Instead, he schooled his features to some form of neutrality as he worked to order his thoughts. Occlumancy still alluded him, his thoughts, reactions and considerations too much of a chaotic mess that had managed to work themselves into an efficient battle awareness. Trying to organize that mess would have taken years to get working.

Instead he stood there, staring at the familiar stone gargoyle with Filch at his side, staring at him suspiciously. Some things never changed.

When the gargoyle moved to the side, the familiar voice came from the top of the stairs. “Thank you, Argus.

Filch cast him one more distrusting look before turning and moving away in a way that Harry could only seem fit to describe as skulking.

There was a beat, before the voice continued, reluctantly. “If you would please come up, Mr. Potter.”

Steeling his spine, Harry nodded unconsciously before starting to rise up the steps of the office, until he found himself facing a rather… unamused Albus Dumbledore.

“Please sit, Mr. Potter,” he stated a bit more briskly than was polite.

The chair he was directed to was rather comfortable looking, so Harry simply inclined his head in agreement and then carefully took a seat, watching the man warily. “Headmaster Dumbledore.”

They sat in silence for a moment, Dumbledore looking over him as if trying to take his measure. Harry, in turn, simply looked back at the man with a calm, expectant look and the arch of a brow.

Finally the headmaster sighed and leaned back in his seat.

“So, I am told you will be the new Defense against the Dark Arts professor.” Dumbledore stated as he looked resignedly at the young man in front of him.

That made Harry blink before his brows knitted and he looked back at Dumbledore, almost in confusion. “I was under the impression that was your decision to make.”

Dumbledore snorted softly and almost seemed to glower resentfully at the man. “Typically that would indeed be the case, however, after your little display at the interview, and my own apparently ill-advised actions, if I would attempt to block you from the position, I would find myself facing less than pleasant counter from a variety of different fronts that have not, classically, allied.”

Harry stared at the man for a moment, genuinely confused as he processed the statement. “… Wot?”

This time, it was Dumbledore’s turn to stare back at the man, with no small amount of incredulity. “Really, Mr. Potter, do you truly understand so little of politics?”
And he earned a snort in response. “I’m not a politician. Never have been, bloody never will be. I’ve spent too much time actually going out and getting my hands dirty to ever be comfortable being the person behind a desk sending people out to do it for them.”

Wearily, Dumbledore leaned back into his seat. “I have been advised to let you have the position without a fight.” There was a pause, before he continued. “I have also been advised that it was perhaps time for me to take a sabbatical this year.”

“Ah.” Harry looked at the man oddly for a moment. “If you don’t mind my asking… why?”

“Because I do not want my students recruited to join a war.” Dumbledore stated bluntly as he gave the man a look.

This time, Harry stared at the man incredulously before snorting softly. “Are you truly daft?”

“I beg your pardon?” Dumbledore demanded in a cool, chilly voice as he looked back at Harry in a truly condescending manner.

“Your students are most likely already being recruited. And if they’re not, they will be soon.” Harry stated bluntly. “By their families, by their friends, by the promise of power, prestige and a cause, it doesn’t matter. They’re going to be recruited. Whenever war comes, the young, the idealistic, the easily swayed, they’re always recruited.”

For a moment Dumbledore frowned, looking as if he were about to dispute what he was saying, before he finally settling back to look at Harry with a look of ill-disguised displeasure. “And I am to take this as a reason for me to allow you to do the same? They are children.”

“We were all children, once,” Harry stated quietly as he looked back at Dumbledore. “And in our youth we often allow ourselves to believe that the paths we should follow are the ones that play to our egos. If no one shows them that the difference between what is right and what is easy involves, then they will often be more easily lead down a path that they never know isn’t the best one for them.”

“That does not give you the right to convince them to fight in a war that can and will get them killed.” Dumbledore stated with a slight glare. “They are the future. If we do not protect them, there will not be a future for the rest of to fight for.”

“And, whom has more reason to fight than them?” Harry asked as he looked back at the man. “It is, just as you said, their future. You think that by trying to treat them as if it’s none of their concern, nothing they need to worry about, that you’re protecting them?”

“They should not be involved!” Dumbledore snapped back as he stood up, slamming his hands down on his desk as a sudden surge of magic swam into the air around him.

“No one should be involved in this!” Harry agreed as he stood up himself and met his gaze unflinching, ignoring the swell of Dumbledore’s magic. “But that doesn’t mean they aren’t already! You think Voldemort will just roll over and leave them be because they’re children? You think that he won’t send his knights after them and their families just because they don’t follow him?

“That future you talk about? That is their future!” Harry’s own magic came to bear, and Dumbledore found that it was not lacking against his own. “That means it’s our jobs to make sure they live to see it! And if that means that we have to teach them to defend it? To fight for it? That is our burden to bear! If we don’t, that means that many more of them will die, cowering in fear
“You can’t expect them to survive against fully trained wizards! They…” Dumbledore began as he glared back at Harry.

“Without having it drilled into their heads? No, I can’t,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head, before looking at Dumbledore with a hardened gaze. “But I’ve seen a handful of school children hold off a group of fully trained wizards and witches intent upon ending their lives long enough for help to get to them. All of them living through it.”

Dumbledore wavered for a moment, his outrage and magic dying off as he looked back at Harry with suddenly sullen eyes. “So that they can become like you? Killers?”

Harry sucked in a breath as he clenched his fingers back into his hands and his eyes started to burn. “… I would train them so they didn’t become like me. Make no mistake, Albus Dumbledore, I am not how I am because I was trained to be. I am not whom I am because I was brought up to fight, to kill to destroy.”

He shook his head at that and glared back at the headmaster, a small spark of hate in his eyes as he strangled down on his emotions. “When I was at the age of when I was in school, it was run as you would have a school run. When war broke out, we were told it was none of our concern, none of our business. They came for us, targeted us, and we were told we were children, and it was not our place to fight.”

Then his fist slammed down on Dumbledore’s desk like a crack of thunder, causing several things to jump. “But we still had to fight! Wishful thinking and good intentions didn’t prevent us from being attacked. Wanting us to have our childhoods didn’t stop us from watching our friends, our classmates, cut down in front of us!

“I have seen where good intentions like yours lead, Dumbledore. I have seen the good lives it costs. I have lived through the suffering it encourages. Ignorance is not going to save them; it will only leave them brittle and easy to break when they come from them!”

Harry took a slow deep breath, forcing himself to calm down, to rein in his emotions as he continued to glare at the bewildered and flustered man in front of him. “What I want for them, is for them to be able to survive, without having to become like them. And if that means I have to fight through your well-intentioned, stubborn stupidity, I will beat it into your head until it finally sticks.”

Dumbledore sat there, staring up into burning emerald eyes and he couldn’t help but stare. In them, he saw something that truly made him pause.

Conviction. It was not the kind he’d seen in Gellert’s eyes, with the lingering impurities of doubt and remorse, leaving it weak and vulnerable to the right angle. It was not the kind that he had seen in Tom Riddle’s eyes, even before he’d inadvertently allowed his escape from the man before him, that one had been a fire, raging and roaring without direction or control. That was a conviction that eagerly, greedily consumed everything it touched simply to keep feeding itself.

No. This was solid, icy steel, forged by pain and suffering, and through it, tempered into wisdom instead of bitter hatred and anger.

And it left him feeling a great swell of emotions he couldn’t begin to quantify.

Before either man could speak, a sudden melody filled the air, a warm rush of sweet notes that
seemed easily into their pounding hearts and soothed frayed tempers. Above them, flying in a small, lazy circle, Fawkes, the phoenix, had apparently had enough of the pair’s bickering and had decided to intervene. For a moment the bird merely sang, a soothing, gentle melody, before finally he fluttered down and came to rest on Harry’s shoulder, looking every bit as if he belonged there and gave the younger man a look.

In that look… Harry couldn’t quite quantify it. There was sadness, understanding, comfort and hope, all mingled together in a way that suddenly left him feel so very, very tired.

With a slow, almost boneless, collapse, Harry sat back into his chair, looking suddenly so very much older than Dumbledore believed him to be. “My parents were murdered by a dark wizard whom called himself a lord when I was a baby. What was left of my family were dead before I even had a chance to graduate. I lost friends and classmates of my own dealing with the way he waged ‘war.’”

He reached up and gently stroked against Fawkes’ feathers as the phoenix preened slightly beneath the attention. “People kept trying to keep me in the dark about as much of the ‘bad things’ as they could. Because I was a child. Because I shouldn’t have to be worried about it. They came up with excuse after excuse to try and shelter me. They wouldn’t fight, they wouldn’t let us fight; they just reacted.”

“But you are still here,” Dumbledore pointed out as he looked back at the man. “Surely…”

“I am here in spite of it, not because of it,” Harry corrected quietly as he stared back at Dumbledore. “And I didn’t win out of skill, or power, or because adults took responsibility for the mess that had been created on their watch. I lucked out. I tricked him into killing himself. If I hadn’t? If he had changed his mind, if he had used something else? He would have won.”

“I…” Dumbledore began to speak.

“If I can stop it, I will not let the world rely on luck or fate to keep it surviving.” Harry stated quietly. “I will not allow others to have the weight that was pressed on my shoulders be pressed on theirs. So, yes. I will teach children. I will teach them how to move, how to think, how to survive. Beyond that? If they want to learn how to fight, I will teach them.”

He paused a moment before slowly continuing. “And I will make sure they understand just what kind of damage they can do if they don’t take it seriously. I want them to grow up into men and women whom have the strength and the strength of character to do what is right instead of what is easy, Headmaster. And if I can teach them that one lesson, above all others? Then I will have done my job. Because the darkness lives where the light will not tread, because it is not so easily reached.”

As Albus saw what he could only take as a smug look on his familiar’s face, he leaned back. “I… see. I believe, Mr. Potter, that we have both let our emotions run away with us enough for today. Shall we continue this another evening?”

Wearily, Harry nodded his head as he looked back at the Headmaster.

“Very well. I will have our transfiguration teacher, Minerva McGonagall, show you to your quarters,” Dumbledore stated simply before looking at Fawkes. “Though I would appreciate the return of my familiar.”

“… Wot?” Harry stated with a blink. “After that?”
“I told you earlier, Mr. Potter. You are the only acceptable choice I can make in the current climate,” Dumbledore stated simply. “Thus, you are hired. The lesson plans of your predecessors will be made available to you and I will ask for your own lesson plans by August 15th at the latest. Any changes you’re making to the book list will need to be made as soon as possible, so I urge you to look over them all.”

“Right,” Harry repeated as he then stared back at Dumbledore for a moment, before groaning lightly as he rubbed at his face. “What the bloody hell am I getting myself into?”

“Why, the noblest pursuit one can have, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore stated with an innocent smile. “Education.”

Harry just knew that on his shoulder, Fawkes was laughing at him.

-o-o-o-

It was some days later that Harry was seated in the Hog’s Head in the nearby wizarding village of Hogsmeade, working through a variety of different scraps of parchment and journals as he would scribble at his own notes, while working to create his own lesson plan. Most of it was adapting the lessons he remembered from Remus, Crouch and, surprisingly, Snape, and then expanding on what he remembered missing out on from his less helpful teachers. So far, he’d figured out how to fit most of what he’d wanted to into the various years, but he was struggling to figure out exactly what order he really wanted to present things in.

“Well, you certainly seem to be having a fun time,” Charlus’ voice cut in as he took a seat across from Harry, a slightly bemused smirk on his lips.

“There will come a time, Charlus, when I will have my vengeance upon you for convincing me this was a good idea.” Harry stated coolly as he lifted his eyes and affixed the man with a look. “And when that times comes, you will beg for a mercy you know will never come.”

“Charming. Have you been taking lessons from my niece?” Charlus asked with a curiously bemused expression.

“What do you want, Charlus?” Harry asked, his attention returning to his papers.

“I wanted to see if you’d made any… progress.” Charlus stated delicately.

“I need the goblin forged blade before I try.” Harry answered as he moved to another page.

“And that would be why I am here.” A voice Harry didn’t automatically recognize cut in as another figure took a seat across from him.

Harry’s quill stilled before he looked up and found himself meeting a pair of steely hazel eyes framed by worn, wrinkled skin, and a steely grey mess of hair. “And you would be…?”

“Lucius Potter,” the man stated simply as he leaned forward, studying Harry now that he could meet the man’s eyes.

“Charmed,” Harry stated flatly before resuming returning to his work.

Lucius frowned slightly while Charlus stifled a smirk of amusement. “Head of the Potter family.”

“And your point?” Harry asked as he continued writing out his lesson plan.
For a moment Lucius could only stare at the man before his brow twitched slightly. “Normally, being the head of someone’s family would mean something to someone.”

“As I was not brought up in the wizarding world, and as no one bothered to try and teach me anything about why I should care about something like that, your statement means less than nothing to me.” Harry answered without looking up from his parchment. “And, as you came here with the bastard who set me up for this lovely bit of hell, I’m even less inclined to care.”

Charlus broke into an open chuckle at that. “Ah, but Harry, this is perfect for your needs!”

Harry slowly put down the quill before looking up and affixing Charlus with a look. “No, all I need is a day, two at the most, to deal with the basilisk and then the horcrux. You’re the one that somehow convinced me that I should see to all the bloody sprogs’ training myself instead of finding someone else suited to it.”

Sighing softly, Lucius looked over at Charlus, whom was merely smirking back at him. “Fine. He’s a Potter.”

Harry sighed and put his lesson plan aside for a moment and then just looked at Lucius. “What do you want? Because, if this is something about filial obedience, you’re talking to the wrong guy.”

“You wouldn’t be a Potter if you were,” Lucius stated with a sigh as he rubbed his forehead. “Being the head of the Potter family means trying to be Britain’s best cat herder, and failing miserably more times than not.”

“Don’t you mean kneazle herder?” Harry asked curiously.

“No, I meant cats,” Lucius stated flatly. “Kneazles will listen to you if they know you can be trusted. Cats simply don’t care and won’t listen no matter what.”

“What do you want then?” Harry stated simply as he started to slowly reorder the various items lain out in front of him.

“To make sure that my son James grows up to continue being a stubborn, willful man who does not flinch back in the face of adversity.” Lucius stated simply. “And that means ending this Voldemort as soon as possible. And if that can’t be done, making sure that he, and as many of his generation as possible, learn how to make sure that they have the character to make the choice about which side they’re on.”

Harry slowly nodded his head and groaned as he rubbed his temples then as he realized he was potentially looking at the man whom had been his grandfather. And he was named Lucius of all things. “I see. You don’t really make this easy, do you?”

Charlus snorted softly. “Come now, lad, would you really choose the easy way?”

“One of these days I’d like for it to at least be a viable alternative,” Harry answered with a sigh. “Or at least not be the one duped into always having to pick the other way.”

“When you’re older and wiser and can find the ones to who will do it for you.” Charlus stated with a bemused smile on his lips.

“… I was really afraid of that.”

-o-o-o-
Voldemort hissed in displeasure as he looked down over the corpse in front of him. It hadn’t exactly been easy to perform the necessary procedures but he was rapidly approaching the final step of his new creation. If only the worthless fool would stop bleeding so profusely.

Strapped down to the table before him, the man, a wizard he couldn’t be bothered to truly remember the name of, stared up at him with frozen, terrified eyes. His bare chest was cracked open, his heart, lungs and other organs exposed to Voldemort’s cold gaze. The smell of blood was mixed with the oily smoke of burning flesh as the bright tip of Voldemort’s wand continually, skillfully burned a series of runes down the sides of the exposed ribs, and then onto the still beating heart.

“I suppose I should say something soothing, something reassuring,” he stated, the words more out of idle boredom and a desire to break the lull of silence. “Something to let you know that your suffering will be over soon.”

His lips drew back into a cold, reptilian smirk as he lightly tapped the man’s heart. “It would be a lie, of course. And really, at a point like this…? What do lies matter?”

The chuckle that followed was coldly amused as he then leaned down and brought his wand out of the man’s chest and moved it towards his face. “Such a pity, for you, and for them, that I have to resort to such measures. To create something like you… I so much would have them fearing me above all else. But, as I am unlikely to have quite the level I desire any time soon… I will have to settle for their fear of what I bring with me instead.”

A cluck of his tongue and a shake of his head as he sided softly. “A shame I can’t let you scream, it would be so… invigorating. Alas, the sacrifices one makes for one’s work. And, all that thrashing and spitting and spasming… it would make this so… difficult.”

And he smiled then. “So, I’ll have to settle for ripping them from your mind instead.”

He took a moment to revel in the feeling, the sheer terror in the mind of the helpless wizard before him, before he continued his work, burning a series of runes beneath the man’s eye lids, then onto his eyes. Once he was satisfied with the work, he pulled the man’s jaw open, before pulling out his tongue to continue. All over the man’s body, the runes were carved, etched into his flesh by the tip of Voldemort’s wand.

Finally he sighed and shook his head, almost regretfully. “I’m afraid, that it’s almost time for this little bit to be finished. A pity.”

And with that, he turned away from the table and moved to a nearby cauldron, simmering, glowing, steaming liquid that looked like liquid silver.

Dipping his wand into it, he stirred it only once before pulling it out as it changed from a glowing silver to a pulsing, virulent crimson, clinging to the tip of his wand with a glowing thread. It stretched and grew and grew as he walked back the tip of Voldemort’s wand.

As the slow glow of red began to seep into the runes and spread, he slowly begin to let his grin grow to sinister proportions.
Yes, this had potential indeed.

-o-o-o-

Bellatrix Black was frowning heavily as she looked over her dresses. None of them would do. They were all heavy, puffy things, for balls and public appearances, or simple daily outings. Nothing for properly enticing a man’s attention.

This would not do. Not in the least. How was she supposed to catch his attention if she had nothing to catch his attention with?

“Well, Maeve, all these clothes and nothing right.” She almost pouted as she voiced her thoughts and slowly tapped her wand against her lower lip.

“… Do we even want to know, sister?” Andromeda spoke up as she and a nervous looking Narcissa walked into Bellatrix’s room. “What madness have you fallen into this time?”

“… Madness?” Narcissa asked, eyes wide as she looked fearfully at Bellatrix.

“It is simply a figure of speech, one that our sister is taking liberties with,” Bellatrix stated with a slight glower, before brightening. “But, now you both can help me!”

“And with what, pray tell?” Andromeda asked with a weary sigh. “Perhaps the destruction of the mound of mail from your suitors? I understand it might be a bit much too simply chuck onto an open flame. I’m not sure the wards could handle that much parchment going to flame at once.”

“I need something to wear,” Bellatrix stated imperiously before her lips broke into a slightly shy smile. “Something to attract a man’s attention.”

Narcissa stared. Andromeda arched a brow. Bellatrix took in both reactions and frowned.

“What? Is it so completely unbelievable that I would wish a man’s attention?” Bellatrix demanded with a huff.

“I think it is more we were wondering if it would be best for us to warn the poor man to settle his affairs.” Andromeda stated dryly. “Whom is the poor soul who has managed to catch your eye?”

Andromeda had grown consistently sharper in recent days, her words almost cutting, among everyone save Narcissa. A reaction to the end of their short lived neutrality. Or, at least what everyone thought.

“Father has informed me that the newest Hogwarts Professor is one Harry Potter.” Bellatrix stated as she looked at one of her tighter robes critically.

“Who?” Narcissa asked in confusion as she looked up to Andromeda for an explanation, only to see her sister’s face suddenly ashen.

“… You… you truly plan to see this through?” Andromeda asked, her voice trembling slightly as she stared back at Bellatrix. “He is…” There was a pause, before she licked her lips then continued. “He is a half blood, sister. Our family…”

“Our family will be taking his side; you should know this.” Bellatrix stated with a slight bite to her words. “The Knights broke our neutrality when they assaulted our father and the head of our family. What did you expect to happen? That we would turn a blind eye to this and fall on bent knee to our would-be oppressor?”
“Yes,” Andromeda stated faintly as she stared at Bellatrix, moving to the bed and sinking into it. “I… did not imagine anything could change Father and Uncle’s minds. But, the Storm Chaser, Bella? Do you understand what that will mean?”

“… The Storm Chaser?” Narcissa asked, her eyes widened and then sparkling. “He’s a Potter?!”

“Yes, he’s a Potter,” Bellatrix agreed with a roll of her eyes at Narcissa before she settled her gaze back onto Andromeda. “What were you expecting, sister? Surely you saw that this was coming? Even I could see that eventually the Knights would violate our neutrality. They were going to become our enemies sooner or later.”

“But…” Andromeda stared at Bellatrix, looking lost. “… How did this change? How did so much change?”

“How did what change?” Bellatrix was getting frustrated with her sister. She couldn’t understand why she seemed so utterly lost with the situation.

“Our family hates half-bloods and muggleborn!” Andromeda blurted out as she stared at Bellatrix wide eyed. “They hate anyone whom accepts them!”

Bellatrix just shrugged. “Our family is changing, Andromeda. And based on what I’ve seen? Is that truly a bad thing? All three of the current lords are half-bloods. All three. Not a single pureblood among them. We can either start blindly follow the lying mad man who destroys his own soul in a futile attempt at immortality, or we change and start looking at the bigger world.”

“A world that has the man you’re lusting after in it?” Andromeda said accusingly.

“Yes,” Bellatrix agreed. “Now, are you going to help me find something to wear or not?”

-0-0-0-

“He is not what I was expecting,” Albus Dumbledore said quietly as he lightly swirled a glass of brandy in his hand, taking a moment to savor the bouquet before taking a simple sip.

“You knew you were meeting a Potter and you were expecting him to be… what?” Alastor Moody asked with a snort as he sipped at his own flask. “Either belligerently blood thirsty, or wide eyed and impressionable?”

“Certainly not the latter,” Albus stated with a sigh of irritation as he affixed his friend with a look. “Our previous encounter had proven that he was not some wide eyed innocent. I was not expecting him to be so… rational. I expected more cynicism, more ruthlessness.”

“And that’s the problem with men like you, Albus,” Moody said sourly as he took another drink of his flask. “You automatically associate being willing and able to kill with becoming a monster.”

Dumbledore turned and looked at the man. “What would you call it then?”

“There was a muggle from across the pond that had a saying: ‘Those who abjure violence can only do so because others are committing violence on their behalf.’” Moody noted as he sipped his flask. “There will always be those out there who will try to use violence upon others for their own gain. It is only moderated by the presence of people whom will turn that violence back upon them should they do so.”

“That offers a desolate view of humanity,” Dumbledore responded with a frown before sipping at his drink. “I prefer to think of the nature of men as being something above such a need, so long as
“And as the muggle said, the only reason you can even believe that is because there have been men whom have stood between you, your students, and the public at large and those that would do harm.” Moody stated with a hard eyed glare at Dumbledore. “A fact that is so readily forgotten until the next Dark Lord rises up and men like you insist upon restraining and shackling those that would protect you.”

“I have already had this discussion with you before, Alastor, I have little interest in continuing it now.” Dumbledore said disapprovingly.

“Arrogance is something that betters no one,” Moody stated with a slight glare. “You might’ve accepted him, but you still think yourself his better.”

Dumbledore slightly scowled at Moody, before sighing softly. “What do you expect of me, Alastor? I cannot see the world as you see it. I will not see it. Because otherwise, why did I stand against Gellert?”

“You stood against him because he had become one of the men whom think that it is their right to judge what is best for the world, and that it is their right to use violence to achieve it.” Moody said simply. “You stood against him because good men were willing to stand up against him first, to be the wall that the wave of his armies broke upon, good men that fought and brought violence back against those that would do violence upon them.

“And if they hadn’t, how much more death and suffering and violence would’ve been spread?” Moody capped his flask and screwed it shut before shaking his head as he stood. “This time, though, this isn’t an argument of philosophy, Albus. Actual lives are at stake. How many are your high minded ideals worth?”

Turning, Moody cut off anything that Dumbledore could have said in response and moved to the floo. “Lucius Potter just received a goblin forged sword, commissioned on behalf of one Harry Potter. Might be worth knowing what he plans to do with something like that.”

And with that, a pinch of floo powder, and a few quiet words he was gone in a flash of emerald flames, leaving Albus behind in a sour mood he’d become entirely too familiar with of late.

Though, Moody’s words echoed in his head. What would someone like Harry Potter need with a goblin forged blade? With a sigh, he set down his brandy and moved to his personal collection of books. It would seem that he had some research to do.

-o-o-o-

“… Why in Merlin’s name did you have us meet you here of all places?” Lucius demanded as he warily looked at the entrance to the girl’s bathroom as he held the case containing the goblin forged blade.

“Because it’s where the entrance is located, why else?” Harry asked as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“Yes, Lucius, why else?” Charlus agreed with a bemused smile on his lips and a helpless shrug of his shoulders.

“… In a girls’… why the devil is it in here of all places?!” Lucius demanded with a huff and a glare.
“Don’t look at me,” Harry said as he walked towards a specific sink. “I just found it.”

“… I am getting entirely too old for this level of ridiculousness.” Lucius muttered sourly, but followed Harry anyway.

“But, we’re still here, now, aren’t we?” Charlus stated with a chuckle as he held out his wand at the ready.

“And we’re still here.” Lucius agreed with a huff.

“Open.” Harry hissed to the sink, causing it to transform into the entrance of the chamber.

“… You’re a parselmouth?” Lucius demanded, his eyes wide as he and Charlus stiffened in shock.

“I stole it from Riddle,” Harry agreed with a nod, causing the men to relax slightly. “And all it means is that I can get some snakes to listen to me. And most of them, aren’t actually too bad. They’d rather be left alone in peace and quiet. In a nice warm spot.”

The two elder Potters simply gave him a look.

“… Moving on,” Harry said with a slight grumble. “It’s a slide, so best to have a cushioning charm ready to go.”

The trip was remarkably smoother than it had been last time. There was only one shed skin and this one was rotted and almost completely decayed. It had been almost 30 years since Voldemort had been there.

When they finally reached the chamber entrance, Harry had turned to them and looked pointedly at the men. “All right, this is as far as you two go. At least until after I’ve dealt with the basilisk.”

“And why is it we’re not allowed to help?” Charlus demanded as he gave Harry a look the younger man was unused to seeing on his face, one of childish petulance. “We are both completely capable of…”

Lucius and Harry both just gave him a look, each of them with their arms crossed about their chests while he finally sighed. “Fine. Take away my school boy dreams.”

“Happily,” Harry and Lucius stated completely in sync before glancing at each other in slight surprise.

“That is mildly disturbing,” Charlus noted as he forced himself to regain his typical composure. “Though, I still wish you’d let us help.”

“I’d prefer to live to at least James’ graduation, thank you.” Lucius corrected as he opened up the case to reveal the sword inside.

Frowning slightly, Harry lifted out the silvery blade, a long sword instead of the slim rapier like blade that was Gryffindor’s sword. Taking a few swings of it, he pursed his lips, getting a feel for the weapon.

“What do you think?” Lucius asked curiously.

“It’s a sword,” Harry stated simply with a nod. “That’s about all I really know and I’m just going to make sure I stab it into the snake. What were you expecting? For me to be some kind of sword master?”
“Well, I had hoped you’d at least had some training,” Lucius stated with a wince as he watched how Harry handled the blade that had cost just short of a small fortune.

“Nope,” Harry stated. “Now, wish me luck.”

And with that, Harry opened the door, and shut it behind him.

For a moment he glanced around, taking in the relatively familiar sights of the chamber. With a slow nod of his head, he set to work, his magic flowing out, settling into worn stone and earth that was spread about the chamber from the centuries of decay. Calmly, deliberately, he enforced his will upon earthen pieces, forcing it to grow to his will.

This time there were no slithering wyrms, burying into the ground to explode up at a moment’s notice. Instead, a hulking brute took form, carved into a rough parody of a man, with huge club-like fists tipped in jagged talons. From the earth he created a sleek creature, a mix of cat and serpent, that calmly formed around the silver blade.

With the remaining stones and earth a slim, snake-like length slipped up and draped itself over the mouth of the statue that held Slytherin’s basilisk. Rough spikes, positioned like spikes pointed in, and the creature went still. Taking a moment to survey the scene, Harry nodded his head before positioning himself behind one of the columns, hiding himself from the sight of the snake and speaking.

“Speak to me, greatest of the Hogwarts Four.”

There was a great creaking yawn as the statue opened, just as it had before. Then, with a slow, almost tentative motion, Harry could hear the hiss filling the air. “Master? Have you returned for me, finally? Is it time for me again?”

Giving no response, Harry kept his eyes closed, keeping a feel on the magic he’d set out soaking into his creations. Slowly, tentatively, the basilisk stuck its head, partially out, its tongue flicking out. Then another pause, before it continued.

“No. You are not Master. Who are you, who thinks he can command me? Speak! Or I will end your miserable existence!”

When it received no answer, it slowly began to slip more fully out of the whole. “So be it…!”

As soon as its head and fully slipped out of the statue’s mouth, the creature looped around the hole tightened up, driving its stony spines into the basilisk’s hide as pulled the snake into a ligature. Small swelling pools of blood grew around the noose as the snake hand its head pulled against the roof of the hole. While the attempted strangulation was straining the basilisk, the hulking brute lumbered forward.

With a sudden rush it grabbed ahold of the snake’s snapping jaws, attempting force them open and wide.

Primal, wild panic flooded the basilisk and it shoved forward, ripping through the wrap about its throat and smashing into the brute Harry had created.

For a moment, the golem-like creation held its ground, but then slowly it began to bend, cracking groans heard as stone began to crack and break before the force of the snake’s push. Wild, snapping bites struck against the stone, its wild, thrashing force tearing the creature’s fingers from its frame. Finally it snapped at its waist, falling back as the basilisk surged forward trying to escape.
Harry fought down a swearing breath as he focused. His golem’s arms snagged hold of snake’s neck and weighted it down. The broken lower part of its body fell back, legs reshaping, then clamping down, locking around the basilisk as well.

Unfortunately, there was simply too much room for the monster to thrash its coils about as it hissed with wordless fury and tried to escape the stone holding it in place.

With a barely repressed growl, Harry sent the sleek creature he’d created running forward at high speeds, straight towards the basilisk. The restrained beast did the only thing it could; it snapped down on the creation as soon as it was in range, swallowing it almost whole. Inside of the basilisk’s mouth, the creature pushed itself deeper and then suddenly hunched forward, revealing the goblin forged blade erupting out of its spine.

Sinking hooked nails into the soft flesh of the basilisk’s sensitive tongue, it waited as the snake’s jaws flung open, tongue flailing about, before snapping shut. And, as soon as the mouth closed, the creature froze in shock as it could feel the thick, long blade penetrating up into the soft flesh at the back of its mouth, into its brain. When the still twitching basilisk collapsed bonelessly onto the ground, Harry almost sighed in relief before concentrating on the remains of his humanoid brute and having it continue crushing the basilisk’s throat, tighter and tighter.

When he was finally satisfied that the creature was well and truly dead, Harry let the sight escape his lips and made a gesture. The earth around the sword almost melted away from it, flowing out of the snake’s mouth, before moving over each of the basilisk’s eyes, covering up the deadly gaze. One of these days, he really was going to stop doing things this bloody stupid.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t going to be today.

-o-o-o-

Groaning softly, Harry carried the case containing the blade, now imbued with the venom of the basilisk, to his room, ready to call it a day. He’d had to promise Lucius and Charlus a return trip to see about harvesting the basilisk and exploring what was left of the chamber. Now, though, he just wanted to wash off the feeling of grime and grit that simple cleaning spells would not remove.

And stow the blade somewhere safe.

That would be what was important.

As soon as he opened his door, however, he found his wand in his hand and pointed straight towards a wide-eyed looking young woman staring back at him.

A dark eyed, dark haired beauty, dressed in a tight, elegant looking dress that would be borderline scandalous for the wizarding world. A beauty with her hair done up, her face artfully made up, and the press of cleavage presented around a rim of black lace. Unfortunately, he also recognized this particularly beauty.

Bellatrix Black stared back at him for a moment, before lightly licking her lips and nervously pressing them together. “… Hello, again?”

Harry had a feeling this was going to be a long day.
Bellatrix felt suddenly small and uncertain as she stood in front of him. Her stubborn determination and desire felt suddenly hollow, inadequate, for the task at hand as she could swear his cool gaze was slowly dissecting her. There was a frightening lack of desire, a lack of want, or even emotion in those eyes that left her wanting to turn and flee.

“What, exactly, did you think that you’re trying to do, Ms. Black?” Harry asked with a kind of bland curiosity that immediately left her wishing he wasn’t standing between her and the door.

Shifting nervously, she swallowed and asked in an uncertain tone. “Um, seduce you?”

“I see.” And suddenly he was moving, like a serpent as he was upon her, lips drawn back, teeth bare like a wolf before his prey as his eyes burned with a predatory intensity. “And, what? You thought that all you would have to do was look pretty, bat your lashes and wear something… revealing?”

If the absurdity of the situation wasn’t leaving him reeling, he would’ve laughed at what she considered revealing. There was a kind of old fashioned appeal to it, he had to admit. A black velvet corset cut low, to reveal a hint of cleavage, dusted behind an artful decoration of black lace, with a tight, matching shrug of that same, elegance black lace that reached all the way down to her wrists.

If she hadn’t worn a full set of heavy skirts with it, cut low enough to reveal her black leather heeled boots, and opted instead for a more “modern” skirt, something flowing and tight, cut up to at least her knee, she would’ve had more impact. To a boy whose teen years had been the 90s, it was more than a little quaint and old fashioned. To the same boy whom had spent much of that time growing up in the muggle world, it only emphasized that view.

Bellatrix Black was, he was coming to realize, shockingly naïve. Easily swayed and influenced, at least if it was by someone she respected. He was starting to understand exactly how she’d been molded into the infamous Bellatrix Lestrange. Some of the flashes he could see when she looked at him…

She remembered a milder version of that look on Lestrange’s face. When she looked at Voldemort.

He could see the dark passion in her eyes, the hunger that could easily be pushed to madness under the right pressures. She wanted to be challenged, to fight. To prove herself at the end of her wand, and the fall of her opponent.

Now, however, he seemed to be finding himself the focus of that passion, that desire, instead of Voldemort. He just knew, somewhere, his godfather was laughing at him. There was, of course, the obvious solution for how to deal with this, to put himself back on familiar grounds. Reject her and sent her running to Voldemort.

As he looked at the vulnerable, uncertain woman in front of him, he found that he didn’t particularly like that idea. From what he understood, he had intervened at exactly the part in her life when she was taking her first steps down the path of a Death Eater, solidifying her fate as Voldemort’s hand. She had not yet started to kill and torture anyone. At least, not physically.

And… she was a very attractive witch. One who was practically throwing herself at him. It had
been so long since he’d had any…

Quickly he banished those thoughts. She might not be Bellatrix Lestrange but he was still Harry Potter. Which meant that he couldn’t just take advantage of her.

As much as he knew a part of him truly wanted to.

With a sigh, he spoke. “Miss Black. I’m going to assume you have a fairly good idea of how this is inappropriate?”

She flinched as a blush rose up her cheeks.

“I thought so,” he stated with a nod, then a sigh. “Exactly why is it you thought this was something you should do anyway?”

Bellatrix found herself shifting about, finding everything about his room suddenly so very interesting as long as it kept her from looking back at him. Saying she wanted him to court her didn’t exactly feel like the smart thing to say. With those vibrant green eyes she could still feel staring back into her, she couldn’t seem to come up with any other excuse.

As she managed to hold her tongue, he sighed and she flinched again. “If you will not say, perhaps I should simply contact your parents and Head of House?”

“No!” Her response was sudden vehement. “We haven’t… they haven’t declared an end to our neutrality yet!”

“Neutrality?” Harry asked as he arched a brow, now more confused and curious.

“… In the conflicts between the lords?” she offered back, feeling more than a little wary and confused as she watched him.

“… What lords?” He was trying very, very hard to fight down the sudden sinking feeling he was certain was rising up in his chest.

“… Dumbledore, Voldemort and… you?” She stared at him as she offered the explanation. Didn’t he know?

“Bloody hell. Already?” Harry muttered sourly as he reached up and rubbed his face. “Dammit, Charlus, I was supposed to have more time than this.”

“… What does Uncle Charlus have to do with this?” Bellatrix asked carefully.

“Too much,” Harry said with a sigh as he slowly shook his head. “This is…”

There was a pause as he found himself catching his words before he revealed thing she had no place knowing. Instead he pushed past her, dropping the wrapped up sword he’d been carrying with him carelessly upon his bed, before turning to look back at her. He watched as her eyes were caught flicking back towards the now unblocked door before looking back at him.

“The door is open, Ms. Black,” he stated simply and shook his head. “I’m not trying to keep you here.”

“… Why not?” It blurted past her lips but, once it left… “What do I have to do to interest you?!!”

Harry arched a brow as he looked at her and then tilted his head to the side as he struggled to come up with an answer to that.
Instead, she seemed to take his silence as encouragement. “Do you think I throw myself at every passing man whom is reasonably attractive? That I dress like this because I enjoy the feeling of dirty, roaming eyes upon my skin?”

There was an almost physical disgust in her voice as she glared at him. “I. Dressed. For. You.”

“… You do realize I grew up in the muggle world, yes?” he pointed out blandly as he looked back at her. “Being a half blood and all?”

She froze slightly at that. That… well, she hadn’t known that. She’d actually assumed that…

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Muggle fashion is much less… restrained,” he stated, fighting the way his lips wanted to tug into a smirk. “And they stopped wearing skirts with that much material fifty years or so back.”

“… what?” Bellatrix couldn’t help it; she had to stare at him.

“The top is nice and all, elegant, with a bit of an old fashioned sophistication,” he went on, feeling a bit of his own babbling coming into place. “But the skirt is really where you lose me. I’m sorry, but it’s just too old fashioned.”

She continued to stare at him, mouth hanging slightly as her eyes were caught wide and disbelieving.

“So if you’re going to try and seduce me again, I’d suggest spending some time in the muggle world and get caught up on the fashions there instead.” he went on, feeling a degree of satisfaction at the idea. That would keep the bloody woman away. As much progress as she’d made, Harry just couldn’t see her willingly submersing herself in muggle culture.

“You… you…” She struggled to form the words staring back at him. Suddenly she very much wished she had left her wand more readily accessible.

“If there’s nothing else?” Harry asked leadingly as he looked at her over the rims of his glasses.

“… This is not over,” she declared firmly, glaring at him before turning and stalking off.

With a kind of sinking certainty, Harry realized that maybe, just maybe, he had pushed things an ounce too far.

Shaking his head, he waved his wand and sent the door shutting itself before focusing his attention back on the sword. For the moment… well, he was just going to have to try and get some sleep. It had been too damned long of a day.

-o-o-o-

Andromeda could hear her sister well before she appeared before her. Her steps were loud, angry, her breath heavy and she slammed every door behind her. When she appeared, her lips were curled back into a snarl, her eyes wild and angry with her hair in disarray.

“Is there a problem, sister?” The words left her lips before she could even help herself, before she looked over exactly what her sister was wearing.

Ah. She had made her move on the Storm Chaser. And it had not gone to her expectations.

She was not, however, expecting her sister to answer, not with words, but a scream of frustration.
“That bad?” Andromeda arched a brow as her sister took a moment to take slow, deep breaths before finally calming down enough to speak coherently.

“Apparently I dressed ‘too old fashioned’,” Bellatrix stated through gritted teeth as she took a slow deep breath. “As he grew up in muggle society, ‘the skirt was just too much.’ He calls this too old fashioned!”

As Bellatrix gestured to her skirts, Andromeda was absently nodding her head as she distractedly stated. “For the muggleborn and half-bloods it is.”

Both sisters froze, though; while Andromeda’s eyes widened, Bellatrix’s narrowed as she looked at her sister dangerously. “And… exactly how do you know this?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Andromeda stated as she averted her eyes completely away from her sister. Reflexively, her eyes flicked only for an instant towards her closet. Unfortunately, the instant was enough for Bellatrix to follow her gaze.

 “… Sister… exactly what have you done?” Bellatrix stated slowly as she assumed her full height, looking down at her almost identical sister.

“… As I said, sister, I have no idea what you could possibly mean.” Andromeda insisted, unable to fully meet her sister’s gaze.

Bellatrix, however, followed the direction of her sister’s reflexive look from before and began to purposely walk towards the closet. Andromeda’s eyes immediately widened in response and she stood up straighter as she moved to bodily intercept her sister.

“There is nothing in there that concerns you, sister!” Andromeda stated swiftly as she stood there, firmly in front of her sister, with her eyes visibly fighting off panic.

When the sudden stiffening of the body bind hex caused her to turn into a human statue, the panic in her eyes became rampant. As she could feel her body starting to fall, she almost missed the cushioning charm that let her land gently on the ground. Helpless, she could only watch and blink as Bellatrix stepped over her and reached the closet.

Then there was silence, broken only by the sound of the door being opened and her sister stepping inside.

Cold dread terror swelled up in her stomach. Bellatrix was going to find out! Her family would find out! She was about to be thrown out!

Andromeda Black had known that she would end up marrying her boyfriend, Ted Tonks, since just before the end of term at Hogwarts. She had also known that as soon as that was revealed to the rest of her family, she would be cast out. Ted Tonks was, after all, a mudblood to them, and Toujours Pur. The Blacks had to be pure.

No matter what her sister thought, the family’s stance on that would not change so quickly. Her mother and aunt had proven that. Her uncle might have displayed a brief spark of defiance to her aunt, backed by Uncle Charlus, but it wouldn’t last.

She had thought she’d at least be able to graduate Hogwarts first, though.

“What are these?” Bellatrix’s voice was not as angry as it had been; there was more genuine curiosity in it. “And, is this a… dress? But it’s so… tiny.”
Oh, sweet Morgana, of course her sister would find her dress with the mini skirt right off the bat.

“… And are these are pants of some kind. But they’re… wouldn’t they just… cling?” Now Andromeda could hear the blush in her sister’s voice. “And what manner of material is this?”

As it stood, Andromeda was rather helpless and quite unable to respond to her sister’s questions.

“Is… is this what he was talking about? I… never knew muggle fashion was so… so…” There was a pause before Andromeda suddenly found herself able to move again. “Andromeda, sister… are these muggle clothes?”

Slowly, warily, Andromeda stood facing away from her sister for a moment, before collecting herself and keeping her face carefully blank. When she turned to face Bellatrix, she didn’t find the anger an accusation she was expecting. Instead, she found only confusion and vulnerability.

“Is… is this why he didn’t want me?” Bellatrix asked, her voice small as she clutched at the dress she’d found. “Because… I wasn’t wearing something like this?”

Andromeda was left suddenly feeling almost as lost and uncertain as Bellatrix looked. As long as she could remember, Bellatrix had been a strong personality, almost refusing to show even the slightest weakness. To see her like this…

Sighing, Andromeda looked at her sister and parted the dress with what she was wearing. “I… could only guess it’s more about what it represents. As you said, he is a half blood, and, as you also said, he grew up in the muggle world. If you don’t know enough about the muggle world to fit in, how could you be with a man who apparently is very comfortable there?”

Privately she rather doubted it was the case. The man likely didn’t believe she was any different from the would-be thug and murderer he had stopped her from becoming. It disturbed her on some level to see the man whom had casually slaughtered the Knights of Walpurgis and had used her sister as his messenger, become the object of Bellatrix’s desires.

“Truly?” The hope and life suddenly seemed to bubble back up in to her sister’s eyes.

It disturbed her, but it did not surprise her.

“It might be,” Andromeda agreed with a slight nod as she continued to watch her sister like she was an irritated viper.

“You can help me then, can’t you?” Bellatrix stated, an eager hunger in her eyes as she leaned forward. “You have these; you must know more!”

Andromeda stared back at her sister, eyes wide and blinking. “… Sister… Bellatrix, are you asking me to… teach you how to go muggle?”

When Bellatrix nodded eagerly, Andromeda slowly rubbed her forehead. This… was not what she expected. Looking back at the eagerness in Bellatrix’s eyes, she wondered if perhaps exile would have been preferable.

