Animus, Anima: English version

by Maiathoustra

Summary

In limbo, Harry doesn't choose to go back to the Forbidden Forest to face Voldemort. He makes another decision and finds himself in a baby's body: little Tom Riddle.

Years pass and intimately bind the orphan and his imaginary friend, in a hopeless and incestuous relationship. Indeed, all the odd events of Tom Riddle's life happen in spite of Harry’s presence: could he be the one who provokes them?

This is Tom Riddle's entire life, as close to canon as possible, if he shared his body with Harry Potter (and fell in love with him).
Hi! This is a translation of my most elaborate work, Animus, Anima. So you know, I'm French and this fanfiction is a monster. I'm sorry, it won't be perfect. I just want to offer something far better than the google translator's version. If anybody wanna help, beta-read, tell me anything, feel free to leave a comment! :) Please tell me if you find any big error too.

Warning: Harry/Tom slash. Creepy and frustrating relationship, for it is weird to fall in love with yourself. There will be blood, tears, sperm, sweat, and some visceral descriptions but never rape, terrible torture, mutilation and other painful things. Moreover, angst doesn’t prevent neither love nor humor.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter.

- A translation of Animus, Anima by Maiathoustra
"You cannot help," said Dumbledore.

With shameful relief, Harry turned away from the flayed creature that groaned under the seat. Since the wizard had arrived in this strange vaporous white place, the thing that had the form of a small, naked child had not ceased to emit pitiful and obscene noises, disturbing the ethereal atmosphere. It was choking.

It was as if it was struggling for breath, but it had no lungs, as if it tried in vain to speak, but its tongue had been torn off. In any case, it had neither hair nor skin. It was only a tiny being, curled up on the ground, whose raw, rough flesh was partially covered with a sticky, reddish substance. It was sad and disgusting.

Harry was extremely afraid of it.

As soon as he had seen it, so small and wounded, unwanted, he had knew he ought to comfort it. Yet his entrails were twisted with repulsion and his whole body had told him to step back. His eyes barely could stand the vision.

At eleven, he had seen the cadaverous face of Voldemort on the other side of Quirrell's skull. At twelve, he had almost been eaten by a Basilisk with bursted eyes, which whistled sinister melodies. At thirteen, he had had to face hundreds of putrid Dementors trying to give him a kiss. At fourteen, he had witnessed the resurrection of Voldemort and the murder of Cedric Diggory.

At fifteen, he had seen Sirius passing on the other side of the veil and had had to escape once more from Voldemort and his followers. At sixteen, he had been at the top of the Astronomy Tower when Snape had sent Dumbledore into the void without mercy. Finally, just an hour earlier, he had seen Snape die in the Shrieking Shack, his throat slashed by Nagini.

Nevertheless, none of these terrible events had left him as panting and desperate as this small and ignoble creature. When finding himself face to face with the most atrocious things, he had always been able to make quick and effective decisions. But now he did not know what to do with this struggling creature.

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Dumbledore had appeared at the right time. A moment later and Harry would have obeyed the moral law in him and he would have stretched out his hand to caress the creature's cheek, in a poor gesture of comfort.

*Phew*, the teenager thought. *I don't have to worry about this anymore. Dumbledore can save it, he is*
With these thoughts, his stomach made a turn on itself and an unpleasant feeling of guilt invaded him. He was not used to act so cowardly.

He no longer remembered that Dumbledore had approached him by simply saying "You cannot help". It was absurd. Dumbledore could not ignore a being who was suffering, even if it was a very tiny being, could he? Apart from Voldemort, who could he let die?

*Dumbledore will find a solution to help it*, Harry thought as he followed his former mentor.

The old man, more serene than ever, led them a little farther, towards two comfortable and curiously solid armchairs.

After a few moments of silence, Harry could not help staring with amazement at the dead man's face, so keen, so similar to his memories.

"But you're dead," he said at last, astonished.

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His encounter with Dumbledore caused him to momentarily forget the thing that moaned behind them. He had a lot of things to ask and Dumbledore answered all his questions cheerfully.

The former Headmaster was very satisfied with himself. His plans had worked perfectly. Before the dawn, Voldemort would be just as dead as himself. He certainly could take a few moments to reassure Harry and explain to him two or three things he had forgotten to tell him during his lifetime.

No, Harry had not died in the Forbidden Forest, even though Avada Kedavra had touched him again. On the contrary, as the teenager had not defended himself, Voldemort had accidentally killed the Horcrux the boy carried in him. Wasn't it wonderful?

"Your soul is whole, and completely your own, Harry."

"But then ... what is that, Professor?" the Boy Who Lived asked, pointing to where the small, maimed creature trembled under a chair.

"Something that is beyond either of our help."

This answer somewhat annoyed Harry. If he, Harry, could do nothing, that was understandable - after all, he did not have his NEWTS - but how could Dumbledore be helpless? It seemed so unlikely...

But Harry still had so many questions to ask!

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Dumbledore then explained that if he had not succumbed to the spell of death, it was again thanks to his mother's love. Even if Harry had reached his majority, Lily's protection was still active. Indeed, in Little Hangleton's graveyard, Voldemort had used the teenager's blood to come back to life. From that moment, Lily's love had flowed in their veins. So neither Harry nor Voldemort could die while the other was alive.
"I live . . . while he lives! But I thought . . . I thought it was the other way round! I thought we both had to die? Or is it the same thing?" Harry was again distracted by the tortured creature who wriggled behind them and he glanced over his shoulder. "Are you sure you can't do anything?"

“There is no help possible.”

Harry bit his lips but Dumbledore resumed his explanations before he could protest. Everything seemed as crazy as it was logical.

Harry was Voldemort's seventh Horcrux, the one that should never have been created. Voldemort knew nothing about House Elves, fairy tales, love, loyalty, innocence. Harry's wand had broken the one Voldemort had borrowed from Lucius because it had absorbed its twin's powers in the graveyard three years earlier. And if Harry decided that this ethereal place was King's Cross, then King's Cross it was.

In tears, Dumbledore told him about the Deathly Hallows. He felt so sorry for himself and his youthful mistakes and Harry found himself compelled to comfort him. Weren't his whining shameful? How could the Headmaster dare to sob, when the creature behind them was agonizing in the indifference of everyone?

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Dumbledore finally pulled himself together. He began to monologue about his sister, Ariana, that he might have killed. He also spoke a lot about Grindelwald, his brilliant and ephemeral best friend, whom he had been forced to send to Nurmengard. Harry assumed that, for once, Rita Skeeter had been right. The two men probably messed around. In any case, speaking of Grindelwald caused tears to reappear in the old man's eyes.

Dumbledore's complaints were now so strong that Harry could hardly hear the groans of the creature behind them. He did not know why, but despite his disgust, he did not want the thing to die without him noticing it. If at least one person was there for its last moments...

Dumbledore dried his tears. He described with febrility his lust for the Resurrection Stone. When he had it in his hands, he had even forgotten it was a Horcrux and he had put the ring on his finger, expecting to see Ariana again. The Headmaster denigrated himself with a passion that annoyed Harry. It looked like he was hoping to hear "I forgive you" or "Everything will be fine now". When he called Harry Master of Death, the thing uttered the most desperate cry.

But Dumbledore continued to babble, without turning around. He did not seem to have heard the creature's noise. He asserted that Voldemort was not interested in the Hallows and that he had sought the Elder Wand for the sole purpose of defeating Harry's wand.

“He would not think that he needed the Cloak, and as for the stone, whom would he want to bring back from the dead? He fears the dead. He does not love.”

Dumbledore was certainly right, Voldemort probably did not love anybody. But to think it was one thing, to affirm it was another.

Who are we to do that? How could we psychoanalyze Tom Marvolo Riddle? Harry wondered.

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Dumbledore spoke for a long time. When at last he shut up, nothing could be heard but the feeble sounds of the agitated creature, moaning a few yards from them. During these long minutes, as if a soft, slow snow was falling on him, Harry gradually became aware of what was to happen now.

“I’ve got to go back, haven’t I?”

“That is up to you.”

“I’ve got a choice?”

“Oh yes,” Dumbledore smiled at him. “We are in King’s Cross, you say? I think that if you decided not to go back, you would be able to . . . let’s say . . . board a train.”

“And where would it take me?” said Harry, worried.

"On."

Harry glanced again at the raw-looking thing that trembled and choked in the shadow beneath the distant chair.

“Do not pity the dead, Harry,” Dumbledore said sharply. “Pity the living, and above all, those who live without love. By returning, you may ensure that fewer souls are maimed, fewer families are torn apart. If that seems to you a worthy goal, then we say good-bye for the present.”

Harry took an instant to think and finally made his choice.

Leaving this place would not be nearly as hard as walking into the forest had been, but it was warm and light and peaceful here, and he knew that he was heading back to pain and the fear of more loss. But he was determined.

He and Dumbledore stood up and they stared at each other for a long time.

Harry nearly asked if all of this was real or if it was happening inside his head, but he held back. The question seemed stupid. He would certainly have asked if he had planned to return to the Forbidden Forest. Yes, if he had decided to go back there, the answer would have been useful.

But for the moment there was something that seemed more important to him than killing Lord Voldemort.

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Harry eventually went over to the sobbing creature without saying goodbye to Dumbledore, who didn’t complain. Harry did not turn to check if he had already left the station. After all, the Headmaster was dead, he could not be offended by Harry’s lack of politeness.

The teenager kneeled down near the thing and watched it closely. It was still alive. It was hard to get used to its partly burnt, partly oozing surface, but Harry could now look at it without feeling the urge to vomit.

In fact, the more he watched, the more he found its face familiar. Exactly as this place had gradually defined itself as King’s Cross, the creature became slowly more and more identifiable.
Harry suddenly felt like a mother who has just given birth and who sees her child for the first time. Even if her baby is deformed and covered with blood, even if its eyes are blind and its cries are ear-splitting, she can see the human being it will slowly become under its wrinkled skin. She loves this piece of premature flesh and she gently hugs it.

In the same way, Harry eventually came to find the little thing was not so ugly. His stomach was filled with a weird affection, one you feel for something you care about. This grotesque creature was like a plant he would have watered every day and he decently could not let wither.

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Without thinking, he took the thing in his arms. It had been very easy. Harry had more or less expected it to melt or freeze at his touch, he had thought its skin would peel or its inside would pour out, but the child was as concrete as another child. It was just particularly repulsive.

With delicacy, Harry palpated its crusty skin and, once again, he was surprised to find a very ordinary surface. His hands did not get through the body as if it was made of water or butter. The flesh of the creature was solid as a stone and as soft as a rotten fruit. It was a living being. How could Dumbledore let it die?

Harry tried to cross the thing's eyes but it did not have any. In fact, it was rather as if the wizard's sight was not subtle enough to discern the little being's features. He tried several angles of approach, he even carried the baby at arm's length, but he did not manage to see its eyelids. He gave up.