-o-o-o-

“So, what do you think?” Charlus asked as he looked over his tumbler of whiskey at Lucius Potter.

“I have no thoughts I wish to dwell on,” Lucius stated as he sipped upon his own drink.
“And those you don’t want to dwell upon?” Charlus pressed quietly.

“Doesn’t that defeat the purpose of not dwelling upon them?” Lucius asked rhetorically before Charlus’ look made him snort. “He is… not exactly what I was expecting.”

“Heh,” Charlus nodded his head in agreement. “Harry seems quite happy to defy expectations, both good and ill.”

“He is crass, blunt, and unsophisticated,” Lucius stated simply. “But, also skilled, pragmatic, and…”

“Too much like you?” Charlus finished, clearly amused.

“I am sure I do not need to acknowledge what you might be implying, do I, cousin?” Lucius asked with a dangerous narrowing of his eyes.

“Of course not, cousin, of course not.” Charlus’ amusement did not falter in the slightest.

Lucius stared, unamused at him for a long moment, before sighing as he slumped back. “The size of that beast… To think it was hiding under Hogwarts all these years, and in the girl’s loo of all places!”

“Indeed,” Charlus agreed, sobriety quickly returning to his features as he leaned back. “And he managed to kill it.”

“While impregnating that blade with its venom.” Lucius shuddered a bit at the thought. “A sword like that… I doubt there’s much it could not destroy. Horcruxes be damned, that thing could likely carve through the most heavily warded items in existence.”

“Which is what these Horcruxes are, unfortunately,” Charlus agreed with a grimace of distaste, before the sound of the floo flashing hit them. “Also, I took the liberty of inviting my nephew and his brother in law.”

“… Must you?” Lucius asked with a measure of distaste wrinkling over his features. “I know you have assured me that they have been forced to take stock of their situation, but…”

“I believe that, in the end, this will benefit us all.” Charlus stated seriously before walking over to the floo and answering. “Yes?”

“You know who it is, Uncle,” Cygnus Black stated back through the floo with a look of ill pleasure. “You were the one who insisted upon this, after all.”

“I do have to take at least some precautions, nephew,” Charlus stated before stepping back, wand at the ready as he lightly gestured for Lucius to do the same. “Whenever you’re ready.”

And in a flash, Cygnus and then Orion Black appeared before them, both dusting off ash from their clothing. After a moment, Orion’s eyes found Lucius’ and he inclined his head in greeting. “Potter.”

“Black,” Lucius agreed, raising his glass lightly but making no move to rise from his seat.

“Do take a seat,” Charlus advised as he gestured to the empty chairs across from Lucius’ and his own as he retook it. “I believe we have a great deal to discuss.”

Sighing, Cygnus waited for Orion to be seated before setting himself and speaking. “You implied
something akin to an alliance.”

“I do believe that you now understand that ‘serving’ under this ‘Lord Voldemort’ would not be in your best interests,” Charlus stated. “And that his influence upon our society would do neither of our beliefs much good.”

“A point,” Orion stated as he leaned back in his seat, elbows resting on the arms and fingers steepling in front of his face. “And in light of recent revelations, I find it prudent to… reevaluate my family’s priorities.”

“Truly?” Lucius asked as he arched a brow towards Orion. “I find that… surprising.”

Orion grimaced in distaste. “We have three lords. All of them half-bloods. Each of them capable of dispatching any of us if pressed to. Likely without too much effort if what I saw was valid…”

“Oh?” Lucius asked as he tilted his head to the side. “I have yet to see either in action. Care to elaborate?”

“It took me over a week to track down even references to some of the spells Riddle used,” Orion stated with a shudder. “Spells that have been lost for generations. Even one would’ve been impressive. To use the number he did? It is, I will admit, terrifying.”

“And yet,” Cygnus continued quietly as he settled back into his seat, “it was not he who was the victor. Storm Chaser… I freely admit, I’m not sure how he did what he did. To have created and guided so many of those constructs all at once. To take a curse like fiendfyre and turn it back upon its caster…”

“It was…” Orion paused a moment before his face twisting into displeasure. “It was like being caught up in a whirlwind. It was all we could to do simply stay out of the way and survive. If we had been the actual targets of that abomination, we would not still be here if the Storm Chaser had not been there.”

“Harry is an interesting fellow,” Charlus agreed with a nod of his head. “Before, though, what other methods do you know of for the destruction of one of these horcruxes?”


“… Beyond that?” Lucius asked carefully as he eyed the Blacks. “There must be…”

“Obscure rituals, and magics that destroy the soul or expel it. Or ones that destroy and consume magic. That’s why basilisk venom works. It destroys everything, even the magic binding the soul fragment.” Orion stated simply as he wearily leaned back in his sea. “And yes, ever since they were first mentioned, I’ve taken the time to go back over the records. Your Storm Chaser has hit upon a rather ideal method of destroying them.”

“An expensive method,” Lucius stated sourly. “Not to mention dangerous.”

“He still lives, and he now has the blade,” Cygnus stated with a canting of his head. “Does anything else matter?”

“He is a Potter,” Lucius stated flatly. “As such, my responsibility to look after, in case he does something so foolish as to get himself killed, it should be despite my efforts to prevent it, not due to him simply doing something insanely life threatening and not bothering to inform me of it until it is entirely too late for me to do anything about it!”
“So, you wish for him to stop being a Potter?” Charlus asked, hiding his smile behind his glass.

Cygnus coughed to cover his laugh while even Orion’s lips twitched slightly, but then he sighed. “I don’t know if ‘Storm Chaser’ or ‘Storm Bringer’ is more accurate. Where he goes, everything is left on chaos in his wake. Everything tossed up into the air, left to fall into chaos and uncertainty, even beliefs held onto for generations.”

“That can be a good thing,” Lucius noted quietly as he looked back at the man, then quietly sipped at his drink.

“Where we come from helps make up who we are,” Orion countered back. “We follow after our fathers and their fathers before them. If we do not honor where we come from, what becomes the point of even having a history?”

“To learn from it and build upon it,” Charlus answered this time as he looked back, staring not at Orion but at Cygnus. “Our fathers will always be our fathers; they teach us what they have learned but it is up to us to build upon it, to grow it beyond what it was before us.”

“It was good enough for them.” Orion snapped back, sinking into his chair, glowering quietly at Charlus.

“And tell me, do you want what you have to be good enough for your sons?” Lucius asked back quietly as he looked piercingly at Orion. “Because I know that what I want for James is far more than this. I want him to rise up, to surpass me, to be better than me.”

Orion opened his mouth to protest before remembering the lingering darkness of his home and the look of stubborn determination on Sirius’ face when he’d asked to see the memories. Was this the life he wished for his son? If he’d been asked not long ago, it would’ve been yes.

Now, though? Now he didn’t really know. The world had suddenly become a confusing, terrifying place. It was filled with men that could cut down men, wizards, like grain before the thresher. Men who could, would, end his line.

The past glories could not save them. Following after the vengeance hungering hypocrite would not save them. No, instead he could see now it would simply hasten their destruction. Change had come, and no longer was what they knew certain.

“I do not think that the past should be forsaken,” Cygnus spoke up, his voice careful and measured as he voiced his own thoughts, “but we cannot be so focused upon it that we do not see the present, and cannot look to where we are headed. The glories of the past, of our forbearers, are just that: the glories of the past.

“We cannot live on them. They are not ours, they are the laurels of those whom we came from, and now, I find myself thinking we ill honor them by resting upon them.”

“Well said, nephew, well said,” Charlus agreed with a nod of his head as he sipped his drink. “It is too easy to forget that there is a whole world out there beyond these simple isles we make our home upon. We might fail to make our own mark upon them, but we leave a chance to our children, their children, and beyond. Can we ask for more?”

“To live to see it?” Orion asked rhetorically as he looked at his drink before sighing softly. “But, for my sons and the future they might have… We each have a legacy to protect. And perhaps… perhaps that is what we should’ve been doing. Protecting the future instead of seeking to take it from others.”
“They are someone’s child,” Lucius stated quietly. “For good or ill. They are someone’s child. That is why we do not rush to spilling blood. But, so are we, and for our children, we will not flinch from it when they come for ours. A fine line to follow. A dangerous one to track.”

“But one that it is necessary,” Charlus agreed. “Otherwise you become either the monster in the dark that you fought against, or you stand there, with bare throat, waiting to be prey. We may not always be hunters, but we will never be prey. Tell me, cousin, will you?”

Orion stared back at Charlus, fingers clenching upon the glass in his grip and staring back at him, before releasing a slow, sharp hiss of breath. “No, cousin, I will not.”

“Then, I believe we have much more to discuss,” Lucius stated simply as he leaned forward. “And even more work to do.”

Silently, Orion nodded in agreement.

-o-o-o-

Balefully Voldemort turned his gaze across the small clutch of muggle homes. They were nothing of importance. In fact, they had been selected more at whim and fancy than anything.

But, they would make an excellent testing ground.

He didn’t even bother looking behind him as he spoke, gesturing. “Go. Kill them. Kill them all.”

The figure that followed his command moved with a convulsing, twitching gait, seeming to suddenly, jerkily snap from movement to movement. Fingers, arms curled back against its chest, as if reflexively protecting it as empty reddened eyes stared, bug eyed and open at the buildings in front of it. Its lips pulled back, thin and tight against its gums, revealing bloody, and almost rotting flesh surrounding jagged, uneven teeth.

Then it opened its mouth, then let loose a hissing, warbling sound, like a high pitched whistle, before it surged forward and suddenly pressed its hands against the frame of the door on the first building.

Immediately a twisting, rust colored miasma surged out from beneath its touch, rapidly spreading across the walls of the home. And as it passed, wood, stone and metal twisted and warped. Glass cracked and shattered as windows were crushed, and shingles bowed down as the roof seemed to collapse in on itself.

Then the screams began. Raw, pure terror ripped out of the throats of an entire family. Standing a distance away, Voldemort closed his eyes and savored the sounds before, one by one, they were suddenly, violently, cut off.

From the broken window, something with long, spidery limbs emerged, skittering about with a girl’s head with long, limp hair hiding empty, gaping sockets rimmed with teeth as its jaw hung open, with a bulging sack of eyes staring out, blinking and looking seemingly everywhere at once.

A fist ripped through a wall, a heavy, thick knuckled, brutish thing, its flesh torn back to reveal bloody bone. Following it, shoulders hunched forward, spine pronounced, every vertebrae pushing up, almost breaking the skin. Its jaw was exaggerated, thick, heavy with boar-like tusks. If one looked closely enough, however, they could see that the body vaguely showed evidence that it had once been female.

Behind it stumbled what looked to be a man, long strips of leathery flesh hanging off of it, tipped
in bony hooks as hand-like feet gripped at the ground. His face was impossibly stretched out and long, eyes held open by straps and hooks as they also held his mouth pulled wide into a mockery of a grin. When the brute in front of it stepped too close, its arms flashed out and, with a crack, the strips of leather flash flayed across the brute’s arms, making it squeal and retreat.

Voldemort stared at them for a moment before smiling, his lips curling back as he began to slowly, darkly, let loose a burning, twisted laugh.

“You think you can keep them safe, Storm Chaser? You think you can steal their fear of me?” His unnatural eye burned as he watched his creation move to repeat the same process at a second home. “Fine.”

He paused, his words soft as he let the darkness and shadows wrap about him. “But let us see how you fare against fears, nightmares made flesh and blood, hmm? How will you save them, against all the things the dark, wretched pits a mortal mind can conjure up?”

When his creation turned his head, he looked back at Voldemort and screamed. Or at least as close to screaming as he could and jerked his hands back. Instantly, the house seemed to snap back together, shuddering there where it stood. Then it quivered once and collapsed.

In that same jerking, distorted movement, he moved hands again curled back against his chest.

Behind him, Voldemort smiled, watching. The fool could chase all the storms he wanted. Voldemort would bring the nightmares to drown them out into nothing.

-o-o-o-

Harry sighed as he leaned back in his chair and stared at the silvered length in front of him. The goblin forged blade caught the light, shining brightly along its edge. He could use it, take it up to the seventh floor and into the Room of Requirement. Just one little stroke and the deed would be done and, with it, his need to remain at Hogwarts.

“An interesting piece, Mr. Potter,” Albus Dumbledore’s voice intruded upon his thoughts. “I find myself wondering what you plan to do with it.”

Stiffening in response, Harry slowly turned his head and affixed the man with a hard look. “And I find myself wondering if suddenly the bounds of personal privacy have stopped holding any meaning for you.”

“When I find one of my teachers meeting with non-staff members in a clandestine manner before somehow vanishing from the sight of the wards, a feat that should, I admit, not be possible, their meaning changes dramatically. When he then meets with a most recent graduate, a young woman, alone in his quarters, it changes even more.”

Harry snorted softly at that. “Ms. Black somehow came to the belief that it would be a grand idea to come to my room for the purpose of my seduction. I disabused her of the notion, I assure you.”

“And you and your family’s disappearance?” Dumbledore asked, pressing firmly as he stared back at Harry.

Only, Harry stared back, directly into Dumbledore’s eyes, his gaze both daring and warning.

And Dumbledore would admit some slight bit of intimidation. Few were those whom would meet his eyes that way. Knowledge plain in them that he both knew of Dumbledore’s skill at Legimency and warned him that it’s use would not be tolerated.
“They brought me the blade so I could kill the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets, thereby impregnating it with its venom.” Harry answered as blandly as he could.

“… To what purpose?” Dumbledore asked, neither belief nor disbelief tinging his tone.

“Because it’s the safest method of a destroying a Horcrux I know of.” Harry answered as he looked down the length of the blade. “Quickest, too.”

“Horcrux.” There was a look of fascinated horror on Dumbledore’s face. “You… this… Such a thing is beyond horrendous.”

“Yes,” Harry agreed with a nod, “but that is the kind of man Tom Riddle is.”

Instead of looking surprised, Dumbledore merely looked resigned. “I had suspected something of the sort from him. I had hoped to be wrong.”

“I’ve found two of them,” Harry stated simply. “One of them, in fact, hidden in this school.”

“WHAT?!” The light in Dumbledore’s eyes exploded like a star as he stood up straight and demanded. “WHERE?!”

“Secret room on the seventh floor,” Harry answered, not looking even the slightest bit intimidated or surprised by the display of emotion on Dumbledore’s face. “It’s been responsible for your inability to keep a defense teacher for more than a year lately.”

Dumbledore stared at him before sighing wearily as his shoulders slumped in defeat. “I had suspected such, however I could find no evidence of such a spell. No curse, no jinx, no hex, no ward, no enchantment, nothing.”

“Riddle is a genius,” Harry admitted freely as he shook his head. “Especially when it comes to the more esoteric of dark arts. I wouldn’t be surprised you couldn’t find it.”

“I am, if you will recall, Mr. Potter, somewhat learned in those esoteric arts myself.” Dumbledore noted with a slight bit of amusement. “It is no small feat to find something I have not.”

“Not if you’re unwilling to reach into the dark places no sane man would step foot into,” Harry stated and shook his head. “You represent the best the past can offer, ancient magics that require skill and discipline beyond what most can imagine. Voldemort… the worst. The depraved, the uncaring.”

“And where, Mr. Potter, does that leave you?” Dumbledore stated pointedly.

“Someone who stumbled around blindly until he found a path that led not to the past and the secrets waiting to be rediscovered, but one that was forged by his own footfalls.” Harry stated it simply as he chuckled slightly. “I tried something new. As luck would have it, it worked.”

“And, if you know not the secrets of the past, then how do you know that your path is your own and not one merely overgrown since it was last tread?” Dumbledore countered back with a slight smile on his face.

“If it’s over grown and gone, is it really a path still?” Harry shot back before shrugging a bit. “But it hardly matters. I didn’t follow any of those old secrets to get where I am.”

“A point, perhaps,” Dumbledore admitted before sighing as he leaned back, watching Harry warily. “Of late I seem to find myself on the receiving end of lectures with an unsettling
“Oh?” Harry asked, arching a brow up slightly but saying nothing else as he waited for him to continue.

“Indeed,” he agreed, humming for a moment into the silence that lingered between them and before continuing. “I am not a warrior, Mr. Potter. I am a teacher, an instructor. And perhaps above all else, a scholar.”

“Most people aren’t warriors, Headmaster.” Harry stated simply quietly as he tilted his head to the side. “And those that are… tend become one of four things.”

“Oh?” It was Dumbledore’s turn to arch a brow, prompting Harry to continue.

“Something else, very dead, very broken, or very good.” Harry stated simply and softly as he looked at the Headmaster. “Most fall into the first three categories. Too few into the last.”

“And where does that leave you, Mr. Potter?” Dumbledore asked quietly as he looked at the man.

“Sometimes, I think, the last. Most, I think the third,” Harry admitted simply as he tilted his head to the side and stared back at the blade. “Of course, those that knew me always told me it was the last.”

“… Do you enjoy killing, Mr. Potter?” Dumbledore asked softly as he stared back at Harry intently.

“I take neither pleasure nor displeasure from taking a life, Albus Dumbledore,” Harry stated softly as he looked back into the man’s eyes. “It simply is. A man who has willingly raised his hand to intentionally strike down another, to intend to kill, maim, or torture, will willingly do so again. And if they have raised that hand against me, they will even more willingly do it to another.

“So I cut them down and leave their fate those waiting on the other side.” Harry tilted his head to the side. “If they find damnation or redemption there, it is not my choice to make.”

“They could still change their ways. They could still do good,” Dumbledore pressed as he stared back at Harry.

“Could they? Perhaps. Would they? Perhaps,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head before shrugging again. “But, if the world were fair, would they have become what they did?”

Dumbledore sighed as he looked back at Harry. “That is not a view I can endorse, Mr. Potter.”

“As long as you take responsibility for the repercussions the actions your views limit you to.” Harry responded simply as he shook his head.

“Repercussions?” Dumbledore asked with a brow arched.

“You could cut down an opponent in a moment. Capturing him alive will take you five minutes,” Harry stated softly. “One of your allies was killed in three minutes after you focused on capturing your opponent. If you had cut down that opponent, you would have been able to save your ally and more.

“Bloody math,” Harry stated simply and shook his head. “Mercy requires a position of unquestionable superiority, Professor. Without it, in battle it costs more blood than it saves.”
“Life is more than a set of numbers to run, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore stated with a frown creasing his face. “It cannot be so coldly assessed and distilled.”

“In war it is.” Harry responded back with a sad shake of his head. “But your belief is why you should not be involved in war. Clinging so tightly to those ideals… while admirable, it’ll only cause more problems than it solves.”

“And you would instead have me do nothing?” Dumbledore asked, a tinge of anger rippling through his voice.

“I would think that healing and protecting would be something you’d find preferable,” Harry stated blandly instead. “And researching.”

Dumbledore twitched slightly at that statement before slightly inclining my head. “Yes, I would, however…”

“You’re no longer the only one Voldemort fears.” Harry stated quietly as he looked back at Dumbledore. “You’re no longer the only one he knows could beat him. End him. This war, it is not yours to fight on the front lines. Stay where you’d do the best.”

“And what of you then? Would you not, as you said, be best out there, on the front lines then?” Dumbledore asked, arching a brow. “Instead of here, in this school?”

“A hammer that knows not where to strike damages what it does not mean to and itself,” Harry stated ruefully. “One of my teachers used to tell me that. I’m not a hunter, Headmaster. I’m a fighter. I leave it to the hunters to find him for me, or for him to give me an opening I can exploit.”

“I… see,” Dumbledore said while his voice clearly showed he didn’t.

“I’ve done most of what I could against him as it stands,” Harry stated softly. “I have no way of tracking him. I don’t have any connections. I don’t have any experience casting the kind of spells that would be necessary to find him. So I have to leave that to those that do. In the meantime, I might as well do something useful.”

Dumbledore merely stared at him for a moment before sighing softly. “I again feel the need to ask to continue this another day. Instead, perhaps you should see about taking care of that…. objective you had that blade created for.”

Harry glanced back at Dumbledore before arching a brow a bit. “You mean, you want to know what secret room its hiding in that you never found it.”

Coughing softly Dumbledore looked back at Harry, the slightest tug of his lips rising up. “I again feel the need to ask to continue this another day. Instead, perhaps you should see about taking care of that…. objective you had that blade created for.”

“Of course,” Harry agreed with a snort before standing up and resting his hand on the hilt of the blade. “Though, do you really want to have to watch the destruction of Ravenclaw’s Diadem?”

Dumbledore stared back at Harry, frozen in place as his face slowly drained of color. “… what?”

“Tom Riddle was a very, very persuasive and too intelligent man,” Harry stated simply. “He convinced the ghost of person who stole the diadem to tell him where she hid it.”

“And he made it into one of his horcruxes.” Dumbledore finished the implied statement with a sigh as he slumped forward. “What other sacrilege has he performed?”
“Too many,” Harry stated sadly and shook his head. “By now… I imagine he’s done the same to Hufflepuff’s cup and Slytherin’s locket.”

“… How do you know this?” Dumbledore asked, his eyes piercing and sharp as he stared back at Harry.

“… Maybe one day I will you tell you, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore,” Harry answered quietly as he stood, holding the blade gently in his hand. “But that day is not today. Shall we see to the horcrux?”

Dumbledore’s eyes narrowed in distaste towards Harry, but he none-the-less nodded his head and followed after him.
Chapter 10

Andromeda and Bellatrix Black were standing in the changing room of one of the smaller stores Andromeda was familiar with, a pile of clothing to the side. So far Andromeda was attempting to ease her sister into things, to show her some of the muggle world without burialing her too deep in all it offered.

It was thus far met with mixed results.

Andromeda sighed at the blush that decorated Bellatrix’s face while her sister stared at the items she offered.

“What… what manner of… I cannot even call this a garment!” Bellatrix declared, blushing furiously.

“A brassiere and panties,” Andromeda stated blandly as she watched Bellatrix. “They’re undergarments; for wearing under your clothes.”

“Truly?” Bellatrix asked, staring back at Andromeda in surprise, then carefully, almost gingerly, picking them up. “But… how?”

Sighing, Andromeda showed her sister how to unclasp and then clasp the bra, then explained the panties. “There, now after you’ve got them on, we’ll start with something simple.”

Once her sister had stripped and donned the undergarments, Andromeda handed her a pair of jeans and a shirt. “On with these.”

Bellatrix just stared.

Andromeda affixed her sister with a look. “Now what’s the issue?”

“I… pants, sister? You wish me to dress as a man?” Even more confusion colored her face at that.

“Jeans,” Andromeda corrected. “In the muggle world, they’re worn by both men and women. These jeans were made to be worn by a woman.”

“If you are sure…” Bellatrix slowly agreed as she worked to pull the garments onto her body.

Andromeda shook her head. Her sister was almost painfully reminding her of the way she herself had been. So she would start simply and then ease her sister into muggle society and culture.

Though she had to admit, the idea of dressing herself up to match was amusing. The look on the boys’ faces alone… She almost giggled at the thought.

When Bellatrix appeared again a few minutes later, Andromeda looked over her sister then nodded thoughtfully. “Well, it’s a start.”

Slowly Bellatrix began to turn about, marveling at the way the clothes fit her body. “These are truly muggle fashion?”

“Casual clothes, yes.” Andromeda agreed, tapping her lower lip in consideration. “I suppose you might find an affinity for them, considering your… predilections.”
“Predilections, sister?” Bellatrix crossed her arms about her chest just below where the V-shaped neck of her shirt ended.

“Your taste for violence and destruction.” Andromeda said flatly.

“Oh.” Bellatrix paused there, considering the words, before she shrugged her shoulders just a bit. “Thank you for the consideration.”

For a moment Andromeda could feel her jaw wanting to fall down in disbelief at her sister’s frank admission before quickly shaking her head. “Right. Let’s see how you look. Go ahead and try walking about.”

As Bellatrix did so, with a look of wonder falling across her face, Andromeda reached up and slowly rubbed her face. This was obviously going to be a long day.

-0-0-0-

Albus Dumbledore slowly looked about the room of clutter, dust and miscellaneous items with a look of delighted fascination. “Remarkable. Simply remarkable. However did you find this room?”

“I asked a house-elf.” Harry responded honestly with a shrug as he moved towards where he remembered the diadem being the last time he’d encountered it.

“Ah, remarkable indeed,” Dumbledore agreed as he looked about the room with a curious eye.

There was still a sizable amount of various things all throughout the room, though Harry couldn’t help but feel it seemed… smaller than it once had. The layout was different than it was previously. It was as if…

Then he froze as looked at a pocket sized portrait as a realization hit him. The war had ended families left and right. It had been one of, if not the most, brutal war to hit wizarding Britain in over a thousand years. Prior to it, most of the wars had been mirrors of the wars in the muggle war.

Wars fought between actual soldiers. There had not been a systematic purge since the arrival of the Romans to the Isles, back when the druids had tried to force them back out. Voldemort, though… he didn’t target soldiers; he was a terror because he targeted entire families.

When a student died and there was no family left to claim their things… that made this room even creepier.

“Is something the matter, Mr. Potter?” Dumbledore asked curiously as he looked at the man.

“Just a sobering question,” Harry responded as he looked over the room. “Wondering, how many of these things were left here because a student passed and there was no one left to claim them.”

“I would like to believe that it would be remarkably few,” Dumbledore stated quietly as he none-the-less looked around the room with an uncomfortable shift from one foot to the next.

“And from there I wonder how much more will be put here if Tom Riddle has his way.” Harry stated softly and shook his head. “He already strikes at muggle families, so how long until he chooses to target those whom he deems… obstacles?”

Dumbledore frowned as he considered those words before turning uncomfortably and looking away. “I hope that is simply a more than pessimistic fear.”
“I don’t think it is,” Harry stated quietly as he ran his finger through a layer of dust. “Why do you think I’m trying so hard to prevent it?”

Turning, he then moved back deeper into the room behind him and he could hear Dumbledore following. “Your diligence is commendable… though I still find myself wholly uncomfortable with your methods and philosophy.”

“Which is why you’re not being asked to take part in them.” Harry agreed with a slight nod of his head as he looked from one side to the next, searching out for the diadem.

“And you’re certain that the relic has been… corrupted by Tom?” Dumbledore asked again as he frowned. “Not merely hidden here to begin with?”

“Yes,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head as he moved through the debris. “Ask the Gray Lady if you don’t believe me. She’s the one who stole it from her mother to begin with.”

“The Gray Lady?” Dumbledore repeated, staring at Harry. “She is…?”

“Helena Ravenclaw, Rowena’s daughter,” Harry stated softly and looked off into the distance. “A tragic tale. One that is not mine to tell.”

“There had long been rumors of her origins. But she rebuffed all whom attempted to ply the truth from her.” Dumbledore stated as he studied Harry intently.

“All until Tom Riddle.” It was a cryptic response as Harry stated it and he could feel the way Dumbledore blanched.

“Then how did he return… Ah. The interview,” Dumbledore stated sourly as he slowly shook his head. “That… does coincide with when we had begun our yearly… lack of consistency in our Defense instructors.”

“He is certainly creative when he comes to his plots,” Harry agreed neutrally. “Though I wonder at his choice of targets and why he simply didn’t target you since the curse is apparently so successful.”

“Tom has always felt a degree of… caution, and likely even fear of me,” Dumbledore admitted quietly as he looked off into the distance. “Once I defeated Gellert… Grindelwald, it became more pronounced. It is likely he simply did not believe it would affect me as he intended.”

He paused before he looked back at Harry with narrowed eyes. “But you already knew that, didn’t you, Mr. Potter.”

“I thought the statement that you were no longer the only one he feared made that obvious.” Harry answered without looking even the slightest bit sad about it.

“You are a most vexing individual, Mr. Potter. You are willfully obscure about things in a way that I find quite… disagreeable.”

“Imagine that,” Harry stated with a slightly amused drawl to his tone. “And of course you’d never do something similar to someone.”

Dumbledore opened his mouth to respond before shutting it as he studied Harry far more carefully than he had previously. “Do you hold some sort of personal grudge against me, Mr. Potter?”

“Grudge?” Harry asked musing over the word before chuckling. “No, not particularly. Do I believe
that you have moments where you’re quite… misguided? Yes.”

“And this leads you to being purposely… enigmatic?”

“No. The fact that I think being more direct would cause more problems than it would solve does. Your irritation at it is, I will admit, an amusing bonus.” Harry stated before at he found what he’d been looking for. “Ah, here we are. The unfortunately cursed Ravenclaw Diadem.”

“Wit beyond measure,” Dumbledore stated with a kind of sad reverence. “… Must we?”

“I would have preferred to not do it, honestly,” Harry agreed with a sad nod of his head as he withdrew the blade. “Sadly… what has been done to it, I know of no way to undo.”

With a weary sigh Dumbledore nodded his head, steeling his shoulders. “If this proves to be something other than advertised, Mr. Potter…”

“Yes, I know,” Harry agreed before, not pausing another moment, he brought the venom-imbued blade down upon the priceless artifact.

Immediately there was an inarticulate scream of rage, fear and pain filling the air as the blade cleaved through the shining metal, releasing an inky black muck, dripping down the stand it was set upon, and releasing an ugly black smoke into the air. With it came a release of tainted magic, clinging to the air that made Dumbledore shudder. Harry himself shook his head and carefully examined the blade with a satisfied nod.

“I take it my point was proved to your satisfaction?”

Dumbledore could only nod.

-o-o-o-

This, Voldemort quickly decided, was where he would begin. Not quite the most crowded part of London but with enough of the muggles to draw the attention of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. At least, eventually.

They were notoriously slow. It would be made even slower by the fact that there would be no obvious magic, at least at first. Once he was ready, he would call them forth.

And they would be slaughtered by his nightmares.

The thought brought a smile to his face, an almost childish glee tempered by a dark malevolence.

A few quick gestures and a notice-me-not charm covered one end of the street and then other. A moment later a muggle repelling charm followed. No one would get in, no one would get out.

It was one of the first tactics he’d taught his knights, throw the muggle repelling charms on all potential entrances and exits. Trapping them like the rats they were. Allowing you to work at your leisure to end them.

For a moment he simply savored the anticipation hanging in the air, the sense of what was coming. Then he gestured and suddenly series of cages appeared all around the street and on the roofs. Shortly thereafter the cages dissolved, letting loose their inhabitants into the streets.

-o-o-o-
Their presence was felt before they were even seen. A dirty, soiled feeling of wrongness that permeated the air, telling everyone that something that should not exist walked the land with them. Without knowing why people began to shrink back, eyes wild, hearts racing as primal instincts sent pulses of fear-powered adrenaline through their veins.

In the small boutique, Bellatrix looked up from her clothes and then quickly looked towards the door.

“Sister?” Andromeda asked, a careful, fearful wariness in her voice as she stared at the sudden rigidity of her sister’s frame.

“Something’s wrong.” There was a pause as Bellatrix withdrew her wand, fingers gripping upon it as she looked at her sister from the corner of her eye. “Can you not feel it?”

“I…” Andromeda began, only to freeze when the miasma of wrongness permeated the air, wrapping itself about her with a whispering, wicked hunger. “What is that?!!”

“I know not,” Bellatrix stated before her eyes looked back at her sister, “but I mean to find out.”

“In that?!!” Andromeda almost squeaked out, and with good reason. She had finally managed to coax her sister into a mini skirt dress that clung about her sister’s hips, with a pair of calf skin boots to go with.

“I do not believe whatever is out there will give me the courtesy of granting me room to change.” Bellatrix noted dryly, but… something crashed through the door of boutique with a tortured scream.

“I suppose not.” Andromeda agreed, her face pale and terrified as she beheld something ripped from fevered nightmares.

Bellatrix, however, was under no such restraints as her wand flicked out and hungry flames leapt from the tip of her wand to greedily splash upon the thing in front of them.

Its scream grew in intensity as flesh crackled and crisped, filling the air with a sickly scent of burning flesh. What the pair thought were eyes turned onto them and the sound that came out was filled with anger and despair as it opened its jaws impossibly wide and then lunged at Bellatrix.

Bellatrix was not idle, however, her dark hair flashing across her face as she twisted and snapped her wand down, ripping the ceiling down with a single spell, smashing it into the creature.

Unfortunately, she quickly discovered, she’d pulled down little more than plaster and dust, doing little more than simply confuse the thing in front of her instead of doing seriously damage. With a growl Bellatrix quickly summoned forth numerous bits of clothing before banishing it at the creature. As it tried to shake them off, Bellatrix snarled and snapped her wrist against, sending out gout of flame that quickly splashed over the clothes and began to spread across them.

With an agonized scream the creatures’ attempts to shake off the burning clothing grew more and more frantic.

“Sister! I do not believe setting the thing between us and the exit on fire is going to help!” Andromeda called out as she glared slightly at her older sibling. “Not to mention… must you burn the clothing?!?”

“I’m a bit distracted with trying to kill this thing, Romeda!” Bellatrix snapped back. “It does not wish to be accommodating!”
“Imagine that!” Andromeda snapped back before pulling out her own wand and, growling slightly as she summoned forth a bra and panties, transfiguring them into sharp tipped spears and banishing them at the shrieking creature.

With a dull, wet ‘thunk’, each of the sharp tips contacted the creature and buried deep, causing its voice to grow several times in strength as it thrashed about.

“What’re you doing?! This is my fight!” Bellatrix snapped at her sister before sending another banisher that shoved the spears deep into the creature’s body, earning another howl of agony.

“I’m a little bit more interested in just surviving for now, Bella!” Andromeda responded as she pointed at the still squirming and now whimpering thing. “If you want to do something incurably mad as fight this thing on your own, kindly do so when my life is not similarly in danger!”

Bellatrix looked sourly at her sister before turning towards the ruined doorway, only to find another creature waiting there, this one with a gigantic maw, opened wide to reveal the caricature of a face, gaunt and deformed, surrounded by broken, jagged teeth. Just as the thing looked about to release another wail, Bellatrix banished the debris from the first creature’s violent entrance at it. Jagged glass and wood flew at it, smashing into it with more of a random pattern than she would’ve liked.

“Now how did she do it then?” Bellatrix muttered while summoning the spears Andromeda had sent into the first creature, then banishing one at the creature shrieking in the door.

The spear flew at the creature, though it was not tip first, and ended up smashing the length of the half into the face.

“Sister! How did you manage to have your spears fly true?” Bellatrix asked as she looked back at her sister.

“… How the bloody hell do you think a spear flies true?!” Andromeda snapped as she let some of her fear bleed into anger, as she flicked her wand at the remaining spear. “You have to aim the ruddy things, you god damned bint!”

The first flick had oriented the spear properly and then, with her declaration, she banished it towards creature, who spat out the first spear from its open maw just in time to have the second spear smash deep into the head and bury itself deep, causing the creature to freeze and then collapse into death.

“… I…” Bellatrix stood there a moment, frozen in disbelief as she watched her sister take the second kill herself as well. “Oh.”

For a moment she just stood there, gaping, trying to process what had just happened before looking back at a still fuming Andromeda and whining a bit. “… Again, sister?”

“… Yes, sister, bloody well again! Now shut your damned gob and can we please get out of here?!” Andromeda snapped as she stood up and almost stomped forward. “I am not an insane, bloodthirsty maniac! I do not like to fight and I do not like being attacked by idiots and maniacs and monsters! I do not even like the utter rubbish that is pureblood society!

“I came here to indulge you in your new fascination’s preference for muggle culture and dress,” she continued standing up and stalking forward, dressed in a pair of bell bottomed jeans and a tight t-shirt herself. “Then I was going to shoo you off so I could have some time with my boyfriend.

“Except, of course, as soon as you got involved, everything had to go to bloody hell! We get
attacked by some kind of obviously magical beast I’ve never even heard a hint of, and you’re standing there, complaining because I want to bloody well not give them a chance to kill me?!”

“Um… Yes?” Bellatrix answered, more than a little uncertainty in her voice.

“… Sister?” Andromeda stated with an eerie calm.

“Yes?” Bellatrix repeated the word with a slight cringe.

“We are leaving.” Andromeda stated flatly. “Now. We are going to find my boyfriend, then we are going home, away from whatever mess this is.”

“Right…” Bellatrix agreed warily. “Where are we going to find…”

Suddenly a massive explosion tore through the street outside the shop, shattering the remaining windows as a male voice could be heard shouting, “TAKE THAT YOU FECKLESS BLIGHTERS!”

Andromeda paused a moment before sighing as a ghost of a smile crossed her lips. “That would be him now.”

“As you say,” Bellatrix answered in a daze as she stared at her sister, whom promptly walked past her, banishing the dead creature in the door way and stepping out onto the street.

Or, more precisely, what was left of the street, the entire length ruptured, as if exploding from below. Burnt and chunked bodies were tossed every which way. Out of the corner of her eye Andromeda could see movement. Turning her head she was treated to the sight of a young, half shaven man in a leather jacket banishing chunks of the broken street at some of the still moving creatures.

With a frown she snapped off a piercing curse at one of the creatures, only to see it barely dent the creature, mainly splashing off of it harmlessly. “And of course they are magically resistant.”

“Rom!” the man called out as he caught sight of her before gesturing at his free hand, covering it in the debris from the street and promptly punching one of the rising creatures stirring nearby in the head, sending it crashing back to the ground. “What in the buggering hells is going on here? What in Merlin’s blue balls are these things?!”

“Not a ruddy clue,” Andromeda stated flatly as she stepped over one particularly brutalized corpse and fought to keep down the bile rising up in the back of her throat at the sight. “One minute I’m finally finished getting my sister into a mini and the next one of these things was blasting through door. I don’t even know what happened to shop girls.”

“And no dark Black knowledge to tell us what these things are?” he asked with a wink as he then brought his debris-covered arm up just in time to catch the mouth of a smaller creature that had taken his momentary distraction to attack. “Bloody hell! Can’t I even get a mo to chat up my girl?!”

As he was knocked back onto street, he immediately tried to blast a number of spells into the things torso, to very limited effect.

“Ted! They’re magic resistant! You have to actually hit them with something other than spells!”

“Well, fine then!” Ted put his wand up against the top of the armor on his arm and fired off the strongest banisher he could into one of the pieces, launching a chunk up through the soft tissue of
its mouth and into its brain, causing it to suddenly go limp atop him. “Now get off, ya great lump!”

“Do I have to bloody well do everything for you, Ted?” Andromeda sighed in irritation as she made a gesture and a sizable stone shot out and smashed into the dead creature’s side, throwing it off of him.

“Oi! Careful! I thought you liked that part of me!” Ted yelped as the stone hit just inches above his hips.

“Obviously not as much as you do,” Andromeda stated sarcastically as she looked around the devastated street. “What the bloody hell did you do?”

“Blew the gas main,” Ted stated simply with a shrug as he rolled up to his feet. “I figured it’d give me some breathing room at least.”

“… Sister?” Bellatrix finally found her voice again as she stared at the rough looking and somewhat familiar young man, uncertain of exactly how to respond to what she had just witnessed.

Andromeda immediately went stiff as a board while Ted winced and looked down the street, before blinking and staring. Then he let out a low whistle as he turned his attention back to Andromeda. “Well, luv, I have to hand it to you, you do have taste. Don’t suppose…”

“Not now, Edward!” Andromeda hissed out and glared at him before looking back at Bellatrix. “What, sister?”

“… Isn’t… I…” Bellatrix just stared at her sister. “… I thought you hated dueling.”

“I do.” Andromeda agreed with a nod of her head.

Ted snorted and smirked. “She’s right good in a brawl though. Even better in a fight. Almost as good as she is…”

“NOT NOW!” Andromeda almost screamed as she blushed a bright crimson Bellatrix had never seen on her normally composed sister. “Or have you forgotten we’re surrounded by Morgana knows what!?”

“How… interesting.” A new voice cut in smoothly, as a new figure made his presence known, one eye glowing a bloody crimson. “I must say this was rather… unexpected.”

Voldemort was more than slightly irritated. His newest creations had, at first, been quite adept against the muggles. And, from the initial tests he had used against his followers, should have been just as adept against wizards and witches.

Only now the vast majority of his current crop of monsters had been slain. All at the hands of one teenaged wizard and a pair of witches.

“LEAVE MY SISTER ALONE!” Bellatrix swore as she wove shrieking blurs of magic at the unknown man whom was apparently behind the attack.
Voldemort deflected them, dodging the few he couldn’t, and the ground around him was quickly reduced to melting rubble as the curses struck. Acidic cutting curses, he had to admit, were a new one. Effective, too, he idly noted as the ground around him was slowly being decayed. Had he stayed much longer, he wouldn’t be able to keep his footing.

“Enough!” he snapped back after deflecting her latest spell, snapping his wand up and sending a dark wave of magic forward, creating a furrow in the ground as it forced Bellatrix to break off her attack and move quickly out of the way. “I am now in a less than generous mood, little girl. So, now, when I end you three, it will hurt.”

A dark smoke poured out of the hem of his robes and suddenly he rose up into the air, hovering there as it began to coil over his body. “Now, little ones… let’s see you dance!”

Everything changed in an instant. The fury of spells poured down like rain as coiling tendrils of smoke lashed out towards them. Ted quickly transfigured pieces of debris in front of them into a solid wall of clumped together pieces of street just before the spells could hit it.

Chunks of the makeshift barricade flew through the air as the young couple ducked down. Flashes of every color they could imagine struck the barricade, eating it away piece by piece. In a matter of moments their cover had diminished significantly.

“Well, bugger,” Ted noted as he kept summoning up pieces of the nearby debris to add back to the shrinking wall. “Ideas, love?”

“If Bella wasn’t there…” Andromeda stated with a scowl. “I can’t risk a blind shot.”

“Pity,” Ted agreed with a nod. “How long before the Aurors show?”

“Too long,” she responded curtly. “Far, far too long.”

“Well, we’ll just have to last too long.” Ted stated before twisting away as a piece of the wall fell, hissing and melting down next to him. “… I hope?”

Bellatrix found herself doing a reasonable impression of a dance as Voldemort rose up, hovering in the air high enough up to easily switch the barrage of spell fire between the two targets without much change. His hand flicked about in a blur of sharp, precise movements, directing his wand from one to the other as if they were the same target. Eyes wide, Bellatrix couldn’t help but wonder if this was the strength of master of the Knights of Walpurgis, where did which leave the Storm Chaser?

“All that bluster and bravado,” Voldemort noted before a wisp of fire rose from the tip of his wand, then cracked it downwards a flick of his wrist as a stream of fiendfyre, the tip shaped like a serpent’s head, snapping inches from a scrambling Bellatrix. “Where ever has it gone?”

He paused before his lips split into an ugly grin. “Oh, I know.”

A flick of his wrist sent the fire snapping out, wrapping over the wall of debris Ted and Andromeda before another flick tore it in half as half-melted pieces of red hot earth flew towards Bellatrix. “You realized exactly what it was you faced. Can you feel it, hmm? That inching sensation, scratching up from deep down inside of you.”

He paused, letting the fiendfyre pool on the ground for a moment, turning it into a bubbling pool of molten earth, before he flicked his wrist again, sending it splattering towards both Bellatrix and the remaining cover. “Death comes for you now. Struggle all you want; you will not escape its grasp.”
And with a clawing gesture Bellatrix could suddenly feel a pressure squeezing on her throat, lifting her off the feel with a slowly tightening pressure. Instinctively she reached up, clawing at her throat, only to do nothing but drag her own nails into the soft flesh. Her eyes almost popping out of her skull, she looked around, desperately lifting up her wand, directing it at where Voldemort held her without any apparent struggle.

Another flick of his and she let out a gurgled scream as the tip of the flame snapped out, snake head snapping into the back of her hand. Instantly she could smell the acrid scent of her own burning flesh as she reflexively dropped her wand. Dark, charred flesh spasmed and broke, revealing raw, bleeding flesh beneath it.

“Now, now, none of that,” he stated with a smirk as he calmly gestured with his clenching hand, which caused Bellatrix to be used to block a number of rocks banished at him quickly from Andromeda, his lips widening as he heard another gurgling scream leave Bellatrix’s mouth. “I don’t know how much more of this your dear sister here will be able to take until she simply… breaks.”