It was a bit stupid to put down the creature but Harry did not know what to do with it now. Dumbledore had not helped him at all. He knew he had to take care of it so it did not die under that seat. Yet he could not return to the Forest with this fetus and he could not take the train with it either, what would he say to the controller?

Well, actually, could this thing leave limbo?

As he thought too much, Harry's head was spinning. Flashes appeared all around him. He felt bad, oppressed. Very quickly, he no longer had control over his gestures and he could only see non-existent forms. Then, without reason, he bent over the creature and he devoured it.

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The little being was definitely very small. It entered easily into Harry's mouth. Still spaced out, the teen swallowed the embryo without chewing. No bones cracked beneath his molars and blood did not spout out of his mouth. His lips remained clean. He felt as though he had committed a horrible crime, but this crime miraculously cured his headache.

When the thing began to slide down his esophagus, kicking softly, he felt a moldy aftertaste on his tongue. It had been more than time to eat it. One moment more and it would have decomposed. Harry had saved it. He did not understand why, but it had to be eaten in order to survive.

The gesticulating creature felt into his stomach and, for the first time since Harry had met it, it relaxed. It was in a belly with reassuring walls, it was warm, it was finally in its element.

Harry caressed his abdomen. It was a bit swollen, like a pregnant woman's. There was inside it an inhuman form of life that he simply could not let go. Even if it was totally fucked up, he had made the right decision.
Only a liar and an utilitarian old man like Albus Dumbledore could ruthlessly let die a fragment of Harry Potter's soul.

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Harry watched over his stomach for days. He walked when he felt like it but most of the time he simply stayed on the floor. He found the ground contact comforting. He slept sometimes but he woke up quickly - at least that was what he thought. He was never hungry or thirsty. In fact, he did not want anything except to watch over his belly like a pathetic penguin brooding a dead egg.

During all this time, he saw no train and Dumbledore did not come to visit him. In limbo there were only him, three chairs, and a mutilated Horcrux in incubation.

At last the thing began to hatch.

Harry had became so used to live with indolence that he no longer remembered what a sensation was. At one point, however, he was nothing but pain. It was as if his body had become too narrow, too small for him, and all his joints dislocated.

*My skin will break, I'll break, the station will explode!*

Everything broke outside and inside him. The shell shattered, scattering shards everywhere, soiling the bright station with pieces of placebo placenta.

One could describe in many different ways what Harry experienced at that time. It was like receiving the cosmos in your body and having to regurgitate all the sharp stars. It was like being in love with a shooting star and dying while giving birth to one of its sparks. It was like believing you are one of Saturn’s natural satellites when you actually are a robot sent by NASA, and eventually blew up due to sadness.

In any case, Harry's full body peeled off, it was an unsayable pain and it was a complete transformation. After this episode, he would never be the same again. After having turned into a volcano, he left everything behind him.

Then, he sank into the darkness.

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To Be Continued...
Childhood (1926-1934 / 0-7 years old)

Chapter Summary

Harry wakes up in a child's body and the story truly begins now.

Chapter Notes

Hey! I'm gradually getting used to translating. In fact, I have a lot of fun looking at this story again and training my English. Hoping you'll enjoy this chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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Childhood (1926-1934 / 0-7 years old)
Chapter 1: Happy Days

Shit, Harry thought, when the hell-like spiral stopped spinning and he felt all of his pores closing. I can't stop dying and yet I never die. Where am I now?

He felt as warm as at King's Cross. Yet he was almost certain that after his hatching he had moved to another place. The station seemed far behind him, as far as if it were in a completely different world. According to his logic, one could not be born twice in the same Cosmos. So, he must have landed elsewhere: neither was he in Limbo's King's Cross, nor in the real world's Forbidden Forest.

To confirm this hypothesis, he decided to open his eyes to look around himself, but he soon realized it was impossible. His eyelids were wrinkled as if they were stuck by glue. He send valiantly a thousand signals to his facial muscles, but none of them moved as he wished.

His body was not responding. His senses worked at least partially though, for he could hear a baby howling in the distance. Without any real clue, he supposed it was a newborn. It must be tiring to scream like that.

Not giving way to panic, he momentarily abandoned the idea of opening his eyes and concentrated on his arms. This time there was a response.

Ah, the situation isn't so terrible, I'll be able to go crawling!

Unfortunately, he had cried victory too soon. His upper limbs moved, but they did nothing he asked them to. They were softly moving up and down, as if they were saying "Good-bye" to a sailor going to the unknown. Ridiculous. With little conviction, the teen tried to control his legs but came to the same lack of result – it was even worse, he realized, when he felt his foot landing in his mouth.
He was obviously victim of a curse similar to Tarentellegra. He just had to call for help and somebody would help him.

After all, if there was a baby nearby, someone had to be watching over it, right?

But when Harry tried to speak, the result was disastrous. No intelligible noise came from his mouth. On the other hand, he vaguely felt drool smearing on his chin. He did not try to wipe it off. In his condition, he could accidentally pierce his own eyes.

He noted absent-mindedly that the child who was crying had suddenly turned silent. Harry took advantage of it to listen. There were indeed several people nearby, talking to each other.

He had to be behind a wall or something like that because he could not understand what they were saying. In fact, he was not even sure they spoke English. How could he get their attention?

At King's Cross he had not had his wand with him, so there was a good chance that in this unknown place he would not have it either. He could not send sparks of distress and he apparently could not speak either. So he decided, for lack of better, to try to open his eyes again.

Perhaps a superior being had pity on him for this time his eyelids complied. What a relief it was to finally see! And what a fright it was to see what he saw!

Everything was blurry, but not blurry as when he was not wearing his glasses. Everything was distorted and grayish like in a bad dream.

*Oh, fuck me. I'm screwed.*

The only thing he could clearly see was an immense face, with large yellow teeth, which occupied half his field of vision. Despite his colorless sight, Harry could see all its imperfections. In addition to the black dots that clogged its nose's pores, there were lighter spots on its cheeks, scars of an especially wicked acne.

Harry tried to turn his head, to look behind the giant, to escape this nightmarish image but his neck did not obey him.

He was about to try to get up, to face the immense thing, when he suddenly felt a great tiredness. *Damn, I can't faint now! This giant will eat me raw!*

But his body, weak as a premature kitten's, was exhausted. His limbs stopped tossing in every direction and Harry fell asleep immediately, without having time to curse the one who had put him in this state. His closed fists rested on a warm surface, which gradually cooled.

Just before losing consciousness, he said to himself: *Feels like human skin ...*

During his sleep, Miss Cole removed him from his mother's corpse and examined him. The baby was healthy.

Just like Merope Gaunt in her last breath, Miss Cole hoped the little one would be as handsome as his father. The young mother who had knocked at their door on the last day of 1926, poor one, had already looked dead before having gave up her soul.
The next day, poorly rested but calmer, Harry finally understood, to some extent, the terrible situation in which he was. After eating the creature at King's Cross, it had grown in him belly like a child's seed. Naturally, it had ended up hatching. A child was born. Yet what was extraordinary was that meanwhile Harry had disappeared.

In any case, his body had vanished. His conscience was intact – it was one of the only positive points he could find. Yes, Harry had kept all his memories and mental faculties but his body ... well he had landed in an infant's body. The baby's screams he had heard when he had come into this world, had been his.

A baby, he often repeated. I've become a baby!

Yet, he was convinced he had not only rejuvenated himself. It was not just a return in the past. No, he had become an unknown baby. He had swapped body. He was absolutely certain of that.

After three identical days – always the same song: baby bottle, nap, bath, baby bottle, nap – he realized that for some reason it was not his mother, or rather the mother of the Child, who took care of him. The faces that leaned over him were never the same. And none of them was Lily Potter's.

His intuition had been right: he had become an unknown baby. As if he had not already had enough difficulties in his life.

At last it's a bit of my fault, he said to himself when he was beginning to despair.

The following days were entirely devoted to the search for his new identity. He was born in someone else's body and he wanted to know whom. Afterwards, he could eventually be interested in the question of How and then to this one: How to get the hell out of there?

But although his intelligence was incredibly developed for an infant, Harry was sadly infirm. He could not rely on his senses.

His sense of touch was nil. He could hardly tell the difference between his pajamas and his cradle's bars, which often led him to bang nasty. When he stupidly nibbled his hand, he did not even realize it was a piece of himself. And of course, he was incapable of making a precise or even a voluntary movement. He was in a baby's body, but he also acted like a baby. It was very disconcerting to be seventeen and unable to know if what he was holding in his hand was a stuffed toy or his own foot.

His sense of smell was not very useful either. The only smell he could identify was the nauseous one which regularly emanated from his diaper. How could humankind perpetuate a lie as big as the one that said babies smelled good?

Of course, the sense of taste served no purpose to glean information, but it was reassuring to recognize the flavor of milk, the only thing he drank. He also found an obscene pleasure in sucking his bottle and emitting a repugnant and stinking rot right after.

His sight was mediocre. He could only see about twenty centimeters around, in very limited shades and above all, everything was horribly flat. He did not control his gaze and was unable to scan anything with his eyes. In short, he already regretted his myopia.
However, he was positively surprised to find that his hearing was rather good. He heard everything distinctly and he was glad of it, for it was a precious way for learning more. Unfortunately, the immature chick pea that served as his brain could not memorize and analyze the sounds.

After studying his five senses, Harry began his hearing training.

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He fiercely practiced listening and counting the ticks of a clock which probably was not very far from his cradle. The first times, after a few ticks, he was already lost. But he quickly improved and finally managed to add them to each other without forgetting too many in the way.

As soon as he could say – if he could not read – the time, he interested himself in the voices of the people around him. He determined whether a voice was feminine or masculine, young or old, whether it had a particular accent or not. He then tried to retain the syllable sequences, to associate them to form words or, when he was very motivated, parts of sentences.

Between his multiple naps he learned several things. His mother, the child's mother, had died during childbirth. He was in England. The people who looked after him were Muggles. It was winter. He was not with his maternal or paternal family. As he had heard a mix of very juvenile and more mature voices, he assumed he was in a institute for children, probably an orphanage.

But all this required a lot of energy, and then his weak body wanted to sleep for several hours, preventing him from getting other clues.

*It piss me off so much! Is there worse thing in the world than having all your mental faculties but being unable to take care of yourself?* he often rebelled before falling into sleep.

His struggle against his infant's body, however, was not in vain. After a week of insane efforts, he heard during his bath one of the girls who worked at the orphanage – Anna or Cathy, he could not tell – saying the following sounds: “o-tom-weer...”

After several minutes of intense reflection, he realized that the girl had said "So, Tom, we are ...". He did not care about what he was, surely "all clean" or "a pretty baby" or "a big disgusting larva".