Andromeda stared up at her sister as she struggled for her life as Voldemort kept her helplessly struggling in the grip of whatever spell he was using. Her face twisting into a look of horror, Ted spoke up quietly. “Rom. Look away.”

“I am not going to just…!” Andromeda started to protest angrily, taking a moment to glare at Ted, only to pause at the look on his face.

“Turn away and close your eyes, luv.” he simply said as he looked at her meaningfully.

“How quaint. He knows how it’s about to end and wants to spare your sister the agony of watching you die.” Voldemort stated as Andromeda took one last look at her sister and then did as her boyfriend instructed. “Such a wonderful sensation, watching that look of despair…”

What he was going to say next was cut off as Ted snapped his wand in an arch towards him, sending a small glowing sphere of magic at him. Sneering Voldemort again moved Bellatrix to intercept where they arching spell would land between the two of them. Only suddenly his world was caught up in a blast of light and sound that sent him reeling, shattering his concentration.

“Rom! NOW!” Ted called out as Bellatrix began to fall, the spell holding her aloft shattered.

Wordlessly, Andromeda’s wand was out and catching her sister, quickly summoning her back to them. Voldemort falling himself had no one to catch him. His scream quickly filled the air as he landed in the writhing embrace of his own unleashed fiendfyre spell.

Immediately the flames died out and slowly he stood up, eyes burning with hate as he snarled angrily. “Worthless little curs! I will strip the flesh from your bones! I will raise your corpses and send them to rip whatever you care for, whatever you love to pieces as your worthless souls are bound to watch!”

Ted tossed out another one of the same spells he’d used earlier, only to have it snuffed out with a slashing motion from Voldemort. “Well, bugger.”

“You think a trick will work twice?!?” Voldemort snarled as dripping blobs still red hot material rose up from the ground and then flew above their heads. Then it suddenly surged in size. “Now DIE!”

And with no small amount of satisfaction Voldemort watched as the molten earth dropped upon the
three. They were not able to move out of the way. They were not able to dodge, they were not able to hide.

He watched as it landed with an almost splat like sound. He could hear a sizzling crackle as it made contact with the far cooler street side. His lips pulled back into a wide grin of sadistic triumph as the material settled and flowed down before beginning to harden.

There was no motion, no sound beyond that of the cooling, cracking material, the rustle of debris, and slowly encroaching sounds in the distance. With a flick of his wrist, he cancelled out the wards holding back apparition and port keys and, with one last sadistic smirk of triumph, vanished.

-o-o-o-

As he left the Room of Requirements, Dumbledore’s face wore the expression of a man haunted by what he had just seen, skin pallid and looking more brittle than it had in years. It had only taken moments for Harry to do what he needed to do. Moments to watch the destruction of one of the most coveted treasures of history revealed to be a corrupted abomination that had to be destroyed.

“Not much fun, is it?” Harry noted with a slight nod of his head in an admission of sympathy towards the older man. “I can’t say that I really enjoyed that myself.”

“To have done such a thing to such a great treasure…” Dumbledore stated as he slowly shuddered. “How can he be both so intelligent, and so utterly foolish? He could have easily simply kept it, or declared its discovery and become famous or… Does he have no comprehension of what he did?”

“I always put it up to his ego, myself.” Harry said simply with a shrug. “He considers himself greater than any other wizard or witch that has ever lived. As such, he ‘obviously’ doesn’t have any need for such things.”

“And he makes use of them as his horcruxes as he can’t stand of using anything less than a priceless treasure.” Dumbledore stated with a soft murmur.

There was a silence in the air as suddenly they realized they were not alone, finding themselves facing a grim faced Grey Lady, ghost of Ravenclaw tower.

“What have you done?” There was a note of something not easily placed in her voice. It bordered on neutral but hung with an undertone of something deeper beneath.

“Lady Helena Ravenclaw,” Harry stated simply as he canted his head to her and nodded in slight acknowledgement. “I don’t know if you truly want to know.”

She withdrew at the title, flinching back as her eyes went wide for a moment, then narrowed into slits. “How do you know that name!?”

Dumbledore looked startled for a moment, mouth opening to respond only to have Harry cut him off.

“Tom Riddle figured it out,” Harry stated evenly as he ignored the sour look on Dumbledore’s face at the reminder. “I managed to get a number of pieces of information from him without him ending up aware of it.”

She flinched back at the statement, shrinking slightly away from him. “Then you know.”

“I had to clean up your mess, yes,” Harry agreed simply. “If you want to be rid of the Baron, I’d suggest taking the time to explain the situation to the headmaster.”
There was a pause as Harry seemed to debate things for a moment. “Perhaps he’ll be sufficiently horrified by the thought of you being forced to suffer through the presence of your murderer.”

“Pardon!?” Dumbledore stated, eyes widening almost comically as the Grey Lady stared at Harry, mouth hanging open.

“You know, the Bloody Baron?” Harry stated, looking at the headmaster curiously. “He killed her. Most of the blood on his clothes is from when he killed her before killing himself.”

“I, but… then…” Dumbledore fumbled over the words as he tried to come to terms with that statement before sighing heavily and turning to the Grey Lady. “This is true then?”

“Yes,” Helena stated faintly with a slow nod of her head.

“I will see what I can do,” Dumbledore stated with a sigh and a note of weary resignation.

“It does help to actually tell people about the problem though,” Harry noted casually before turning his attention back to Helena. “I would imagine a number of things could have been avoided if you had stopped running away and ignoring your problems.”

That struck a nerve in the ghost as she glared angrily at Harry before turning and silently storming off as best a ghost could.

“And thus exemplifying my point,” Harry noted with a sigh of relief and a shake of his head. “I swear, I’m not sure which of them I dislike more. Her or what I know of Slytherin.”

“I… worry about how easily you can find new and previously unknown ways to disturb me, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore stated with deep breath to calm himself back down. “It is an entirely unpleasant experience for a man who thought he had long outgrown such things.”

“It’s a gift,” Harry declared flatly. “Where were we, though?”

“We were discussing Tom’s violation of priceless artifacts to make his… abominations,” Dumbledore stated with a quiet shudder of displeasure.

“Well, that or something of his own,” Harry stated as he stared out into the distance. “There’s one that’s not a relic, another he may or may not have made yet that won’t quite be either.”

“Ah.” Dumbledore slowly released a breath then stood up straighter. “But again this begs the question: How do you know all this, Mr. Potter?”

“What makes you think my answer would be any different from before, Mr. Dumbledore?” Harry asked back while arching a brow slightly before smiling at Dumbledore. “Come now, what kind of man would I be to burden you with such things? You more than deserve to enjoy your golden years in peace.”

“… Have I done you some wrong, Mr. Potter?” Dumbledore asked, his eyes studying the man whom merely smiled back at him. “Because I find myself under the impression that you seem to be holding a grudge towards me.”

“You simply remind me entirely too much of my own headmaster,” Harry stated with a wave of his hand. “He thought it in my best interests to keep the truth from me in order to keep me from being worried and to ‘allow me a normal childhood.’”

Harry paused for a moment seemingly lost deep in thoughts of the past. “In the end, I was less than
prepared for what I had to face and had to rely too much on luck and guess work. And the childhood I had already was completely lost, so there wasn’t much for me to enjoy there.”

“I see,” Dumbledore said in a tone that clearly stated he didn’t. “I would then appreciate it if you would not…”

What he was going to say was cut off as Alastor Moody stormed up to both of them. “Albus, Potter. We’ve got a problem.”

That immediately made both men stiffen as they looked at Moody expectantly.

“There’s been an attack. Muggle shopping district. Place is a bloody war zone and some of the things there…” Moody’s face immediately grimaced. “It’s bad.”

“Well, that didn’t take long.” Harry noted with a sigh.

“What exactly didn’t take long, Potter?” Moody demanded with narrowed eyes.

“For something else to go tits up,” Harry responded with a slight growl. “Now, come on and let’s get past the wards so we can bloody well get there.”
Harry couldn’t help but stare at the damage in front of him. The entire street was ruptured as if the gas main had been… Right, that’s likely what had happened. Though, there were other things that didn’t match up with it.

There were places where it was obvious the ground had been melted down and then cooled again. Parts of the rubble was oriented like a barrier that had been raised then torn down. Other parts of it were melted and corroded as if by acid.

It was a mess all around.

“Well, talk about a cluster fuck,” Harry muttered sourly under his breath before taking his attention away from the mess towards Moody. “Clearly this was obviously more than just a gas line blowing.”

“Aye,” Moody agreed as he nodded to the carnage. “Mess all around.”

“I… believe I will be with you gentlemen in a moment. I will likely be asked to fix the majority of this mess,” Dumbledore noted as he saw a visibly relieved wizard moving over to them.

Harry barely nodded in acknowledgement before stepped over to side of the street and grimaced as he caught sight of a burned and fragmented corpse. “That’s the honest truth. How many dead?”

“We’re still counting,” Moody admitted with a grunt. “Something went through all the shops and drove out all the muggles before, well… So far, no survivors.”

Harry’s mouth ran dry for a moment before he took a deep breath and then let it out. He had seen worse. He didn’t like it, but he had seen worse.

“Right. So, you want me here for clean up or analysis?” Harry was already starting to look through the scene with a practiced eye. There were signs and residue of dark magic all around them.

“Whatever we can get,” Moody admitted before gesturing towards a boutique with its entrance caved in. “Though the real treat is in there. Need to see if you’ve ever seen anything like it before.”

Harry frowned slightly. “Wait, what?”

“Just look,” Moody stated with a shudder of revulsion. “We found bits and pieces of them, but in there are the only ones that are at least somewhat whole.”

“… Right. Did the Department of Magical Creatures not show up yet?” Harry asked with a grumble as he moved towards the boutique.

“They did,” Moody answered, “and after they finished puking they said they had no idea what they are.”

“… Joy.” Harry stated with a sigh as he walked into the boutique. Immediately he saw the first of the creatures and then saw the other.
They were… well, he couldn’t quite come up with a proper description for how utterly wrong they looked. A part of him could understand why the previous group had lost the contents of their stomachs. They had vaguely human characteristics but it was as if someone had taken them and twisted them into…

Frowning, Harry then began to cast a few charms over the things. Then he began to curse as he felt the blood drain from his face. He didn’t recognize the spells themselves but he could tell who cast them. And he could figure out from them just what they were.

He turned and then walked back out, his features a mix of horror and anger as he returned to where Moody was waiting on him. “Well?”

“Get the bloody Department of Mysteries down here.” Harry stated as he looked around the scene with new eyes.

“You don’t know what they are.” Moody stated with a sigh of irritation. “Bloody joy. This is going to be…”

“I know what they were. Moody,” Harry corrected with an angry snap. “I know who made them into those things. They were human. Until Voldemort somehow turned them into those bloody, buggering monstrosities!”

“What?” Moody stared at him, his eyes narrowed into slits. “You’re saying those things…”

“What is the problem, gentlemen?” Dumbledore chose that moment to return from his survey of the street. “I already surveyed most of the damage. I believe that simply blaming most of it on a… what’s the word? Ah yes, ‘gas main’ explosion, will suffice.”

“Except for the melted pools of stone and aggregate,” Harry muttered quietly. “Those… well, that’s going to have to be fixed. Stuff of conspiracy theories that is. Not to mention some of those acid melted bits. Going to need to do something about those too.”

“Right,” Moody stated with a frown as he realized that didn’t really fit with the rest of the scene. “Point. So, this is a tits up, buggered up to the bollocks situation then.”

“Yes.” Harry agreed with a nod.

Dumbledore frowned as his attention left Moody and Harry and focused on the remains in the boutique. With a few charms of his own, his face quickly turned ashen, then green as he took a step back. “Good lord…”

“Pretty much my reaction,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head and a shudder. “They’re…”

“To do this to someone… this is an abomination.” Dumbledore stated softly with a shake of his head. “No matter how twisted, no matter how much hate… for someone to become this…”

“That’s what happens when you become inhuman.” Harry stated with a shake of his head before looking around. “Now, what I want to know… is who did all this.”

“Aye,” Moody agreed with a nod of his head. “We didn’t find anyone, nor any other bodies on the scene when we arrived.”

“Pardon?” Dumbledore asked, frowning slightly.

“Someone killed these two,” Harry stated as he gestured to the creatures. “If I’m not mistaken, it
was before that explosion happened outside. This one shows some signs of burns, but its back is facing towards the street, and most of the cuts look post-mortem.”

“Aye,” Moody agreed with a nod. “Plus, this other one was killed in this place, first I think. Someone transfigured some items into weapons and banished them into the thing.”

Harry didn’t bother correct Moody that the thing had once been human. After the point it was in… killing it had been a mercy. Slowly he moved back to the changing rooms, moving carefully from one to the next with a practiced caution.

When he finished, he took a slow deep breath, before exhaling. Two sets of robes, empty and hung up carefully to be donned again along with several sets of female clothing. “Well, fuck.”

“What’d you find, Potter?” Moody asked as he stepped over and then frowned. “… Two witches then?”

“At least,” Harry agreed with a frown. “We need to get as many traces going as we can. We better reconstruct things. We have to figure out what happened to them.”

“Gentlemen?” Dumbledore spoke up as he looked at the two. “What have you discovered?”

“Two witches were here.” Harry answered as he looked around. “I’m guessing there were anti portkey and anti-apparition wards up. They fought their way out.”

“And were responsible for the street outside?” Moody suggested.

“Maybe,” Harry agreed with a nod. “We need to identify what traces we have going on here. Don’t suppose…?”

“Don’t look at me. I can walk through the scene as well as you,” Moody stated with a frown, “but I can’t identify what was cast or come close to by whom.”

Then he gestured towards where Dumbledore was weaving his wand about. “But, that’s why I brought him.”

“Ah,” Harry noted with a nod as he watched Dumbledore work.

With a forceful mutter leaving his breath, Dumbledore finished his casting and suddenly the air lit up with symbols and colors that shone all around them. Harry could tell barely anything about the glut of information they conveyed. Sighing, he glanced at Moody.

“Don’t suppose you can understand any of that?”

Negligently, Moody shook his head. “No, lad, over my head. You?”

“Too much raw spell crafting information. I’ve always been a better doer than theorist,” Harry explained as he watched Albus go to work.

“Initial spells were ineffective from first caster,” Dumbledore muttered a bit under his breath. “Second caster used transfiguration…”

Harry sighed and grimaced. “He made them magically resistant. Of course he did. Let’s walk the rest of the scene. This is likely going to take him a bit.”

“Aye,” Moody agreed with a nod of his head. “Since you mentioned the melted bit… There’s one more of them. Bloody well should’ve realized it definitely didn’t fit.”
“Oh?” Harry felt a slight chill of worry running down his spine as he followed Moody a bit further down the street. Then frowned. “Oh.”

It was a slagged mess running down into a pile from the pavement onto the street. “This isn’t like the other bit.”

“That’s bloody obvious.” Moody stated sourly.

“No, I mean someone dumped this here,” Harry responded as he pointed to how there was a distinct difference between the pavement and the mess. “See? You can see where it was flowing around it. Looks like someone melted a mess of stuff down there and then dumped it here.”

The pair of them shared a look before looking back at the mess with suddenly sharper eyes. Harry sighed before he slowly lifted his wand and gestured towards the pile. “Well, it could explain why we couldn’t find our two witches. If it was dropped on them…”

“Another nasty bit of work this.” Moody stated with a frown.

“Actually, this is something I’ve used myself before,” Harry responded as he then focused on the pile. “The number of people who can think fast enough to get out of it aren’t many.”

There was a few more moments before Harry sighed. “Well. I found them…”

-o-o-o-

Sitting quietly in his den, Cygnus Black leaned back and stared into a crackling fire as he held a tumbler of whiskey in his hand. Things had become… He wasn’t sure how to truly put it. His whole world was not what it had been mere days ago.

“The lads are back together,” Charlus stated with the kind of casual amusement that always left him more than a little frustrated with his uncle.

“Of course they are,” Lucius Potter noted with a groan as he settled himself in his chair next to Charlus. “Did you at least remember to bring your wife into things?”

“Never!” Charlus declared, sounding fully aghast as he looked back at Lucius. “Do you know how those brutes look at my wife?”

“Yes,” Lucius agreed with a nod of his head. “The same way you do.”

“Exactly! How would you feel if someone was looking at your wife that way?” Charlus asked pointedly.

“As my wife isn’t the only thing keeping them and you from causing more trouble than they fix…” Lucius stated leadingly.

“We are all grown men now,” Charlus refuted him with a slight scowl.

“You were, as I recall, grown men then as well,” Orion Black joined the conversation as he gave Charlus a look. “It failed to make a difference then so why should it now?”

“We were wild unmarried men at the time and we have all since settled down and become far more reasonable,” Charlus stated with a slight huff of irritation. “We can manage to keep from causing trouble without our wives, thank you very much.”

“After everything else…” Orion frowned and looked at the Potters. “The Storm Chaser seems to
have things well enough in hand on his own, why would you need to do more?"

“Because you know it’s not going to be that simple,” Charlus stated, all traces of humor fading from his face. “If someone already came as far as he has, they’re not just going to turn around and give up. Having a group of wizards hunting down these knights in the meantime will help diminish his resources.”

Orion scowled slightly but sighed in resignation. “Fine. Just don’t expect us to join in on that little crusade of yours.”

“Quite,” Cygnus agreed with a nod of his head before sighing. “It is enough trouble that you have drawn us into this little conspiracy.”

“Even if it benefits your family in the long run?” Lucius pointed out with an arched brow.

“The benefits are still dubious, even if you have had points,” Orion told them bluntly. “But, while it is nice that you’re keeping us in the loop about your mayhem, I do look forward to laughing in your face when you end up with things blowing up in your face.”

“It won’t be anything we can’t handle,” Charlus declared with a cool, narrowed eyes. “Besides, you were the one that brought me into all of this, Cygnus. I would expect you to have a better recall than that.”

Cygnus shifted uncomfortably. “As I recall, I simply asked you about him being a Potter. You were the one that turned around and made all of this about changing our entire family philosophy and more!”

“As charming as this is, perhaps we can stay on topic? The latest part of the plan was a success,” Lucius said as he gave them both a look, cutting off anything further they could say.

“So, he succeeded then?” Orion asked from his seat, keeping his gaze instead on Charlus and Lucius Potter.

“Aye. Though my cousin had to be reminded that he was not going to take part,” Lucius stated with a glare towards Charlus.

“I still think I could’ve helped.” Charlus instead with a grumble.

“And now Slytherin’s basilisk is dead,” Cygnus noted with a somber sigh. “Another piece of the founders gone. All to stop this bloody madman.”

“Yes,” Lucius agreed with a grimace. “And he killed it with a surprising efficiency.”

“Did he at least try to reason with it?” Orion asked as he looked at the Potters.

“… Reason with it?” Lucius demanded as he sat up and glared at Orion. “You as well as I can remember what happened when that chamber was last opened and what happened when that beast was last loosed.”

“Yes, yes. The muggleborn witch died,” Orion stated with a sigh and a wave of his hand. “I suppose it was unavoidable. Though, think of what it could’ve told us about those times.”

“… True,” Lucius admitted with a faint nod of his head. “Though, in this instance, I think we can understandably have written it off. After all, considering whom it was that last opened that chamber, and was responsible for the witch’s death…”
“Fine,” Orion stated with a grimace. “Another thing to hold against that monster.”

“And I wonder, with all that we know about what he is willing to do, what else will we lose?” Cygnus stated quietly as he looked off into the distance. “How much else will he taint beyond repair, beyond redemption?”

“Too much, I imagine,” Charlus stated quietly as he nodded his head back to his nephew. “Far too much.”

“Indeed,” Orion agreed with a nod and a frown before a sickened thought reached his features. “Do we know what it is that this monster has made into his horcruxes?”

“… No, I never really considered asking.” Charlus admitted with a frown. “He knows at least four of them have been created, and knew the location of two of them. Beyond that…”

“Based on what he has said of him, of this Voldemort… based on what we have learned of him ourselves…” Cygnus asked with a slowly growing resignation. “How much do you wish to wager that he has defiled priceless artifacts to house his broken soul, just to make them even harder for people to bring themselves to destroy them?”

“... Merlin and Morgana,” Orion stated with a pale face. “And if the Storm Chaser knows what they are…”

“Then there is a reason he did not tell us what they were.” Lucius stated grimly.

Any further discussion was halted when there was a knock at the door and, after a moment, Narcissa Black stuck her head in, looking worried and nervous. “I apologize for the interruption, Father, but… have you seen Bellatrix or Andromeda?”

-o-o-o-

Charlus had barely exited his floo before it was burning again with a burning insistence.

Sighing with a slight weariness, he none-the-less walked himself back to it and allowed the call to come through. “Yes?”

“We have a problem,” Martellus Longbottom’s face stated with a sharp severity.

Instantly Charlus could feel his stomach dropping like a lead weight into his feet. “What’s wrong?”

“Someone attacked a muggle shopping district in London,” Martellus informed him with a frown on his face. “Looks like a warzone according to some of our contacts. Street’s in pieces, bits of it are melted down in various ways and there are things all over the place.”

“What do you mean things?” Charlus demanded with a frown.

“I mean just that, things, as in things we don’t have names for and don’t know what they are,” Martellus snapped back. “They were found dead amidst the destruction. I don’t have anything more to really go on yet, but they’ve called both Dumbledore and the Storm Chaser to the scene for their opinions.”

“This is not good,” Charlus muttered for a moment before shaking his head. “What else do we know about this?”
“Frustratingly little,” Martellus admitted with a sigh and a shake of his head. “Just what we can infer and swirling rumors. We had heard that the Lord of the Knights of Walpurgis had isolated himself for a time but we knew little of why.”

“And of course it would happen just when we think we’re starting to get the upper hand in this whole debacle.” Charlus muttered under his breath.

“The upper hand? Without the rest of us?” Martellus sounded positively affronted at the thought. “How could you?”

“I didn’t,” Charlus corrected. “He did. Wouldn’t even let me help. Dashed bastard just took a goblin silver blade and used it to kill off Slytherin’s basilisk of all things.”

He paused a moment before brightening considerably. “I did get to deface a statue of Slytherin in the bastard’s Chamber of Secrets, though.”

“Slytherin’s basilisk? The Chamber of Secrets?” Martellus repeated, staring mouth hanging agape. “What the devil have you been doing?”

“Finding out how the Storm Chaser likes to destroy my childhood dreams,” Charlus stated with a long overly dramatic sigh. “I think the man’s really a bit of a sadist.”

“That, or you likely brought it up upon yourself,” Martellus agreed before shaking his head. “So, he found the Chamber of Secrets?”

“He claims to have stolen the ability to be a parslemouth from Riddle,” Charlus stated with a shake of his head and a sigh. “And considering we’ve found that Riddle is the last of the Gaunts…”

“Bloody hell, I thought we stopped having to deal with those idiots when Morfin finally went and kicked off,” Martellus stated with a sour grimace. “They always were a particularly foul brand of sadists.”

“This Dark Lord is Merope’s with a muggle,” Charlus stated simply and shook his head in disgust. “But apparently being a half blood is little barrier towards spouting off the madness of bloody purity.”

“Yes, well, if this was the work of that half-blood bastard, we can’t let it go unanswered,” Martellus stated sharply. “This was dangerously close to blowing the statute. Not to mention how many of the muggles were butchered at the scene.

“An entire street of shops, and not one survivor that we could find.” He paused before sighing. “At least it means we don’t have to worry about an oblivator bollocksing up on everything.”

“How many dead?” Charlus asked with a quiet levity to his voice, letting his previous humor melt away.

“We don’t know yet. A lot of the bodies were severely dismembered,” Martellus stated quietly. “At least a dozen, maybe even a score or more.”

“Bloody hell,” Charlus stated with a hiss as he almost fell back. “Has he gone daft on top of being mad?”

“I told you we don’t know!” Martellus growled back at him with a glare. “The only thing we really know is that there was an attack, that unidentified creature remains were found and that a lot of muggles were dead.”
There was a pause and a sigh as Charlus nodded his head. “I understand. Get the lads together. It is past time we sent a message.”

“Happily,” Martellus stated with a nod. “We’ll be assembled by the time you show up.”

“Good,” Charlus stated grimly with a nod of his head. “Just one question.”

“Yes?” Martellus asked after a moment’s pause.

“Who the hell are we going to send the message to?” Charlus demanded.

“… That will be a problem, yes.”

-o-o-o-

The Blacks had arrived in the ministry to chaos. Everywhere they looked, someone from the ministry was literally running around, dashing across the atrium as the wizard at the check in desk looked especially haggard. “Name and purpose of visit?”

“… What in Merlin’s name is going on?” Orion demanded as Cygnus frowned slightly next to him.

The wizard looked up and blanched slightly at the sight of the Black Patriarch before reluctantly answering. “There was an attack. Muggle part of London. An entire street and its buildings were destroyed, a bunch of muggles killed. We’re trying to get it all explained away but… they found… things there.”

The way the man said “things” made both Blacks arch a brow, especially at the shudder that shivered visibly through the wizard.

“Be that as it may…” Cygnus stated with a frown. “Two of my daughters are missing. We need to speak to someone about it.”

“That would be…” The wizard started to say before checking something. “No, they’re busy. How about… They’re busy too. Hmm… I think that… No, not them either.”

“… Are you implying that there is no one available to assist us?” Orion asked, a slight edge to his words as he looked at the wizard behind the desk with a dangerous glare.

“I am trying to find someone, it’s just… well, everyone got pulled into this damned mess in the middle of the muggles.” the wizard apologized quickly. “Everyone who’s anyone is involved. It was just that bad.”

Cygnus rubbed his forehead in irritation. “So, what, the Dark Lord decided to attack a muggle street in broad daylight?”

“It was worse than that, from what I heard.” The wizard shivered again. “They found what they say used to be muggles. Only they’re all twisted and wrong. That the Dark Lord made them into things that weren’t even recognizable as human. And that he destroyed an entire district, just to show how powerful he is.”

Orion snorted a bit. “I am quite aware of just how powerful he is. We were both there to see him fight the Storm Chaser in Hogsmeade”

“Oh.” The man blinked a moment. “But, then… I heard that all the stories about the duel were just stuff people made up. I mean, someone other than Dumbledore, strong enough to take on the Dark
“The only reason we’re even having this conversation is because Albus Dumbledore saved the Dark Bastard’s life,” Cygnus growled as he loomed over the man. “Now, I want someone who can help me find my daughters. NOW!”

“Cygnus Black?” a witch in Auror’s robes asked with a careful voice.

Cygnus whirled around, a hand gripping on his wand as he glared at the woman. “Unless you’re here to help me find my daughters, I suggest you choose your next words carefully.”

The Auror paused a moment, swallowing heavily before schooling her features to neutral. “I just came from your home, where I was told you had come to the Ministry. I’m here to… talk to you about your daughters.”

“What do you mean, talk to me about my daughters?” Cygnus demanded as he almost growled out the words. Everything had him on edge. The talk of the trouble, everyone being too busy to do anything, the way an auror was looking for him to talk to him about his daughter.

“I apologize for my brother-in-law’s demeanor, Madam Auror,” Orion stated smoothly as he pointedly gripped onto Cygnus’ shoulder. “He simply is a bit… agitated, as his daughters were supposed to be back some time ago.”

“I’m sure,” the woman agreed quietly with a vague nod of her head. “I need to ask you to come with me, sir.”

“… Why?” Cygnus asked, a slow cold trickle of dread moving down his back.

She shifted uncomfortably as she looked around. “I’m afraid I can’t tell you, not here, sir.”

Orion’s eyes narrowed and his grip on Cygnus grew tighter. “And your suggestion, Madam Auror?”

She swallowed slowly, seeing the almost murderous look directed at her from Cygnus and nodded her head. “Please, follow me.”

“But they haven’t…!” the desk wizard started to protest, only to be silenced with a glare of pure, molten fury directed at him by Cygnus. “Um… I suppose since you have an Auror escort, exceptions can be made.”

“Quite,” the auror agreed and lead them into the Ministry.

-o-o-o-

The Ministry was both more subdued, and contrarily, more active than Harry remembered. There were far, far fewer people running around that he could see. At the same time, those that were seen, were busying themselves with an uncommon vigor.

“Why am I here again?” Harry asked pointedly as he looked at Alastor. “You have him to answer anything about what was being cast.”

“You’re the one that found out about the witches,” Alastor stated grimly as he shook his head. “We’ll need you around to explain things.”

“And of course the Minister will want to meet him,” Dumbledore noted with a faint smile of
amusement.

Harry immediately froze in place and refused to go further. “No.”

That brought them up short as Dumbledore seemed surprised by the action. “Pardon?”

“Not meeting ministers,” Harry stated firmly and shook his head. “I meet ministers and they inevitably do something to piss me off. That leads to me causing incidents. With any politician, really, muggle or magical. It’s never a good idea for me to get involved in politics, ever.”

“Well, that is at least somewhat refreshing,” Dumbledore noted with a faintly amused smile beneath his beard. “Though that does limit a good deal of potential influence you might wield.”

“I don’t want influence,” Harry told them bluntly. “I don’t want to deal with the stupidity of people looking to me for answers when I barely have them for myself half the time.”

“Puts you ahead of most of the dunderheads I have to deal with,” Moody stated with a grunt of approval. “Most of them only think about how much influence the job can give them.”

“Give a person who has always craved power a taste of it and you’ll find them always craving more,” Harry noted, “At least, that’s been my personal experience.”

“Right, then I’ll just need you to write out what you found and what you can tell us about the wizard who did all this,” Moody stated to both of them as he changed the subject. “Albus should be familiar enough with them by now.”

“Sadly, it won’t be as much fun as the Lovegood incident,” Dumbledore noted with a sigh and a faint smile of remembrance. “How they managed to turn their wheat into candy I’m still not certain of.”

“Probably used a half twist and an elephant foot trawl,” Harry stated absently as he remembered a passing conversation he’d had with Luna. “What that translates to, I have no idea.”

Dumbledore opened his mouth, then shut it again as he looked thoughtful. “Yes, I suppose that would allow the bypass of the restrictions and mm…”

Moody just started at him.

“I’ve never had a dull conversation with a Lovegood,” Harry stated simply. “I almost never know what they’re actually saying but I don’t have dull conversations with them.”

Dumbledore actually laughed at that. “A truth I’m afraid I had quite forgotten. They do tend to have a most… unique view of the world.”

“Nutters, the lot of them,” Moody muttered sourly with a grunt.

“True,” Harry admitted with a slight nod of acknowledgement. “But can we say any different? Do we have some insurmountable claim to the bastion of sanity? Because I can tell you, I do not.”

“What is sanity but simply the most commonly accepted view by the general populace?” Dumbledore mused for a moment before shrugging slightly. “I have found that when one has a certain degree of success, one differs themselves from that norm.”

“I’m sure,” Harry stated neutrally. “Now, I believe we need to take care of somethings?”

“Right, this way,” Moody agreed with a grunt and a nod while Dumbledore looked entirely
bemused.

-o-o-o-

The cool touch of darkness wrapped about Voldemort as he sat back in his almost throne like chair, alone in an unearthly silence.

Again, he had been denied.

He had, of course, lain waste to the muggle street. His creatures had brought forth slaughter and terror. The results almost exactly what he’d hoped they would be.

Except for the single wrinkle that it had not only been muggles where he’d chosen to test his newest weapon. Two Hogwarts student and one who had barely graduated. Somehow they’d managed to kill off all of his weapons on their own.

Three children.

It was beyond infuriating. Beyond frustrating. And then they’d somehow had the nerve to defy him even further.

And the mudblood had actually managed to hurt him.

He took a deep, long breath.

Once word got out of what he had done to the muggles, the Wizarding World would still be scared and worried. And he had managed to deal with the brats. The elder sister had even shown up a bit of promise with her spell selection, even if she was woefully inadequate in its application.

When the information about how he had ended the two blood traitors and their little mudblood pet got out, the fear would grow again.

They would fear him again.

But, in the meantime, he would pursue other options. The nightmare twisted had not been as effective of a weapon as he thought they would be. If those children had been able to defeat them, then what would the actually dangerous wizards would do.

So that left him once more needing to rely upon wizards and witches of his own.

As his original plans had been thrown out the window, perhaps now it was time for him to pull something from much further along his original time line. Those who were going to oppose him were easily identifiable enough. Time to start… pruning those problems.

-o-o-o-

In the lift Harry leaned back against the cool metal of the wall and closed his eyes as he took a slow, deep breath. Today… had not been the best of days. Despite what he had shown Dumbledore, despite what he had shown the Diadem.

And coming to the ministry to fill out paperwork and avoid ministers had been the cherry on top. He’d gotten too used to his reputation keeping the various governmental officials from sticking their nose too deeply into his business. He’d forgotten just how… ignorant they could be.

Perceived weakness, something that they thought they could exploit. When that happened, they would swarm in unless they found themselves facing off against a bigger fish than they could
handle. Even then, if the weakness was thought to be big enough…

He sighed and shook his head, reopening his eyes and staring forward. So much had already been changed from what he knew. Thanks to him Voldemort would no longer be as predictable as he’d been before. He was already pushing the boundaries of things further than he ever had, as far as he knew.

The idea of actually following through with the idea of teaching was becoming less and less appealing. With Voldemort being even less predictable and more dangerous, he was going to need to be hunted down. It was only the fact that he no idea how to go about it that was keeping him in the position.

Voldemort had too many holes to run to. And he didn’t know how to find which one to look down. Hell, most of his knowledge from this particular era was practically non-existent, a taboo dead zone as far as the wizarding world has been concerned.

Too soon to make it into the history books, too far back for it to be the kind of thing that people remembered readily.

And now here he was, trying to juggle it all while apparently mounting a resistance against an enemy that had been forced to war before they were ready.

He had changed everything irrevocably. What would Tom do next? Would he run and hide? Would he strike back?

Would he create something even worse than whatever it was that he had done to those pour souls had had broken and twisted into his monstrosities?

He closed his eyes and took a slow, deep breath. He had changed things irrevocably. Now he just had to do his best to make sure that those changes didn’t make things even worse.
Chapter 12

Neither Cygnus nor Orion particularly liked St. Mungos. Each of them had endured their own mishaps and misadventures. To arrive there usually meant that you had done something dangerous, foolish, or had completely ruined something to the point it had exploded so spectacularly in your face that you could not resolve the issue yourself.

“Can I help you?” the witch sitting behind the desk greeted them both.

“Cygnus and Orion Black,” Cygnus stated, ignoring the slight irritation that Orion exuded at being placed second in the order. “I am here because I was told my daughters were here.”

Instantly the woman’s face paled, then grew serious as she nodded her head. “Yes, sirs. I was made aware of it. Especially due to the extent of the problems.”

Cygnus frowned heavily. “What is wrong with my daughters?”

The woman blinked a moment before looking at him with wide eyes. “Oh, no one told you?”

“… I am becoming less and less amused,” Cygnus stated, hissing out a breath as he clenched his fingers about his wand.

“My apologies, sir!” the woman said quickly. “Your daughters are fine. Your eldest had some bruises, scrapes and her throat was almost crushed, but she’ll be fine. Your younger daughter has a few minor burns and scrapes, with a bruise or two.”

Cygnus let out a slight sigh of relief, though only seemed to relax slightly at the news. “Finally, someone with a straight answer.”

“No, the serious injuries were sustained by young Mr. Tonks,” the woman continued. “From what I understand, if he hadn’t shielded them with his own body, they would have been far, far worse. And if he hadn’t managed that shield, they would’ve all died.”

That was not what Cygnus had been expecting. “… Who?”

The woman seemed to realize just whom she was addressing before wincing slightly. “I believe it would be better for you to talk to the aurors who are stationed at their rooms for more answers, sir. All I have is second hand information on things.”

“… I intend to,” Cygnus agreed with narrowed eyes. “Now, where are my daughters?”

-Cygnus stared at the bed in front of him and reflexively tightened his grip on his wand. All around him he could see the glowing runes projecting information to the mediwitches and wizards that were copying down notes in between waving their wands. Each of them was pointedly ignoring his presence as they focused on their patient.

“How did this happen?” he asked the only mediwitch not involved in the treatment.

“The Aurors have already taken copies of what memories were available on the issue, though they haven’t told us much about it,” the mediwitch said crossly before sighing. “As we’re more
interested in fixing the damage, we hadn’t asked beyond what we needed to know for treatment.”

Cygnus frowned but then nodded in acceptance. Turning his head, he looked at where his daughter, where Andromeda, was staring intently at the patient, worry etched on her face, her face tear stained and eyes red. The injuries Andromeda had sustained had, thankfully, been rather minor.

He looked back at where the healers were working hard to save the life of Edward Tonks, the savior of his daughters, and apparently Andromeda’s secret beau. A muggleborn boy he hadn’t even been aware of. One that had put himself at grave personal risk to save both Andromeda and Bellatrix.

It left him…

He wasn’t sure how he was meant to feel. His daughters were alive because of this boy. This mudblood boy.

And that bastard was apparently quite intent upon striking at House Black. He took a slow deep breath and then released it. “What are the extents of the boy’s injuries?”

“Severe burns caused by secondary exposure to Fiendfyre,” the healer stated clinically. “With enough curse residue to impede healing. Fortunately we have a number of treatments for it. He’ll still scar, though. Magical exhaustion, Core strain, and a variety of asphalt shards that will take a great deal of time to remove.”

Cygnus nodded his head and winced as he considered just what that meant. “How the bloody hell did he even survive then?”

“That’s what caused his magical exhaustion. After he collapsed the street into the sewers beneath them, he apparently created an instinctive shield over them. It wasn’t enough to stop it from burning him completely but it did keep it from completely incinerating his flesh long enough for it to cool down to simple extreme burns.”

Nodding his head, Cygnus let out a long sigh. “Have the bill sent to the Black Family.”

The healer didn’t even bat an eye at the statement, nodding. “Very well.”

It, however, was apparently enough to get Andromeda’s attention. “What?”

“I do not believe I had stuttered, daughter.” Cygnus was tired. It had been a relatively frustrating time in the last few days. And now this. “So I do not need to repeat myself.”

“But… but… he’s a muggleborn!” she blurted out as she stared at him, eyes wide in disbelief.

“I’m aware.” His voice was sour as his lips turned down into a frown. “You do not need to remind me.”

“I…” Andromeda’s face was completely dumbstruck as she stared back at him. “Then, why?!”

“Unless I’m mistaken, he was saving the life of both yourself and Bellatrix,” Cygnus stated, arching a brow up as he looked back at her. “Were you saying that shouldn’t earn him my gratitude?”

“No! But… he’s muggleborn…” Andromeda said the last part quite quietly as she looked away.

“As I said. I’m aware,” Cygnus stated with a look of dislike on his face. “You need not repeat it.”
There was a pause. “He will, of course, have to change his name.”

“What?” Confusion wrote itself across Andromeda’s face as she stared back at her father.

“When you marry,” Cygnus stated blandly. “Tonks is hardly a dignified name. He will have to become a Black.”

Andromeda just stared.

Cygnus continued to stare at Ted, looking more than faintly displeased.

-o-o-o-

Bellatrix Black was staring at the wall when Orion Black found her, her eyes distant and her hands lain listlessly on the ground.

“So, I understand you had another encounter with the ‘Lord’ of the Knights of Walpurgis.” Orion simply looked at her expectantly.

She nodded her head quietly in agreement, not quite looking at him.

Orion frowned slightly at the listless look on his niece’s expression. This… was not the Bellatrix he was used to encountering. And it put him in an… awkward position.

Especially since her father had already come and gone to check up on her sister and their savior.

“And your thoughts?”

“I was useless,” she stated flatly. “Absolutely bloody useless. Andromeda and her… ‘boyfriend’ kept having to save me. They killed all of the monsters.”

“Oh,” he nodded his head slowly at that. Well, that would certainly explain things then. For someone like Bellatrix to have to be rescued by her far more reserved sister... “How do you plan to do better next time then?”

“… Next time?” Bellatrix asked, finally showing some life as she looked up at her uncle.

“This is the second attack by this ‘Lord’ against the House Black. This is the second time he has failed to take the life of a Black.” Orion stated as he arched a brow. “Do you honestly think it will be his last?”

“I…” Bellatrix frowned slightly before looking off into the distance again. “But what am I supposed to do then? Nothing I tried worked. He brushed it aside… and those creatures… none of my spells would…”

“And if your approach fails, what? Will you simply give up? Try the same approach again and again, expecting the results to be any different?” Orion almost winced at his words hit entirely too close to home. After all, that was what their family had done for the last few centuries, clinging to the same approach, the same beliefs and philosophy.

Bellatrix frowned slightly before slowly shaking her head. “No.”

“Good,” Orion nodded his head and looked her over. “I will assume the healers have seen to your injuries?”

Bellatrix unconsciously rubbed her throat before nodding her head.
“Good.” Orion then gestured. “Then you will share your memory. We will go over it. We will see what happened and where you could do better. Understood?”

She bobbed her head in agreement, still highly subdued.

“Good.” He paused before looking at her again. “… But first… what in Merlin’s name are you wearing?”

Bellatrix simply blushed.

-o-o-o-

“What?”

The shrill screech echoed through the House of Black almost made the walls themselves recoil and shudder.

Cygnus simply seemed to arch a brow back at his sister as he regarded her and look of almost apoplectic rage she wore, mirrored by his wife. “I don’t believe I stuttered. And while I’m sure you’re going deaf would explain your inability to listen or control the volume of your voice, I hardly think that’s the case.”

“No! I will not accept this! I will not allow this!” Walburga Black declared, practically frothing at the mouth. “This is too far! This is-!”

“Prudent,” Orion noted as he poured himself a generous few fingers of brandy, before a flick of his wrist with his wand sent a number of chilled cubes into the glass. “Distasteful, but prudent. And the boy did save two of your daughters.”

“I’m quite aware,” Cygnus stated as he poured his own drink a moment later. “And unfortunately Andromeda was already besotted before this mess.”

“Stop ignoring me!” Walburga screamed out. “Druella! We won’t stand for this, will we!”

“Oh, quit your shrieking, woman,” Cygnus snapped out with a hiss as he glared at his sister. “You already lost any say in these matters with your stubborn idiocy. We’re not going to commit suicide just so you can have your twisted delusions satisfied.”

Druella had opened her mouth to agree with her sister-in-law, only to suddenly shrink back as she caught sight of the look in her husband’s eye. Seeing her only support starting to falter, Walburga turned towards Orion fully. “Orion! How dare you-!”

“Enough,” Orion declared flatly as he took a long drink from his glass. “I have had enough of this. I have had enough of your blind hatred and devotion. I have had enough of our family being assaulted and attacked. And most of all?”

He turned his head and affixed Walburga with a burning look of pure and utter loathing. “I have had enough of you. You have been warned, repeatedly. You have been shown the evidence, you have seen what this monster has dared do. And you dare to ask how I dare?”

There was a dull sound as he set his tumbler down, his face lined not with a resignation or sullen acceptance as it usually was when he dealt with his wife. No, this time there was true and unmitigated fury etched across his features. “We are facing an end to our family, and you want to slave us to the force responsible? To a monster that dared to blaspheme the sanctity of his own soul in a futile bid for immortality? To a creature that has shown repeatedly that he is quite happy
to hunt us down and kill us when we had declared neutrality instead of opposition?”

“Neutrality is just a pathetic excuse for not being willing to-!” Walburga retorted, only to suddenly collapse, screaming as a dark blast of magic slammed her back off her feet and into the wall behind her.

“Enough.” The word was flat and hard as magic hissed out of the tip of Orion's wand.

“You, you dare?” She scrambled back to her feet, her hand going for her wand as she stared at him with furious, disbelieving eyes. “I am a Black! I am your wife! I am-!”

“No, you are not,” Orion stated the words with a furious finality. “Walburga, you have sought to defile the house of Black. You have sought to bind us to the service of a monster that would destroy us-.”

“You wouldn't dare! You can’t!” Walburga was staring at Orion, a look of horror and outright disbelief on her face. “You cannot do this!”