No, what he had just discovered was that his name was Tom. And he did not know a lot of Toms who had grown up from their first day in an orphanage.

*I should never have eaten that thing*, he lamented, as the girl dried his bald head.

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Months passed and Harry had time to think a lot. In fact, in his quasi-vegetative state, it was the only thing he could do.

He was now persuaded he could not leave the body of the future Voldemort without dying himself, for this body had become his own. He was condemned to live all his life again as Tom Riddle. And even if there was a spell or an artifact which could bring him back to his time... how would he manage, with his baby's body? In spite of his awakened consciousness, if someone left him in the street, he would die of cold, hunger or from a genital infection, since his diaper would not have been changed in time.

He could still wait a few years before escaping from the orphanage and looking for a way to return in 1998, but there was no guarantee that this would actually happen. Hermione had told him several times that Time-Turner had a limited scope and that meddling with Time was terribly tricky. And
even if a miracle happened and he managed to return to his Present, what would he do there, with Tom Riddle's child body?

No, hope seemed out of place.

So, after a long period of rage and depression, he surrendered to the evidence. He was unlikely to see his time any time soon. 1926, it was more than half a century before his birth.

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That said, he wondered a lot about how he got there in the first place. By giving birth to Voldemort's soul piece – that's how he pictured what had happened at King's Cross – he had created a new bond with the Dark Lord, a bond so intimate that their two souls had mixed up and that Harry had resurrected as Tom Riddle.

He could not explain this event to himself but after all, when Magic was involved, absurd things tended to happen. For example House Elves who send crazy Bludgers after you to save your life.

However Harry had no idea of the nature of the world in which he was. Was he in an endless dream? Was his inert body resting in the Forbidden Forest? Or had he really been transported through time? And where was his old body?

By the way, when this time would catch up with his own, if it caught up with it, what would happen? If he had really gone back, if he had become baby Tom Riddle, the slightest of his actions could have a butterfly effect... for he would never kill his parents and he would never start a war!

Maybe the year 1998 of this world had nothing to do with the 1998 he knew. Maybe in this future, Harry Potter would not be an orphan and, above all, would not be *him*. For if he was sure of one thing, it was he was still Harry Potter.

But as he had no way of knowing if he was sane or awesomely mad, he avoided making too many guesses. He often bitterly reproached himself for not having asked Dumbledore the question he had found so stupid at King's Cross: "Is this real? Or has this been happening in my head?"

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Time, at least, seemed to advance at the same pace as in real life, as in his other life. The days were twenty-four hours long, and the months had a terrifying number of hours. Everything went so slowly and so fast that Harry sometimes thought he had been there for years, and the next moment he would bet it has only been a few minutes.

It's scary to be a baby, he thought when a naughty little fellow poked him with his fingertip and Harry could not defend himself.

He missed Ron and Hermione, of course. He missed everybody. He sometimes wondered if he simply had died. Voldemort might have killed him in the Forbidden Forest, and everything that had followed – King's Cross, his reincarnation – would have been nothing but what was called "afterlife". Just as his diaper was being changed, his friends had perhaps already succumbed to *Avada Kedavra*. Hogwarts might no longer exist, Voldemort might have taken control of the world.

*Shit, if I'm dead, why am I still a worrywart?*

When he thought about what he had left behind, he wondered why he had chosen to eat the dying creature instead of going back to confront Voldemort. If he had returned, according to Dumbledore, he would have been able to kill the Dark Lord, putting an end to the war. At the present time he'd
been celebrating or mourning the dead. Anyway, he would certainly not have been suckling a rubber pacifier. He would not have been Tom Riddle.

Yet he did not regret his choice. It seemed like the right thing to do at that time, and he felt invested with a mission, even though he did not know its objective for the moment. He would probably make a long detour before coming back, so better not whine all along and try to enjoy the trip.

It was not that difficult. After the terror and uncertainty of the beginning, he grew accustomed to his new life. He just had to chase away the memories of the persons he had left in his world: Ron, Hermione, Ginny, every Dumbledore Army's members.

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Indeed, everything was so wonderful in this new body! He had nothing to worry about and he let himself be carried away by the few events of his routine. His life was peaceful but not really monotonous, for he was regularly surprised by a new faculty surged out of nowhere. His body was slowly changing and he found this fact crazy enough. In fact, his worries about his reincarnation were often supplanted by the small things of his baby everyday life.

For example, at first he indistinctly slept day and night. But after three or four months he had taken a pace. He drank his five bottles a day at regular hours. Well, he still had no teeth and his food was still deadly boring, but everything in its own time.

He soon discovered he could calm his odd crying impulsions with some willpower and he became a very quiet baby. After some time however he unintentionally began to produce strange babbles which turned the adults' smiles more indulgent. He overused it a bit.

He also ended up gaining control on his gestures. As soon as an object was handed to him, he took it with delight. And after some time, he learned to control his head's movements, which allowed him to observe his surroundings with curiosity. It was funny being a baby. The world seemed very different. Everything was so huge!

He realized that it took in fact a long, very long, time to become an autonomous living being. And time passed, and his grief faded. After all, there is so much to see when you are a baby with a conscience.

I'm sure it's a unique case, he thought. When I come back ... If I come back as Harry Potter ... I'll write a book about child development.

And he had fun picturing the press' reaction when Harry Potter would tell them he no longer wanted to be an Auror but a pediatrician.

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One day, little Tom, who was more or less one year old, was crawling around when he suddenly uttered his first word. However, no one except Harry realized what it was.

"Areuh," the child said maliciously. “‘Ary. ’Ry. ‘Arry.”

Harry was deeply moved.

I can say my own name!

From that day on, he gave himself the modest task to teach himself to say other words. He kept mentally repeating simple words in the hope that they would cross his lips. And, to a certain extent, it
worked.

Setting aside the complex words Harry enumerated, Tom preferred to tirelessly repeat the most stupid onomatopoeias. "Mew" was his favorite. He crawled, stood up, fell back on his buttocks and meowed, getting the tender eye of the cook time after time.

For his age, it could be said that Tom was precocious. He was very quiet, for Harry was watching after him, and he had almost done all his teeth without shedding a tear. But he never played with the other brats.

*They're disgusting*, Harry thought, seeing Babeth and Elliot cramming their fingers in each other's noses, or even elsewhere. *I'd rather look like I'm smarter than them.*

xXx xXx xXx

At two years, like any other kid of that age, Tom had an existential crisis where the only word he agreed to say was "No". Farewell, the adorable meowing at the top of his voice, it was "No, no, no!" at every spoonful of soup and every time he was brought to bed.

*Be quiet!* Harry ordered.

It was no good. Although he firmly closed his mouth, an unknown force reopened it to shout "No!".

It was about then that Harry realized he was not alone in his baby's head. The first two years, *the other one* had been almost non-existent. His presence had been so weak, so hidden, that Harry had simply not noticed it.

But after eighteen months of larvae existence, the legitimate conscience of the body he squatted began to wake up and assert itself more and more.

Harry still controlled his body's moves, but *the other one* could choose to stop him. Harry wanted to remain quiet but *the other one* decided to swing his wood cubes in all directions. Harry listened to the information on the radio but *the other one* preferred to rob a smaller kid's toys, just for the sake of making him cry.

Tom Riddle's conscience was awakening and it was considering, not without reason, Harry as an intruder. Of course, the latter had the upper hand almost all the time. He had fifteen years of maturity more that him and an indiscutably stronger will. Anyway, Tom could barely *think*.

The rascal, however, was not stupid. Thus, each day, his thoughts were formulated with more precise images and more and more words. Harry feared the day when Tom would have enough linguistic baggage to stand up to him.

xXx

Tom's two-year crisis did not last long in appearance. He stopped answering "No" to what was offered to him and ate his green vegetables without complaining. Everybody marveled at his exemplary maturity. The boy had in reality simply noticed that there was someone who was much more interesting to annoy, someone who had far more authority over him than the ladies of the orphanage.

Of course, he did not understand exactly what was going on in his head but he understood that he was not alone. And that did not please him very much.

So he took a cunning pleasure in opposing Harry. As soon as he felt that the *other one*, Harry, was
getting weaker, he took advantage of it to do foolish things, simply to contradict.

Then the crisis passed. However, the child's awareness did not stop growing and taking more and more room in their common head.

Harry at first found the other conscience's awakening upsetting. When he heard Tom's words invade his mind, he did everything to repel them, as if they were a contagious disease.

Yet the more time passed, the less he fought against Tom. When Tom was two and a half years old, he had gave up all defense.

*What could he do to me? He's still a baby!* he told himself the first time he yielded to the future Voldemort's whims.

He who had at first fought all move coming from his other conscience, now let the toddler do as he liked. He contented himself with observing his actions as a parent watches over his child.

xXx

In spite of himself, he was amazed to watch every day the construction of a conscience. He also finally realized he had developed a weird attachment to Tom.

Who has lived in somebody else's head for more than two years feels so close to them that it seems impossible for him to hate his host, for his host and himself were the same one.

*Tom Riddle, who conscientiously stack cubes, it's me,* Harry thought.

*Tom plays,* said Tom's conscience. *Tom likes to play.*

*That's good,* Harry commented. *What if we made a pyramid?*

*Tom wants!*

And the child played alone but in fact he was not. Tom and Harry had become indissociable. Even though they were two consciences, they formed one unique being. That was what everybody saw: there was definitely only one baby trying to make a pyramid with its cubes. No one noticed, hovering above him, a bespectacled scrawny teenager who had a scar on his forehead.

Harry himself slowly forgot that about three years ago he had another physical appearance. His old life seemed like an old and funny dream he had not enough time now to care about. He spent his days watching over Tom and Merlin knew how a kid could be exhausting.

On July 31st 1929, however, he felt something twisting in his little boy's belly. Since when was not this date his birthday anymore? Well, it would be strange to celebrate his birthday when he was technically not born yet ... So how old was he then? Tom was two and a half, of course. But he, Harry, was he seventeen, nine months and change years old, age at which he had reincarnated in Tom? Or had he ceased to age when he had abandoned his first existence?

But if he was a soul, could he even have an age?

Could he die?

xXx xXx xXx

On December 31st 1929, Tom turned three years old in dignity.
It was a very festive New Year's Eve. A few days ago, the orphanage had welcomed two new children who were very loud but adorable and Miss Cole, who freshly had become the Matron, had allowed them to stay awake until midnight. She always had had a weakness for rowdy kids.

The two newcomers, who were seven and eight years old, spent the evening jumping on every surface available and begging for sweets, monopolizing everyone's attention.

In their corner, Tom and Harry were playing with their birthday present, a wooden puzzle that would represent, when finished, three little girls walking in a forest.