“You have tried to drive us into hands of those who have thrice shown that they are our enemies. You have demanded that we ignore the debts we have incurred and the violation of a taboo that we have long known was set for horrifyingly sound reasoning!” Orion growled out the words as his wand flicked from her to the family tapestry. “You have proven you have no place among this house, you are Black no-!”

“NO! YOU WILL NOT!” she screamed out as she raised her wand towards him, only to have her own brother blast her back with a spell before she could cast.

“MORE!” Orion declared with an icy finality before a wretched black spot consumed the portion of the tapestry that had once held her name.

He did not blast her off of the tapestry, not like was typical of casting someone out of their family for their indiscretions. No, he had taken it a step further. He had stripped her of her connection to their family, of their name.

He had named her traitor, not just to their ideals, but to the safety and security of their family.

“Get out, Walburga,” Orion stated softly as he looked down at the horrified woman who had once been his wife. “You have no place here.”

“No, no, no, no…” Walburga was staring at the tapestry, eyes wide, disbelieving. “You can’t, this isn’t real, you can’t, you can’t!”

Orion sighed as the strength seemed to drain out of him. “Just go, Walburga.”

“No! I won’t go! I am a Black! You can’t take that from me! I am-!” she said hysterically, shaking in denial.

“Go,” Orion stated forcefully as suddenly the ancient wards of the home came to life and Walburga suddenly found herself bodily flung out of the room, down the halls and forcefully thrown out the front door.

When it was done he turned to Cygnus, who’s attention had fixed onto Druella, who was staring back at them both with wide, horrified eyes.

“Well, Druella, what will it be?” Cygnus asked with a face that looked carved from stone. “Shall
She swallowed and then slowly shook her head.

“Then I suggest you take your leave, sister-in-law,” Orion stated simple as he looked at her with a gimlet eye. “I do not feel particularly rational at this point in time, and I do not wish for you to further tempt me.”

With a squeak, Druella scurried away leaving behind the two men alone with their drinks.

“Bloody fucking hell,” Orion declared as he seemed to just collapse in on himself. “Merlin’s bollocks, what did I just do?”

“Probably saved us an immeasurable number of headaches and give us reason for others,” Cygnus stated as he stiffly sat down in a seat, staring hard at him.

“What was I supposed to do? She didn’t give me any choice in the matter!” Orion responded defensively. “You know that!”

“You just took away the most important thing she had, the thing she built up her everything around: her family,” Cygnus responded coolly.

“Because of what she was going to end up doing to that family!” Orion said in return as he clutched at his drink. “Do you think I wanted to do that?”

“Do you think I wanted to support you doing it?” Cygnus shot back with a glare as he clutched at his glass.

“What else was I supposed to do then?” Orion demanded as he glared back at Cygnus. “She would not listen! She would not change! She was intent upon doing what we both know would see our family destroyed in one way or another!”

“Yes, she would have,” Cygnus agreed with a slight nod of his head. “That is the only reason I supported you. It does not mean I particularly like it.”

“She was my wife! You think I liked it?”

“She was my sister.”

They stared at one another for a long, sullen moment before Orion sighed and shook his head. “It does not matter now. What I have to do is ensure that she cannot use her former position to hurt us.”

Cygnus frowned, wanting to refute Orion’s statement but finding himself recalling the madness he’d seen in his sister’s eyes. This betrayal… The only place she would, could go would be to the monster.

A monster that would happily exploit everything he could from her.

“I suppose there’s nothing we can really do about it now,” Cygnus finally admitted as he stared down at his drink. “Even after everything…”

“She made her choice and wouldn’t change from it,” Orion stated softly and then sighed. “I suppose I’m partially to blame for always letting her forcefully get her way. It just never seemed important enough to fight her on it in the past.”
“It was how she was raised. Everyone just found it easier to just give her what she wanted, let her assume she was right instead of dealing with her outrage,” Cygnus stated with a slow shake of his head. “It was all too easy, as long as she held the right ideas.”

“I remember,” Orion admitted with a quiet nod of his head. “It’s always just been so much easier.”

“And now, I suppose we’re paying for it.”

“I think we are.”

-o-o-o-

Martellus Longbottom was not a particularly happy man at the moment. It was early, not even crack of dawn early, and he was hunched down in the middle of a foggy moor, and unable to even cast a warming charm on himself to keep from letting the cold morning get to him. He just wanted to get back to his wife and his warm, warm bed.

Especially the warm, warm bed. His wife had cold feet.

Sighing, he looked at the lot of men around him, all of them looking equally miserable as he was.

“Why did we agree to this nonsense again?” one of them asked with a grumble.

“Because otherwise we’re just waiting for someone in the Ministry to get off their arses and try to do something, making a right mess of it, having Dumbledore step up and try and offer assistance to them, and watching everything go to hell in a bloody handbasket,” one of the surlier men stated with a grumble. “And, personally, I’d rather do this shite myself than have to leave this off for one of my boys.”

“Or one of my girls,” another agreed.

“Definitely not one of my grandkids either,” came another.

“You need to get some kids of your own before you get that!”

Before the conversations could devolve further Charlus grunted loudly interrupting them. “You do realize that if I have to call in my wife to get you bastards to behave, I’ll make sure that I tell each and every one of you little gits’ wives exactly what I had to do, yes?”

“You think he’s serious?”

“Probably, of course my wife was the one who told me she’d leave me for his wife if given half a chance.”

“She’d probably even take the captain with her.”

“I wouldn’t take her,” Charlus cut in as he glared at them all. “I’ve met his wife. Now, if you’re all finished acting like a bunch of ickle tossers? Can we please get on with preparing to kick in the teeth of these bloody gobshites?”

“Fine, fine, bloody bastard,” someone said with a grumble. “Why couldn’t we hit up the Malfoys first?”

“Because that particular bastard married my cousin and do you want to end up wanting to cross wands with Lucius Potter’s sister?” Charlus demanded with a glare at all of them.
“… Right, Averys are fine. Besides, this is supposed to be some kind of big to-do according to what I was hearing. Bunch of those bloody knights all getting together in preparation of something big.”

“This early in the morning?”

“You think it’s going to be a quick work for us to pop those wards?”

There was a rippling murmur of displeasure. “Shouldn’t take us that long.”

“Good, because they’re showing up in time for brunch and I’d hate to end up arriving unfashionably late.”

The morning fog had fallen to a moderately warm day, with the sun occasionally visible beneath an overhead veneer of clouds.

Inside, seated at a sizable table, a group of wizards sat before half-finished repasts.

“So, Avery, what new bit of madness is our lord involving us in now?” one of the assembled wizards asked with an almost mocking sarcasm.

“Do you truly wish for word of your disrespect to reach him?” Avery countered back with narrowed eyes. “Or, have you forgotten that you pledged yourself to his service already.”

“That was when he was promising us a return of proper pureblood ideals and putting the mudbloods and muggles under heel where they belong, not creating bloody abominations and monstrosities.”

“You think that you can simply back out now? After you’ve taken his mark?” Avery scoffed scornfully. “You are his. There is no where you can go he cannot find you, no where you can escape. He can find you, he can hurt you no matter where you are.”

“That’s as long as he can do any of those things. He has yet to prove he’s able to deliver anything but sweet sounding promises. Or are you forgetting the string of failures he’s given us?”

There was a softly murmured wave of assent a moment later. “And now, what, he wants to drag us into another one of his ill-conceived plans?”

“How exactly have any of his plans been ill-conceived?” Avery demanded, eyes narrow slits of fury as he almost spat out the words.

“You truly need to ask?” one of the wizards demanded. “Ever since that debacle with the Lestranges, everything he has tried has ended in failure.”

“And never once because of his ideas or his execution,” Avery snapped with a hiss of zealous fury. “Tell Me, which of you, any of you, have ever heard of the Storm Chaser before that night?”

There was a grudging silence to that as Avery continued. “Another Lord, not Dumbledore. A Lord who wields magic like nothing any of us have ever heard of before. A Lord seasoned in violence like nothing any of us could imagine. A Lord like that that fights for the blood traitors and the mudbloods. Which of you could have even conceived of such a thing?”

That left them all silent for a moment before another spoke. “That doesn’t change the fact that he
needed Dumbledore of all people to save him!”

“Dumbledore is a fool, one that our Lord can deal with at his leisure. It was the one that we all still know nothing about that was the problem.”

“And the incident in London?”

Avery paused there before his lips twisted in distaste as he looked back at the speaker as if looking at a bug. “You really think that the he would have targeted muggles of all things for an actual plan? He was simply testing his new creations and found them… insufficient.”

“Which is why he left three survivors.” The sarcasm cut through the air sharply. “A mudblood and two blood traitors. Who identified him as being the man responsible for the attack. Do you know how many people have turned against us as a result of that?”

“And again, which of you could have conceived that in the middle of the stupid muggle’s city, there would be that many of us, let alone two of those blood traitor Blacks,” Avery argued back.

“He still left them alive.”

“He used fiendfyre imbued melted cobblestone to burn them alive,” Avery snapped back. “Dumped it on them where they couldn’t escape. Their deaths should have been assured.”

“You see, that’s what’s wrong with you arrogant gobshites,” a new voice broke in that made them all freeze. “You assume that just because you think something should be a certain way, it will be.”

Slowly, the assembled Knights of Walpurgis turned to see a vanished wall and a group of assembled wizards wearing weathered and beaten-looking steel masks.

“Like you assumed that no one would decide to kick in your front doors and catch you lot with your trousers down,” the voice continued before pausing. “Shame we don’t intend to let you learn from the mistake.”

And then the magic exploded into action.

A shield immediately leapt in front of the speaking intruder, who calmly took a step back as the men with him split into teams and began to cast in unison.

The Knights of Walpurgis, however, were far from helpless.

The table immediately flipped over, shimmering as it turned from wood into stony fortification. Those knights that had been on the wrong side of the table managed to take the time their assailants took in setting up their own defenses to scramble out of the way or erect their own defenses.

“What the bloody hell is going on here, Avery?” one of the knights demanded as he ducked a particularly lethal piercing spell. “You said we were safe here!”

“I don’t know! How did they even know about this!? I only told each of you personally! You weren’t to tell anyone else!” Avery shot back as he as popped up only long enough to swish his wrist in a circular motion and sending a black crescent of magic slashing towards their attackers.

“Does it matter at this point?” another one of them asked. “Why in Merlin’s name aren’t your wards protecting us?”

“I don’t know! They should have- They’re down! How the bloody hell are they down?!”
“Then I’m getting out of this mess!” one of the Knights snarled as he suddenly seemed to shrink into disapparition.

A moment later, a wet, warbling shriek filled the air as the spot the wizard had been vanishing from suddenly exploded in blood, bone and viscera.

“Bloody fucking hell!” one of the knights exclaimed. “What the fuck was that?!”

“Incentive to not run away,” another one stated with a grunt as he flicked up his wand, forming twisting lance of molten stone before sending it over their fortifications with a twist of his wrist. “They mean to see us all dead.”

“But, but…” one of the knights was sputtering, eyes wide and horrified. “They can’t!”

“You think Lord Voldemort was building us up quietly for no reason?” Avery sneered as he ducked as a chunk of stone exploded where his head had been a moment before. “We were supposed to train up so that we could eliminate potential threats like this before they knew we were there! Once we dealt with them the rest of the sheep would be-URK!”

A silver wire looped around Avery’s throat from the other side of the wall before swiftly and brutally pulling him up and over it and out of the security of their fortifications.

Snarling, one of the knights popped up on the fortifications, throwing the sickly green of the killing curse towards their attackers, only for it to explode upon the physical fortifications their attacks had erected.

“We need to get out of here!”

“And how exactly do you expect us to do that? They grabbed the only one who could potentially restore the ward!”

“We could blast through the walls?”

An explosive spell was thrown out, causing the decorations on the wall to suddenly fly back at them as the wall stood there, unblemished.

“Walls are all charmed unbreakable.”

“Then why don’t we fucking vanish them like those bastards did?”

There was a pause and immediately they raised their wands to do just that.

Unfortunately no one bothered to take the time to coordinate exactly where they were going to vanish, and a moment later all of the walls in the vicinity around them vanished. As the ceiling above them creaked dangerously, they realized something else. The walls might have been charmed unbreakable, but the ceilings and floors were not.

“MOVE!”

The knights heard a few shouts of alarm and a number of screams of pain behind them as the floor above them collapsed down onto the room. Roughly half of them managed to make it into the next room that still had solid walls supporting the second story. Behind them, their less fortunate compatriots were buried under the broken remains of the fallen section of house.

“Let’s get out of here!”
Sharp lances of metal rocketed after them as shouts could be heard from the collapsed area.

“Move! Those bastards are right behind us!”

A flash of a dark colored spell and a cry of pain before one of the surviving knights crowed happily, “Ha! Got one!”

A moment later, an entirely different reaction could be heard. “Oh fuck!”

An enormous, churning ball of blue flame was suddenly bursting after them, turning everything it touched almost instantly into ash.

It consumed several of them in an instant as it turned the house into a sudden inferno. A few of them survived its path by diving out its way and by managing to put a wall between themselves and its final destination. That saved them from the resulting explosion of flame and force.

It did not mean they were safe, however. Flames were everywhere. The entire house had turned into a blazing inferno in an instant, with smoke quickly filling the air as things burned to ash and cinders.

One of them was desperate enough to try and again apparate out. The splatter of his remains convinced the others to try something else. Only, a moment later, the heavy clouds of smoke already filling the air turned into a thick, oily mess that coated their bodies in a sticky black tar like substance.

They barely had time to raise their wants to try and dispel it when suddenly the smoke began to burn. Flames exploded through the air once more. This time, however, there was nowhere left for them to escape.

-o-o-o-

“FUCK!” Charlus almost screamed out the word as he glared around at the men, his eyes burning with anger. “What the bloody fuck was that complete and utter shite!?"

“We thought…” one of the men started to say before looking at the dead body of their comrade, their friend, James Stibbens and then going silent.

“We were doing this because we knew how to handle ourselves, to act like soldiers, not a bunch of cocky little shites out to treat all this like a duel! We were here to make a statement! How the hell did that spell get through?”

“We moved too fast,” Martellus stated simply with a frown. “We got too eager. We thought we had them on the run and we forgot to be careful.”

“That’s not going to be any comfort to his wife and kids, will it?” Charlus growled out, before slumping down and glaring at the burning house. “Make sure that none of those bloody rats get out of this sinking ship. Damned if we let them get out when they got one of our own.”

“Yes sir, we’re already running the sweeps now,” one of the men stated quickly. “None of the bastards have gotten out. The inverter ward saw to that.”

“Get Stibbens out of here,” Charlus stated with a growl before looking at the burning manor. “The rest of us will make sure that the rest of this place burns.”

Grim faced beneath their masks, the men nodded their heads and went to work.
“Where is Avery?” Voldemort demanded in a cold, sibilant voice.

“You… haven’t heard, milord?” one of the wizards asked, looking suddenly very fearful. “It… We thought you had.”

“He was supposed to be meeting with several…” Voldemort stated before trailing off as he narrowed his eyes towards the wizard, who had flinched back at his statement. “You know something.”

“He… his manor was burned to the ground, milord,” the man stated slowly as he flinched back from the furious gaze he was affixed with. “It… seems he and his guests did not escape alive.”

“How exactly does a wizard, a knight of Walpurgis in fact, fail to escape something as simple as a fire of all things?” Voldemort demanded with a glare. “Let alone a group of them!”

“Avery… Avery didn’t burn. He was killed before that,” the wizard explained as he flinched back from the terrifying man in front of him. “We found him, with his neck half cut through, half of his guests were buried under what we think was the floor above them. The ones that ran… they were the ones that were burned.”

“Who?” Voldemort asked with a hissing release of angry breath. “Who did they kill, and how did the Storm Chaser find them?”

“Milord, I don’t think it was the Storm Chaser this time.” another wizard spoke up quickly. “He was at Hogwarts the entire time, preparing for the coming term. He never left. I discretely checked with Slughorn when we heard about this.”

“Then tell me, exactly what is it that killed even more of my knights?” Voldemort demanded with an angry hiss of breath. “Who else dared?”

“… Maybe the Blacks?” someone asked warily.

“No,” a single voice said against that. “Those fools are too blind and cowardly to have done something like this. Too blind, cowardly and weak.”

The last word was said with an angry hiss that bordered on outright hatred.

“Well, that’s something coming from a Black,” another wizard muttered as he glared sourly at the defiant figure of Walburga as she glared at the offending man.

“Unfortunately those worthless wretches are so blind and cowardly that they cast me out,” she responded with a sneer at the wizard before turning back to Voldemort. “Because I would not cast you aside and believe their lies about you, my lord.”

“Ah, but you had faith, hmm?” Voldemort asked with a smooth cool voice. “Despite whatever foolish lies they told you, hmm?”

“Yes, milord,” she agreed, bowing her head quietly to him before looking up at him with eyes that burned with no small amount of madness. “I wouldn’t stop, I wouldn’t be silenced, and I wouldn’t be cowed. So they showed their true colors and banished me from the family because they couldn’t handle someone who wouldn’t believe their lies.”

“Of course, casting out such a loyal and devoted witch, only the corrupted and foolish would do
that,” Voldemort agreed with a commiserating sneer.

“It was even worse than that, milord,” Walburga stated with a seething hiss of breath. “They’re bringing a mudblood into the House of Black.”

Voldemort’s eyes widened for a moment, before narrowing into slits. “Madness! And they still dare to call themselves an Ancient and Noble family?”

“Yes, milord, they do. They have disgraced themselves, utterly and completely,” Walburga stated with a hiss. “They openly speak against the righteousness of your cause. They doubt your power, your skill. They make base and slanderous accusations against you and expected me to believe their lies!

“But I did not!” she declared, her eyes practically burning on her face. “I would not be fooled! I would not be swayed! I could see the truth! They are the lost ones! They are the fools! They are destroying the House of Black, and I will see it burn before I let that happen!”

For a moment Voldemort said nothing, letting the silence hang in the air, and a cold, ruthless smile curled over his lips. “Yes, my dear, we will.”

He looked at his assembled followers. “I will see to it personally. We will make them regret, we will make them pay.”

He let those words hang in the air before hissing out one more statement. “We will see them burn.”
Chapter 13

Chapter 13

The end of summer came with a whimper instead of a bang as the pall of unease had fallen across the Wizarding World of the British Isles.

There had been no acts of violence or destruction. No unexplained deaths, nor assaults on muggles, nor destruction of home and property. But most everyone could sense that the issue was not quite resolved. That it would not be resolved so easily.

“They’re going to Hogwarts today,” Lucius noted as he slowly sat down across from Charlus in the study of the man’s home. “James is already practically bouncing off the walls with excitement. I wonder if he will be able to contain himself long enough to actually make it to the platform.”

“He’ll be fine,” Charlus stated with an almost sullen voice as he took a long drink from the glass in his hand.

“You know, this is really unbecoming of you, Charlus,” Lucius stated with a frown. “Yes, you lost a man, but you’ve lost men before. You know this isn’t the way you should be acting.”

“I didn’t lose a man in another country, against an army of professionally trained and disciplined dark wizards,” Charlus responded with a glower. “I lost a man against a bunch of hopped up dark wizard idiots because we weren’t taking them seriously.”

“You weren’t taking them seriously, or your men weren’t?” Lucius asked with a slight frown on his face.

“I don’t even know anymore,” Charlus admitted with a sigh. “I… I can’t tell if I was being foolish because I was still wanting to get a chance for glory and adventure I’d been craving since I was left out of the fight with the basilisk, or if the boys were just riding too high on their memories of glories since past.”

“And exactly how is sulking and nursing a drink helping with that?” Lucius asked with a condescending drawl that reminded Charlus entirely too much of the man’s brother-in-law.

“I hate it when you pull a Malfoy impression,” Charlus told him with a sour faced grimace. “It makes me want to punch you.”

“It is hardly my fault that that fool Abraxas tries to mimic me and fails to understand how to use things in moderation,” Lucius declared with a slight huff and a shake of his head. “But that is not the point. You are wallowing. That is not acceptable. Potters don’t wallow.”

“You know sure as Merlin’s bloody bollocks we sure as fuck do!” Charlus snapped back as he glared at Lucius. “We wallow all the fucking time, whenever we cock up something. We all bloody well do it.”

“We do not wallow when there is someone around to do this,” Lucius corrected before walking over to Charlus and firmly smacking him upside the back of his head.

“Ow, dammit!” Charlus yelped as he spilled his drink over his lap. “That was good brandy, Lucius!”
“Then you had best remember that in the future the next time you decide to wallow in your own misery instead of getting up and fixing your damned problem,” Lucius snapped back without missing a beat. “You bollocksed up. Fine. Bloody well get off your arse and fix it.”

“There isn’t anything to fix, dammit!” Charlus snapped back as he glared at Lucius. “They already know what happened and they know not to do it again. We learned the lesson back during the war, Lucius. This was a reminder we didn’t want.”

“But you apparently needed,” Lucius reminded him with a frown. “Then why are you sitting here, doing nothing but drinking in self-pity?”

“Because I’m the damned officer,” Charlus stated sourly as he stared down at his almost empty glass. “I can’t act until I have intel. I can’t really get the intel myself because no one is going to willingly talk to me right now. So, all I can do is hurry up and wait.”

“Ah,” Lucius acknowledged with a frown. “Then who is…?”

“The boys,” Charlus admitted sourly. “Only, those damned Knights got smart after the raid. They’re not letting any of their plans slip.”

“Surprising,” Lucius admitted with a frown. “I had expected…”

“Yes, well, apparently us taking out the majority of the bastard’s lieutenants in one go has made them more careful,” Charlus said with a grunt as he put his glass back on the table and began to pour more brandy into it. “He’s likely terrorizing them into it, but it’s effective.”

“And I’m sure you can find something more productive to do than sit here, drinking.” Lucius said as he crossed his arms about his chest.

“Yes, well, currently my nephew and his family are rather upset with me. Harry is busy with Hogwarts, you’re busy with James going to Hogwarts…” Charlus said as he listed off all the things keeping him from actually being entertained.

“You know, for a married man, you’re awfully reluctant to spend time with your wife.” Lucius reminded him with a shake of his head and a drawled out chuckle.

Charlus muttered something under his breath that Lucius couldn’t quite make out.

“What was that?” Lucius asked, eyes slowly narrowing into slits.

“She’s yelling at me about losing a man,” Charlus admitted with a quiet voice. “And for taking out the boys without her there to keep them in line and stop them from doing something so stupid as to get themselves killed.”

“Ah,” Lucius nodded his head slowly. “I suppose that would do it.”

“She’s also refusing to let me do anything unless they have enough actionable intel to warrant a full strike,” Charlus continued as he sank into his seat a bit more, clutching at his drink. “It’s not fair!”

“…Charlus?” Lucius stated slowly as he affixed his cousin with a long, flat look.

“Yes?”

“Get over it.”
Sirius Black walked carefully behind his cousin and… he wasn’t quite sure what to call Ted. He knew he rather liked the laidback muggleborn whom had saved his cousins and had been all but forced into the family at wand point. He supposed he’d be Andromeda’s fiancé, only with the distinction that he’d be taking the Black family name.

There had apparently been a bit of grumbling about that, but not enough to cause a full out confrontation.

At least once his mother had been thrown out.

Sirius still didn’t know exactly how he wanted to feel about that. His mother was no longer a Black. Not simply exiled or thrown out, but completely stripped of her family. Because she’d refused to see reason.

Regulus was still too young to really understand what was happening and why he wasn’t supposed to talk to his mother anymore.

The last few weeks had been… He didn’t know what to call them. Everything was different. There was both a grimness to the air around his family home, but at the same time it was as if there had been a weight lifted off of everyone’s shoulders. He didn’t really know how else to put it.

He did know that, otherwise, things had quieted down from what he could tell. There hadn’t been any more attacks and nothing new had been reported about the Storm Chaser. Bellatrix had been by several times, dressed in increasingly muggle fashions, while reviewing various things with his father. He’d asked once what but his father had told him he would go over it with him when he was older.

He really hated that. Though, he had to admit, with his mother’s influence stifled, he found that he actually enjoyed spending time with his father. The man was so much more vibrant these days, if perversely also increasingly grim and serious.

“Well, squirt, I think you can take it from here, right?” Ted asked as he ruffled Sirius’ hair, making it a playful mess.

Sirius rolled his eyes but made no move to stop the playful gesture. “Well, while I can’t imagine how it’ll be without you blocking the way, I imagine I’ll make do.”

“Honestly, Ted,” Andromeda huffed and hid her slight smile before looking at her little cousin. “Let us or Cissy know if you have any problems, alright? And try not to make too much trouble; it’s your first day.”

Putting on his best “who, me?” expression, Sirius smiled at her like butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth. “Of course not, cousin.”

Andromeda snorted softly. “And I’m sure that you’ll say the same thing when you’re dragged off by a prefect.”

Sirius waved off the concern and happily trotted off into the train, in search of a compartment. While he did enjoy his cousin and Ted’s company, he was still an eleven year old boy and they were both Seventh years. Best to find someone more his own age.

That way he could at least have some fun.
In one compartment he found a boy with messy black hair that looked like the Storm Chaser, a girl with bright red hair, and a sleeping man with an odd looking muggle hat over his face, leaning comfortably in the corner of what he could quickly tell was a magically expanded compartment. When the girl turned to look at him, Sirius had to swallow heavily as he found himself staring at a pair of very familiar emerald green eyes. Well, that was certainly offsetting.

Quickly shaking his head after a moment he offered a slight bow. “Mind of I join you?”

“It does look like they’re plenty of room,” the girl noted with a bemused smile. “I’m waiting for my friend Severus to join but it looks like this particular compartment has more than enough room.”

“More the merrier,” the boy stated with a nod as he grinned in a manner Sirius found quite familiar. “Though I think we can thank him for the whole compartment thing.”

Sirius nodded his head and settled into the compartment with a nod. “Sirius Black.”

“Nice to meet you. Lily Evans,” the girl introduced herself with a smile and a nod as Sirius noted her eyes were a bit red rimmed, as if she’d been crying recently.

“Ah, right. Da mentioned you’d be starting this year, too,” the boy agreed with a nod of his head. “James Potter.”

“Right,” Sirius agreed nodding his head a bit. “Lucius Potter’s son, right?”

“The same. Orion Black’s son?” James asked back.

“Until last few months, I’d have asked you to not hold it against me,” Sirius noted with a grin. “At least until somehow someone kicked some sense into my family.”

“I think that was Cousin Charlus,” James admitted, before pouting slightly. “He and Da still won’t introduce me to the Storm Chaser.”

“… Who?” Lily asked in confusion.

Sirius blinked at her before his eyes widened slightly. “Oh. Muggleborn?”

“Yes, why?” she asked again, still visibly confused.

“Right, well, there’s this group, the Knights of Walpurgis,” Sirius started with a nod. “They’ve been doing a bunch of dark stuff. Dark Arts, muggle baiting, muggle attacking, that kind of stuff. Blood purists, the lot of them.”

Seeing Lily’s confusion, James spoke up. “Blood purists believe that if you were born to muggles or have a muggle parent or grandparent, then you’re inferior to those with a few generations of magical parentage. If someone ever calls you a mudblood, they’re insulting you, so hex them to bits, I say.”

“Mhm,” Sirius agreed with a nod before continuing. “So, these Knights of Walpurgis were making all kinds of trouble… until they accidentally picked a fight with the Storm Chaser. And he basically slaughters the group that had attacked a muggle bar he was having a drink in, looking to murder everyone there.”

“Then there was the whole things at Hogsmeade, too.” James stated excitedly with a nod.
Lily looked pale and worried. “Really? So they’re just… attacking muggles, for… what? Being muggles?”

“Yes,” Sirius said with a serious look on his face. “Did you hear about the explosion in London a bit back?”

“It was all over the news!” Lily exclaimed, looking worried. “You’re saying that was…?”

“My cousins were there,” Sirius looked at her solemnly. “If it hadn’t been for Andromeda’s boyfriend, they’d have died. The Lord of the Knights of Walpurgis is apparently a crazy scary dark wizard.”

“We’ll be safe in Hogwarts, though,” James stated quickly. “Not only is it the safest place in the world, but the Storm Chaser is going to be there!”

“He is?” Lily perked up at that. “I thought Albus Dumbledore was…?”

“Dumbledore’s there, too,” James admitted. “But he’s old.”

Sirius snorted a bit. “And crazy.”

Lily looked at them both, slightly scandalized. “There’s nothing wrong with being old!”

Sirius quickly put up his hands placating. “Sure, sure.”

The door to the compartment opened once more and a boy with sallow skin and greasy hair looked in. Seeing him, Lily’s face immediately brightened. “Severus! I was waiting for you!”

For a moment the boy looked like he wanted to say something before shook his head a moment. “We’re about to be under way.”

Lily nodded his head and gestured to the seat next to her. “This is my friend, Severus. He’s the one who told me I was a witch! These are James and Sirius.”

Sirius nodded his head. “Lo.”

“Hiya,” James stated with a nod. “We were just telling Lily here about the whole mess that’s been going on with those Knights of Walpurgis.”

Severus froze for a moment, glancing at Lily worriedly as he took his seat. “I… see.”

“Well, more talking about the Storm Chaser, I think,” Sirius pointed out with a smirk as he lounged back in his seat. “And about that whole mess in London.”

Severus grimaced a bit. “I… heard.”

“Sirius’ cousins were there!” Lily stated, her eyes still wide before looking at Severus who shifted uncomfortably. “Why didn’t you tell me about it?!”

“… I didn’t think you’d want to know?” Severus asked, uncertain, before looking out the window and noting that they had begun to move, and smiling slightly. “But it looks like now we’re finally heading off to Hogwarts.”

“Brill,” James stated eagerly. “I can’t wait!”

“It’ll be nice finally getting away from my family, even if they’ve been better lately.” Sirius agreed
with a nod.
Lily’s face grew strained at the family comment and she nodded her head in agreement. “I see. So, Severus, what house do you think we’ll be in?”

“It had better be Slytherin.” Severus stated authoritatively.

James’ face twisted into displeasure and he opened his mouth to say something, only to find an adult voice cutting in.

“And why, exactly, would you say that, young man?” The voice came from the man in the corner, who slowly sat up and pushed his hat up his head.

Sirius’ eyes widened as he recognized the figure from Bellatrix’s memory. The Storm Chaser!

Snape, coloring slightly at being called into question, stiffened his back and sitting up straighter. “Slytherin is the best house! Cunning and ambition are…!”

“There is no best house.” It was a gentle rebuke as the man shook his head. “And your friend here is a muggleborn, yes?”

“What of it?” Severus stated defensively as he glared back at the man.

The man turned his head and looked at Lily. “Slytherin is also known as the house of the purebloods and is where most blood purists prefer to be sorted. While I’m sure he didn’t mean it that way, wishing for you to be sorted into Slytherin would mean that you’d be in for a very… difficult seven years.”

Severus colored and glared at the man who turned his head back at him and merely arched a brow at the look. When Severus finally broke and looked away, he sighed and looked at the others. When his gaze settled on James, he gave the boy a look.

“However, I would also remember that judging someone and acting against them solely because of their House is the act of a bully.” He looked down at James with hard emerald eyes. “And I would hate to have to tell Lucius that his son was behaving just like a blood purist.”

James colored and then went pale, staring at the man with wide eyes.

Then he turned to where Sirius was just staring at him. “Yes, Mr. Black?”

“You’re the Storm Chaser!”

-ð-ð-ð-

Harry had never had any intention of interacting with his parents or their friends when he rode on the train to Hogwarts. Apparently there was some kind of tradition about the new professors accompanying the students aboard the train and Remus’ appearance on the train had not, in fact, been entirely a one off situation. Something about responsibilities he hadn’t particularly felt like paying attention to.

So he’d found a nice compartment in the back quarter of the train and conjured himself a hat before taking a page from his favorite defense teacher’s book and settling in to spend the trip dozing.

Then James Potter had entered the compartment and, after a bit of hesitation, taken a seat. A few moments later Lily Evans had appeared as well, and a trickle of déjà vu had dripped down his back. When Sirius Black had arrived, he knew that somewhere fate was laughing its arse off at
him.

When they’d started talking about the Storm Chaser and the Knights of Walpurgis, he’d wanted to bang his head against the wall and let out a scream of frustration.

Fanboys. He bloody well had fanboys. AGAIN! And that only meant that he also had fan girls out there as well.

… Which, he had to admit, he probably already knew considering Bellatrix appeared to be one of them.

Then, of course, Severus-the-bloody-half-blood-prince Snape showed up. And the déjà vu continued with only relatively minor variations.

And of course, Severus had to open his mouth for that bit of stupidity of wanting a muggleborn in Slytherin of all places. No one had ever accused Snape of not being a selfish arse, after all. So he’d intervened before James could start what he knew would be a long, constant headache for him as long as he stayed at Hogwarts.

Once he’d hopefully nipped that problem in the bud, he found Sirius staring at him.

“You’re the Storm Chaser!”

Immediately four sets eyes stared at him in disbelief. With his eyes still on Sirius, he stated in a voice that probably wasn’t as calm as he would like, “The appropriate address is Professor Potter, Mr. Black.”

“Brill! You are a Potter!” James looked like Christmas had come early as he gleefully smiled in his seat.

“Yes, Mr. Potter, I am,” Harry agreed gravely. “Which means that I will expect even more out of you than the rest of your classmates. And if I catch you misbehaving…”

Harry slowly smiled at the suddenly again pale boy. “Well, I can assure you that your classmates will be quite happy to not be you.”

James squeaked slightly under the look.

Then he turned his head back to Severus, who looked slightly vindicated at James’ chastisement. “And you will find that you should considering the repercussions of your actions more. While having your friend in Slytherin would mean she was closer to you, if you yourself go there, it would also mean that she would have to deal with far more and quite vocal blood purists.”

Severus looked away at that while Lily looked… perturbed. “Are they really that bad?”

“They can be, Ms. Evans,” Harry stated simply. “The mythology of Hogwarts says that Slytherin was against muggleborns being added to the school, thus it is thought to be the house of the pure.”

His lips quirked at that before shaking his head. “All a matter of perspective, honestly, but nothing children should be worried about just yet. You can listen to the hat, but I’ve heard it will also listen to you. And while you might want to prove yourself… is proving yourself to a group of children truly worth the unpleasantness you’ll have to endure?”

Lily looked… quite confused.
Sirius took the opportunity to speak up. “Where did you learn all those spells you use?”

“And exactly how would you know what spells I use, Mr. Black?” Harry asked, half curious.

“Bellatrix shared her memories with the family,” Sirius stated simply. “As the heir to the head of house, I was allowed to see them after I petitioned my father.”

“Not something a child should really be watching,” Harry chided softly, trying to not think about the things he’d seen and done when he was just a first year himself.

“I have a responsibility to my family,” Sirius stated as he straightened up a bit, before his shoulders slumped down. “Or, at least now that they’re not acting like a bunch of tossers hyped up on the Dark Arts.”

“Language, Mr. Black,” Harry corrected calmly. “I can and will find your cousin to have words with you. From my understanding, Andromeda Black is quite the formidable witch already, with the potential to be far more.”

Sirius grumbled slightly under his breath, something Harry couldn’t quite catch.

“I saw the aftermath of that battle first hand, Mr. Black.” Harry stated seriously. “I saw what she faced. It was far more than luck that saw her through it.”

And he was going to have fun putting the girl who had become his godson’s grandparents on the spot when term started. That was going to be fun. And it wasn’t like he was planning to revenge himself on Romeda for all the times she had tricked him into changes Teddy’s diapers.

Sirius nodded his head slightly. “She and Ted walked me through the train for a bit before they went to find a nice place to snog.”

James made a disgusted face. Lily clearly looked disapproving. Severus looked a bit ill at the notion.

Harry wondered what the world was coming to when, out of the four, Sirius Black was the most mature.

-0-0-0-

It was some time later that Andromeda Black and Ted Tonks appeared at the compartment door, with Harry again resting beneath his hat. James and Sirius had broken into a discussion about what classes they thought would be the most fun, while Lily and Severus had a more sedate conversation between them.

“So, making friends, squirt?” Ted asked as he leaned against the frame of the compartment door with a smirk.

Sirius blinked and then perked up as he pointed to Harry. “The Storm Chaser really is here!”

Harry groaned softly and half tilted up his hat to glare at Sirius with one eye. “Congratulations, Mr. Black. You have volunteered yourself as my go to demonstration aide for this semester.”

“Already making those connections, huh, kid?” Ted stated as he half barked off a laugh while Sirius paled.

“You know, you could’ve just asked Uncle Charlus if you wanted to meet him, Sirius.” Andromeda
stated, before slyly smiling at Harry. “Or talked to my sister.”

Harry shifted his glare from Sirius onto Andromeda. “And what do you know? I never knew that the Black family was so notoriously generous with volunteering their services. Were you planning on making for the trifecta, Mr. Tonks?”

“No, Professor,” Ted stated cheerfully. “I’m quite happy as I am, though I thank you for the offer.”

Andromeda elbowed her boyfriend in the stomach, though that only dimmed his smile a fraction as he grunted at the impact. “I thought we were going through everything together, dear?”

“Mhm. Everything in our relationship,” he agreed with a smirk. “All bets are off when you talk about parading your sister about in lycra minis in front of our newest professor.”

Harry groaned softly and shook his head as he looked back at Andromeda. “Really, Ms. Black? To a traditionalist like your sister?”

“I do believe you were the one that made the comment about her lack of experience with muggle fashion.” Andromeda returned with a brow arching. “She decided to correct that. We were rather in the process of getting her used to muggle dress when we were attacked at the boutique.”

“You missed quite the show,” Ted added with a half-smile as he again ignored the elbow shoved into his side by Andromeda.

“Ah, I see,” Harry nodded his head and then smiled cheerfully at Andromeda in a way that made her hackles rise. “How kind of you to point out the advantages muggle clothing can give you in a fight. I will expect you to bring an appropriate set of muggle clothing to class so that you can demonstrate.”

Andromeda’s eyes went wide as saucers at that. “But, but…..!”

Harry turned his head and looked at the various firsties staring from him to Andromeda and back. “Now, students, what have you learned?”

“Do not try and set you up with my cousin?” Sirius offered.

“That I do not want to find out what kind of punishments you will come up with if you catch me breaking the rules?” James elected.

“… That you are not to be crossed.” Severus stated flatly.

“That you haven’t had a date in a very long time?” Lily blurted out before slapping her hands over her mouth and blushing brightly.

“That she’s going into Gryffindor.” Ted noted as he pointed to Lily with a grin.

“Yes, Yes, Yes, none of your business, and that seems a distinct possibility.” Harry stated with a completely straight face. “Now, what you need to understand is that if I had been sorted into a Hogwarts house when I was your age, do you know which house I’d end up in?”

“Slytherin.” James, Sirius and Severus stated in unison.

“Gryffindor,” Harry corrected with a bemused smile.

That made them all stare at him. “Just because you’re brave doesn’t mean you can’t be cunning. Just because you’re intelligent doesn’t mean you can’t be brave, and just because you’re hard
working doesn’t mean you can’t be all three.”

He paused a moment, before looking at Ted. “Now, take the young Mr. Tonks here.”

Ted blinked a bit at that. “What…?”

“Mr. Tonks managed to kill eleven magically resistant creatures in a few moments, force the Lord of the Knights of Walpurgis to release Ms. Black’s sister while rather pissing him off enough to dump a mound of fiendfyre melted asphalt on top of them. Something that would have killed all three of them if Mr. Tonks hadn’t collapsed the street beneath them and then shielded them with his own magic and body.”

Harry smiled as all four firsties stared at Ted with wide eyes. “And what house are you in, Mr. Tonks?”

“Errr… Hufflpuff?” Ted answered in confusion.

“As you can see, your house doesn’t define what you can be. So, I’d advise you to consider more who are the people that you want to be with for the next seven years?” Harry stated with a bemused smile at Ted.

Ted had a feeling Harry had just done something terrible to him as well, but he couldn’t quite figure out what. Though the looks of awe on the firsties faces were… troubling. Very troubling.

-V-V-V- Voldemort scowled as he drummed his fingers against the desk in front of him as he stared at the piece of parchment in front of him as if he could cause it to spontaneously combust into flame. Admittedly, he did know how to do that particular parlor trick, but as much as he might enjoy it, lighting things on fire would not solve his current problems. At least not without knowing who to actually light on fire.

Things had been… trying of late.

While the addition of Walburga formerly Black had been a much needed boost to morale and recruitment, it had also come with its own sets of challenges. Specifically, the simple fact that the woman was zealously insane. More so than any of the followers he’d had before.

It made her useful to an extent, but, also… unsettling.

Still, she was helping him and for that he was grateful. Not to mention the fact that she was ruthlessly vicious when it came to muggles. They’d already managed several successful raids on various muggle neighborhoods in an attempt to get his new recruits up to speed as soon as possible.

However there had been other complications preventing them from acting further. Nothing major so far, but there had been minor things. Raids on certain operations they’d begun, purchases, recruitments.

Small strike forces hitting them hard enough to make his groups scatter, but never anything that they hadn’t had to drop feelers and whispers into the waters to set up. No more attacks on his followers homes. No more of his followers being hunted down like dogs and crushed beneath that bastard Storm Chaser’s heel.

It did, however, teach his newer recruits to be more cautious and formidable in their defenses. At least, those that survived. These days, it seemed that the only way for him to insure that such
incidents didn’t occur was to make certain to be in place himself.

Not once had they dared mount an attack while he was present.

While it was a wonderfully reassuring that they would not dare assault him, at the same time he found it rather frustrating that he never had targets to destroy.

And now, a new year was starting at Hogwarts.

All those new students, all those minds being led astray. First by Dumbledore, now by that damned Storm Chaser. Teaching them rubbish ideas like equality and that the strong should protect the weak.

Lying to them about right and wrong.

Ignoring the simple truth that Power was all that truly mattered.

It was disgusting how individuals with so much power, so much might could believe in that great lie. Slaving themselves, chaining themselves to such idiotic ideologies. Believing that they should be anything but the rulers of the weak creatures claiming to be men.

He took a slow, deep breath, then shook his head.

No, not now. He would not allow himself to get lost in his anger at them. He would not allow his festering disappointment to rule him.

They were obstacles, cancers that needed to be excised. A rot on the wizarding world along with those worthless muggle loving creatures they supported. Soon enough, he would be rid of them.

After all, their strength was only finite, their lives only mortal. Eventually he would triumph. Eventually, they would be nothing but dust beneath his feet.

And eventually, he would be triumphant.

Time was, after all, on his side.
Forgot to post this yesterday, irritating when my body is making me suffer.

Chapter 14

“I welcome you all to another year at Hogwarts.” Dumbledore’s voice was full and powerful as it rolled over the Great Hall in a way that Harry had never heard before. The sorting had gone well enough. Or, at least he hoped it had.

Harry slowly looked out over the Great Hall and studied the faces of the students he found there. Sirius Black, James Potter and Lily Evans had gone into Gryffindor as expected. He’d seen both Pettigrew and Remus join the house as well and figured everything was going to work out well enough. Then Snape had apparently decided to throw a curve ball when he’d ended up in Ravenclaw instead of Slytherin.

Still, it was something at least. Hopefully Ravenclaw would help him focus more on his love of research and development.

Dumbledore’s voice continued unabated as he addressed the students. “As many of you are aware, we have had a most… troubling summer. There were multiple events that saw unsettling things revealed.

“As the Prophet reported, multiple individuals have vanished without a trace. And it was discovered a hidden campaign of assault against the muggles. Something that had graduated into things that have taken a step beyond unforgivable.”

He realized once more just how much Dumbledore had lost over the years, how they had weighed on him by the time he had met the old man. Still, it would be interesting to see the man who he’d been. Even if there was a bit too much arrogance in him for his own preferences.

“Sadly, Professor Tolmann has decided to not return. As such, may I introduce the new professor of Defense against the Dark Arts, Professor Harry Potter!”