By the late 1920s, the toy industry had taken off and the dolls, lead figurines and teddy bears were no longer reserved for wealthy families. However, the puzzles stamped "3 years and +" had not yet been invented, and Tom's game was far too complicated for him.

But for Harry, it was obviously very simple. The Boy-who-lived cleverly handled the pieces and soon put the last one in the right place. This prowess – no ordinary three-year-old was able to assemble a thirty pieces puzzle – earned them Miss Cole's applause.

“Congratulations, Tom!” she said with one of her seldom smiles.

The child did not answer and the Matron frowned, muttering to one of the assistants, Ana:

"This child is decidedly an odd one."

Harry had heard and he silently ranted about it. Adults tended to speak in front of children as if they did not exist or were too dumb to understand them. And besides, Mrs Cole was unfair. If Tom had not answered, it was not because he was a weirdo but because he had been too busy thinking.

And when you're three years old, it takes a lot of concentration.

*I have not finished the game but it's my hands. It's the other, thank you, the other*, Tom tentatively thought.

*You're welcome*, Harry replied.

It was not really the first time that Harry's and Tom's thoughts succeeded one another but it was their first conscious exchange. Tom had thanked Harry for helping him and it marked the beginning of their relationship. It will also become Tom's first memory.

This modest discussion began several years of constant dialogue. They spent happy days.

**xXx xXx xXx**

The orphanage's residents went to public school from the age of seven. Until that age, the institute's maids gave them the lessons.

Berthe, one of the nannies, was in charge of making the little ones draw and learning how to write their first names to the older ones. Tom learned to spell his name very quickly, partly because it was pretty short, partly because Harry showed him how to correctly hold his pencil.

The child now signed each of his drawings, with a sort of self-satisfaction that made Harry laugh and shudder. But all his fears collapsed when Tom asked him: *Harry, teach me to write "Harry."!*

Martha, the nurse, taught the numbers when she had time. And when by miracle there were no wound to treat nor sickness to heal, she named one after another the objects that surrounded the
children. Then, if her finger pointed towards the chair, the kids had to say "chair" and not "door" etc.

Tom was a little genius at this game, for there was always someone to whisper the answer in his inner ear.

With the help of his imaginary friend, he quickly mastered an impressive number of words, which he jealously kept for himself. He was persuaded to be the only person in the world to know what "fundamental" or "hippodrome" meant. Well, it was not like he really remembered their definitions, but at least he knew a lot of words.

Harry, Harry, what does that mean? was his favorite thought.

xXx

Thus, Tom and Harry spent four more years on the establishment's grounds, internally bickering and reconciling. They were a model boy, which allowed them to have plenty of free time, to meander around the yard and play with stray cats. They explored every nook and cranny of the orphanage, from the attic cluttered with broken furniture to the basement that served as a pantry, and ventured on the days when they felt bold enough in the streets nearby.

Of course, nothing could happen to Tom, for Harry was always there to look after suspect people and cars. The cars were multiplying at an incredible rate, which reminded Harry that the 1930s, it was for him another world. He was as excited as Tom by the cars' design and the tailor-made clothing stores' windows.

They were rarely called to order for, after all, they were truly an irreproachable little boy. Tom always got everything right in the small oral interrogations they were occasionally asked, could count to forty, named all the colors of the rainbow and knew his alphabet.

Moreover, he drew admirably well for a boy of his age. In fact, he himself was unable to scribble a castle, but by chance Harry was always there to lend him a hand.

Tom absolutely did not remember having, at the very beginning, experienced the other one's presence as invasive. "Harry" had always been him, with him, there for him, and he was so happy that he became clingy, if you can cling to yourself.

I adore you, Harry, often thought the child.

Oh, bloody hell, I love you too, my little Tom.

What does that mean, "bloody hell"?

xXx

The few candidates for adoption were all very interested in the so polite, so gifted, so cute little boy playing in his corner. But Mrs Cole – she had married in the meantime – did not really appreciate Tom and described him as a very lonely child, who could spend days without talking, or almost.

In reality, she would have liked to see him leave, but she was afraid they would bring him back. It would put the institution in an awkward position. Tom was not sociable and one had to admit he might even be a little frightening when he was mumbling on his own, his eyes in the vague and the whole body immobile. Moreover, his maturity sent chills up one's spine.

It was not true, however, that Tom was a lonely child. True, he did not like much the other kids' company, whom he found silly and whimpering but it was because he already had a smart, calm and benevolent friend in his head, a friend who could never betray him for he was a part of himself.
Tom felt like the hero of the comics the Matron gave you when you have behave well. He was not an ordinary boy.

Like the other kids in the orphanage, he had no family. But unlike them, he had a faithful friend, a friend for real, a friend for life.

*Harry*, he often called.

*Yes*, always answered the wizard, with amusement.

*Nothing. Come on, let's go outside.*

Tom was the luckiest child in the world. He did not care if he sometimes thought aloud and if he was called mad by Elliot, Babeth and Dorothy. No one else had a "Harry", Harry was his, just his!

xXx xXx xXx

Harry too was happy. He had abandoned all plans to return in 1998. He did not even think about it. His daily life was far from extraordinary. It was good, though. He had never wanted to lead an extraordinary life.

He still missed Hermione and Ron but it had been six years since he had not seen them. The pain was now dull, aching from time to time like an old stitch, with which we had learned to live. Besides, it was not as if his two friends were dead. How could he mourn people who were not born yet?