Harry nodded his head as he glanced around the Great Hall with a cool look.

“With the recent acts of… wanton aggression by the group known as the Knights of Walpurgis, Professor Potter volunteered his services in order to make sure that people will be… properly prepared to defend themselves.”

Dumbledore then turned his face towards him and tilted his head towards the assembled students.

Sighing, Harry nodded his head back to the Headmaster before slowly standing up and gave his robes a negligent brush. Canting his head back, he took a moment to glance out over the various individuals assembled in front of him, taking in the mixture of faces. Some looked at him in confusion. Others had looks of worried apprehension. He made a note to mentally mark down the ones glowering back at him.
“As Professor Dumbledore said, my name is Harry Potter. Few of you will have heard of me. By that name at least,” he stated, the words calmly and simply as he looked at them. “Unfortunately, due to an unfortunate series of events that shaped my life, I acquired a very specific set of skills.”

He paused a moment as he let the first small amount of disapproval seep into several of the other professor’s faces before he continued. “Skills that will, for the most part, not be taught in my classes. I will instead give you knowledge.”

Another pause. “For those of you who choose to learn, at least.”

There was a bit of silence at that and he shrugged a bit. “I would, however, like to thank House Black. Specifically, I would like to thank Andromeda Black for her volunteering to be my assistant for the practical demonstrations, no matter how uncomfortable, painful and/or humiliating they might be…”

Andromeda was glaring at him with an intensity that reminded him of the Bellatrix of his time. Sirius was slumping down in his seat, trying desperately to hide. It didn’t save him.

“I would, in addition, like to thank Sirius Black for agreeing to assisting me with classroom duties and helping to clean up the classrooms at the end of the day.”

Sirius stared at him with a look of pure betrayal on his face.

“In addition…” He paused a moment, tilting his head to the side thoughtfully. “I look forward to having a very… educational year.”

He smiled at them all with a bland, placid smile before settling himself down into his seat and turning his attention to his meal.

“Ah, yes…” Dumbledore struggled a moment to decide on exactly how he would respond to Harry’s statements. “As Professor Potter stated, let us try to have an educational year. Now, let us all tuck in.”

As students returned to their meals to digest that bit of information, a much younger Minerva McGonagall affixed Harry with a disapproving look. “Showing such favoritism so blatantly, Mr. Potter?”

“Minerva, my dear girl, if you think that was favoritism, well…!” Horace Slughorn was chortling a bit, his mustache almost vibrating. “Oh, no, that was most assuredly not favoritism.”

“What would you call it then, Horace?” Minerva demanded with a prim huff and a glare.

“Punishment,” Slughorn stated cheerfully. “I must say, what on earth did they do to get on your bad side so quickly, my boy?”

Slughorn had that gleam in his eyes again, one Harry recognized so very well, collecting once more. Though he had already probably realized that he would best be careful with Harry already. “A punishment they can’t really squirm out of after that declaration. One without needing to resort to detentions or deducting points.”

“Then why ever did you do so?” McGonagall’s tone was slightly mollified as she curiously echoed Slughorn’s question.

“I believe I might have an inkling,” Dumbledore asked with a light twinkle in his eye. “Would this have anything to do with the young Bellatrix’s visit to your quarters earlier this summer?”
McGonagall looked scandalized. Slughorn looked like the rooster that had just gotten the juiciest worm of the day. The other teachers showed a variety of expressions in between.

“You mean the visit from the young woman who seems to want to throw herself at the man that almost killed her?” Harry asked dryly back at Dumbledore. “Whom was promptly told to take her rather improper and ill thought out seduction attempt and leave?”

“Yes, that,” Dumbledore agreed, though he hadn’t known the fact that Harry had almost killed the girl in question. The fact that he wasn’t being hunted by the Blacks and that she was apparently making romantic gestures towards the man was… He wasn’t sure he really wanted to contemplate what might have been going through the Black’s mind in regards to her.

“No, in fact, young Sirius managed to earn his… position by declaring me to be ‘The Storm Chaser’ to every single person he could.” Harry responded with a shake of his head and a look of distaste on his face. “Andromeda earned hers by alluding to her sister’s inappropriate attempts and thoughts. Best to nip that little problem in the bud before it can grow any further.”

They blinked, well, except for Slughorn, who was apparently the only one who actually knew who he was. Then they blinked again. Dumbledore nodded his head in understanding. “True enough. It is always best to defuse those situations quickly.”

“… The Storm Chaser?” McGonagall asked faintly, staring at Harry in surprise.

“You didn’t tell them?” Harry asked Dumbledore.

“And deny them the thrill of personal discovery? Never, Mr. Potter.”

Harry sighed in irritation. “I see. Yes, I’m the one who was daft enough to give himself such a silly moniker. It was in the heat of the moment and I wanted to make an impression.”

“Oh, I daresay you’ve made quite the impression, my boy!” Slughorn pointed out with a gleeful laugh.

“I’m sorry, I simply… you are not what I was expecting.” McGonagall noted as she took another moment to look Harry over curiously. “I was honestly expecting someone…”

“Older?” Harry asked with a droll tone of voice.

“More visibly seasoned,” she corrected as she straightened her back and looked back at him with her chin raised proudly.

“Sounds like older to me.” Harry stated as he turned his attention back to his food.

“Quite right, my boy, quite right!” Slughorn agreed with a happy smile that refused to be turned by McGonagall’s sour look. “Now, really, Minerva, I can still recall how much of a cute little firstie you were. Do you really think such a sour look will work on me?”

“I had hoped it would prompt you to remember your manners, Horace.” she responded primly.

Harry sighed and shook his head as he instead focused on his meal. It was so very… odd to see them so light hearted. Another sign of how much the war had changed things.

He recognized Fillius Flitwick at the table, though most of the other teachers were new as far as he could tell. Or, more precisely, old. People he had never met, who were retired or even had passed by the time he’d arrived at Hogwarts himself.
It was an interesting experience to see things as they once were.

His eyes involuntarily looked towards Snape, who was, while somewhat isolated, appeared to be hesitantly joining in the various discussions around him. Well, somewhat at least. He made a mental note to see about having someone look into the boy’s home life.

If that was even possible.

He understood it was distracting him. Seeing the people that could be his parents and their closest friends as children was… He wasn’t sure what to call it.

However, he did know he didn’t like it. For whatever they were, the people he knew they were not. Based on the changes that he’d already seen, they might never be.

Which meant everything he knew was well and truly gone. It was a bitter pill to swallow as he mechanically continued to eat his food. Still, there was the chance to end Voldemort before he truly became an unstoppable menace.

He had never much cared for revenge. He’d learned that lesson bitterly early enough. It just wasn’t in his nature to hate, not like others did.

It didn’t mean, however, he couldn’t deal with a clear and present danger.

As Voldemort had shown himself to be. A part of him wondered what it meant that he couldn’t even muster up any hatred towards this younger version of the man who had killed his parents. There was no doubt that the man had already completed the path to becoming a monster.

But all he felt when he looked at him was anger and pity.

Sighing, he paused in his meal to stare out over the Great Hall before abruptly standing up. Nodding his head slightly to the other teachers he spoke quietly. “Headmaster, professors. I’m afraid I have to retire. I have to be ready for the morning’s classes.”

“Surely, Professor Potter, you can afford us a few more moments until the end of the meal?” Dumbledore asked him, looking at him pointedly with a frown.

“I normally would, but I just came up with an idea for my first lesson and I believe I’ll need those moments to finish preparation and still get enough sleep.” With that he bowed his head slightly then turned and walked away.

“That… is not what I was expecting.” Slughorn noted with an almost pout as he fell back in his seat. “I had hoped to have more time to get to know the young man.”

“I was expecting him to be better mannered.” McGonagall stated with a huff.

One of the other teachers simply looked at her. “Minerva, m’dear, he is a Potter. If you were expecting manners and good behavior from a Potter, you have obviously never met one.”

“Too true!” Slughorn agreed with a laugh. “But, they’re never boring!”

“As much you might wish they were.”

There was a general consensus of agreement at that. Potters were not boring. And sometimes, you really wished they were.

-o-o-o-
The morning sun was still rising when the next morning brought the first class of the new Defense Against the Dark Arts not to their class room, but to an open field near the lake with their teacher standing there, waiting patiently.

“Welcome to Defense against the Dark Arts.” Harry Potter found himself looking over the various eyes affixed upon him with a mix of wide eyed awe and angry suspicion. Dismissing the discomfort it caused, he gestured around them. “I’m sure you’re wondering why we’re having our first class here instead of in the typical classroom.”

The class of Seventh years, Gryffindor and Slytherin, of course, all wore expressions that mirrored the truth of his statement. He was going to have to request that they stop trying to schedule the two infamously antagonistic houses together. It was going to make his practicals difficult to say the least.

He gestured with his wand and suddenly the earth around them shifted and changed; walls grew up and figures formed.

Their sudden shouts of surprise almost made him smile as his concentration strained against his humor, though he managed to keep it in check. “We are here because I don’t believe it would be appreciated for me to do this in the castle.”

Creatures rose up, formed of earth and stone as they began to stalk around the students, who found themselves uncomfortably boxed in.

“I told you in the Great Hall that I am here to teach those who are willing to learn. Beyond potentially teaching you the Patronus spell, your spell list will match your classic spell list.”

He noted the looks of disappointment on a number of students’ faces, along with the fear and envy on others as they watched his constructs.

“The knowledge I promised for those that wish to learn is a step beyond your typical classroom assignments.” He paused then turned his head towards Andromeda. “Ms. Black, step forward.”

Warily, Andromeda did just that as she watched him as if he was a snake ready to strike. “Yes, Professor?”

Harry summarily ignored her as he looked at the rest of the class, at least at first. “Ms. Black is one of the three survivors of the infamous incident that occurred in London this summer. Tell me, Ms. Black, what did you attempt to do when you realized something dangerous was occurring?”

“Stay safe and get away as soon as possible,” she stated flatly.

“Precisely,” he agreed with a nod of his head, making the entire class blink in surprise. “Unless you have a duty otherwise, that should always be your first priority in a dangerous situation.”

“You don’t!” someone blurted out from the Gyffindor side, getting a number of glares and snide sneers from the Slytherins.

“No, I don’t,” he agreed with a nod of his head before cutting off the moment of satisfaction as he continued. “I don’t because I had a duty to not for so many years I know how to respond. There are rules you need to know and understand. Once you do, you still have to have the training and the experience to know when and how to work with them and when to disregard them.

“I will be teaching you those rules. I will be showing you why they should be followed and I will be giving you the opportunity to exercise them.”
Then he nodded his head to Andromeda. “Ms. Black will be assisting me with this. And we will start out with a demonstration.”

The earth shifted again and the students let out alarmed cries as they suddenly found themselves rising into the air as the ground under them turned into something resembling bleachers.

“The rest of you will be watching,” he stated simply as he gestured with his wand and Andromeda found herself in a rough approximation of a familiar building. The boutique. “I’m afraid, Ms. Black, that I will not be able to supply you with your previous ammunition. I trust you can make up for the lack?”

Andromeda decided then and there that she hated Harry Potter. “I will make do.”

Harry simply smiled at her. “I’m sure.”

And suddenly she found herself facing not a singular creature as she had before, but three earthen wyrms, snapping at her between herself and the exit.

“First thing you need to understand when you find yourself in a situation like this is your goal. In this case, Ms. Black’s goal is to escape. A rather broad objective, but…”

Suddenly one of the wyrms was lunging at Andromeda, who cursed and flinched back as she reflexively tried to banish the construct away from her.

“What’s a challenge without an actual challenge?” he asked as he calmly directed another wyrm towards her as she quickly brought up her wand in response.

There was still an edge of panic in her eyes but she wasn’t letting it run wild. She had already started transfiguring rocks into spears when the wyrm reached her. Instead of launching them, she had lodged them into the ground, angled towards the wyrm as its momentum skewered it onto her defense.

Moving quickly, she started casting again, only to find the skewered wyrm’s tail smacking out and slapping her across the chest. She barely had the time to note that the impact was cushioned and didn’t hurt as she was thrown back. As she struggled to get back to her feet, she found the first wyrm she had banished had returned and clamped down on the voluminous fabric of her robes and was spinning her around by them.

She started to scream as Harry turned his attention back to the class. “Now, as you can see, she kept her cool and did not hesitate in her actions. Which is a key in a dangerous situation: Hesitation will get you killed.”

He flicked his wand and a slab of earth rose up, blocking him from the vomit that Andromeda had finally begun to release as she continued to spin. “She even had decent responses to the initial assaults. Where she failed, however, was another key point you’ll be learning over the course of this year.”

Andromeda finally stopped spinning and was hung by her robes.

“Situational awareness. You need to know what’s going on around you and keep track of it.” He paused there, letting the words sink in as Andromeda was carried to a nice soft patch of grass by the wyrm and lain down. “Now, who’s next?”

Slytherins pointed at Gryffindors and Gryffindors pointed at Slytherins.
“Ah, dealers choice then?” Harry asked cheerfully before randomly pointing to a Gryffindor. “I think… we’ll start with you.”

The student was not happy, at all.

Harry just smiled. By the end of the lesson, they would hardly be the only one.

-o-o-o-

After the class had ended, Harry found himself in his office, going over the results of his lesson, going over the notes he’d made for each of the student’s performances and suggestions to make going forward. They had, almost to a fault frozen when the creatures had attacked. That was to be expected.

That was part of the reason he’d stuck to rather terrifyingly realistic constructs resembling monsters. It took time and effort to overcome the ingrained response they would have to their first encounter with such creatures. But, hopefully once he was done, they wouldn’t hesitate if they had the unfortunate chance to encounter such a thing in the real world.

“What, exactly did you think you were doing?!” Minerva McGonagall was absolutely livid as she forced her way into his office, her voice raised to a screaming yell, only to find herself suddenly facing the edge of what looked to be a spear formed out of… newspaper pressed to her throat.

“I think, Professor McGonagall, that you should take more care in how you choose to approach someone.” Harry Potter’s voice reprimanded calmly before he gestured with his wand and the newspaper seemed to unfold itself and then refold itself into a neat stack back on his desk. “Not all of react with the same civility to violent intrusions.”

Taking a slow, deep breath to calm down her suddenly hammering heart, she swallowed the thick surge of fear in her throat as she reminded herself that this man was not someone to be so casually angry towards. “… You put school children against monsters!”

“No,” he corrected her. “I put school children against animated constructs completely under my control and lined with cushioning charms to prevent any real damage in order for it to be revealed how they react to such situations.”

McGonagall worked her jaw and stared at him in absolute disbelief. “This was not the curriculum you submitted!”

“As I stated last night, it was a last minute change that I had to implement for Seventh year students. I will be doing the same with my Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff classes.” Harry responded easily enough.

“You will not!” she declared with an angry hiss.

“Oh? And why not?” he asked honestly as he tilted his head to the side.

“It’s barbaric!” she stated with a glare. “You will not be putting those students in danger!”

“I’m not,” he responded without even an ounce of hesitation. “I am simulating a dangerous encounter in controlled circumstances so that they have less chance of freezing up should they actually find themselves in a dangerous situation. That is what the class is for, is it not? Defense Against the Dark Arts?”

“You cannot possibly be trying to justify this kind of…!”
“I explained myself to you,” Harry corrected. “They are NEWT students. I intend to do my job and teach them how to keep their heads in a dangerous situation and find a way to escape. Two of them have already been through more than the vast majority of the wizards in Britain and, through some quick thinking, are still here.

“With everything going on, I am going to do my job and teach them to the best of my ability to make sure that they survive.” He gave her a cold hard look as he stood up and glared back at her. “I do not call into question your lessons in transfiguration; I ask you to extend that same courtesy towards my teaching of Defense.”

“You’re not teaching them anything! You’re abusing both them and your position!” she responded vehemently.

“I’m sorry you feel that way. Now, you’ve stated your opinion, so, there’s the door. Good day,” Harry stated in response as he bit down his more vitriolic responses in favor of at least attempting a civilized response.

“You are NOT just dismissing me! I will not…!” she started before suddenly feeling her entire body freezing up.

“And I said good day,” he repeated softly as he calmly gestured with his wand again, and she found herself levitated out of his office and set into the hallway.

A moment later she was able to move again as she watched the door slam shut on her. “THIS IS NOT OVER!”

No, Harry imagined on the other side of the door, it wasn’t. But he really didn’t want to have to deal with it right now when he had evaluations of his students to finish before his next class started.

-o-o-o-

Bellatrix Black sighed a bit as she listlessly walked through the streets of muggle London, walking past the still cordoned off area where she had found herself both tested and wanting. It made her pause as she run her fingers against the film, plastic, she remembered vaguely how her sister had given her a rundown of the things that muggles had developed. Things that wizards and witches, for the most part, had no clue about.

“Terrible shame isn’t it?” A man, a... policeman? Yes, that was it, a policeman. He was standing there, arms behind his back, following her gaze towards where construction workers were working to repair the street. “Nasty bit of business. Gas explosions, who knew they could be so hot! Saw the asphalt melted down a bit. Someone had knocked out most of it by the time I got to see it, but, my word, it was impressive.”

“Ah…?” She shifted slightly, looking at the man who had all of his attention on the scene.

“Not to worry, though. Give them a few more weeks and everything will be back, right as rain all the way,” the policeman stated with a nod of his head. “Right down to that little boutique that sadly got demolished.”

“It was a nice boutique.” Bellatrix stated neutrally as she looked back at the street.

“I don’t believe I’ve seen you about before, ma’am?” the police officer asked politely as he looked back at Bellatrix a bit more carefully this time.
“My sister took me there, once,” Bellatrix stated as she blushed just a bit at the memory. “I… am the oldest sister and my mother insisted on a very… traditional upbringing. I had no idea half the kind of things that my sister likes to wear when she’s away from my family.”

“Ah.” The man nodded his head, his face softening in sympathy. “Well, you seem to have since adapted.”

“I… I’m trying to,” she admitted as she looked away back at the reconstruction. “Just… I don’t know. There’s so much I don’t know. And it makes me realize how much of what I used to know I really didn’t. It makes me feel… I don’t know, small.”

“Then, you’re growing up.” the officer stated with a knowing smile. “Finding out what you don’t know is the first step towards figuring out what you should know.”

“I…” Bellatrix paused a she slowly let those words roll around in her mind. “Because you now know where to look to find out for it?”

“Or at least you know it’s something for you to work on,” the officer agreed with a cheery smile. “I’ll admit, knowing what you don’t know doesn’t automatically tell you where to find it, but it does mean you’re going to be on the lookout for it, I imagine.”

She nodded her head wordlessly as she kept her attention on the construction. It was all so… A wizard would have just gestured a bit, either casting a repair or conjuring, or transfiguring things. The muggles though, they built from the ground up, putting things together with materials she wasn’t familiar with, in ways that she had never even known about.

Before she would’ve looked down at them for having to take so long to do what a witch or a wizard could in mere moments with a barest fraction of the effort. Now, though, she had to admit there was more to it than that. A wizard would have conjured what they knew, mortared stone walls, cobbled streets, a pane of glass here and there.

All of it tied together with magic that would eventually revert unless made permanent. And permanent was so much harder to do than it appeared, to the point that most people never bothered to, just making sure their spells were kept refreshed here or there. It was why several old family homes would, on occasion, simply vanish. For whatever reason the spells holding them together hadn’t been renewed and resulted in everything returning to its original state.

With muggles, though, while they took longer to build everything, they simply weren’t restricted like most wizarding houses.

Then a sudden, terrible realization hit her mind. The Black family homes had matched their surrounding muggle homes flawlessly, and didn’t as far as she could remember, require the typical maintenance to keep up. She had assumed it to be because of superior family magics, but…

What if it was because they were made the muggle way?

She was so lost in thought that she never saw the officer giving her a small, knowing smile and walking off, whistling a faint, cheerful tune.

When she at last forced herself back into the waking world, she considered things for a long moment before nodding to herself. She hadn’t really thought much of muggles, other than what Harry Potter had said about clothing, and it showed how little she actually knew about them.

She had grasped onto the part about clothes, thinking that had been all it was really about. But, was that really the case?
How much did she actually understand about muggles, beyond the clothes her sister had taken her
to get? How much did she know about her own family’s history? How much of everything that she
thought she’d known, did she really?

It was more troubling than she cared to admit.

And the most important question she had to face: Where did that leave her?

-o-o-o-

“Albus.” Slughorn had arrived at the headmaster’s office with a slight frown on his face, almost
uncertain about how exactly he was to handle his most recent news. “I would like to speak to you
about Professor Potter.”

Dumbledore sighed softly as he leaned back in his seat. “What is it, Horace?”

“As you might know, his first class was the NEWT class with my Snakes and Minerva’s Lions.”
Slughorn was more deliberate about his word choice than he normally was. “After speaking to
several of my students, I wanted to bring their concerns to your attention.”

“What are their concerns, exactly, Horace?” Dumbledore could already feel a pit of worry growing
in his stomach.

“It would seem that Professor Potter’s lesson consisted of having them all attempt to escape from
some form of constructs he created in a relatively enclosed space. Creatures that apparently
terrified them.” Slughorn stated with a slight frown on his face.

Dumbledore digested this information before slowly nodding his head a bit. “Was anyone hurt?”

“No. Which is why I’m only voicing their concerns and reserving my personal judgement,”
Slughorn stated simply as his mustache twitched. “In fact, they all were rather sheepish when they
realized that after everything occurred, none of them had so much as a bruise. Not even Ms. Black,
though she had the worst of it.”

“Likely because he expected the most from her,” Dumbledore noted with a sigh. “She acquitted
herself quite well in London.”

“I’m aware, I was quite proud of her when I heard the news.” Slughorn agreed with a nod of his
head and a faint smile beneath his mustache. “As this is a NEWT class, I am prepared to reserve
judgement. Especially in light of the current… atmosphere of the wizarding world.”

“Quite,” Dumbledore agreed with a sigh. “I find myself… uncertain on how to handle Mr. Potter,
to be honest. I rather made a mess of our first meeting and have had some difficulty in interacting
with the man.”

“Oh? I find that surprising, I’ve always found you to be quite the personable individual, Albus.”
Horace noted with a chuckle.

“Yes, well, Mr. Potter has made a point of reminding me that I am a teacher at my core. That it is
in fact the sum and pinnacle of who I am. And how, while that grants me a great deal of insight on
somethings, it leaves me with… deficiencies in others.” Dumbledore stated with a wince. “At least
in his opinion.”

“The great Albus Dumbledore, deficient?” Slughorn asked, amusement in his voice. “Perish the
thought.”
“Quite,” Dumbledore stated in agreement, smiling faintly behind his beard. “However, Mr. Potter has assure me that he will simply be teaching his students how to survive. If they want to come for him for more… well, it will be their choice. I have told him that I don’t believe that they should be involved in the potential… mess that is to come.”

“And Mr. Potter?”

“Believes that they will be involved no matter what, and that I am merely trying to hope for the best when I should not be.”

“Ah,” Slughorn nodded his head in thought. “… As the Head of Slytherin House… unfortunately, I have to agree with Mr. Potter. Based on what I’ve had the misfortune of hearing."

“I had hoped…”

“ALBUS!” Minerva McGonagall’s voice pierced through the air. “HOW DARE YOU LET THAT BARBARIC MENACE ANYWHERE NEAR OUR STUDENTS!”

“… I believe we will have to table this discussion for the time, Horace.”

“Oh, dear.” Slughorn noted. “She sound a smidge upset.”

“Indeed.”

-0-0-0-

“So, how was it?” Ted asked curiously as he settled in next to Andromeda, ignoring the scowling glares he was levelled from his presence at the Slytherin table.

“I hate him,” Andromeda stated with a flat, growling voice as she turned her head and glared venomously at the seventh year student about to reach towards their wand. “And while I might not be able to do much of anything to Professor Potter, the rest of you don’t represent even a fraction of what I would deem a threat.”

They flinched slightly, and all around the table, figures shifted uncomfortably as wands were slowly and reluctantly sheathed or put back down.

“Now, Rommie, you’re acting like you’d be all alone in that,” Ted noted dryly as he shook his head. “I can’t let you go and take all the fun, now could I?”

“Say that after you’ve had your turn with Potter’s class,” she said with another dark growl burning from the back of her throat.

“Well, I think he actually likes me,” he said with a faint grin. “I, unlike a certain beautiful lady, didn’t try to set him up with my sister.”

“So I’m being reminded, repeatedly.” Andromeda stated as she let her shoulders slump down. “Honestly, I just want Bella to stop being so… so…”

“Bellatrix-ish?” a voice piped up helpfully as Narcissa appeared and took the seat in front of Andromeda. “Andromeda.”

“Narcissa,” Andromeda greeted with an inclined head. “I was more hoping she would calm down and become more grounded.”

“If you say so, sister,” Narcissa agreed with a nod of her head, before squinting her eyes at Ted.
“Barely acceptable male suitor.”

“Ickle brat,” Ted responded with a slight smirk on his face. “How’re you?”

“Tolerable, despite the pallor my sister’s engagement to you has cast,” Narcissa said with a sniff. “She could do much better.”

Andromeda groaned softly as she slowly began to massage against her temples. Ted however, just grinned back at Narcissa. “Well, of course she could, she’s Rommie. She just has to snap her fingers and these blokes would be on their hands and knees to cater to her every whim.”

Many glowers all around them protested that statement while Narcissa imperiously nodded her head. “As it should be if they know what’s best for them.”

“Me, on the other hand? I’m a challenge,” Ted stated with a smug grin on his face. “I’m an ill-mannered muggleborn brute that defies her, denies her and makes her actually work for what she wants from me.”

Andromeda’s face turned a bloody scarlet as she tried desperately to vanish herself into her seat.

Narcissa blinked a moment, blinked again as she processed that statement, before slowly nodding her head. “I suppose I could see the appeal. Merlin knows I’m getting sick of the sycophants. I don’t want to turn into another Aunt Walburga.”

“Heaven forbid,” Ted agreed with a nod of agreement and a sly grin. “I heard she had quite the habit of being entirely intolerable.”

“She was scary,” Narcissa stated with a shiver. “If Great Uncle Charlus hadn’t made her stop…”

“Did cousin Charlus do something?” a new voice popped up from directly behind Ted, causing everyone to start slightly and turn to find James Potter standing there in Gryffindor colors, eyes blinking curiously.

As some of the elder Slytherins opened up their mouths, they fell silent to a stern, childish voice. “I would hope that no one would be silly enough to try and say something about allied families having to avoid each other because of something as silly as their House.”

Sirius Black stood next to James Potter looking more severe than any 11 year old had right to be, his arms crossed about his chest as he sent them all a look. “Especially when he was accompanying me to visit my cousins.”

“Heir Black,” Andromeda intoned formally as she reminded the rest of the table exactly who they were dealing with. “Heir Potter.”

“Sirius,” Narcissa agreed, nodding her head, before affixing her gaze pointedly upon James with a kind of speculative gleam in her eyes. “Who is this?”

“This is James,” Sirius stated simply as he nodded to his new friend. “Apparently I have to keep him out of trouble. It’s horrible.”

“Oh, come on, you know you liked it!” James stated with a wild grin on his face. “And they totally had it coming!”

“Yes, but still, you want to have him catch us?” Sirius reminded him with a shudder. “Do you want to know what he’ll do to us if he catches us?”
“That just means we have to be more careful!” James stated cheerfully before waving back at Narcissa. “Lo there! Nice to meet you lot.”

He paused, making note of all the scowling faces and then grinned deviously at them. “I look forward to pranking most of you into oblivion.”

“… See what I have to put up with?” Sirius whined softly as he palmed his face. “He’s even more incorrigible than I am!”

“Lovely,” Andromeda stated with a sarcastic hiss of breath. “Just absolutely lovely.”

“Looks like you have your work cut out for you then, squirt,” Ted agreed with a nod of his head and a bemused grin, before looking at where Narcissa had her eyes locked on James. “Maybe you could drag the ickle brat with you and loosen her up.”

Narcissa started at that before levelling a glare at Ted. “I have no need of…!”

“Eh, I don’t know, she seems a bit stuck up,” James stated warily. “Plus, she’s a girl. And a really girly looking one at that.”

Watching the fire lighting up in Narcissa’s eyes, Sirius glared at Ted. “… I will get you for this. I will totally get you for this.”

“Get him for what?” James asked in confusion.

Sirius looked at the glare Narcissa sent him and then shivered. “I’d tell you, but things would be even worse if I did.”

“Huh?” James looked thoroughly confused.

“You’ll see soon enough, kid, you’ll see soon enough,” Ted stated with a kind of smug smirk on his lips as he looped an arm around Andromeda’s shoulder then beamed at the glares that earned him.

Andromeda simply looked at the whole situation and felt a great deal of confusion as she struggled to figure out if she should feel outraged or resigned. Either way, her boyfriend had certainly made her life even more interesting. Something she would make sure he paid for.

Once it caused enough backlash for her to no longer find it amusing in spite of the irritations it would cause.

-o-o-o-

“My lord? I believe we have an opportunity to potentially harass, or even possibly remove the Storm Chaser from Hogwart.” Walburga stated with a cold, sharp smirk on her lips.

“Oh? Do tell,” Voldemort asked as he leaned back in his seat.

“All thanks to that foolish blood traitor McGonagall…”
Chapter 15

“What,” Lucius Potter stated flatly as he brought his fist tightly about the handle of his wand and glared at Charlus.

“Yes, that was about my own summation of things,” Charlus agreed with a faint nod of his head.

“How the bloody hell does he manage to get called in front of a the board of governors after only one bloody day?”


“How is Minerva a problem?” Lucius said with a confused frown. “I’ve always found her to be…”

“Apparently she let her famous temper get the better of her,” Charlus stated sourly. “Went on a warpath because her 7th year lions came to her complaining about Harry’s methods. Word got out and some less than well intentioned bastards decided to take a shot at him because of it.”

“… Because if McGonagall is considered to be a dedicated instructor and generally stern and strictly by the rules,” Lucius stated slowly as he leaned back and groaned. “Because most people forget she has a bloody temper because she never lets it loose on students.”

“It seems Harry is old enough to be exempt from her rules. Or she let her assumptions about his actions get the better of her. Or any number of things,” Charlus stated helplessly as he lifted up his hands and then sighed. “Whatever the reason, the woman has made things more complicated than they need to be.”

“And I’m sure that Harry’s general attitude had nothing to do with it,” Lucius said with a roll of his eyes as he looked back at Charlus with a purposely bland expression.

“Are you implying something, Lucius?” Charlus asked with a frown. “He is family after all. Not just my own.”

“He’s also thankfully your problem more than mine,” Lucius answered easily enough as he allowed a faint smile to curl over his lips. “I find that fact surprisingly refreshing. Especially considering all the headaches you’ve caused me over the years.”

“You say it like you haven’t cause me a plethora in turn,” Charlus shot back before shaking his head. “So, how exactly are we going to handle this?”

“Do we even need to handle it?” Lucius asked mildly. “While I can see Harry having ruffled a few feathers, it is more likely that Minerva is over reacting due to letting her maternal instincts run wild.”

“You’d rather just leave it to chance?” Charlus asked incredulously.

“I’d rather come in with full facts and destroy someone who thinks they can play games with students’ lives,” Lucius clarified with a faint smile. “And it’s not like there hasn’t been enough evidence of late that more caution should be taken.”

“But…!” Charlus started to protest.
“Which would you rather, us prematurely flexing our strength and wasting it over something minor, or waiting for them to make a poor move, reacting and strengthening our position?” Lucius countered as he arched a brow at Charlus.

“… I hate playing politics,” Charlus stated with a sigh and a grunt.

“Which is why I do it, not you,” Lucius reminded him with an amused nod. “Play to your strengths like telling the boys where to attack.”

“If you weren’t family…” Charlus said with a halfhearted grumble.

“If I wasn’t family, you’d have never made it out of Hogwarts,” Lucius stated with a bemused chuckle. “I remember what you were like, Charlus.”

Charlus was smart enough to shut up at that.

-o-o-o-

Harry was less than thrilled as he looked at the rather stern faced Board of Governors, and he posture showed it as he leaned back in his chair.

“Professor Potter. You are here because one of your coworkers has raised rather troublesome claims about your teaching methods.” The apparent head of the board was no one he recognized and he hadn’t bothered to learn their name. “Do you have anything to say before we begin?”

“I put my NEWT level classes through a mock dark creature attack with cushioning charms. I fail to see exactly what the problem is.” He spoke as if he was addressing a small child, his eyes hard and almost flinty as they stared back at the Governor. “As the creatures were animated under my direction and will, at no time was I not in control of the situation, nor were the students ever in any real danger. I fail to see why I am here.”

“I put my NEWT level classes through a mock dark creature attack with cushioning charms. I fail to see exactly what the problem is.” He spoke as if he was addressing a small child, his eyes hard and almost flinty as they stared back at the Governor. “As the creatures were animated under my direction and will, at no time was I not in control of the situation, nor were the students ever in any real danger. I fail to see why I am here.”

“Professor Potter! If this is the type of teaching that we can expect from you…!” One of the governors started, only to be silenced by a glare from the Professor in question.

“I repeat. My NEWT level classes. These are the only classes I am putting through these scenarios. Scenarios that I am taking from recent events. Or perhaps you’re all forgetting what happened in London just a few months ago?” Harry demanded with a scathing hiss of breath as he glared back at them.

“I believe they would like some assurances that you aren’t planning to do this for your other classes,” one of them stated delicately as they looked at the rest of the board with a look of pleading. “Yes?”

“Only the Sixth years in the second half of next semester, so they have an idea of what I’ll be putting them through for NEWTS year.” he answered as he took a slow, deep breath and then released it, forcing himself to try and remain calm. “The other years I will be incorporating building them up to that level with different exercises.”

“What sort of exercises, Professor Potter?” One of the more neutral governors asked with a slight frown that showed they still very much had his NEWT exercise on their minds.

“Starting in Fourth year they will be learning a paint spell that’s easily ended by a simple Finite, where in they will spend several exercises learning to both dodge and aim.” Harry stated simply. “First years will learn team work exercises in the form of a team game I’m going to work with them on that will also incorporate some of their spell work towards the middle of the second
semester. Fifth years will be taught the Patronus charm and how to run away from a hostile conflict.”

“I’m worried about your definition of hostile conflict, Professor,” one of them stated with a frown that conveyed a great deal of disapproval.

“I will be playing the part of the hostile force, using only the same paint spell as I will be teaching to Fourth years.” Harry was trying to keep the irritation out of his voice but it was getting a bit hard to do. “Everything in my lesson plan is designed to teach.”

“Be that as it may, Professor Potter, we must ask you to cease these types of lessons going forward in the future.” There was another one of them, shifting forward slightly, a puffed up edge of condescension. “We cannot…”

“No.” Harry cut in with a sharp, flat voice that sliced through the air like a knife.

That made the Head of the Board of Governor’s frown as he tried to lean forward, as if he was trying to loom over Harry. “I beg your pardon, Professor Potter?”

“I will not be changing my lesson plans.” Harry had had enough of this. There was no discussion, there was no listening to him, there was just a flexing exercise of power they wanted to exert over him, and he had more than enough experience with that in the past.

“We are not making a request, Mr. Potter.” There was an icy chill to the head’s voice as they glared at Harry now looking down his nose at him. “If you cannot follow the Board’s direction, we will dismiss you.”

“Go ahead,” Harry stated with a pair of tightly pursed lips as he purposely kept his hands on front him and away from his wand.

“… I can assure you, I am quite serious about that, Mr. Potter.” The moment of disbelief passed across the head’s eyes, but quickly hardened in irritation.

“I never said you weren’t,” Harry agreed, and he was more than sure they were serious, but he really, truly wasn’t going to play this game. “If that’s your response to this, that’s your response. I am going to attempt to remain civil about this but I designed my lesson plans to keep my students alive. I will not endanger them by giving them a false sense of security about their capabilities and knowledge.”

Apparently that was not the reaction they were expecting, leaving them to stare at him in disbelief.

Clearing his throat, Dumbledore took the opportunity to make his presence known for the first time since the inquiry had begun, a slight tone of worry in his voice as he realized just how implacable Harry was going to be. “Perhaps, Professor Potter, we could come to some form of compromise about…”

“No,” Harry stated simply and coldly as he looked back at Dumbledore with a stone faced expression. “I am taking more precautions than are taken in Quidditch. I am giving them valuable lessons that will help them for the rest of their lives.”

“You did terrorize your class in the opinion of an established and respected Professor and Head of House, Professor Potter,” Dumbledore reminded Harry as he looked at him over half-moon spectacles. “That does raise some questions that need to be answered.”

“And I have answered them.” Harry stated with a coolness that immediately let Dumbledore know
he has already been pushed past what he considered reasonable as his eyes just bore back into Dumbledore’s with nothing but irritation, bordering on outright anger.

Dumbledore sighed softly and shook his head as he could feel the throbbing of a headache beginning to grow. “Very well, Professor Potter. If you could please excuse us for a moment?”

Harry simply gave the man a curt nod as he stood in one fluid motion and left without even bothering to acknowledge the board with even a glance.

Once the door shut behind him, the eyes all turned towards Dumbledore, even the neutral governors holding a look of irritation in their eyes. Slowly and deliberately clearing his throat, the head of the board fixed Dumbledore with a look. “I don’t care what kind of qualifications that… boy has, he is not…!”

“That boy, as you call him, has slain at least one thousand year old basilisk, repeatedly bested dark wizards…” He paused there, taking a breath before grimacing as he rephrased his words. “No, besting is not the correct word. He destroyed them. Have you all forgotten what happened when he was interviewed?”

“What exactly does that have to do with this?” one of the governors asked in confusion as he looked at Dumbledore with a look of absolute confusion on his face. “I was under the impression that issue was resolved by the Storm Chaser?”

There were a number of nods of agreement among the board as they then turned their attention back to Dumbledore expectantly.

“I had hoped you realized before you made yourselves an enemy of his,” Dumbledore stated with a bland tone and no small amount of exasperation. “I suppose it was too much to hope that you had taken the time to do proper research before this little inquisition.”

That made them pause a moment before one of them stiffened their back and glared at Dumbledore. “I don’t care if both the Potters and the Blacks supported his hiring! That kind of behavior cannot be tolerated!”

However other members of the board were not quite so quick to dismiss Dumbledore’s words as several of them shifted uncomfortably in place, looks of displeasure crossing their faces. “The Potters and the Blacks? Oh, dear…”

“It doesn’t matter! We cannot tolerate such blatant insubordination! That kind of disrespect…!” The head of the board’s face turned a bright red as he rose up in his seat, glowering back at Dumbledore.

“Very well, if you are determined to make an enemy of the Storm Chaser and his allies, I can see there is little I can.” Dumbledore stated with a note of resignation in his voice as he shook his head. “I suppose you have a successor ready, then? I do not believe we have ever a professor fired in their very first week before.”

A sudden silence fell across the board before the head of the board looked at Dumbledore incredulously. “What, now you’re trying to protect him by implying that he is an ally of the Storm Chaser?”

“No.” Dumbledore took a moment to collect himself as he fought down the slow burn of frustration he was feeling swelling up inside of him. He did understand Harry’s frustrations; he truly did when it came to these people, but… “He is the Storm Chaser. I thought that was blatantly obvious all
“Him, the Storm Chaser?” the man repeated looking at Dumbledore incredulously. “Are you daft?”

“I confirmed his identity with Alastor Moody himself.” Dumbledore struggled to not pinch the bridge of his nose as he looked at the man, speaking in a slow, deliberately calm voice. “That is where his influence comes from. That is the man you have made an enemy of. A man that could duel me either to a draw or potentially defeat me, should certain information be accurate.”

He let that sink in for a moment before continuing, even as he struggled to not take pleasure in the looks of ill ease on their faces. “What’s more, I have already had a long and thorough discussion about things with Professor Potter. He has an instinctive grasp on the subject matter and this lesson plan was approved.”

“You approved this madness?!” the head of the board demanded, staring at him incredulously.

“We have more injuries and fewer precautions taken with Quidditch,” Dumbledore calmly repeated Harry’s earlier words as he used a much more experienced voice. “As he said, he had cushioning charms in place and there was not a single injury to the students. Everything they faced was directly under his control, in a manner beyond any sort of trained creature or animation charm can be. There was no danger.”

“Beyond them being terrified out of their minds!” one of the governors protested, struggling to regain their ground and shift the argument back in their favor.

“Which was part of the purpose of the class to begin with.” Dumbledore cut back with a gesture of his hand. “Or have we suddenly come to the conclusion that encountering a Dark creature won’t terrify them out of their minds?”

“Well, no, but…!” The governor struggled to come up with another argument in time maintain the strength of their position.

“So, you are saying that you want the students to freeze up in terror if they ever encounter a dark creature? For them to not have any experience in understanding how they should cope with when their body rebels against them and clouds their mind with fear and terror?” Dumbledore pressed, remembering so very much of how he had first reacted to the proposal Harry Potter had given him.

And he remembered the way Harry had explained it to him. Only, Harry wasn’t very patient about it. The man was, Albus had to admit, very much the warrior. He could teach, yes, but he taught with an almost brutal practicality to his methods.

Though Albus had been ashamed at the surprise he’d felt at the depth of understanding Harry had about the need to keep the student’s safe.

“You know that is not what I’m saying!” the governor declared angrily.

“No, I do not. Nor do I believe that the public will when the papers publish the story about this.” Dumbledore stated with a shake of his head.

“We’re acting in the best interests of the students!” the head of the Governors declared with an angry, puffed up chest, face again flushing red. “They wouldn’t….”

“Blacks and Potters,” Dumbledore reminded him calmly as he gave them all a look to remind them of exactly what kind of fight they were about to get themselves into. “You might manage to get a
preemptive strike, but then they will hit you back.”

He paused there, letting the words sink in as he gave them a look. “However, I do understand your reservations of Professor Potter’s methods. I had them myself, but the man knows what he is doing, and his control is nothing short of astounding. Nothing happens with his creations that he does not direct them to do.”

“And what’s to stop him from…!” The governor started to protest again, only to suddenly fall silent beneath the look that Dumbledore affixed him with.

“The same thing that’s stopping me and him from deciding that, because you don’t listen to us, and are, in fact, being purposely obtuse and obstinate in regards to this, that the lot of you should be summarily dealt with.” Dumbledore stated with an edge to his voice that immediately made the governors stiffen. “Our desire to maintain civility for both ourselves and society. So, if I might suggest: This discussion shall be tabled and we shall redress the results at the end of the school year.”

He paused there, his eyes moving from one member to the next. “That way he will have either proven his point or granted you sufficient proof that he should be dismissed to the point that neither Blacks nor Potters will intervene.”

He looked at them all expectantly as he allowed them to mull over their options.

-o-o-o-

It was sometime later, after the conclusion of the meeting, that Dumbledore found Harry seated outside the room on a stone bench he was quite sure had not been there before. In his hand, Harry was making notes in a leather bound journal with a sleek black fountain pen. However, his attention was not so focused upon his writing that he did not make note of Dumbledore’s approach.

“Headmaster,” he nodded his head towards the elder man and carefully screwed the cap back onto his pen before quietly putting it away and shutting his journal. “Will I be needing to clear out my office?”

The tone was blunt and calm, without any inflection as the man studied Dumbledore with a distant look on his face.

“For the moment, no. I have managed to impress upon them that it would be best to not jump to any ill-considered conclusions,” Dumbledore stated with a generally neutral tone as he looked at Harry. “As such, they will wait until the end of the year to fully assess your skills.”

“Oh?” Harry’s voice was slightly skeptical as he looked back at Dumbledore. “That must’ve taken some work. They didn’t seem to be very eager to change their minds.”

“Yes, well, it was more reminding them that they can only afford to have their egos survive so much before it ends up costing them more than they can afford,” he stated with a calm tilt to his head. “They simply thought that Minerva’s reaction was enough by itself for them to act on.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders a bit as he fought to keep his tone neutral, though, it was audibly strained. “She had a very strong reaction. Publically as well.”

“Yes, I’m aware,” Dumbledore agreed with a nod of his head, his eyes filled with a look of disappointment.

“And you’re going to…?” The sound in Harry’s voice held more resignation than Dumbledore was
expecting, with a flatness that told him that the expectation was nothing.

“I shall have a word with her,” was all Dumbledore managed to say. “In the meantime, I do believe you have a class to teach.”

Harry looked at him with eyes more jaded than Dumbledore was normally comfortable with seeing on his teachers, before simply nodding his head, standing and leaving without a word.

Dumbledore was left watching his departure and wondering just who had failed the boy so completely that he found himself so completely untrusting of him to do his duty.

-o-o-o-

“They failed, my lord,” the wizard stated simply as he bowed to Voldemort.

“Unfortunate,” Voldemort stated with a frown of displeasure. “Why?”

“Those not immediately loyal to our cause were… unaware of the Professor’s identity, that coupled with the fact there was no actual harm done…” the wizard trailed off and kept his face down and supplicant to the man in front of him. “It was pointed out that they were NEWT level students, and… they should be taught how to not freeze up when faced with dark creatures.”

Voldemort frowned unpleasantly before reluctantly nodding his head. “Ambitious. And difficult to pull off.”

“As you say, my lord,” the wizard demurred to his greater experience and knowledge. As well he should.

“I suppose that it was unlikely that the ploy would succeed, fools will be fools,” Voldemort leaned back in his seat and considered what actions to take next.

There was a lingering silence, before finally Walburga spoke up. “My lord, if I might make a suggestion?”

“Ah, yes, Walburga, please do enlighten us about your idea,” Voldemort almost purred out his words as he slid forward. If nothing else, it would be entertaining for the sheer brutality and viciousness it entailed.

“It occurs to me, my lord, that everything that happened to…. Go off track started with one particular incident,” Walburga stated, a look of vitriolic hate in her eyes.

“Oh? Which incident would that be?” He had an idea, but really, he wanted to see exactly what the woman had in mind.

“The night that Bellatrix Black was supposed to be inducted into the ranks of your Knights,” she said, practically spitting the name out.

“Ah, yes, the first appearance of the illustrious Storm Chaser,” he agreed, nodding his head vaguely as he gestured for her to continue. “Do go on.”

“It was her memories, her testimony, her words that turned them against you,” she stated with a furious grinding of her teeth as he could see the muscles of her jaw clenching. “She was the one that turned them from the true path. That blinded them to how our place was at your side.”

“And you want to do something about her, hmm?” Voldemort offered with a slowly drawn out
smirk on his lips.

“It is her fault all of this occurred. It is her fault that they lost their way. It is her fault they cast me out!” Walburga declared, her fury building up as he could almost see a frothing bubble of spittle forming.

“Yes, I suppose it would be,” he agreed with a faint nod of agreement, hiding the dark amusement he was finding at the entire situation.

“And what’s worse? She is infatuated with that lying filth!” she almost shrieked out in righteous indignation. “The Blacks need to learn a lesson! They need to learn that they made a mistake! And that Storm Chaser needs to learn that he cannot corrupt good purebloods without proper consequences!”

Voldemort chuckled softly. It was an entertaining thought. And he could think of how he could work it to his advantage.

Yes, it certainly had possibilities.

“My dear Walburga, I believe you have inspired me.”

-o-o-o-

“You wanted to see me, Albus?” Minerva McGonagall asked, standing tall, stern and proud as she walked into his office with her head held high.

“Yes. Professor McGonagall, I did.” Dumbledore stated with a pointed look and a voice schooled to strict neutrality. “Please be seated.”

Immediately she stiffened, if ever so slightly. Never before had Albus Dumbledore been so formal with one of his professors, typically fostering a lax and friendly atmosphere that, she would admit, she occasionally found lacking. She could feel the cold trickle of worry sinking down her spine even as she calmly took her seat.

“Headmaster. Might I know what this is about?” she asked with a detached calm as she struggled to keep her emotions in check.

“This is in regards to your rather public actions and accusations towards Professor Potter, the repercussions of your act and the resulting fall out.” Dumbledore stated with a weary sigh as he leaned back in his seat.

“He…!” she began the protest out of reflex, before she visibly restrained herself and took a slow deep breath, forcing herself to continue in a more controlled manner. “In what way, Headmaster?”

“The way that you publically confronted him and accused him in front of our students in the middle of the Great Hall.” Dumbledore stated in a slow, sad voice as he watched her over his spectacles. “Which has put me in position I do not want to be in. Tell me, Professor McGonagall, do you know where you failed?”

The cold pit of ill-ease sank even deeper into her stomach as she shifted slightly, but none-the-less stiffened her back and refused to back down. “I did no such thing. That…”

A simple look by the headmaster reminded her that she was not in an informal meeting where her temper was allowed free reign, and she again forced her words back down with a bitter grimace.
“As you fail to understand, I will explain by using Professor Slughorn’s example,” he stated calmly. “As you will recall, the class consisted of both Gryffindor and Slytherin students. And, as with the Gryffindors, the Slytherins went to Professor Slughorn to complain about the class. Do you know what he did, Professor McGonagall?”

“Something else, I would gather,” she allowed a trace of sullen defiance to leak into her voice as she glared back at him.

“Indeed. He did not scream at his coworker in front of the student body over actions he had not fully understood or considered,” he agreed with a nod of his head. “Instead he came to me first and actually talked to me about the issue.”

She swallowed the unpleasant taste in her mouth and slowly nodded her head. “I… see.”

“No, I don’t believe you do,” Dumbledore stated coolly as he leaned forward and affixed her with a look. “Not in the least.”

“My students…!” she began to protest, her voice rising slightly in response to his response.

“Were Seventh Years that had volunteered to take the final year of Defense against the Dark Arts. Seventh years complaining about being scared during their lesson when they were confronted by the sort of thing they would be expected to defend themselves against.” He took his time, emphasizing the words with a subtle force as he threaded his fingers together. “Seventh years, complaining about the danger they were supposedly in, when not a single one of them had so much as a bruise or a scratch as a result of the class.”

He sighed then and slumped back into his seat with a weary resignation. “I understand your initial reaction, I truly do, Minerva. What I don’t understand and cannot accept is how you chose to react to it. We are here to set an example for our students. And yet, you went and undermined not only Professor Potter’s but my own authority in front of them.”

“He’s a menace!” she protested, her voice raising slightly, though there was an undercut of uncertainty in her tone as she shifted slightly in her seat. “How can you side with that… that brute!?”

“Because I have taken the time to look at the issue objectively,” he responded. “Do I particularly like the lesson? No. Do I believe that it is absolutely necessary? I hope very, very much that it is not. Do I think he put them into any sort of danger what so ever? Absolutely not.”

That brought her up short as she stared at him in disbelief. “Albus! You know as well as I do that animation charms fail all the time! That they degrade and act in chaotic and unpredictable manner unless strictly controlled with built-in rune…”

“And did you check to see if he was using animation charms, Minerva?” he asked pointedly, cutting her off her exposition on things he most assuredly already knew, feeling a faint headache building up behind his eyes.

“My students…” she immediately protested.

“Are students, who have not finished their primary education and have a limited grasp of magic’s capabilities,” he stated before taking a slow deep breath to force down his emotions. “So, shall I sum up your beliefs on the matter?”

He didn’t give her a chance to consent before he continued. “You believe that, based on the statement of a group of students, students who have still not even graduated our fine institution, that
you knew exactly what magics were being used, and that your students were in danger, despite the fact that not a single injury, no matter how minor, had been reported.

“Solely based on their statements, without any investigation of your own, you decided to forgo coming to me with any concerns you had and decided instead to directly and publically confront a man you barely know, destroying any potential respect or trust he might have gained for you.” He finished laying out the case as he paused a moment, giving his words a chance to sink in. “Does this summarize what happened?”

“That is a slanted interpretation of what happened and you know it, Albus!” she snapped back with a glare. “I…”

“No, Ms. McGonagall, it is not,” he stated as he found himself wondering exactly where he had gone so wrong with such a promising young woman. “You allowed your emotional response to overwhelm your manners, decorum, and common bloody sense!”

She started as, for the first time she could recall, she found herself facing an Albus Dumbledore who raised his voice out of anger as he stood up in his chair and loomed over her. “I have taken the time to speak with Professor Potter about this. I have taken the time to watch him demonstrate the spells he used for his exercise. I have interviewed the students who, after being forced to calm down, admitted that none of them had been injured even in the slightest.

“And what’s more I have to watch as Professor Potter was called before the Board of Governors in regards to this whole mess simply because word reached them through our students without any sort of proper investigation being done.” Dumbledore loomed up over her as he glared down at her, his voice bearing an edge of frustrated anger never associated with him. “And I assure you, Ms. McGonagall, I do NOT appreciate being called in to participate in what amounts to an unfounded witch hunt against one of my professors.

“Especially not because of the foolishness of one bloody idiot who can’t keep her own bloody temper in check!” He almost growled out the words as he watched her shrink down into her seat, a look of white faced terror in her eyes that immediately made him reign in his temper, forcing himself back into control.

“I do not know where this sudden foolishness came from, Ms. McGonagall, but you must now face the consequences.” He said the words with a bitter disappointment and a weary sadness. “I have no choice but to place you on probation and revoke your position as Head of House for Gryffindor.”

“Headmaster!” she protested, suddenly sounding absolutely horrified as her eyes opened wide and disbelieving.

“If you had kept this a private affair, I could’ve kept it all politely under the rug, as it were. Unfortunately you did not, and you have forced me into a position I loathe.” He almost fell back into his seat as he looked back at her. “I do not like interfering with my instructors, Minerva. I believe that it is up to you to do the best you can and, as long as you are not repeatedly or intentionally putting our students in danger, I give every one of you a remarkable amount of freedom.”

He pushed his spectacles up to the ridge of his brow and the rubbed his eyes tiredly. “That is because I have to trust you to be respectful professionals that are capable of doing their jobs in an intelligent, respectful manner.

“Until one of you proves me wrong.” He allowed the glasses to slip back down onto his nose and he affixed her with a look. “I will be expecting a full and public apology from you to Professor
“I…! But…!” She again began to protest before withering beneath his gaze.

Dumbledore held his glare upon her for a lingering moment before breaking it and sighing as he shook his head. “But, I will also have Professor Potter give you and the rest of the staff a proper demonstration of his skills and an example of exactly why he is in complete control when he was running his students through his exercise.”

The woman looked at least slightly mollified at that, though Dumbledore had a feeling that things would not be resolved so easily.

-o-o-o-

“So, I finally received a letter from my prodigal son,” Orion noted as he slowly swirled his glass of brandy in his hand.

“Oh?” Cygnus looked, not intrigued, but at least mildly curious.

“He is, it seems, a Gryffindor,” Orion stated sourly, though he did not seem horribly disappointed. “I shouldn’t be terribly surprised, but, I do feel… annoyed I suppose. I had hoped…”

“Why are you not surprised?” Cygnus asked, frowning slightly as he parsed the statement. “Why would you not be surprised?”

“He chose to ask to see Bellatrix’s memories,” Orion stated simply as he slumped back into his seat. “Brave and foolish.”

“I suppose I would have to classify it as that,” Cygnus acknowledged with a grimace of understanding. “Though, to see such a thing so young…”

“As I said, brave and foolish,” Orion said again as he leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes. “He has at least made friends with Lucius’ boy. And managed to get himself in trouble with the Storm Chaser. Along with your daughter.”

“… Which?” Cygnus asked after a moment. “I mean, I was already aware of his… issues with Bellatrix.”

“Andromeda apparently,” Orion noted as he flipped open the letter once more and then glanced through it. “She apparently attempted to try and help her sister with her mad attempt to court the man.”

“… I suppose I can see where he might find that unappealing,” Cygnus noted with a frown and a sour grunt. “With the revelation that he was muggle-raised and what not. They have such… odd ideas about how courtship should be.”

“Quite,” Orion agreed before wincing slightly. “Though, after things with Walburga, I am wondering just how wrong they actually are.”

“Just because…” Cygnus said before trailing off as he remembered exactly what his own wife’s reaction had been and what he had almost had to do. “I suppose I really can’t be someone to really make aspirations about this, can I?”

“You could, you’re at least better off than I am, though, I would find reasons to complain,” Orion responded with a sigh as he sank back deeper into his chair. “I honestly have no idea what to say to
the boy. I mean… He’s a Gryffindor!”

“There is that,” Cygnus agreed with a slow nod of his head. “But, there is something even worse you haven’t considered yet.”

“What in Merlin’s name could be worse than this?” Orion sounded absolutely incredulous as he sat up in his chair and stared at his former brother-in-law.

“What Uncle Charlus is going to say when he finds out.”
Chapter 16

Today Harry was back in the regular classroom, away from the open air and sun of the small field he’d used for his NEWT classes. It was the day that he’d actually been rather dreading. The first time he would be dealing with the first year students, his parent’s class.

“Welcome to Defense against the Dark Arts,” Harry stated simply as he looked over the various children looking at him with wide eyes, Gryffindors and, thankfully, Ravenclaws. “I am Professor Potter. That is the only name you will address me by.”

He made the statement with a pointed look at Sirius Black, who had the decency to blush and look away.

“Over the course of this year we will be covering a small breadth of subjects, where you will be expected to learn a number of facts, theories and spells,” he stated calmly and simply as he swept his gaze over them all. “I will also be assigning you to different teams for various in class assignments. There will be one, more often than not, over the course of the year and your participation will be counted towards your grades.”

When no one made any immediate comments, he nodded his head. “To begin with, we’ll start with the most fundamental basic of this class. What is the point?”

Numerous hands went up.

“Mr. Snape?” he asked calmly as he nodded his head to the boy.

“To learn how to defend ourselves against the dark arts.” Snape stated with a remarkably flat tone that made several of the students stifle giggles.

“One point to Ravenclaw for your cheek, Mr. Snape,” Harry stated with the slightest smile on his face. “Close, but not quite correct. It is called Defense Against the Dark Arts because it certainly sounds more engaging than ‘Surviving the Dark Arts.’”

They stared at him and he smiled a bit more.

“It is a sad fact that not all people and things are equally talented in all areas,” Harry stated simply as he looked at the class. “And unfortunately, there are some things that are frightfully good at hurting people. My goal is simple. To teach you not how to defeat them, but how to escape them.”

“But-!” The protest was, of course, from James Potter.

“Manners, Mr. Potter. No speaking out of turn,” Harry admonished James softly and shook his head before looking at the rest of the class. “For those of you that know what I am called other than Professor Potter, you are probably hoping I will teach you grand and powerful spells and mysterious magics that will grant you wondrous and untold power.”

When he got a variety of sheepish nods of agreement, he smiled again and shook his head. “Chance and circumstance allowed me to learn a specific subset of magic that I am uniquely suited to. Unfortunately, those circumstances also preclude me to being able to teach said magic.”
The look of disappointment on so many young faces was almost enough to melt the heart, but Harry shook his head and still smiled. “However, the thing about power and magic is that it is a wonderfully multifaceted thing. You can find it in a great variety of things.”

Shaking his head, he smiled at them. “That’s the thing about magic, you can do so very much with it. That being said….”

He made a vague sweeping gesture. “One of the things you will learn this year is how to work with others. Friends can help you out in more ways than you would believe.”

There was more in their eyes, including a great deal of doubt. “If it wasn’t for my friends, there were so many times that I would’ve died before I even finished school it’s not even funny. So, what you’ll be learning in addition to the base curriculum is how to work together as a team.”

He paused a moment, his lips quirking slightly. “We’ll start with simple three person teams, from there…”

After they were divided up into teams, he gave each team three items: A soft rubber ball, a wood shield and a baseball glove. “Now, anyone have an idea of what the point of this exercise is?”

They looked at one another before shrugging a bit. “We’re going to play a bit of a game,” Harry stated simply and smirked at them all. “You won’t need your wands for this, so leave them on your desks. Each team has three positions. A thrower…”

He tossed the ball towards the wall, where it bounced before hitting one of the shields and bouncing towards the wall again. “A blocker…”

Then he caught the ball with a glove. “And a catcher.”

He looked at them all. “The rules are simple. Only the thrower can throw the ball. Only the blocker can block it, and only the catcher can catch or retrieve the ball. The objective is simple; you follow the rules and try to hit one of your opposing teams with a ball.”

“How does this have anything to do with magic?” one student demanded with a look of angry disappointment on his face.

“Because if you get used to dodging balls, it becomes much easier to dodge spells,” Harry stated simply. “Ready to start?”

-o-o-o-

When the class had almost ended, Harry spoke up as he looked directly at Sirius who was packing up his things into his bag. “Now, Mr. Black, where exactly do you think you’re going?”

“Um… to my next class?” Sirius stated hopefully as he shifted about nervously.

“Of course,” Harry agreed smoothly before gesturing to the scattered balls, shields and gloves that had been haphazardly thrown together in piles. “As soon as you organize and clean up the equipment.”

“But… couldn’t you just… magic it back organized?” Sirius asked after a moment of confusion.

“Why, yes, I could,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head. “Why should I, though, when you
already volunteered?"

“But, I didn’t…” Sirius started to protest before a polite cough came behind him.

“I believe Professor Potter made it quite clear about his expectations after you addressed him on the train,” Severus Snape stated pointedly as he looked at Sirius with half a sneer. “Again during the Welcoming Feast.”

“But, I didn’t think he was serious!” Sirius complained loudly, eyes wide.

“Really, Mr. Black?” Harry asked with a brow arched up. “Name puns on top of everything else?”

“I… wasn’t?” Sirius said with a blink of confusion as he mentally rewound his statement then winced. “Right, I didn’t think you meant it?”

“And now you know better,” Harry stated simply with a nod of his head before looking around and seeing James staring at Lily, whose mouth was opening up to say something he guessed to be protest.

“And since Ms. Evans appears to want to assist, I’m sure she and Mr. Potter and Mr. Snape wouldn’t mind joining you in your activities.”

“… You’re mean,” Lily stated with a huff as she glowered back at him.

“And a detention for each of you on top of it,” Harry stated simply with a nod.

“Why am I getting dragged into this?” James complained with a frown. “I didn’t do or say anything!”

“All for one and one for all, Mr. Potter,” Harry said in response as he smiled faintly at the boy. “I did tell you that I expected better of you. And would you really leave behind your friends to suffer through things alone?”

“But, but, but…” James visibly struggled with a way to answer that before scowling. “That’s not fair!”

“Imagine that,” Harry agreed with a nod as Lily scowled at James, Sirius looked resigned and Severus looked, frighteningly like Sirius.

“I suppose that nothing I say will sway you against this?” Severus asked bluntly.

“Would you rather leave your friend behind to deal with the two of them herself?” Harry asked as he arched brow questioningly at the boy.

“… I don’t believe I should answer that.” Severus noted as he glanced worriedly at Lily.

“I think you just did,” Harry noted dryly as Lily could be seen scowling at her friend.

“Professor Potter, you don’t have to make them stay, I’ll put everything away,” Sirius stated with a slight frown on his face and a look of resignation. “I’ll get everything put away now.”

“You will not,” Lily declared firmly as she gave Harry one last glare. “If the Professor is going to single you out for no reason-!”

“There was a very good reason, as you might want to recall, Ms. Evans,” Harry corrected her with a faint grin. “Which Mr. Black should have been quite aware of.”
“I’m fine with him doing it himself,” James volunteered easily before glancing at Snape. “Severus?”

“He is the one that put his foot in his mouth,” Severus agreed with a curt nod of his head.

“Fine, I’m going to help,” Lily declared firmly as she gave them both a glare. “Even if you two won’t.”

“… We’re going to regret not helping if we don’t, aren’t we?” James asked as he looked at Severus.

“…Possibly,” Severus admitted with a slow nod of his head.

“Definitely,” Harry informed them cheerfully. “Best hurry though; you’re already losing time to get to your next class.”

-o-o-o-

“Professor Potter,” Dumbledore noted as he watched the last four students finally leave the man’s class. “Holding them behind for extra work?”

“Mr. Black did volunteer his services on the Express,” Harry stated simply. “The rest ended up volunteering themselves to help him.”

“So I see,” Dumbledore noted with a faint frown. “You do not feel you are inappropriately singling them out?”

“I think it best to set examples so that everyone knows what is and is not acceptable, and how I will react accordingly,” Harry stated with a faint shrugging of his shoulders. “Of course, considering the fact that I find myself rather expecting more from those four might factor into things.”

“I can even understand why that might be the case, Professor Potter, or, at least in the cases of Messers Black and Potter, but Ms. Evans and Mr. Snape?” Dumbledore asked, a hint of warning in his tone.

“… Wait, what?” Harry blinked a moment as he looked back at the man in confusion about exactly what he was implying before his eyes narrowed into slits. “You would not be implying that my actions had anything to do with blood status.”

It was not a statement so much as a warning as he glared back at the man.

“You do realize how it looks then?” Dumbledore pressed as he gave him a level look. “You are affording them no small amount of attention.”

“Yes,” Harry agreed through gritted teeth and clenched jaw. “Because they were the ones that decided to slip in and take the seats in the compartment I was on in the train.”

“… Pardon?” Dumbledore stated with a blink of confusion.

“They are a group of first years that approached and made themselves at home in the cabin on the Express I was having my ride in,” Harry stated with a bland irritation. “They rather interrupted the nice nap I was enjoying.”

“A nap is a terrible thing to waste,” Dumbledore admitted with the faintest bit of a smile on his face.
“Quite. And I had to break up an argument before it could even begin with the young Mr. Snape being quite keen on extolling the virtues of Slytherin House to try and convince Ms. Evans to join him there,” Harry agreed with a sharp nod of his head. “I’m sure you can imagine how that might go.”

Dumbledore winced slightly but shook his head. “The House system…”

“Would be fine, if it hadn’t been corrupted by bloody arses,” Harry snapped back with a grunt of displeasure. “And I’m not about to let something as stupid as a muggleborn go into the snake den with the way it is right now.”

“Horace does a fine job of keeping them under control, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore reprimanded him quietly.

“With the way things have been going outside of the school? I have to wonder how much he can keep things under control,” Harry countered before sighing and giving Dumbledore a helpless look. “What exactly do you expect me to do? Take a chance with a new student’s life like that?”

“I had hoped that you had more trust in us to ensure that our students are taken care of,” Dumbledore stated with a look of disappointment.

“Does it really look like I’ve seen enough examples of that to really believe that?” Harry shot back with a sigh of irritation. “I understand you’re trying, but…”

“And while there are attempts to recruit and further lines of bigotry, we are aware of them, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore stated sternly. “And we are combatting them. I would advise you to not allow your prejudices about certain families blind you to things.”

Harry bit the inside of his mouth for a moment, before taking a long, slow breath then letting it back out. “I can see why you might see things that way. And if I didn’t know that Voldemort has been actively infiltrating and recruiting the house through his supporters’ children, I might not be so quick to advise as I did.”

“Be that as it may, I can assure you, that none of his followers are among the staff here, and that we will not stand for such actions,” Dumbledore stated firmly as he gave Harry a look. “And while there might be some division, I can assure you that…”

“That you can be everywhere at once and monitor every students’ statements even when none of you are present?” Harry asked with a snort and a mild glare before sighing. “Perhaps it is simply because it’s been so much longer for you since you were that age, but I can quite remember how children were when I was one. And how clever they could be at making sure they only acted when there was no one else around.”

He paused for a moment, taking a slow, deep breath, before letting it out, “Or, perhaps you’ve forgotten how just a look can hurt as a child. I haven’t. I can’t. But, either way, such an argument is moot. The Hat put Ms. Evans in Gryffindor, where she has demonstrated she rightly deserves to be.”

Dumbledore sighed softly as he shook his head sadly. “I do not know what happened to you to leave you so… jaded towards those who are supposed to be responsible for your care, Mr. Potter, but we are not them.”

Harry snorted at that and shook his head. “I think on this, we’ll simply have to agree to disagree,
Headmaster, because I find more similarity than difference. They too thought themselves more in control of things than they were. And they too under estimated the things that could be done when they weren’t watching.”

“I see that I won’t be able to convince you of things being different,” Dumbledore stated as he continued to look at Harry with a look of pity. “To look at the world with eyes only able to see through the tint of your tribulations is no way to live.”

“Funny, I was thinking about how looking at the world only through the view of what you wish to believe is truth is just as blinding,” Harry shot back and shook his head. “Wishing the world to be a different place does not remove its dangers. Children can very easily be those dangers.”

“They are still children, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore stated with a narrowed gaze.

Harry stared back at him unblinking before tilting his head to the side. “And if they weren’t capable of being a danger, then there wouldn’t be a ghost in the girl’s bathroom, now would there?”

Dumbledore actually flinched at that before his face hardened. “That was hardly a fair statement. You cannot…”

“I would be very, very careful, Headmaster,” Harry stated softly as he looked back at the older man in front of him. “Seeking redemption for yourself through the redemption of others will only lead you down a path to hell.”

And Dumbledore went absolutely still at that, his breath caught as Harry’s words struck him, “And from what I’ve seen of you, Mr. Potter, you show little interest in seeking redemption. So excuse me if I find myself taking your statements with a grain of salt.”

“I spent most of my childhood seeking redemption for the sins I was accused of, Headmaster,” Harry said after a lingering moment of silence. “Because someone else wished to spare me the truth of matters because to them, I was simply a child and they saw only the child, nothing else.

“In my experience, no child is just a child.”

“Nor are they monsters,” Dumbledore stated firmly with an almost sharp rebuke.

“Most, no, they are not,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head in agreement. “But that does not mean that they are incapable of being monstrous. Simply that they do not understand just what they do can inflict.”

Dumbledore sighed heavily and shook his head in resignation. “They are still children, Mr. Potter.”

“And how will they learn that it’s wrong to be such if we don’t teach them?” Harry snapped back as a bit of fire hit his eyes. “Actions have consequences, Headmaster. Inaction can have even more. You trust them and believe inaction will let them find the right path. I see them learning entirely different lessons.”

“And what lessons would those be, Mr. Potter?” Dumbledore asked with a narrowing gaze.

“That they cannot trust, or that they can hate and torment without repercussion,” Harry stated with a shake of his head. “That they are alone beyond their friends because the idea that another child can ostracize and drive another to despair is something that cannot happen, because the teachers say so, so there must be something wrong with them.”
“You’re exaggerating, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore stated as he shook his head. “And I would kindly ask you to not bring that kind of paranoia to the students.

Harry just looked at Dumbledore for a long, cold moment, his fingers clenching into his palm, before he forcibly relaxed them. Words were already on the tip of his tongue. Sharp, vicious things that he knew once said, he could not take back.

Words invoking the sister that Dumbledore had long since lost. The relationship between him and Gellert Grindelwald. The “greater good” he had helped propose.

Words that would strike at the wounds that the man in front of him had spent a lifetime trying to heal.

Words that the man had no idea that Harry could wield.

Instead he released the breath he held and shook his head. “It is your choice to believe that, Headmaster. As I said, we will simply have to agree to disagree. If there was nothing else?”

Dumbledore frowned at him. That was obviously not what he had been expecting. “And the issue with the students?”

“As far as I can tell, there is none, Headmaster,” Harry stated pointedly as he gave the man a long look. “Unless you’re trying to show favoritism and prejudice you had previously claimed to not hold.”

For a long moment, Dumbledore just stared back at him, eyes glinting dangerously. “I had thought that after your experience with the Board of Governors you would be more amenable to compromise, Mr. Potter.”

“Then you weren’t paying attention to things, Headmaster,” Harry stated softly as he shook his head. “I am who I am. I take care in how far I will push my students, but I will push them. And I will not apologize for seeing that a student does not suffer needlessly when I have the opportunity to correct that.”

“Ms. Evans hardly seems the type to need your protection, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore reminded him with a look of irritation.

“And you’re the one that’s assuming she was the one I was protecting,” Harry responded with a shake of his head. “Because I can assure you, Headmaster, out of all of the students present in that compartment, she was the one I was protecting the least.”

“Explain, please,” Dumbledore stated with a deepening frown.

“No,” Harry said with a shake of his head. “We’ve already seen where that leads us, an endless loop of going nowhere. And, unlike you, Headmaster, I can learn and change my approach to things.”

When he frowned and then simply left, Harry had little illusion that he had lost a good deal of the respect and leeway he’d previously been granted with the man.

Though, in turn, he wasn’t sure if the man had realized he had done much the same with him.

He wasn’t sure exactly if the man truly did not understand or was simply deluding himself by refusing to face reality. But, he hadn’t grown up in the same household as Dudley Dursley. He hadn’t seen the casual monstrosity that a child could be capable of, simply because they didn’t
understand what the problem was.

And he hadn’t seen what it sometimes took to make them realize exactly what they were doing.

He sighed wearily and shook his head. At least the class was over with and he could move on. Hopefully the remainder of the day would not be as engaged and frustrating.

-o-o-o-

“Hello again.”

The voice behind those words made Harry groan softly as he froze stiffly in place as his hand rested on the knob of the door to his room. “Ms. Black. I thought that we already had a discussion on all this? Do we really need cover it once more?”

“I was thinking we did,” Bellatrix agreed with a much more relaxed tone that he wasn’t quite used to from the girl. Of course, his last two encounters could best be summarized as traumatically terrorizing her and her overly stiff attempts to get him to “court” her of all things.

Sighing softly, Harry released the knob from his grip and slowly turned around. Then he blinked a moment. A slight tilt of his head a moment later and he was arching a brow behind his glasses.

Bellatrix grinned back at him, her hands resting in a soft leather jacket over a simple black v-neck shirt with gold trim as she cocked her hips slightly to the side, showing off how the denim of her bellbottoms clung to her hips and down her thigh.

“I had a feeling we could actually have a talk this time,” she stated, grinning at him with an uncharacteristic predatory grin, her dark eyes sparkling.

He was used to the predatory look of Bellatrix Lestrange, demented mad woman wanting to spill his blood as violently and painfully as possible. The predatory look of Bellatrix Black was the look of a woman who didn’t want to spill a single drop. It was a look he vaguely remembered seeing on the faces of more than a few women over the years, though rarely with such intensity.

“I hope that you understand that a change in the way you dress isn’t enough to make me suddenly leap forward and sweep you up into my arms and confess my eternal desire, Ms. Black.” he stated evenly as he calmly crossed his arms about his chest.

“Well, I heard that you needed someone to help you… demonstrate the practicality of muggle outfits for defense,” she stated simply as she shifted just a bit, crossing her leg across the other as she leaned back just a bit into the hallway’s stone wall. “And what do you know, I’ve learned that myself.”

“That’s also what I have your sister for, Ms Black.” Harry stated with a sign and a shake of his head. “Which it sounds to me she’s trying to get out of.”

“She is,” Bellatrix agreed with a nod of her head, still grinning at him. “Doesn’t mean that I don’t want the position anyway.”

“Sadly, I’m afraid she earned hers fairly and thoroughly,” Harry stated with a tone of clearly faked regret. “I’m afraid she’ll just have to get used to it.”

“And in all the classes that she’s not in?” she asked with a faint smirk on her lips as she pulled one hand out of her jacket and rested it on her hip. “You wouldn’t be planning to deprive her of her other classes, would you?”
“No, but I would deprive her and Mr. Tonks of their snog time,” he responded easily enough as he crossed his arms about his chest “Which means she can make up her classes with her other teachers.”

That made her blink as she looked at him incredulously for a moment before sighing and shaking her head. “You can’t honestly expect that to work.”

“You will find that I learned long ago that you can make even the most insane and illogical things work, if you present it properly,” Harry countered calmly with a shrug of his shoulders. “Wizards and witches just seem to need far less logical acrobatics to convince them.”

Bellatrix just stared at him, one brow fallen incredulously as she tilted her head forward. “There is a limit to what people will just accept. And you keeping my sister for demonstration for every one of your classes is simply not going to be one of them.”

“It wasn’t the original plan, but what can I say? I’m good at improvising.” Harry stated simply as he shrugged his shoulders. “I have to thank you for giving me the push I needed to take her ‘reward’ to the next level.”

For a moment Bellatrix stared at him with a faint frown on her lips before tilting her head slightly to the side. “… Can I watch then?”

That made him blink slightly as he focused his attention back on her. “Why?”

“Well, if you’re going to do it anyway, I figured I might as well watch and see how it was done. The whole ‘get me to take over her punishment-as-an-excuse-to-try-and-seduce-you’ idea was hers, after all,” Bellatrix stated simply as she lifted and then dropped her shoulders in a shrug, making her chest shift noticeably beneath her shirt. “Might as well stick around to watch the fallout.”

Reaching up, Harry pinched at the bridge of his nose. “Why won’t you just give it a rest, Ms. Black? I have already told you, I don’t want to pursue a relationship with you.”

“And last time, your reasoning was my laughable lack of knowledge of the muggle world,” Bellatrix pointed out with a shake of her head. “Which, I as you can see, I’ve rectified.”

“You call some new clothes rectifying that?” Harry asked with a look of sheer disbelief. “You can’t just… you…!”

“Now you’re just assuming its only clothes,” she retorted, before pausing and reluctantly admitting. “Though, I suppose I can’t blame you for thinking that’s all I thought it would take. I did, at first.”

That made Harry blink in surprise and arched a brow.

“I won’t deny that you didn’t have a point,” she told him with a faint nod of her head. “I didn’t know much of anything. Not really. I only had what I’d always been told was the truth. How muggles were beneath me, and then here you were, talking about them and placing them on a higher pedestal than witches and wizards.”

“That isn’t exactly the point I was trying to make, merely pointing out that I don’t think you understand why I am so very much different from what you assume I am,” he corrected with a sour mutter.

“I went home and almost broke down, trying to figure out how I could fix things,” she continued, ignoring his muttering as she forced herself to continue her train of thought. “And I found out that
she wasn’t as ignorant as I was. So she agreed to help me.”

She sighed and slumped. “Then the incident happened and I was useless. Utterly and completely useless and having to rely completely on my sister and her muggleborn boyfriend. When it was over and done with, I left St. Mungo’s and had no idea what I could do with myself.”

“Went for a walk a bit back, after everything had finished falling apart,” she stated easily enough, shrugging her shoulders a bit. “Was feeling sorry for myself and figured I’d mope a bit to clear my head. Then when I was I ended up having a talk with a bobby. It’s funny what they call their aurors, isn’t it? I thought policeman was odd enough at first, then…”

She paused her ramblings before shrugging and sighing a bit. “One thing I did learn is that, for the most part, muggles are dreadfully peaceful. At least compared to wizards. Not quite what I was really expecting, but…”

Harry snorted at that. “Try watching a game of rugby or football sometime and tell me that again.”

“Did catch a game. Football, at least,” she admitted with a shrug. “Sorry, not much on quidditch that. Interesting, but not enough action. And cricket was… ugh. Still. There were some nice plays and movies to watch.”

There was a pause as she watched him stared at her in dumb looking shock, his mouth hanging slightly. “Though it’s a bit sad how most of them are all about those yank colonials. I do wonder if they’re really that much more violent than we are here.”

Harry snorted at that. “No. Not more violent. Just like their bloody guns and weapons. They didn’t much care for finding out that when you confiscate people’s weapons, the people that still had them could and would run rough shod over them if they didn’t do what they wanted. They argued with the crown and parliament, crown and parliament decided their counter-argument would be more convincing with soldiers and intimidation. It didn’t work out like they thought.”

“Ah.” She frowned a bit at that. “I suppose that seems a bit… different. Most wizards and witches are rather… lacking when it comes to taking action unless forced to. Part of what drew me to the knights to begin with.”

Harry’s look darkened at that and she flinched a back a bit, but her back straightened up and she refused to be so easily intimidated. She had seen far, far worse from him before, and she would not quail under such a lesser display from him now. “And what draws me to you. You don’t just talk; you take action, you fight, you…”

“Kill,” he stated flatly, his eyes flat and hard as he gave her a glare as he looked back at her with a cold, sharp glare.

“Well, yes,” she admitted with a nod of her head and a helpless shrug of her shoulders before snorting sadly. “Not like I’m ever going to be any good at fighting, though.”

That… He blinked a moment at that as he struggled desperately to reconcile the resigned creature in front him with the Bellatrix he’d been terrorized by as a teen. There was an air of defeat hanging around her as she leaned back onto the wall. “I’m not sure exactly what you’re saying, Ms. Black.”

She laughed, a hollow, empty sound before shaking her head a bit. “I have no place on the battlefield, apparently. I am, after all, useless at it. You, Andromeda and Ted showed me that.”

He snorted softly at that and shook his head. “Ms. Black, trying to compare me to yourself…”

There was a moment of silence as he paused before sighing. “Do you know what the difference is
between yourself and myself, your sister and her intended?”

There was a pause as she blinked rapidly before slowly shaking her head. “I… You’re all just better than me?”

“Where you want to fight, where you want to prove yourself, where you seek the fight, we don’t. The fight isn’t what we want, but to live past it. We want to survive. And we know that to do that, we have to do whatever it takes.” He slowly shook his head and sighed. “I would happily live a life of peace if I could.”

“But, but…” Confusion consumed her face as she stared at him, her mouth hanging open. “I… everything… You.. fighting and…”

“I fight, I kill. I do not back down. I do not run. I claw my way through everything in my path. I kill. I steal. I lie. I destroy and ruin,” he stated as he stepped towards her, his words soft, dark and sharp, “because I’ve seen what happens when no one stands up to those that want to do those things. Because I’ve watched families driven to ruin, entire societies driven into despair and crushed by fear by those that want to fight, want to kill want to see people suffer.”

He looked at her hard in the eye. “When I see you, Ms. Black, what I see is a young women who seems to want to become the kind of thing that I hunt. I can see the hunger to fight, to battle, to kill, in your eyes. And when you look at me, I can feel the kind of monster you think I am.”

She shuddered a bit under his stare and looked away her voice breaking and stuttering. “T-t-that’s not true, I….”

“I have seen it in your eyes, Ms. Black. I have seen that look before. And I can tell you quite simply, no matter how attractive she might be, I will not be with anyone who looks at me with such eyes.”

He shook his head, a sudden weariness running through him as he turned away. “Now, I have a class to teach, and if you have nothing further to do here, I would suggest you leave the school grounds.”

With that said, he turned and quietly walked away, leaving her trembling and staring blankly ahead behind him.

-o-o-o-

Bellatrix had found herself staring at a bottle of fire whiskey as she sat in a darker corner of the Three Broomsticks inn and pub, a goodly amount of its contents already having found the way from its mouth down into first her glass, then down her throat.

Today… had not gone how she’d intended. Again. She had thought she was finally, finally making headway in everything, that she was finally going to actually make some progress with him.

Instead she found herself further back than she ever imagined she could be.

She stared at the amber liquid in the glass in front of her and felt her shoulders slump down in resignation as she lifted the glass up a bit towards her lips as she could practically hear her aunt and mother’s voices flitting through her mind. Calling her worthless, foolish, a blood traitor. She would sneer at the last no matter what truth might be in the rest of it.

Bloody well fuck blood superiority as far as she was concerned. That much she had learned clearly. Bloody well fuck her mother and aunt for all the stupid bloody shite they had subjected her too as well.
None of that mattered in the end as far as she could tell. Power wasn’t about blood, wasn’t about heritage, wasn’t about breeding. Power was about something that she was convinced she would never really have.

So she could do a few things to muggles, make them scream, hurt them, leave them helpless before she killed them. She’d have found it easy just a few months ago. Only, now when she thought about it, she thought about the policeman who’d taken the time to speak to her, to try and cheer her up. She thought about stupid, silly things like the workers she’d seen and the people at the theaters.

People. Actual people. Months ago they had just been people shaped things, less than animals, really, just there to be tortured and slaughtered. Now, though, now she had to admit, seeing them as they really were made her sick at the thought of what she’d have done before.

So she certainly couldn’t start making a life like she’d originally intended.

Now she had to figure out what the hell she was going to do.

She didn’t realize she’d actually said her last thought aloud, until a silken, familiar voice hit her ear. “Why, my dear Ms. Black. You come with me.”

Turning fearfully, she saw one burning crimson eye before a single word froze her and shattered her world. “Imperio.”
Narcissa had watched her sister almost stumble through the halls of Hogwarts, her eyes staring vacantly forward, almost unseeing as she mechanically walked towards the exit. For a moment she had almost approached her. Almost gone to her.

But something about the way she moved, something about the look in her eyes, even from the distance she had been, was enough to hold her back.

It did not take much to guess what the problem was, even for her.

Nor did she think that it would be too hard for her to figure out exactly what her sister was likely to go do. Sighing, she shook her head and straightened her shoulders. She would have to have words with her other sister.

“Is something wrong?” a familiar voice suddenly asked as Narcissa almost jumped in surprise before quickly forcing face to a stony calm.

“You're not answering the question,” James Potter stated evenly as he saw James Potter standing there, looking at her curiously before nodding his head to his companion. “Sirius.”

“You're not answering the question,” James pointed out plaintively as he crossed his arms about her chest and gave her a look.

“Whether or not I answer the question is my own personal prerogative, Potter, and it is none of your concern.” she stated primly as she gave him a sharp look while looking slightly flustered.

“Well, excuse me for trying to make sure you were all right, princess,” James stated with a snort and a bit of sarcasm. “I was just trying to be nice about it.”

Sirius groaned lightly and nudged James with his elbow. “Come on, mate, don’t we have enough trouble without you going and antagonizing my cousin? She’s at least been decent, hasn’t she?”

“She was,” James admitted with a slow nod. “She’s not right now, though. She’s being a bit of a jerk.”

“Please?” Sirius asked again with a pleading look in his eyes. “I mean, come on, my family’s finally being decent. I don’t want it to start going to hell with them turning back into a bunch of angry berks.”

“She’s not exactly helping that idea,” James snapped back before looking a Narcissa with all the seriousness an eleven year old child could muster. “Being upset is no reason to not comport yourself with civility and decorum! It doesn’t matter how what your position is compared to someone else, let them degrade themselves, you’re supposed to do your best to offer compassion and consideration.”

He paused, a moment, and then his eyes narrowed. “Until they show that they will not offer you
the same.”

When he made the statement, he stood straight, giving her a sharp look in the eye, his back ramrod and the look in his eyes one that wouldn’t be easily cowed. “So, what’re you going to do, Black? Offer the same consideration given to you, or throw it back in my face?”

Sirius groaned and palmed against his face.

Narcissa however, just stared at him in silence for a long moment. Then she took a slow, deep breath and nodded her head. “I apologize, Potter. I am merely worried about my sister and need to talk to Andromeda.”

And then it was like a switch was thrown and James with nodding his head looking sympathetic and even worried. “Right then. Hope everything’s alright. Anything we can do to help?”

“Not at this moment, but I will keep you… in consideration going forward,” she informed him with a slow nod of her head. “Good day, Potter. Sirius.”

She half bowed to them both before turning and making her way to search the school for her sister.

“Seriously, James, have you gone daft in the head?” Sirius asked with an almost whining tone in his voice. “I mean, come on, you know she could’ve hexed us seven ways to misery, right?”

“So?” James asked as he looked back at Sirius, tilting his head to the side questioningly. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

“…” Sirius looked at his friend for a moment before sighing and letting his shoulders slump. “I’m seriously starting to see what father meant by Potters being utterly nutters.”

“If you aren’t willing to stand up for what you say and what you believe, what else are you going to be other than a fraud?” James asked pointedly as he looked back at Sirius. “I mean, sure, it’s scary and stuff like that, but if I just let myself only do stuff because it didn’t scare me, what would I end up being?”

“I just… I just want to keep my family from going back to being how we were,” Sirius said quietly as he looked down. “I don’t want to lose this, James. You don’t get how they were before. You don’t understand how much different they are now. So much is different. And I don’t wanna lose that.”

“And if it’s something that breaks that easy, well…” James started to say before pausing and shrugging his shoulders. “Well, wouldn’t that mean you’re, well, gonna have to spend the rest of your life being scared and worried about breaking it? That really how you wanna live?”

“… I just wanna have my family. I finally have them and I don’t wanna lose that,” Sirius said as he shifted his feet around. “I really don’t want to lose them. Really, really don’t.”

“If you say so,” James noted with a slight frown before shrugging. “Wanna go prank those bastards that called us blood traitors?”

“Yeah,” Sirius said as he breathed a sigh of relief. That was something he could get behind, easily enough. “Wanna drag Remus into it?”

“Eh, he’s not really interested in it. He wants to impress Professor Potter and be on his best behavior,” James stated with a shake of his head. “And he convinced Pettigrew it would be a good idea too.”
“Guess that just leaves the two of us then,” Sirius stated as he straightened his back and made a show of straightening his robes. “More’s the pity then.”

“Oh?” James looked at Sirius in confusion. “Why do you say that?”

“Because neither of us know much of anything about restraint unless family’s involved,” Sirius reminded him before grinning a bit. “Which means we’ll likely cause too much trouble without them trying to stop us.”

“If you say so,” James said with a slow nod. “Not sure what trouble that’ll mean for us, but, sure, if you say so.”

Sirus wondered for a moment if Potters were all as absolutely nutters as James when it came to everyone outside of their family and friends, then quickly shrugged off the thought. He was technically both. So, he didn’t really have much to worry about, did he?

-o-o-o-

Harry was in the middle of teaching one of his third year classes when he felt the creations he left in the cave come to life. Frowning a bit, he had paused the lesson, lifting up a hand to signal for the students to be silent as he focused on confirming he had actually felt what he thought he had. Confirming it once more, he sighed and shook his head.

“Is there a problem, sir?” one of the braver third years asked, a hesitant tremor in their voice.

“No,” Harry stated simply as he reluctantly pulled his attention away from the notification he had gotten. “Simply an alert spell I cast some time back has been triggered. Unfortunately, it is also something that I will have to be leaving to investigate shortly.”

He took a deep breath then released it. “So, instead of your main exercise today, I want you all to take out your books and study chapters three through five. Your homework will be a three feet summary of the contents, one foot per chapter. We will have a quiz on the next class.”

All of them were scurrying quickly to write down the information as he gestured and the instructions appeared on the board, as well as instructions for the next class. “Make sure that you take the time to think about how you can use the information as well. Class is dismissed, but those of you who wish to use this room for studying may do so.”

He gave them all a nod before turning and briskly walking out of the class room towards the Headmaster’s office.

As it happened, he found his path crossed by a still irritated Minerva McGonagall, frowning slightly but still maintaining an air of dignity. “Professor Potter. I thought you had a class to teach currently.”

“Something suddenly came up and I am on my way to discuss it with the Headmaster.” Harry stated simply as he gave her a brief nod of acknowledgement. “Excuse me.”

“What could possibly be so important as to lead you to abandon your students?” she demanded with a glowering glare at him, while keeping pace with him.

“It’s not particularly any of your business,” he retorted flatly as he kept his voice calm and reasonable. “But, if you insist on knowing, an alert ward I set up has been triggered and I need to see to it.”
Her face twisted into a grimace but she halted her hounding of him and gave him a slight nod of acceptance. After all, matters of security, as long as they weren’t abused, were something that teachers had the right to investigate. “Have you contacted the Aurors?”

“No,” Harry stated simply and shook his head. “Nor do I intend to.”

“That is highly irreg…”

“I prefer them not be put in danger,” he stated simply as he shook his head. “Trying to work with people I don’t know and don’t know me just adds a degree of complication that puts everyone in danger.”

For a moment she opened her mouth to again protest before frowning a bit. “Is it truly that difficult for you?”

He snorted at that. “Professor McGonagall. I specialize in capturing and containing dark curses. I also turn them back against their casters, along with some of my more unique forms of elemental manipulation. It is very easy for someone that doesn’t know how to work with me to end up hurting themselves and others because they panicked and did something stupid.”

She grimaced a bit at that. “Do you not trust anyone then?”

He paused where he was, almost causing her to collide with his suddenly stiff back, before he slowly turned himself around and affixed her with a look. “Professor McGonagall. I happen to have had quite a number of people I trusted. People who I knew would have my back through anything and everything. Unfortunately, all of those people are gone now. And I am not so foolish as to think that the kind of rapport that takes years to build can be built up again with complete strangers in a simple matter of moments.”

The unspoken ferocity in his tone made her take a step back, almost stumbling as the air of danger clawed at her. Slowly swallowing the thick bile of terror that she could feel squirming in her stomach, she reluctantly nodded her head. “I… see.”

“No, you don’t,” Harry stated with a resigned sigh as he broke his eyes away from her and turned back towards his previous path. “Now, if you will excuse me, I need to be on my way.”

Without waiting for her answer, he resumed his walk towards the headmaster’s office, leaving her behind to consider exactly what his words meant.

-o-o-o-

Narcissa eventually found her sister settled at one of the tables in the Great Hall, enjoying a free period with Ted Tonks. Steeling herself, she quickly strode over directly in her direction. She was supposed to already be in class but family always came first.

“Andromeda,” Narcissa said with a quiet urgency. Her hand reached out, lightly taking hold of her sister’s sleeve and tugged upon it. “We need to talk.”

“What is it?” Andromeda asked as she turned her attention away from Ted onto her little sister. “And aren’t you supposed to be in class right now?”

“Did you convince Bellatrix to make another attempt to seduce the- Professor Potter?” Narcissa asked as she looked firmly into her sister’s eyes, pointedly ignoring her second question.

“A bit, I suppose,” she admitted with a slow nod of his head. “I thought it would also make for a
decent enough distraction from his fascination with making my life miserable.”

“He just thinks you have plenty of talent, Rom,” Ted said with a faint grin. “So he pushes you a bit more, just means he thinks you can go far.”

“I have no interest in going far in that kind of life,” Andromeda stated with an almost harsh sharpness to her voice. “And even less in being pushed towards it.”

“I saw Bellatrix,” Narcissa spoke up again as she looked at her sister. “She did not seem particularly pleased. Or even aware of herself. She did not have the look of a woman who had managed to secure even the slightest interest in the man she desired.”

“Oh, bollocks,” Andromeda swore as she hissed out a breath. “I thought…”

“Andromeda!” Narcissa hissed out as she glared, scandalized at her sister before looking at Ted with a scathing glare. “This is all your fault, getting this crass and ill thought out behavior in her head.”

“No, pretty sure she was like that before we got involved,” Ted disagreed with a shake of his head and a look of amusement on his face. “She just kept it hidden better before the whole thing about us being together came out to your family.”

“This is not-!” Andromeda started to say before shaking her head. “So, he rejected her again?”

“As I said, she did not seem like a woman who had the confession of her feelings returned,” Narcissa repeated as she glared at Andromeda. “Why do you insist on tormenting her like this?”

“I’m not tormenting anyone! I’m trying to help!” Andromeda protested quickly. “She was the one to come to me about it! Asking me for help!”

“And did you ever considered if she actually should have that help or not? That maybe Professor Potter truly does have no interest in pursuing a relationship with her?” Narcissa asked as she gave her sister a sharp glare. “That you were going to hurt her?”

“Why in Merlin’s name would I think that?” Andromeda asked with a frown and a look of confusion on her face. “I mean, considering how she actually looks in muggle clothes? I don’t see how he wouldn’t be interested!”

“… Right, far be it from me to comment on the intricacies and potential shortcomings of your line of thought, love, but…” Ted noted before shaking his head. “You do realize that a bloke isn’t guaranteed to be interested in a bird just because she’s attractive, yes?”

Andromeda turned and just looked at him flatly. “Since when?”

“Look, love, there are plenty of blokes that works on, yes,” Ted said with a shake of his head. “But, it’s not a sure fire guarantee. I know it might be hard to believe, but there are some men that have standards beyond just how attractive she is.”

“Are you implying that there’s something wrong with my sister?” Andromeda asked as she glared back at him.

“You want me to quote you on just what?” Ted shot back before turning his attention back to Narcissa. “Sorry, but your sister has a bit of a problem with thinking fully about certain things and then over thinking overs.”
Narcissa slowly rubbed her forehead and glared back at Ted. “Bellatrix is walking around looking like a zombie, with her dreams crushed, because you didn’t think that it would be a bad for her to go and try to seduce the Hogwarts professor that has been single handedly rearranging our family’s views and singling out you to focus on?”

“I thought-…” Andromeda began only to be cut off by Narcissa.

“Andromeda, he’s the bloody Storm Chaser!” Narcissa stated with a glare. “Did you really think that it was just going to magically take care of itself? That he would see her dressed up and looking good and suddenly forget all about how they met?”

“… Yes?” Andromeda admitted with a slight wince and a shake of her head. “I mean…”

“I swear, the both of you are completely nutters in different ways,” Narcissa stated before slowly shaking her head and sighing as she bowed her head to Ted. “My apologies. I shouldn’t have accused you like that.”

“I understand where you were coming from. I love her but I know she can be a bit daft in the head once she gets an idea in there,” Ted stated with a rueful chuckle. “Trying to get it out before she causes herself a world of unpleasantness is damned near impossible.”

“Hopefully what happened this time didn’t have too much lasting damage,” Narcissa stated with a sigh. “I really don’t want to see Bellatrix end up as deranged as Au- I mean Walburga.”

It was at that point that they saw Professor Harry Potter hurriedly along the edge of the Great Hall in a path that would lead him quickly towards the headmaster’s office.

Involuntarily, Narcissa shuddered as she saw the stormy expression on the man’s face. “I… Really hope that Bellatrix is all right.”

-o-o-o-

“Is there something I can help you with, Professor Potter?” Dumbledore asked with a slight frown and an arched brow. “I thought you had a class to…”

“Ward alert.” Was all Harry said as he nodded towards the professor’s fireplace. “Need to floo to Hogsmeade so I can look into it.”

“What manner of ward alert? I was unaware you had any property, Mr. Potter.” Dumbledore stated with a frown.

“Ward on a cave I had a feeling Voldemort would be making use of,” he stated simply, shrugging his shoulders slightly. “I got the alert for an all clear after he left. I need to check on it and see what he did. Or what he didn’t do.”

“Ah, I see,” Dumbledore stated with a frown. “Do you desire assistance?”

“No,” Harry stated simply as he shook his head and walked over to the fireplace before pausing. “What’s the school policy about students trying to use their families to get out of responsibilities?”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to be a bit more specific than that,” Dumbledore pointed out with a slight frown before giving him a knowing look. “Though, I imagine this has something to do with the sisters Black?”

“Just getting tired of having Bellatrix confronting me for courting.” Harry stated with a sigh and a
shake of his head. “It’s getting old.”

“Ah, young love,” Dumbledore noted with a faint smile. “Perhaps you ought to give it a chance, Mr. Potter.”

“I have. It wasn’t to my liking.” Harry stated bluntly before vanishing into the floo in an explosion of emerald flames.

“Ah, I suppose that would be a problem then,” he noted with a sigh as he watched Harry vanish before pursing his lips. “Though, I fail to see what the issue is. From what I can see, the two of you would make a most interesting couple.”

Sighing and shaking his head, he turned his attention to the paperwork in front of him. An interesting project for another time, he supposed. When there wasn’t the pressing threat of a Dark Lord pressing down on things.

-o-o-o-

Bellatrix knew next to nothing. She existed, floating in a pleasant fog that didn’t have the unpleasant realities of her life. Instead she enjoyed the warm, soothing sensation of doing nothing but what she was told to.

“Well, my lord, you have captured one of the blood traitors… what do you plan to do with her?” a voice commented, not that she really felt like paying attention to them. She had more important things to do, like enjoying the cloud she drifted on.

“Be silent, fool. Crucio!” A part of her wanted to giggle at that. She vaguely recalled the spell, one that she’d been hoping to learn how to cast, to master. That had been a long time ago, hadn’t it?

The screams around her mattered little to her. She just had to stand there, enjoying the feeling that permeated her body. That was nice.

Tilting her head to the side, she frowned just slightly. Or was it? She remembered that the Storm Chaser didn’t like that about her. How she thought it would be fun to be dangerous, dark, destructive.

Should she really be just standing her letting all this happen?

“Damnedable little wench. Imperio.”

And instantly all her thoughts and worries went away. That was nice. Nothing to think about once more.

“My lord… I apologize, but if she’s going to be so difficult to keep under, shouldn’t we just…?”

“You wouldn’t be implying I’m having difficulties controlling one blood traitor, now would you, Avery?”

“N-n-no, my lord, I would never…!”

“CRUCIO!”

The screams started up again then. They weren’t very nice she decided. Too shrill and pleading. Did they always sound that way? She remembered how she sounded when she screamed herself before the Storm Chaser.
She didn’t particularly like that sound, either, now that she… was she thinking something again?

“Get out of those worthless muggle scraps you call clothes, you little wretch.”

She blinked a moment before realizing that the order was for her. Slowly, mechanically, she removed things. First the shirt, then the jeans. A moment later the brassiere and the panties until she was standing there, completely naked.

“Now burn those them and go put on your uniform for tonight.” His voice was sneering and acidic as it commanded her to action. But that didn’t bother her. She just needed to do as she was told. Nothing else really mattered.

Soon the clothes burst into flame and she watched them for a moment, almost feeling something, but it was too faint, too weak, to make an impression. Then she moved as she had been told. It was so much easier to just do as she was told and ignore her own wants and expectations.

A part of her mind noted that the “uniform” couldn’t really even be called a robe. A brief, thin material of transparent silk that looked almost black when it layered together, and trimmed with black lace. It was almost… traditional in its appearance.

“Now, the collar and the cuffs.”

Obediently she did as she was told, slipping on the collar she had been supplied, and then the cuffs. Almost as soon as she’d done so, she could feel the way the cuffs snapped her arms behind her back, and the collar forced her to arch back, thrusting out her chest in the process. As she stared up towards the ceiling, she noted the grain of the wood ceiling, studying the lines with a bored emptiness.

They were there, and she had nothing else to do until she was commanded again.

“Good,” he stated with a sharp nod of his head. “Come along. Everyone should be arriving now.” He grabbed hold of her by the back of her hair and suddenly she could feel herself being violently torn through the sensation of forced apparition.

They were in a cave. With a lake. An ornate wood platform stood around a solitary island in the center, with ornate silver snakes curling down hanging emerald banners hung around the cave’s roof.

“Go, stand,” he stated simply with his voice once more aloof and in control.

She didn’t need to be told where she was supposed to go, the small platform raised up in front of the only rock jutting out of the island was the obvious answer as she walked to it and then stood there silently.

Then suddenly the air twisted and rent as black clad forms spilt out, arriving in sudden clumps in groups of three to five. All of them with their eyes behind stylish silver masks, watching her with eyes made of empty shadows. It was like being stared at by statues of puppets.

“Welcome to you all,” he said, addressing them from where he stood in front of the assembled figures his head tilted to the side and his entire posture radiating power and control. “There have been those among you that have fallen prey to doubts and whispers. Thoughts that perhaps I am not whom I claim to be. That I am somehow… wanting.”

He paused, letting the word roll off his lips as if the syllables themselves were a fetid rot. “I have found your lack of faith… disturbing.”
A grand gesture and, from the edges of the lake, a rolling flame erupted, spreading with a sinuous, undulating motion as it turned into a slowly uncoiling snake that hissed as it circled the edge of the water.

“In fact, I would almost call it disheartening. To think that a bunch of muggle loving fools would be able to vanquish Voldemort?!” He roared the last word as the head of the snake rose up behind him, looming over Bellatrix and Voldemort, staring down at the assembled Knights of Walpurgis, its body flaring so wildly, it was almost as if it had developed flaming feathers.

Then he seemed to calm down, though his crimson eye still burned with a hungering menace. “But, I understand. You were weak, you gave into the temptation of fear. You allowed doubt to cloud your judgement.”

There was a pause before he affixed one figure in particular with a look.

“Most of you, however craven your doubts had made you, did not allow it to dull your thoughts and leave you prone to a most foolish mistake. Most of you did not make the mistake of thinking I would be so weak, so foolish, as to not notice the way they had gone crawling to others to try and curry their favor in return for my secrets.”

He gestured languidly towards a single figure and suddenly everyone else around it was pushed away. “Honestly, Johnston… your betrayal alone was bad enough, but for you to think that I wouldn’t notice it and that you were safe to come back after your little trip to the Ministry?”

“M-my Lord, you… I di-did nothing of the sort! I was only there… to deal with a fine my father received! They say he was muggle baiting!” There was a cringing, whimpering desperation in the voice as it struggled visibly against some kind of bonds holding him in place. “I…”

“Muggle-baiting, honestly, Johnston? That was the best you could do?” He sneered as his eyes locked on the mask and suddenly the shadows covering their eyes fled them, revealing terrified hazel orbs. “Did you really think a mind as weak as yours could deny me? Could hide your sins from me? I can see the truth of it all, all those traitorous thoughts, dancing about in your small, small little mind.”

Then he turned and gestured grandly around the room.

“So, here, my friends, we have a foolish little traitor among your ranks. A craven little coward that thought himself clever as he went crawling to the pathetic little wretches at the Ministry for protection. And what’s more, he thought he could keep it hidden from me! Even as he stands here, wearing the same mask and robes as you did, only he has soiled his beyond redemption.”

There was a pause there as he let the words hang in the air and savored the look of panicked, animalistic terror in his prey’s eyes. “So, alas, I’m afraid I have no other choice. Measures must be taken, as all of you know. Our honor must still be maintained.”

The words were said with a note of sadness that didn’t reach his eyes and suddenly the snake leapt forward and the traitor only screamed a short amount of time before dying into a whimpering gurgle as his flesh blackened and his body contracted, hunching involuntarily forward as his flesh burned and his muscles contracted.

When nothing was left but charred, greasy flesh, the serpent withdrew, leaving a wretched figure in its wake, a corpse horrifyingly disfigured, with just enough black, charred flesh left on its frame to resemble a man. Only to have Voldemort take it a step further. A gesture and a sickly spell shot out, wrapping itself about the figure with a nauseating glow.
“But, even in death and dishonor, there are still uses for such a creature,” Voldemort noted idly as it straightened and stood on poorly angled legs, arms curled back against its body as its head hung limp and broken to the side. “After all, why make such a thing even more of a waste?”

And then the burned inferni turned and stumbled into the water of the lake, falling down in into its depths and vanishing from sight with an unnatural speed.

“But, for the rest of you!” He turned and smiled at them, a sharp, vicious thing that made them all shift nervously about. “For all your doubts, you did not falter and did not flee. So, I have a reward for you.

“I welcome you all to where I first realized my role in this world, where I first started on my path of cleansing away the mud and the filth, where first had the pleasure of ending one of their worthless lives.”

The all looked both eager and worried as suddenly they could feel a tingle of magic slamming into place as wards went up all around the cave.

“For the duration of this evening’s festivities, no one will be suddenly appearing in, no one will be leaving. Tonight, to each of you I give a piece of my own vengeance.” He stepped aside, gesturing towards Bellatrix with a cold, jagged smile. “You can have everything of her except her life.”

He gestured then once more and suddenly the fog over Bellatrix’s mind lifted, returning her to her faculties. “But, no need to deny her the enjoyment of the experience, now is there?”

And suddenly, it was like a switch had been flicked, and the pleasant haze of the Imperius curse withdrew, leaving her suddenly aware of her surroundings and her situation; standing half-naked in front of a group of masked Knights of Walpurgis, bound and helpless without her wand. In a place where she didn’t know where she was. Trapped under magics she had no comprehension off.

She shook away the last fogging clouds that remained of the spell and then sucked in a sharp breath as the reality of her situation sank in.

“There we go. Now she has some fight in her again,” Voldemort noted with a drawl as he gestured and an onyx throne appeared at the back of the island where he took a seat, the burning serpent looming menacingly above him. “I do expect all of you can do something about that?”

It was then she realize exactly what they planned to do to her when the first figure advanced on her. “NO!”

“Oh, shut up you blood traitor bitch!” one of them spoke up, his wand slashing up as a sickly yellow length of magic snapped out and grabbed hold of her collared throat. “And get on your knees where you belong!”

She could smell the leather of the collar burning, an acrid, greasy smoke that burned at her nose as she was suddenly pulled forward, slamming her down onto knees as she felt the first sharp pain of her knees hitting solid stone with only a thin piece of silk to cushion her. Then she felt a sudden sharp twist of her hair being grabbed, pulled tight and vicious. With a hiss of breath, she felt how she was forced to arch back, to stare up at the silver clad face even as she struggled against the grip.

“You disgusting little harlot.” She froze at the voice. The words mattered little, they never had, but she recognized the voice itself instantly. Walburga. “You ruined everything”

Then she felt the back handed slap across her face as her flesh scratched and tore from the few
scant rings the woman still kept. “You cost me my family, my history, my dignity! My legacy! All because you wanted to be a panting little bitch for some dirty, half-blood mongrel!”

Bellatrix could feel the stinging slap once, then once more before something hot and wet splashed on her face, her aunt’s spittle, before her face was thrown down almost stronger than she could resist.

“You should be grateful that you’ll at least have something to offer your betters before your worthless life is ended. Even if it’s to relieve themselves of their frustrations.” She could hear the sneer in that voice, sharper, uglier than she remembered. “Even if they’re just going to waste their seed on your worthless body.”

Then she could feel her Aunt’s face replaced by another, stronger, larger hand, and she was suddenly forced face down into the ground as her hips unconsciously rose, her body not flexible enough to curl down completely. “Well, that’s a bit much. Maybe some of the more desperate will have a go, but some of us can enjoy ourselves in a much less… demeaning way.”

And then she screamed as the curling shock of pain wroth up her spine, leaving her clawing, spasming in the air. “Like that? Not quite like a Crucio, it doesn’t make your entire body just sing like the Crucius, but it leaves such a wonderful spread of sweet, raw flesh.”

She could feel the tip of his wand then, pressing into her, tracing over her flesh like nothing, before suddenly hitting one particular patch, and it again exploded in pain. “We developed it after noticing the effects of a particular magical beast that liked to make its victims suffer an excruciating fate before they died. I’ve always wondered, though… what would happen if someone decided to flay skin like this, hmm?”

“Well now, why don’t we find out?”

Bellatrix endured it, for a time, fighting down the tears, trying to give them as few screams as she could. But she could only last for so long before she finally couldn’t help but scream, and scream, and scream.

-o-o-o-

Harry hadn’t been in any particular hurry as he made his way through his secret tunnel. Voldemort had hardly done much to the cave beyond the inferni that he had stocked and the poison hiding the locket last time. And the poison, he knew, came after Sirius and Regulus were much older.

He did, however, note subtle tingling of magic as he approached, and frowned slightly. That was not what he was expecting. A quick check made him even more confused. Anti-apparition and portkey wards?

Why in Merlin’s name would he have those up?

He frowned and closed his eyes as he extended his will out to the stone ahead of him, and assured himself that, yes, they were still there, ready to go to work. Which meant that there was another reason for those wards to be up.

A feeling hit his stomach, a dark, sinking feeling that promised no small amount of horrible, horrible things ahead.

He had already thrown everything that would be to the wind with his actions so far, was this part of the fall out of his actions?
Had Voldemort merely used the cave for other purposes that he’d never learned about? What reason would he have had to erect wards preventing anyone from leaving?

Too many questions. Too many things it could be. Too many horrible thoughts he didn’t to contemplate. But he needed to know what he was going to face before he did anything.

So he willed a number of his creations to break away, peeling back from the wall, until only a thin layer remained. A thin layer that did not stop the faint sounds of screaming from reaching his ears.

Fighting down the urge to immediately rush in, he had a small piece of stone at eye height pull away from the wall so he could see inside. When he did, what he found made his blood boil.
Chapter 18

It started with a rumbling crack, missed by the participants in Voldemort’s little party as they focused on the sobbing screams that rose out of their victim. The stone shifted slowly, piece by piece as jagged edges rose up around the edge of the lake. They twitched, violent and chaotic, like a reflexive impulse of fingers wanting desperately to catch hold of something and simply begin to squeeze.

A warning that they didn’t notice.

The only warning they’d get.

Suddenly it exploded, an explosive rush of vicious stone figures, all made of jaggedly broken rock and crystal that sang with an angry scraping and grinding that set ripped through the air. In an instant they all turned, their faces wide with shock, disbelief, and a sudden look of wide-eyed terror. They could see a banished wave of jagged tips of stone blasting into them with just enough time to instinctively try and apparate away or throw up half-formed shields to protect themselves.

Wards slammed into them as they tried to force themselves away, slamming back into the paths of stone shards that drove into their flesh like spikes, as the force behind them pulverized flesh and bone. Poorly raised shields buckled and broke, glowing bits of magic that melted as much as they shattered beneath the sudden assault. In an instant, an entire line of the masked figures had been reduced to broken, screaming wretches and the gurgling dead.

Their bodies began to shake and convulse and one particularly unlucky wizards had just enough time to fall on his arse before seven stones shot out of the body in front of him and thick rocky slabs smashed his leg between them as they formed a blood spattered arm. Sharp splashes of blood erupted out of the figures as the survivors were treated to the sight of a stone hulk forming itself from the broken bodies of their comrades. Just as they raised their wands to it, it suddenly swung the leg it held, and the helpless knight attached to it, in a powerful arc that slammed away five of them into the lake around them.

It rose up, holding the now limp figure in its hand, and loomed over them, dripping with blood and sinew.

Then suddenly a great serpent of flame was coiling around it, ignoring the way it consumed the giant’s makeshift weapon, and squeezed tightly together. Hot, molten stone began to bubble and fall, making hissing drops of steam bubble and pop as it bit again and again at the jagged rock. Around them, the wizards looked horrified as the scent of burning flesh and boiling blood filled their noses.

“Did you think that I would be so easily defeated by the same tricks again?!” Voldemort’s voice spoke up, echoing in fury as all around them, shambling monsters of stone and crystal dove down into the lake, vanishing into the inky darkness as the cave grew and grew insize. “Your elemental parlor tricks mean Nothing to me! I will break your precious stone toys!”

The snake suddenly squeezed sharply and a violent crack made the stone giant shatter and break as it fell into a pile of half melted stone.
“I will melt your pathetic little pets!” He threw spells at the leaping stone forms, and they suddenly vibrated to red hot in midair before turning into shapeless molten hunks that exploded into steam when they hit the water’s surface.

“I will crush everything you care about, everything you hold dear!” he snarled as he slashed his wand down, and suddenly entire chunks of the cave’s roof fell down like they’d been shot out of a cannon and smashed everything beneath them.

“And when I’m finished, I will-!”

“BURN!” The word was spat out with so much emotion, so much pure, unadulterated hate, that for a moment, Voldemort physically flinched before the air around him warped and wroth as the air around him burst into a vicious mix of flame and concussive force that sent him flying.

And with that Harry stepped forward from the shadows behind where Voldemort had been standing and he banished the man’s throne straight into the first Knight of Walpurgis to raise their wand towards him, throwing the figure straight into the angry, burning snake had been slowly uncoiling from the mess that had been his giant.

In one slashing sweep he gestured, his wand glowing so brightly it seemed on fire as reflexively his enemies dove in a blind panic to escape whatever he’d been casting.

Only there was no spell fire, no conjuration, no charm, nothing that came even remotely close to them.

A familiar, angry, maddened voice suddenly cackled out. “What, all out of magic already, you mudblooded son of a wh-“

Walburga Black’s words cut off as a flick of his wand sent a concentrated blast of air the size of a woman’s fist straight in to her chest, one that hit so hard that her sternum was instantly powdered before it spread out, grabbing hold of the rest of her body and smashing it all the way across the room to pulverize against the jagged rocks sticking out of the wall.

As he seemed to ignore the way that he could see Voldemort angrily rising up out of the water he’d been thrown into, his robe destroyed, hanging off of the man’s body in ragged, half incinerated tatters, revealing pink and burned flesh beneath, Harry spoke.

“For those of you too stupid to pay attention, no, I am not out of magic.” He raised a wall of crystals from the floor beneath him to stand between himself and the sudden jagged spikes of ice that Voldemort had thrown at him from the lake, dully noting that they held only a few seconds before crashing and shattering as he stepped out of the way.

“But, now, now you’ve got nowhere to run to.”

-0-0-0-

The sheer arrogance of the brat in front of him made Voldemort’s blood boil as he snarled back at him. “This is where you die, Potter.”

Harry simply tilted his head to the side as he looked back him. “This will be your eternity, Riddle.”

It was the name that was the last straw as he could feel the throbbing pulse of magic in his eye. An eerie, bloody glow suddenly filled the air as his crimson eye suddenly turned into a solid crimson. Without even a moment’s hesitation he grabbed hold of one of his wounded followers and slashed his throat, with the tip of his wand glowing in time with the pulsing of his eye.
He let his wand soak in the spread of blood before shoving away the dying knight, ignoring the
desperate, terrified gurgles that came from him and stepping over his struggling body. With a snap
of his wrist, he sent a splattering of the blood towards the pile of bleeding corpses. Then he ripped
his wand back and suddenly an eruption of blood ripped away from the bodies, both dead and those
still struggling to hold onto their lives.

Harry’s eyes widened at the display before immediately slabs of stone and crystal rose up, pillars
that suddenly slammed into the roof of the cave, and obscuring himself from direct sight by the
forest of the stone and crystal pillars.

It made him laugh, a dark, rumbling thing as he flicked his wrist and a lash of blood cracked and
shattered one of the pillars with one motion, sending it flying. “Did you really think I wouldn’t be
ready for you?! That I would fall for the same tricks?!”

A twist of his wand and the blood began to spin, drilling through one pillar and then the next,
cracking, shattering into broken chunks that scattered everywhere. “I studied our little duel, Storm
Chaser. All your little tricks, impressive as they might seem, are just that, tricks! Now I will show
you real magic!”

Only, when the dust and rubble settled, his opponent had vanished from sight. Snarling, he gesture
with his hand and his serpent slithered into the broken stone and crystal, turning it all into a melted
mess of hissing, breaking stone. Only, suddenly it rose up like a great pair of jaws and consumed
half of the serpent’s body before pulling it back down into the floor.

“You call it real magic. I just call it a fetish.” Harry’s voice drifted through the air around him, and
he snarled in response.

“More paltry little parlor tricks,” he stated, growling as he raised his wand, and the drilling coil of
blood solidified into a floating orb, hovering over the bodies of the first wave of dead.

Then the moans of the wounded rose into the air before becoming panicked cries as the orb called
to their blood, pulling it from them bodies from everywhere it could be found in the room.

“Can you feel it, little Storm Chaser? The way it pulls at you, the blood in your veins. The way it
slows down, pulling at you?” He hissed out the words with a smile, listening to the sudden shouts
of panic from the surviving Knights of Walpurgis as they too felt the magic. “Blood calls to blood.

“I used to think that meant something far more… familial. Only, when you get down to it, it’s far
more primal, far more visceral,” he purred out, as he watched one of the knights, his mask knocked
away, fall to the ground, his face purpling from the pressure of the blood rushing up to it. “Blood
calls to blood and it makes it so very easy to exploit, wouldn’t you agree?”

Then blood burst out of the noses of the wizards, out of their ears, their eyes, flowing into the air,
flowing in drops, then streams as the bloody almost exploded out of their heads and wounds,
feeding into the swirling, pulsing orb in the middle of the cave.

“Seen it. Fought it. Beat it.” Harry’s voice snapped back almost boredly. “Not to mention, you used
it wrong.”

Instantly the orb spiked out, sending stabbing tendrils into every little inch of the cave, into every
shadow every corner, everything that it could find.

“No, I don’t think so,” Voldemort stated with a smug curl to his lips as he stood there, surrounded
by rigid tendrils jutting out like spears outlining his body.
“You’re entitled to think whatever you want,” Harry’s voice countered back.

-o-o-o-

Harry recognized the spell as soon as Voldemort had flicked it into the group of bodies. His response had been swift and immediate as the ground beneath his feet flooded with his magic, spreading into the stone and crystal beneath and before him with alarming speed. Speed fueled by the sudden, raw terror that spread with a glacial chill through his veins.

Even as the first swell of blood began to take shape he had a dozen pillars up, with more rising. Then he was gone, running as fast as he could away from where he’d been standing. He recognized that spell and he knew what it could do.

He remembered a day in Sudan, working through a muggy swampland with his team, a brave handful of locals helping guide them towards the home of a local Dark Lord who had been terrorizing the village populaces. He remembered the way buzzing insects had approached them, again and again. The way the locals had looked at the small little things with a terror, like they were watching the darkest of wizards plying their trade.

And he remembered the sheer squealing terror one of them had let off when he slapped his neck and then saw a small patch of fresh blood.

The man’s friends had banished him a few dozens of yards away as soon as they’d seen it. Their own eyes filled with a horrified determination as they grabbed hold of Harry and his team and pulled them away.

They hadn’t understood it at first, had argued against it. Then the man had started to scream. Horrible, wet sounds as his face grew bulged and bloated and a fine red mist had started to spray out of the tiny pin prick left that had been left on his skin. And then it had poured back down on the man’s flesh, eating away at the flesh of his throat like a giant crimson pustule.

Surging in size as the man’s flesh had grown pale, his body faltering, falling to his knees in the muck. Then his entire throat had exploded, sending flying droplets of blood in every direction. Harry had watched as every animal they touched suddenly began to twitch and convulse and bleed.

It had been a horrible chain reaction that had thankfully been contained by the local’s quick actions.

The Blood Gorger. A spell that had been used to slaughter entire villages in brutal, agonizing minutes as every living thing with blood in its veins it could touch was used to try and infect others. A curse that was considered vile and horrible on a level beyond even the unforgivable to those few who knew of its existence.

And Voldemort was apparently one of the few who not only knew of it, but had no qualms about actually using it.

He only had moments; the second stage of the Blood Gorger, while less overtly terrifying, was still more than most people would think possible. The blood fueled the magic controlling it. It turned it into a horrible weapon that could tear through almost any defense with impunity if it had enough blood to draw upon.

And then he remembered Bellatrix.

Hissing in anger, he glanced around and found her staring dumbly at head at the wall where he’d brutally half splattered her aunt.
A part of him wanted to just leave her there, to let her die so that he could then focus on Voldemort. Only, that niggling little whisper in the back of his mind wouldn’t let him.

He grabbed hold of her as he pulled them both to the edge of the lake and into the water as he heard the sound of stone and crystal cracking behind them, a bubble of air forming around them as they sank down into the depths.

They were caught by several of the constructs he had animated before, the ones that had been pulling the Knights of Walpurgis that had been thrown into the lake down beneath the surface. A quick motion and the side of the small island indented, forming a cave inside the cave as he hollowed it out and created a ledge large enough for two people. It was there he left the still shocked Bellatrix as he focused his attention on the world above them.

A deep breath was taken and he focused, letting his magic reach out past the earth and the stone back into the main cave.

“-tricks! Now I will show you real magic!”

He missed out on whatever else the dark wizard had said and he twitched slightly before focusing his attention and responding with words that echoed through the air itself. So he responded by turning his stone and crystal, the burning slag and molten earth onto the flame serpent, sucking it down into the sluggish, bubbling stone. Then there was the banter, back and forth.

A moment later he could feel the magic suffusing everything, pulling at the blood in his very veins.

Next to him Bellatrix gasped in fear as she felt much the same, her eyes regaining a bit of their light as renewed fear broke through her veins. The pressure was building. Cursing softly, he gestured with his wand, forcing on blocking the pull. Lessening the pressure. Keeping their blood in their veins.

Then the spears had hit every inch of the earth, digging into the lake, trying to kill everything there.

It was just the three of them now, Voldemort had seen to that. And Harry had to respond.

When he pulled the spears back, preparing for another strike, he launched the still red hot, melted rock straight the floating orb of blood and swept it down into itself, sending a splashing wave in Voldemort’s direction.

Snarling in anger and frustration, Voldemort pulled his wand back and an explosion of steaming black burst out of the rapidly cooling stone. A twist of his wand and a bright crimson orb the size of a fist exploded out of a black charred shell, steaming thickly in the air as its surface roiled and twisted like a curled sludge.

Harry pulled his senses back at that and then gave Bellatrix a look. “Stay here.”

As she just stared at him with wide eye, trying desperately to keep her breath under control.

He gave her one last look before dropping back into the water.

-o-o-o-

Harry rose up out of the water with a bubbling roil as he stood on a walking collection of broken stone while Voldemort glared balefully at him.
“More parlor tricks, Potter?” The voice echoed the angry sneer curled up on Voldemort’s face as he stood there, dressed in half burnt robes and radiating a burning menace.

“Just a couple more, Riddle,” Harry stated back with a sharp glare that was razor sharp. And he just needed to finish this one more time.

“Then let’s see how well you can perform your tricks without your tools, magician.” Voldemort hissed before he invoked a wave of mass transfiguration on a scale that Harry had only heard tales of.

Every inch of stone and crystal surface in the entire cave suddenly wavered and then splashed into the lake down to three feet from the surface. Harry’s eyes widened as his constructs splashed down into the water, leaving him submerged up to his knees. In front of him Voldemort hovered, his lower body a mass of black mist, his lips curled back into a smug, superior sneer.

“What now, hmm? Where are your tricks now, oh Storm Chaser?”

Harry looked back at him, glaring sullenly at the man who had destroyed his childhood, before suddenly the water swirled around him, faster and faster as it leapt into the air, blasting away from his body as slowly he rose up into the air. Glaring back at his opponent, he cracked his neck to one side and then the other as he floated there at the same level as Voldemort.

“Congratulations, Voldemort. You’ve managed to push me farther than anyone has in quite some time.” Harry stated with a slight nod of grudging acknowledgement.

Voldemort’s eyes were flat and disbelieving as his smug sneer had broken into a snarl.

“You have me at a disadvantage,” Harry acknowledged with a nod of his head. “But…”

And Voldemort wasted no more time, refusing to be baited into a distraction. Spells were thrown out, a stream of action designed to box Harry in, to trap him in place as he send an explosion to the roof of the cave above him. A box to try and force Harry into a compromising position.

Only Harry rushed straight at him as a wave of water tore in either direction, as a plow of air sent it to either side. Voldemort’s eyes widened and reflexively floated backwards, trying to keep distance between himself and Harry. His wand raised up, its tip glowing a sickly green as he reflexively cast what was his signature spell.

“Avada Kedavra!”

It leapt free of his wand, its form becoming a translucent skull, jaws gaping wide and hungry, as it sped towards Harry. The killing curse was followed by one, then another, each of them racing at a slightly different angle, as if trying to anticipate just where Harry would dodge.

Instead Harry dropped into the water, vanishing beneath the black surface. Voldemort shifted uneasily, swaying from place to place as he floated above surface. The dim, flickering lights couldn’t reach more than a few feet into the water. Everywhere he looked, he saw the same: of rippling black surface still swaying from Harry’s dive.

“Where are you? Do you think you can hide? Foolish boy, let us see what happens when your own little tricks I turned against you!” he declared, his wand raising towards the roof of the cave then twisting into a slow half circle, before viciously striking down towards the water.

Hundreds, thousands, of stalactites formed on the roof of the cave, then shot down like a rain of arrows, piercing the water wherever they could. Voldemort laughed, a harsh, vicious thing that
scraped through the air. He then slashed across the air. Beneath him, the water exploded.

For a moment there was nothing, just the sound of splashing waves and crumbling rock falling into the water. Then the air began to hum, a low note that slowly rose. Higher and higher it rose. Voldemort could feel it in his teeth and in his bones. He clenched his jaw tightly and gestured with his wand.

And suddenly he was in silence. The hum in the air no longer shaking his flesh. The sound of the water falling muted.

Then suddenly the air in front of him distorted, bending backwards into a sphere, before exploding. He barely had the time to react, flying backwards as he raised a shield. It’s still threw him out of control as his body crashed into the hard stone wall.

Harry rose out of the water than, faint traces of blood dripping down his skin, his clothes in tatters. Around him the air twisted into spirals. Voldemort could see it coiling, pulsing drawing back its strength.

He slashed an arc into the water in front of him, sending up a spray which suddenly froze into an icy wall. He only had a moment to slide away before it cracked and shattered from an impact as boring drills of air pierced through it and into the wall. With a hiss of anger he banished the shots of stone and ice back at Harry.

Air in front of Harry had barely begun to distort when he screamed and suddenly the shots exploded with a horrifying force.

Harry’s eyes widened and he let out a hiss of pain as he was propelled back, skidding across the water surface. Only he twisted around, his boots digging into the water, digging a valley of waves in their passing. Then he shot forth, cannonballing towards Voldemort as he sent scything blades of distorted air spinning at his opponent.

He didn’t even wait for the blades to hit or miss as suddenly a plume of flame burst at his heels, and a trail of fire lit across the water.

Voldemort had two of the blades stopped by a barrier of ice but the rest shattered it as he sent a wave of darkness that spread like ink over the water. Where it touched the blades, they shuddered and ground to a halt.

Sweat dripping off of his face, he glared balefully at Harry. The flames coursing behind Harry suddenly erupted. They rose out, surrounding him, wreathing in a hungry shell. He did not slow. He did not flinch.

In front of him Voldemort waited, knowing he would dodge. Wand raised, he held it ready, waiting. He would end this fight now.

Only, Harry had other plans.

There was no spellfire. There was no curse, no hex. There wasn’t even a jinx.

Voldemort only had a moment to realize Harry intended something far different than what he expected. Reflexively he tried to banish him away. The tip of his wand began to glow that killing curse green.

Instead Harry’s fist, cloaked in flame, smashed into him. It knocked him back as he could feel the crackling burn of the fires digging into his skin. He couldn’t even hear the sound of his own
momentary scream, but it echoed all throughout the cave.

Desperately he blasted a wave of unfocused explosive magic at Harry, knocking him away. The sizzling hiss of boiling water surrounded Harry as he sank for a moment. Then, with a shake of his head, he rose up. He looked at Voldemort and his lips curled in a snarl.

“You know, I actually thought that you, with all of the nightmares you’ve given, wouldn’t have lasted this long. I didn’t think you could push me this hard. Not anymore,” he said the words bitterly. Not that Voldemort heard him.

The man realized Harry was saying something and he grit his teeth as he banished the silencing spell from him. As he spit out a mix of saliva and blood, he glared at Harry. “What are you?”

“Me?” Harry barked off a bitter laugh. “I’m an unfortunate soul who was always in the wrong place at the wrong time. All because pair of old men listened to the ramblings of a mad woman and took the words as gospel.”

He paused there, tilting his head to the side, staring at Voldemort for a moment. “So, the King of serpents bit me. A phoenix cried for me. I died and rose again. You call me a magician. You say I just use tricks.

“My blood is the earth. My heart is the flame. And my soul is the wind.”

“None of that matters. You are only mortal!” Voldemort spat back. “You think that you can strike me down? You think that you can kill me? Death has no hold over me!”

Then he began to laugh, a vicious, taunting thing. “I am an immortal! I shall never die!”

Harry tilted his head to the side and then shrugged. “The ultimate plan was seven, wasn’t it?”

Voldemort froze at the words, staring at Harry in horror before rallying himself again and glaring back. “You know nothing!”

“A diary. A ring. A diadem. A cup,” he said, each word causing with a vicious smirk on his lips to grow. “A locket. Haven’t quite decided on the last, have you?”

A look of sheer terror crossed Voldemort’s face. “Impossible! You can’t! They are safe!”

“Well, the diary, the cup, and the locket are,” Harry stated with a bemused smile. “The ring and the diadem? Sorry. Oh, and the basilisk in the chamber joined them.”

For a moment Voldemort stared at him in horror before his face firmed and he glared back at Harry. “No matter. As long as the others remain, I am still immortal.”

“Yes, you are,” Harry agreed, only the vicious smile on his face relayed far more sinister intention. “I never wanted to hunt them all. I never needed to destroy them all. I already destroyed the ones that mattered.”

Voldemort took a deep slow breath and then glared at Harry. “Then, you have already tipped your hand. You cannot stop me.”

“I cannot kill you. I can stop you. There is a difference,” Harry stated as he summoned forth a ball flame and narrowed his eyes at Voldemort. “Lucky me, that means I just have to destroy your body.”
Voldemort responded by hissing back at Harry before a giant snake of water suddenly formed around him. “I will enjoy stripping the flesh from your bones and leaving your skull at the bottom of my chamber pot.”

The ball of fire in Harry’s hand morphed into a phoenix, the air rippling with its cry as it suddenly began to fly around Harry’s form. In response to Voldemort’s claim, Harry merely arched a brow. And then he simply gestured for Voldemort to come and take it.

And, like lightning, the serpents struck, snapping out into the distance between him and Harry, mouth opened wide with glistening wet fangs. In response the phoenix swelled up in size, letting loose a great cry. From its mouth roared out a spear of flame. It flew true and sure.

Instead of being skewered by it, the snake rippled and twisted around it, coiling along its length and shattering the flames with a hiss of steam. Still, it came. And the phoenix rose up with outstretched talons and caught the snake in its grip.

They twisted and turned, fighting for dominance. One trying to smother, the other trying to boil away into nothing. And, as they fought, then masters were not idle.

Voldemort flew to the side, trying to flank Harry. Harry retaliated by sending wave after wave of air rolling at him. They made him twist and turn, but they did not deter him.

A barrage of killing curses left his wand, streaming towards Harry. Strategy and variety with thrown out the window in favor of flying death. He no longer wanted to play; he no longer wanted to prove his superiority. Now all he wanted was for Harry to die.

Harry responded by flying through the air, leading Voldemort on a chase through the cave. Suddenly a distorting sphere appeared between him and Voldemort, hanging in the air. Voldemort tried to steer around it, only Harry shot a burst of flames into it and it detonated with vicious force.

Thrown flying again, Voldemort snarled before jabbing his hand into the water as another hand, a giant hand, rose up around Harry and caught him in its grip. The flames burned around Harry, pushing back against the watery grip, trying to keep it away from Harry’s body. But slowly they were losing.

His wand rising, its tip glowing green, he sneered. “Now, Potter, it ends.”

Harry’s eyes widened and he pushed harder, desperately, against the enclosing grip trapping him in place. Only, it wasn’t enough. He could see he wouldn’t be free in quite enough time.

And then Voldemort screamed in pain. His wand dropping and his hand jerking out of the water, pulling Harry down for a moment before the grip was released. Both his hands went towards his back as he turned around.

Harry stared in astonishment at the knife helped sticking out of Voldemort’s back. He raised his eyes and followed Voldemort’s disbelieving stare. There, standing waist deep in the water, arms still extended, stood a trembling Bellatrix Black.

“Go to hell, you bastard,” she said in a voice that echoed around the empty cave.

He raised his hands as if to attack her, only suddenly a blast of air drove the knife in his back until it pierced out of his chest. With it, Harry’s voice spoke up in agreement.

“Better yet, enjoy your new hell, Riddle.”
He hovered there a moment longer before collapsing down into the lake. His blood swiftly spread, forming a murky cloud of crimson beneath the surface. A moment later an unnatural black mist began to rise out of his body.

“Oh, no, you’re not going anywhere,” Harry stated with a snarl, gesturing towards the mist, throwing out a cage of white light, like glowing panes of glass connected at its corners by stars.

“This it’s your eternity, your immortality, Riddle. This will be your hell until you welcome death.”

He gestured to the ceiling, where it opened like a blossoming flower, revealing a chunk of quartz. As the essence of Voldemort was captured by Harry’s cage, it struggled violently against its prison. He could almost hear Voldemort wailing as the cage carried its prisoner up to the courts and then into it. A moment later the stone close to again, trapping the quartz, the prison, and Voldemort, in darkness.

Harry then turned and looked at Bellatrix.

“Didn’t I tell you to stay down there?”

“You’re welcome.” Bellatrix stated flatly as she glared at him with narrowed eyes.

“Thank you,” Harry stated with a roll of his eyes before pausing and arching a brow. “Wait, where did you get that knife?”

Bellatrix turned her head towards the body of her aunt. Harry could see where her robes had been slightly opened and quickly turned his face away, suppressing the sudden pulse of nausea he felt the back of his throat. When he looked back at Bellatrix, he wore a grimace of distaste.

“Couldn’t you have just told me that? I could’ve gone without seeing that,” Harry half complained as he focused on the earth beneath his feet and slowly pulled out a walkway towards his tunnel.

“You only had to look for a moment,” Bellatrix stated with a grimace. “I had to be the one to actually search inside.”

Harry sighed and shook his head before raising the stone beneath Bellatrix and his feet up and out of the water. With a gesture, a spark of fire began to slowly circle around her, spreading its warmth into her wet, thinly dressed body.

“Here,” Harry gestured with his wand, summoning forth a simple black robe and then lightly tossing it to Bellatrix. “I think it would be best if you put on something more.”

She clutched at the robe, holding for a moment, before slowly pulling it on as she affixed him with a look. “Oh, now I have something you want to see.”

For a moment he just glanced at her before he then let out a bitter chuckle. “I never thought you were unattractive, Ms. Black. I simply look at more than just a woman’s beauty.”

She shook her head. She felt, well, tired. Everything that she had been through, everything she had experienced in the last few minutes, all of it suddenly slammed into her at once. The Imperius. Her aunt. The Knights of Walpurgis. Their words, their actions, their spells, their intentions.

The way she had felt so absolutely, completely helpless. The way they toyed with her, the way they made her completely humiliate herself for their amusement. She remembered those things and the way she’d gone from uncaring bliss, the horrified realization...

“… How many people have you seen something like this happened to?” she asked, her voice barely
a whisper as she stared down at her feet.

“Something like what?” he asked curiously as he gave her a look with his head tilted to the side.

“You know what,” she stated firmly.

He paused for a moment before shrugging his shoulders. “To be humiliated? To be treated as and made to feel like you’re less than human? To be tortured by someone who was just looking for an excuse to be a sadist?”

“… Yes,” she agreed softly looking to the side, staring at the dark water.

“That was me, growing up,” Harry stated simply. “There was always someone who wanted me to think I was worthless, that I only deserved scorn and ridicule. There was always someone decided they could treat me like a thing because of my birth, my family, or the things I could do.”

“Oh,” she stated as a horrifying revelation hit her. “Oh.”

“Yes,” he agreed with a thin smile. “Oh.”

“I, ah, see,” Bellatrix half whispered before taking a slow deep breath. “Do you hate me?”

Harry sighed and shook his head. “No, Ms. Black, I don’t hate you, I have seen entirely too much hate to willingly invest in it myself. I have seen what hate does to men. I want no part in that.”

She looked at him, finally. Her eyes were dark, glistening with unshed tears. “I didn’t want to be like that. I just wanted to fight. To prove myself, that I was worthy, that I was more than just a pretty pureblood bride.”

“Then, Ms. Black, exactly what did you think would happen in that pub where we first met?” he stated, pausing, slowly turning around and affixing her with a look. “How exactly did you figure that attacking a group of unarmed Muggles was going to be a fight?”

“They only told us that there would be violence and we would have a chance to prove that we were where the purebloods.” Bellatrix stated as she looked at his lips instead of his eyes.

“And you thought… what? That it would be some kind of tournaments, perhaps? An underground dueling ring? Maybe a cage match, between yourself and some helpless muggleborn?”

He asked the questions with a brutal point, pressing her with his words as he stared back at her with cold, hard eyes.

“I didn’t think,” she admitted, her whole body slumping. “I just wanted something, anything, to make me feel like I mattered. I had already been sold off to Lestrange.”

She paused there for a moment before shaking her head. ”No, that’s not right. I had been expected to marry a pureblood. I had been required to marry a pureblood. He was someone my family accepted, someone they found to be a proper pureblood. To be honest, I didn’t even care for him.”

Her shoulders rose and fell and a shrug. “I remember that night, when I realized that he was dead. That I would not be marrying him. I didn’t feel sadness, I didn’t feel the elation, I didn’t feel relief. I felt… nothing. He had meant nothing to my life.

“Instead I felt the horrified fascination with you.” She looked away, staring out into the darkness, her eyes unfocused, looking not at the scene in front of her but deep into her memories. “I
remembered the violence, how grand and impressive it seemed. I remember then how much it fascinated me. How easily it came to you. No remorse, no restraint, no hesitation. And I’ve realized how much I wanted.”

Shoulders slumped, she began to chuckle bitterly. “And I thought it was the violence that freed you. I thought it was the violence that would free me.”

Harry was silent for a long moment before calmly responding, “It probably would’ve, but it would’ve left you a very unpleasant person. And eventually it would’ve led to you doing to others what was done to you tonight… and worse.”

She shuddered, nodding her head faintly as she looked down at the wet stone ground. “I know. You knew. You saw it, didn’t you? You saw what kind of monster I could’ve become.”

He pursed his lips and tilted his head to the side. “I don’t think it really matters. All I can really say is that I think you were ignorant. It wasn’t the violence that freed me. In fact, in a lot of ways it holds me back.

“What frees me… I can’t say it’s a lack of fear, because I still know fear. No, what frees me is looking at that fear and understanding that it can’t hold me back, that it doesn’t control me. I am who I choose to be. Flaws, faults, failings. I’m not perfect.” He looked pensive for a moment. “I don’t know how else to describe it. I am me. And I know no one can change that but me.”

Slowly she looked up from the ground and looked at him with cloudy eyes, a frown tugging at her lips. “But what about expectations? Traditions?”

“What about them?” he shrugged and allowed brief smile on his face. “I lived with the expectations that I was bound to be either Merlin reborn or a horrible Dark Lord in the making. Often from the same people. Traditions? The good ones can be nice if done for the right reasons. The ones that are done just because they’re tradition? You should follow a tradition because you want to, because you respect it. Doing something just because others did?”

He snorted and shook his head as he gestured with his wand to the wall and the walls seemed to melt down, revealing a tunnel.

“Traditions start for a reason. As long as that reason is still valid, there’s still a reason to follow it. Though, if that reason is just hate, sadism, and self-superiority, well…”

“You don’t consider those valid reasons.” Bellatrix pointed out with a shrug of her shoulders. “After tonight, I can’t say I particularly do either.”

“Then, perhaps there’s hope for you yet.” Harry noted with a nod of his head.

-o-o-o-

He escorted Bellatrix back to the door of her parents’ home and then swiftly vanished to Hogsmeade. He appeared before The Three Broomsticks and walked inside. Madam Rosamerta smiled when she saw him, shifting her hips slightly to the side as her lips revealed the flash of white teeth.

“Well, welcome back, Professor Potter. Get your business taken care of?” she asked before pausing and frowning. “You vanish so quickly, I didn’t even get the chance to say hello to you earlier. Seems to be the day for people vanishing. I could’ve sworn Bellatrix Black was here, but I can’t seem to find any record of her.”
“Business is all taken care of, yes,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head. Then he winced as he listened to the rest of her statement. “I’d advise you to talk to the mind healers then, because Bellatrix Black was kidnapped under the Imperius. Someone might have done something to you too.”

She paled, her hands rising up to her mouth. “That poor girl! I hope she’ll be okay!”

“I imagine she’ll be fine. She was fortunate enough to have her trouble intersect with my business,” Harry stated with a slight shrug of his shoulders. “Now, I apologize, but I need to use your floo. I left the headmaster rather anxious and I’m sure he’s eager to hear from me.”

“Oh, of course!” she stated with a nod of her head. “You know where to find it.”

“Thank you,” he said, before slowly walking over to her fireplace and grasping hold of a handful of floo powder. “Hogwarts, headmaster’s office.”

As he spoke the words, the powder ignited in the flames, turning them a flickering green. There is a moment where there was nothing but flickering flames. Then Dumbledore’s face appeared, his features looking both curious and expectant. “Professor Potter. I take it that your business is done?”

Harry grimaced for a moment, before nodding his head. “I suppose you could say that. It turned out to be more involved than I thought it would. If you don’t mind, I’d prefer if you let me through, and perhaps invited over Mr. Moody.”

“Why, Professor Potter, do I have a great feeling of trepidation?” the headmaster asked with a sigh. “Very well. I will reach out Alastor.”

Harry turned his head, giving Rosamerta one more nod, before vanishing in a flash of flame.

When he reappeared in Dumbledore’s office, the headmaster was able to get a full view of Harry’s current state. Where Rosmerta had missed most of the small, subtle little signs of his ordeal, Dumbledore caught them with only a glance. Harry watched the man frowned then affixed him with a piercing look.

“I have to say, Professor Potter, I am not accustomed to having my professors return from their outings showing every indication that they managed to find themselves in a bit of a scuffle. I do hope this isn’t going to be a habit of yours,” Dumbledore noted with a slightly distressed voice. “I believe I’ll find it very… trying to continue to explain away a common recurrence like that.”

“Things ended up being more…” Harry paused for a moment trying to find the right words. “Involved than I thought they would be.”

“Indeed?” Dumbledore asked, his brow arching up slightly.

“I’m in bad need of a drink,” Harry stated flatly as he shook his head. “What I encountered… let’s just say it’s not the most encouraging of things. Though there is some good news to go with.”

“And now I feel a swell of trepidation. Must you, Professor Potter?” Dumbledore asked as he looked at the man. “I am, alas, an old man. I can only take so many surprises.”

“All I figured was I’d tell you first as you are technically my employer,” Harry stated blandly as he shook his head. “And I was, technically, acting during my working hours.”

“I feel a great swell of esteem knowing that you place such high regard on my position.” Dumbledore stated dryly and lifted the bowl of candies in front of him towards Harry. “Lemon
“No, thank you. Though as I said, I wouldn’t say no to a drink. Especially some whiskey,” Harry stated with a sigh. “I’m already quite tired.”

“I’ve always found fighting tends to be a most strenuous activity,” Dumbledore noted before flash of green flame announced the arrival of Alastor Moody. “But as the esteemed auror Mr. Moody has arrived, please, do enlighten us: what was all this about?”

“Aye, I’d rather know exactly why I suddenly got a message from Albus right before my bloody shift is over, with an allusion to what’s likely going to be a nightmare worth of paperwork for me. So, what’s going on?”

“I discovered him a location of significance to Voldemort several months ago. He hadn’t done anything at the time, at least not there, so I left an alarm ward behind along with a secret entrance. Earlier today the alarm was tripped.

“It was only supposed to activate after any wizards had arrived to then left, so imagine my surprise when I showed up to find them in full revel. Voldemort sitting back and watching as his followers tortured and molested Ms. Bellatrix Black.”

Harry let those words sink in as he sat back in his chair. “And, of course, the bastard had up anti-port key and apparition wards. That put me in a very… particular position.”

“The girl?” Alastor asked with narrowed eyes.

“With her parents,” Harry answered with a shrug of his shoulders. “After everything, I figure that would be the best place.”

“What about the aurors?” Alastor demanded.

“More importantly, what about the healers?” Dumbledore asked as he shot Alastor a look of disapproval.

“I left it up to her how she wanted to do things,” Harry stated simply and shrugged his shoulders. “She thought her family more appropriate.”

He tilted his head to the side, and gave them both a look. “I wonder why that is?”

Alastor Moody took a slow deep breath, before looking back at Harry. “I’m going to need a statement from her.”

“Why?” Harry asked blandly as he continued to sit tiredly in his seat. “Don’t think there’s anything you need to worry about anymore. At least why are they’re concerned.”

Dumbledore closed his eyes for a moment, taking a slow deep breath. “Do I want to know what you did?”

“I wasn’t the one who killed most of them,” Harry stated shaking his head. “Voldemort’s Blood Gorger saw to that. And it’s why I really want to drink right now.”

Dumbledore went still while Alastor just looked confused. “What the bloody hell is that?”

“An anti-army blood curse,” Dumbledore stated in a faint half disbelieving voice. “One considered a war crime in the civilized world. It is one of the few spells I wholeheartedly support the
annihilation of any and all reference to and of.”

Alastair stared at Dumbledore, his mouth half opening as his brows rose up his face. “What the bloody hell is so horrible about it?”

“If used right?” Harry asked, a shudder running down his spine as he again recalled his previous experiences with the spell. “They can use a mosquito to kill an army.”

“The Blood Gorger contaminates any bloody comes in contact with. It uses that blood to power itself, and takes control of it,” Dumbledore stated with a quiet voice, his eyes affixed to Harry. “Contamination is almost instantaneous. Typically the blood is then ripped out of the victim’s body and used it to attack everyone else around it. Continually feeding itself new victims, growing in size, growing in power.”

“Yeah, I was lucky,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head as he shuddered again. “The bastard knew how to use it but he didn’t have the creativity to make it as dangerous as it could’ve been. Still, he did use his followers to power the whole bloody thing. Even the ones who weren’t even hurt.”

Warily he looked at the two. “That place is a graveyard now. I’d suggest you leave it as such.”

“And Voldemort?” Dumbledore asked intently. “What of him?”

“I left him with his precious immortality,” Harry stated as he looked up and stared into Dumbledore’s eyes. “Since he valued it above everything else, I figured he wouldn’t mind paying with his life, his body, his freedom, and his mind.”

Dumbledore blanched slightly, his face pale as he looked at Harry. “Then he is…?”

“Trapped. And unable to escape,” Harry added flatly. “Where only I know where he can be found, primarly thanks to his own ward work.”

“What the bloody hell are you two talking about?” Alastor demanded.

“Old Tom, well, he decided he was going to cheat death,” Harry stated as he looked at Dumbledore. “And he thought he found the perfect way to do it. Split his soul, attaching to artifacts so valuable that he thought no one would consider destroying them. Only he didn’t think about why it is no one uses them, beyond the fact that you’re tearing your part your soul.”

“It is an abomination,” Dumbledore stated with a shake of his head. “It denies you your ability to move on. You are trapped between life and death, unable to move one way or the other. A miserable existence.”

“So… you’re saying that all the attacks are going to stop, but you won’t give me any proof of it. And in the next few days, I’m going to find out that another group of fine, upstanding purebloods are reported missing and they’re never going to be found.” Alastor stated slowly. “And just like that, the Knights of Walpurgis are gone.”

Alastor just stared at Harry.

“Does this mean that I can assure Minerva that your lessons will become more… acceptable?” Dumbledore asked as he tried to change the subject.

“I think not,” Harry stated with a shake of his head, “but you can assure her that I will be staying no more than seven years.”
“Just long enough for a single class?” Dumbledore asked, sounding slightly disappointed.

“Seven years to determine if what I’m teaching has any value or not. After all, if it doesn’t, then Minerva will have proven her point, now, won’t she?” Harry noted with a tired sigh. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, gentlemen, I’m going to my room. I’m going to have a drink and an early night so I can pick up first thing in the morning and try to get some actual teaching done.”

A few moments after Harry left, Alastor turned to Dumbledore and stated bluntly, “Albus? That boy scares me.”

“I find myself rather uneasy with him, to be honest,” Dumbledore admitted with a faint shrug of his shoulders.

“You find yourself uneasy because he’s a warrior,” Alastor stated matter-of-factly. “He scares me because he gave that report like I would after catching some fresh out of Hogwarts idiot muggle baiting.”

Dumbledore blinked a moment, then slowly nodded. “Because he speaks with a familiarity bordering on weariness?”

“Because he’s so bloody familiar with clusterfucks like this that they don’t surprise him, and he knows to keep his mouth shut about things that could cause problems down the line,” Alastor stated flatly. “Since only he knows where to find that bastard, only he can get him back out and only he can reveal the information to someone else.”

“Ah, and that means it is unlikely to be coerced out of him,” Dumbledore agreed with a vague nod of his head.

Alastor looked at him for a moment, before sighing and shaking his head. “I’m going back to the Ministry, Albus. Then I will be heading to have a few words with Ms. Black to have her corroborate Mr. Potter’s story. In the meantime, I would consider you keep a watchful eye on your young professor.”

“… If I might ask why?” Dumbledore asked in confusion.

The auror paused for a moment, as if weighing the words before shrugging his shoulders. “Because he’s either a confrego waiting to go off or a man who has a lot of things to teach.”

With that Alastor Moody nodded his head towards Dumbledore and moved back to the floo, leaving the Headmaster to sit in his chair in quiet contemplation.
“Maeve’s tits, Bellatrix! What in Merlin’s name happened to you?!” Cygnus Black demanded as he saw his eldest daughter enter their home, clinging to a robe with a quiet death grip, and immediately made his way towards her.

She only flinched a bit when he reached for her but it was enough to give him pause as he looked at her with suddenly furious eyes. “Daughter… what’s been done to you?”

Bellatrix flinched again at his gaze and hung her head as she stared at the floor, trying to organize her thoughts. “I…”

The jumble of words that poured out of her lips left him confused and angry as a dangerous look crossed his eyes, forcing him to take a slow, deep breath to force himself to calm.

“Bellatrix. Daughter. I… try to calm yourself, please. Just… tell me what happened,” he asked as calmly as he could, his frustrations churning through his veins.

“I… I went to try to seduce the Storm Chaser again. And, again, I was turned away. He said things… things I didn’t want to hear about why he had no interest in me. Things that angered me, confused me… I felt so, so lost…”

Cygnus’ lips pressed angrily into a hard thin line. “Was he the one that…?”

“Merlin no!” Bellatrix quickly shook her head, grabbing hold of him with a tight, desperate grip. “I went for a drink, and then I was put under the Imperius.”

He sucked in a breath at that, his eyes going wide, before narrowing into flinty chips. “Who DARES?!?”

“The Lord of the Knights of Walpurgis,” Bellatrix told him as the memory rose unbidden, that horribly pleasant memory of feeling absolutely happy to do whatever she was told. “I… He had me strip. Then dressed me in…”

She paused a moment, before lifting her arm out enough from the robe to show the translucent nothing underneath. “This. Then he made me collar myself. And cuff myself.”

Every word seemed to fuel a fire inside of her father, a rage unlike nothing she had ever imagined. Her whole life, her father’s temper had always been cool, controlled. A razor, sharp and ready to cut where it was directed. But this? This was like a volcano, wanting desperately to explode and burn everything in its path.

Still, she had already faced worse than this tonight. A part of her firmed and a she stood up straighter at that and looked her father in the eyes. “After that he released me from the spell and then told his followers they could do whatever they wanted to with me.”
She could almost hear the creaking of his bones as his fingers clenched back into his palm as his body began to tremble in fury.

Then he froze when he heard what she said next. “Aunt Walburga was with them. She was with them.”

“… What?!” Cygnus growled out the word as he struggled to come to grips with the concept that his sister, his sister, would help do such a thing to his daughter.

“They… only started with the torture. Calling me things… promising more… and then, suddenly, they were screaming.”

Cygnus stared at her, dumbfounded for a moment as he realized. “They… what?”

“The Storm Chaser found them,” she stated simply as she shrugged her shoulders a bit. “He found them… He started to fight them. All of them. He killed her so brutally… And then their lord… he just… he killed them all. All his followers, he just ripped the blood out of their veins just to power some kind of spell to use against the Storm Chaser.”

For a moment, Cygnus said nothing, before finally he spoke again. “Then... is it over?”

She nodded her head quietly. “He finished it. They’re all dead. All of them.”

The last bit was more to herself as she recalled the horrid thing that escaped the fallen Voldemort’s body.

“Unfortunately, without all the horcrux’s destroyed…” Cygnus stated with a slow sigh of anger still smoldering in his voice.

“He caught him,” Bellatrix stated quietly. “I saw it, when he died. It rose out of his body like… it was almost like smoke, but so very wrong.”

Cygnus nodded slightly as her description watched what he had read about the death of a horcrux-bound wizard. “… Caught him?”

That wasn’t something he’d heard about before but he had to admit that, with every other impossibility he’d faced lately, it sounded like it could be plausible.

“It was… it was like he created a cage for it. It was trapped. Then he made the roof of the cave blossom to show some kind of crystal. A moment later, he had the cage somehow merge with the crystal, trapping him there. Then the whole then was swallowed up again.”

“Where?” Cygnus asked, almost demanding it.

She opened her mouth to answer before freezing and slowly shaking her head. “I… don’t know. I was taken there… and he took me back, here.”

He grimaced a bit and then nodded. “I suppose that means that it’s unlikely to be discovered.”

“I… yes,” Bellatrix agreed with a slow nod of her head.

Then suddenly she was engulfed in his arms as he pulled her to his chest. For a moment she tensed in confusion before slowly relaxing as she buried her face into his chest. She could hear his voice, quiet against her ear. “I am so sorry, daughter. I am so very sorry.”

Bellatrix just held onto him, her eyes glistening with tears as she finally allowed herself to break...
Harry awoke bleary eyed with a bone deep ache in his body that left him hissing in discomfort. And that was discounting the pounding throb in his head from his hangover. Sighing softly, he allowed himself a moment to try and simply will the pain away, hoping that the comfort of his bed would allow him to ignore it.

When it failed to abate, he sighed tiredly and slowly rose up out of his bed and blearily searched out his glasses. He was going to have a class to teach today. Which meant he would need to recover enough to fulfill his responsibilities.

“You look like shit.”

He froze a moment, before pulling his glasses up onto his head to see Charlus and Lucius Potter standing there, watching him expectantly.

“Yes, well I had a shit day yesterday.” Harry stated blandly before shaking his head. “But at least it was worse for that bastard Riddle.”

“It’s truly done then?” Lucius asked as he cautiously watched Harry.

Sighing, Harry nodded his head. “Yes. It’s done. Bloody bastard used a Merlin damned army killer curse, but it’s done.”

Lucius blanched slightly at the statement. Army killers were practically unheard of outside of use against actual armies. “He went that far?”

“Blood Gorgerl,” Harry stated flatly as he involuntarily shuddered again. “Used it against his own bloody people to power it up to use against me.”

Seeing the looks of incomprehension on their faces, Harry sighed. “It’s a blood curse. If it connects with your blood, it spreads to it, and generally the caster will then just rip it out of your body. It uses the blood both as attack and as fuel. Nasty, nasty curse.”

Both elder Potters grimaced at the description. “But, you are well?”

“As well as can be expected for a man who just fought like a bloody damned idiot and then got drunk last night on top of it.” Harry stated with a grunt and a grimace. “I really don’t like dealing with fights like that but I didn’t have much choice in the matter.”

“You won.” Charlus pointed out to him.

“ Barely,” Harry corrected with a sigh before looking at the two men. “Now, if you don’t mind, I’d like to get changed, take a shower and get dressed.”

“Thank you for saving Bellatrix.” Charlus spoke up suddenly as he looked at Harry. “I know you didn’t have to…”

“Yes, I did.” Harry corrected with a shake of his head and a grunt as he pushed up his glasses then rubbed his eyes. “Just leaving her like that would’ve meant she would have died or been broken. I’ve seen too many people suffer through things like that.”

“… You’re a good man.” Lucius stated sincerely. “We’ll talk to you after you’re finished with your
preparations for the day.”

“Thank you.” Harry stated simply as he walked towards his shower while the two men saw themselves out.

When he finished, he exited his room, dressed in a fresh set of robes and finding the two Potters talking quietly with a third. Young James Potter, to be precise.

“Professor Potter!” James stated with a bright earnestness that made Harry almost twitch slightly.

“Mr. Potter,” Harry acknowledged with a nod of his head. “Charlus, Lucius.”

“James was just telling us about the classes you’ve been giving.” Lucius noted with a slight smile on his face. “A game, was it?”

Harry shrugged his shoulders. “They are still children, and far more likely to invest themselves in something they enjoy after all.”

“Quite,” Charlus agreed with a nod and a small smile. “James seems to be quite energetic about it, though he seems disappointed you're not teaching grand and arcane magics.”

“Cousin!” James whined slightly as he looked at Charlus with a face lined by betrayal.

“I’m sure,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head as he gave James a look. “Magics which I already informed him that I will not be teaching him.”

James’ expression took on a look of sulky irritation at the declaration while Lucius chuckled softly.

“I see. For the best I’d imagine. Merlin knows what kind of trouble James would get up to if he had access to such things.”

“I can most assuredly imagine,” Harry stated dryly as he gave James a look, watching the boy blush brightly and cringe back down. “Fortunately, he’s managed to refrain from his antics in my class.”


“I’m sure she’ll be ecstatic to hear that.” Harry drawled before giving James a look. “Now, I believe you have breakfast to get to.”

“But…” James started to protest, only to have a look from Harry, Lucius and Charlus send him off with another sulky mutter.

“He’s enthusiastic and stubborn, I’ll give him that,” Harry noted with a faint smile, “but I imagine you were here for more than an update on James’ behavior.”

“Minerva McGonagall already gave me a report.” Lucius stated with a grimace. “I swear that boy is more trouble than… How do you manage to keep him behaved?”

“Creativity,” Harry stated simply with a faint tug of his lips. “After all, everyone else will only take off points and/or give him detention. He knows I am far, far more creative than that, and that he will not enjoy whatever punishment it is I inflict upon him. I presume you have heard about Andromeda Black’s fate?”

Harry smiled at the snort Charlus gave. “Yes, my nephew has made it abundantly clear how much his daughter dislikes the honor you gave her. And he finds it amusingly ironic. Using rewards to
“Yes, well, I did do much the same to young Sirius.” Harry noted with a faint chuckle. “His example made James realize that I am not one to be crossed.”

“McGonagall is convinced that the only reason you can keep my incorrigible little menace to behave is because I am enforcing your discipline.” Lucius noted, his lips twitching in faint amusement. “She refuses to believe that I have no part in it at all.”

“Yes, she tends to view me with a less than admirable gaze,” Harry stated with a faint shrug of his shoulders. “The fact that I make my classes quite interactive seems to have her believing I am a reckless deviant destined to send all of my students to St. Mungo’s long term treatment ward.”

“I gathered.” Lucius agreed with a nod of his head and a smile before his face grew serious. “But, I must ask… The issue is… resolved?”

“As resolved as it’s going to be,” Harry admitted with a sigh. “There are still several of his Horcruxes left to find, but the man himself is dealt with.”

“That is something of a relief,” Charlus noted with a faint sigh and a shake of his head. “I had been worried…”

“You should still be worried,” Harry admitted with a grunt and a shake of his head. “At least one of those items can possess people. I don’t want that damned thing to fall into anyone’s hands but I don’t know where it could be.”

“What else is there?” Lucius asked with a sigh. “Will we never be rid of this monster?”

“At least a diary.” Harry stated with a purse of his lips. “Potentially a locket, and potentially a chalice.”

No point in alarming them just yet.

“And you were able to remove the one in the school already?” Charlus asked with a penetrating look in his eyes.

“Yes,” Harry agreed with a nod of his head. “Dumbledore can attest to it.”

“So you did bring him in after all.” Lucius murmured softly as his eyes grew distant. “I had wondered.”

“I had to make sure that I wasn’t stumbling over him when I was acting. Didn’t leave me much choice in the matter.” Harry responded, pausing a moment before continuing. “He is a good man. Too idealistic and kind, but still he means well. He just has trouble comprehending that good intentions and desires to help can cause more damage than they prevent at times.”

“Very well, we’ll take your word for it.” Charlus stated with a nod of his head. “Though I will thank you for saving my grand-niece. She and her family do send their regards.”

Harry stiffened for a moment, before sighing. “I suppose they know what I did to Sirius’ mother then.”

“Yes.” There was a sigh as Charlus nodded his head sadly. “It wasn’t unexpected. And Sirius had been told to expect such a thing. Still, his family is gathering him, Andromeda and young Mr. Tonks now to let them know what’s happened.”
“Right.” There was a nod of his head before he affixed them both with a look. “I’m not taking you to the cave.”

There was a slight look of disappointment in Lucius’ eyes. “I thought not, but there was a chance.”

“I don’t want to take the chance of anyone finding him.” Harry stated simply with a shake of his head. “Not as long as I’m around.”

“Very well then,” Lucius cut off anything Charlus was going to say with a look.

“What? I wasn’t going to argue!” Charlus protested with his hands raised up. “… Even if it does sound like it would be a rather intriguing place to see.”

“No.” Harry stated flatly.

“Well, I suppose I tried.” Charlus agreed with a sigh.

-o-o-o-

Sirius stood stiffly in the Headmaster’s office as he waited for his cousin to arrive. Next to him his father sat with a resolute face carved as if from stone. Across from them, Albus Dumbledore looked... Well, Sirius wasn’t sure how the man looked. But it was not the look of a man who was in the least bit happy.

So, Sirius leaned back in his seat, trying to remain as still as possible. He didn’t want to upset his father. Not with how angry the man looked. And Uncle Cygnus didn’t look much better, though his emotions looked more subdued and sad than anything. Sirius wasn’t quite sure why, but he was sure it was important.

Then his cousin was there, along with Ted. Fortunately, it didn’t look like they’d been snogging. Though, typically it was still a bit early in the day for them to be doing that. He still took a great deal of pleasure in tracking them down, if only to find the right hiding spots that the prefects never seemed to check.

“… Father, Uncle. What’s this about?” Andromeda asked, her hand having reflexively sought out Ted’s when she saw the looks on the two brother-in-laws’ faces.

“I can take my leave if you’d prefer,” Dumbledore spoke up softly as he looked at them. “This is a family matter after all.”

“You know what this is about.” Orion made sure to not word it as a question as he stared at Dumbledore.


“Quite.” Orion stated with a succinct hiss of breath.

“I will take my leave then,” Dumbledore stated before looking to his perch. “Fawkes?”

The headmaster’s phoenix ruffled his feathers and then gave the headmaster a look, before promptly ignoring him as he began to sing. Slowly the tension drained out of the office’s atmosphere and Dumbledore managed a faint smile. “Very well, I suppose it might be beneficial for you to stay after all.”
Fawkes simply chirped back at him as he settled back onto his post after his song faded.

Once the Headmaster had gone, Orion looked from Andromeda to Ted, and then almost reluctantly to Sirius. For a moment there was nothing but silence as the man seemed to debate exactly what to say. Finally, it was broken by an impatient chirp from the phoenix, as if to tell Orion to get on with it already.

Casting the bird a slightly rebuking look, Orion then turned back to Sirius and sighed. “Yesterday Bellatrix was put under the Imperius by the Lord of the Knights of Walpurgis and kidnapped.”

Andromeda gasped loudly, her eyes wide and shocked while Ted quickly held onto her shoulders. Sirius himself looked surprised, and then worried. But, that didn’t explain the look on his father’s face.

“She was taken to a cave, where she was put through… a very unpleasant experience.” Orion struggled to state exactly what had been done to Bellatrix, glancing towards Sirius and Andromeda, before shaking his head. “Very unpleasant. But thankfully not permanent.”

He took a slow deep breath. “Unfortunately, Walburga was with them. And chose to help them instead of Bellatrix.”

Andromeda gasped lightly as she clutched tightly at Ted’s hand. Sirius frowned slightly but didn’t show any other reaction. Orion… Orion wished he could tell himself to be disappointed with his son’s lack of reaction, but the fact that his son wasn’t surprised at his mother’s actions hit home hard.

“She’s dead, isn’t she?” Sirius more stated it than asked it as he sat in his chair, looking at his father rather pointedly. “Did Bellatrix kill her?”

“No, Bellatrix did not kill her,” Cygnus answered, though he did not dispute that she had not survived. “She was rescued.”

“Does… does this have to do with why the Storm Chaser left his classes behind yesterday?” Andromeda asked as she looked from her father to her uncle while Ted stayed quiet next to her.

“As it stands… yes,” Orion agreed with a reluctant sigh. “He managed to rescue her. But, they were the only survivors.”

“And he killed Mother.” Sirius stated simply, his face unreadable as he leaned back in his seat.

“…Sirius…” Orion started to say, reaching out and placing a hand on his son’s shoulder.

“What? You say it like you weren’t expecting it.” Sirius stated quietly and shrugged his shoulders a bit.

The rest of the Blacks all turned and looked at him with a horrified shock as he shrank back under their gazes.

“… Why don’t you explain to them why you think that, kid?” Ted offered Sirius as the boy seemed to squirm and shrink under their gazes.

“Well… It was Mother. Don’t you remember how much she tried to say we needed to kill the Storm Chaser?” Sirius stated quietly as he looked down at his hands. “After she got thrown out, who did you think she was going to go to? What did you think she was going to try?”
The rest of them froze at that, before they slowly looked at each other and then back at Sirius. “I… I thought it was obvious. I mean, we all saw Bellatrix’s memory…”

“You showed him?!” Andromeda hissed as she glared at her uncle.

Orion shrugged his shoulders a bit and sighed. “He is my heir, and insisted. It was his choice.”

“He wasn’t even in Hogwarts at the time!” Andromeda protested.

“It’s fine,” Sirius stated quietly, shaking his head. “It stopped father from being like mother. I needed to know why.”

“It’s not fine!” Andromeda insisted with a growl. “It should never be fine! That memory was of a slaughter! No child should see that!”

“Rom.” Ted’s voice was a soft but firm rebuke. “Look at Sirius.”

Unwillingly, she did as she was told, turning her head to look at her young cousin, only to see in the eyes looking back at her a sharp steel in his grey eyes, one that wouldn’t back down, wouldn’t flinch away.

“… Maybe it was stupid of me, maybe it was selfish of me…” Sirius agreed quietly as he stared down at his hands, his voice soft, listless. “But… I had to know. Otherwise… You were all going to hate me.”

“I would never…!” Andromeda quickly protested and Sirius winced a bit and nodded.

“Sorry, Romeda, I meant, Father, Uncle, Mother, Aunt… everyone else in the family except maybe Uncle Alphard,” Sirius amended quickly and shook his head smiled a bit at her. “I just… I don’t see the point of all the hate. I don’t want to just go around hurting people for something they never did to me. What does it matter to me who someone’s parents are? They aren’t them. Just like I’m not my parents. I can get hurting someone because they were trying to hurt you or someone you knew, but…”

There was a pause and he shrugged quietly. “That’s not really what you were talking about, was it?”

“Oh, Sirius,” Andromeda sighed as she got up and walked over to her cousin, giving him a quick hug.

He smiled faintly at her. “Thanks, Romeda. I just… It was what it was.”

Orion frowned as his son refused to look at him before sighing softly. He wanted to say he would never have turned on his son like that. That if the boy had been in Gryffindor and not followed in his own footsteps that he wouldn’t have treated him any differently.

But he wasn’t so sure he’d have been able to. Losing Sirius wouldn’t have been the danger that facing the Storm Chaser would have. Having Sirius rebel would’ve been disheartening, disappointing, but not world shattering like what they had experienced.

He wondered if that was just another sign of just how mad everything about who he, they, had been before all this.

So he didn’t try to deny it. He didn’t dispute his son’s statement, instead, he simply set his hand down on his shoulder and gave it a soft squeeze. Then he looked towards Cygnus.
Cygnus sat there, his eyes half closed as he slumped back in his seat, looking as if the world itself had suddenly become something he no longer recognized. A man lost in the things he was realizing and wondering exactly where he would go from there. The sheer lack of surprise or grief in Sirius shook him deeper than he would have thought.

“It’s funny,” Ted stated quietly as he watched Andromeda try to comfort Sirius. “We look at the world, where we think we’re going, how it works, what we’re going to expect… And then it throws something at you and makes you realize that you never really knew half as much as you thought you did.”

Slowly opening his eyes, Cygnus would give a faint nod of his head as he studied the young man who would become his son-in-law.

The boy was an odd one. Always relaxed, almost appearing lazy, with an easy grin and an amiable personality. But he had heart. The scars on his back proved that. And the way he’d saved Bellatrix proved he had both intelligence, cunning and power.

And he had a bloody point. Who would have expected that he’d be welcoming a muggleborn to join their house and marry his daughter? The whole world had gone mad.

As he sat there, considering just where it had lead his sister when she had refused to change with it and his fist clenched. Perhaps it had been best that they had gone mad with it. At least this way they were still a family.

-o-o-o-

“Well, things certainly took an interesting turn,” Charlus Potter noted as he sat quietly in his chair, sipping at his scotch.

“You say interesting, I say maddening.” Cygnus Black responded with a half glower as he leaned back in his seat.

“What are you complaining about?” Charlus asked with an arched brow. “The Blacks are more influential than they’ve been in generations. And looking to be more plentiful as well.”

“Must you remind me, Uncle?” Cygnus half whined as he shook his head. “After everything, Bellatrix is still enamored with that blasted Storm Chaser. She ignores her responsibilities, rejects all suitors and spends her time doting on the man!”

“Are you upset that she’s doting on him, or that after so many year’s he’s finally starting to come around to her attentions?” Charlus countered back with a bemused smirk on his face.

“I still can hardly believe it’s been seven years now.” Cygnus released a heavy sigh and a shake of his head as he slumped back in his seat. “And that I am a grandfather already.”


“… Yes, well young Cassiopeia and Antares are looking to already cause enough trouble for Andromeda.” Cygnus allowed a faint smile to curl over his lips. “Adorable little rascals.”

“Yes, quite,” Charlus agreed with a faintly amused smile. “Are you still trying to talk Lucius into betrothing James to Narcissa?”

“It would be a good match.” Cygnus defended as he raised his chin. “And I’d like to have at least one member of this generation involved with a pureblood for a change.”
“Still upset about Sirius’ engagement to the Evans girl, hm?” Charlus teased casually with a triumphant smirk. “I should think she proved more than up to the task. Head girl and a remarkable head on her shoulders for charms and potions.”

“Yes, and the same damned eyes as the Storm Chaser.” Cygnus shuddered softly. “How he can look at them and not shudder is beyond me.”

“I fail to see why you find Harry to be such a terrifying wizard after all these years. He hasn’t done much of anything beyond teach since he finished dispatching that Voldemort pest.” Charlus responded with a shake of his head. “Honestly. Must you be so antagonistic with your likely son-in-law? You even get along with young Ted well enough.”

“Ted is perfectly willing to let me bully and intimidate him, as a proper son-in-law should!” Cygnus shot back with a glower. “That blasted monster can tear me into pieces small enough to feed doxies without even breaking stride.”

“Yes, but you can’t deny that he isn’t effective in how he trains his students.” Charlus smiled as he sipped his drink. “And that seems to benefit our whole society. By the time they graduate they have a group of stalwart friends that they have already been through hell with.”

“I know. I have to admit, I took a great deal of satisfaction watching the expression on dear Andromeda’s face when she realized that she had trounced an entire squad of trained aurors with her friends when they had gotten too rowdy in their celebrations.” Cygnus agreed with a faint smile.

“Did Edgar Bones manage to forgive her?” Charlus asked with a bemused chuckle.

“Once he realized that he had even more to lose from it getting out that she not only out fought him, but out drank him, he decided it was better to try and recruit her.” Cygnus chuckled faintly. “Andromeda still gets recruitment letters from the DMLE like clockwork.”

“You would think having her husband would be enough.” Charlus pointed out, still smiling.

“Ted is entirely too laid back in his opinion. Andromeda is the vicious one.”

“True enough,” Charlus laughed and nodded his head. “Are you still disappointed the Malfoy family turned out to be so… deficient?”

“You mean am I still desiring their blood after that brat approached me for Narcissa’s hand after it was painfully apparent that his father had been one of the bastards involved in the things done to Bellatrix?” Cygnus countered back with a glare. “I have accepted that your cousin is protecting the boy from paying for the sins of his father, but if that fool comes around here again…!”

“Yes, well, considering how it was enough to finally push Lucius to wash his hands of the whole thing, I’ll count it as a win.” Charlus agreed with a nod of his head.

“I’m sure,” Cygnus agreed with a nod of his head before pursing his lips thoughtfully. “I suppose at this point all that’s left is the future, waiting to see what it holds.”

“And how many grandchildren you end up with to spoil.” Charlus stated teasingly.

“As long as they don’t have those terrifying green eyes,” Cygnus agreed, though, he hated to admit exactly how likely that was.

“Of course, nephew, of course.” Charlus agreed with a slight teasing to his voice.
And thus it ends.

As before, original novel is available on amazon kindle store at https://www.amazon.com/dp/B072FVVQKY/

And when I can, working on original works at www.chilor.com

End Notes

I have also released my first novel on Amazon. Book One of I’m Not a Super Spy!: I’m Only a Freshman! By Jonathan McCready

You can find a link to the novel on my new site http://www.chilor.com/

I will be not only promoting published novels, but other original works I’m putting together there.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!