As for how he became Tom Riddle's half soul, he did not think much about it either. He was partly lying to himself, thinking that now that Tom was bigger, it was better not to leak too much information about himself, Harry. If Tom learned he was from the future ... if he learned they future selves wanted to see each other dead... Better keep this a guarded secret.

As far as the nature of this world was concerned, it was sad to say that but in six years he had not made any progress. A dream or reality? An hallucination?

In the case he had really gone back in time, he might have completely fucked up Voldemort's soul. Well, the Dark Lord had a friend and it was him, Harry Potter! When he formulated this idea like that, it filled him with terror. Once, he had even imagined that when Tom would be seventy, they would go to visit Ron and Hermione teenage selves. It would be an awful meeting ...

But it would not be before so long and it was so unlikely that Voldemort would hug the two Gryffindors that Harry quickly dismissed those sweet reveries. What was the point?

And even if all he had been living for several years was an illusion, Harry did not care. Every day was filled with tenderness, and tenderness was for sure what his childhood and Voldemort's had cruelly lacked. So he was doing all he could to let Tom know he had someone who would not let him down, someone he could always count on.

He also realized he did not miss magic. It was as if he had forgotten he was a wizard. He was under the impression that even if he was given a wand, he would not be able to cast a single correct spell.

He however regretted the reassuring touch of his wand. But if he had once been so glued to it, it was precisely because he was always expecting a certain Dark Lord's surprise attack. In this alternate universe, he had not to worry about this.

xXx
In the end, life at the orphanage was peaceful. He had nothing to defend himself against except the older residents's mockery. Okay, it was not your dream location to grow up: it was shabby, greyish, you shared a dormitory until seven years old, the meals were all alike, the clothes were worn-out, the comforts were basics and corridors were fairly stressful. And they only left the neighborhood once a year, in summer, to go either to the countryside or to the seaside.

But for the first time of his life, Harry was never alone. He had at last a family, a little brother he loved and who loved him.

As a child, Harry had believed he enjoyed the rare moments he was alone at 4, Privet Drive. With a step back, however, he realized those evenings at Dudley's computer, those pudding and other stolen foods eaten with his fingers were not so fond memories. Instead of these tete-a-tete with himself he would surely have preferred – but it was surreal – to exterminate virtual aliens with his cousin until the end of the night.

In the early 1930s, even if Harry still was an orphan whose others were laughing at, he had a little brother, who was so identical to himself that he could be called his twin. He never felt alone.

There was always the child in his mind to ask him to tell him a story before they went to bed. And Harry always woke up in the company of the boy who was, ironically enough, the one who would deprive him of his family sixty years later ... Or who already had done so twenty-two years earlier.

But this sweet routine with Tom almost broke out in pieces the day they both felt, at the tips of their fingers, the characteristic tingling of magic.

To Be Continued...

Chapter End Notes

See you in something like 10 days and thank you all for reading!

Please leave a comment if you feel like it, they always make me happy :)


Chapter Summary

Tom experiments magic for the first time and enters primary school.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

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*Discovery of magic (1934/7 years old)*

**Chapter 2: The same proud and frank look**

Tom and Harry were dressing up in front of their wardrobe's mirror, like every morning. For some unknown reason, a hair lock persisted in being an anarchist, annoying the small maniac.

*I don't understand*, Tom grumbled. *Everything is perfect usually!*

*Calm down*, Harry advised, annoying him a little more.

At seven years old, Tom was a very clean boy. His clothes were worn but never stained, his knees showed no hematoma. He regularly filed his nails, soaped between his buttocks and toes and he changed his pants every day.

If he could have done it, he would certainly have washed his laundry himself but no one would have left a child dip his arms in the tubs full of soap and hot water to vigorously beat the clothes, even if he had an imaginary friend of age. It was one of the establishment's rules: each had its own place.

That morning the boy was trying to tame a rebellious spike, eyes riveted on his mocking reflection, when something strange happened. His right hand, the one holding the comb, was suddenly tingling. And the spike *disappeared*.

Tom had not been struck by lightning, but he had the impression that what he had just experienced was similar. A mysterious force had passed through his fingers, violating without scruple all his intimacy. He felt completely changed, as if he had been emptied of all his organs and then had them hastily put back in their place. Something had turned everything his abdomen jealously hid upside down, reversing right and left lung and spleen's and pancreas' locations. Was the force from the
outside or from the inside? He did not know. But that was not normal.

xXx

Did you feel it? Tom asked, in a worried mental voice.

Other thoughts, less intelligible, were squabbling among themselves: What was it-it looked like a lightning-Harry doesn't answer-Why doesn't he answer-Will I die?

Harry, too, was thinking fast. Unfortunately, as he thought using words, Tom clearly heard all his panicked thoughts.

Shit shit shit-How to do-It's inevitably magic-It's too early-Oh Merlin what to do?

What are you saying? What are you talking about, I don't understand! the child silently cried, eyes fixed on his reflection.

So Harry was forced to look into the mirror himself.

Tom and he were combing their hair every morning, but for the first time did the Boy-who-lived realized the child standing in front of him was Tom Riddle. He had become so accustomed to the kid he had almost forgotten his identity. Tom had a strong personality, of course. He was not easy to live with, especially twenty-four hours a day. He was capricious, at least with Harry, and sometimes downright unbearable. But until then, Harry had never seriously considered him as a budding Voldemort.

Well, shit, I read stories to him before we go to sleep!

How could one believe that a boy who had not even learned to read could one day kill his parents, torture Muggles and destroy villages? How could he imagine that the kid he had learned to love like a little brother, like a son, a twin, was the same man who had tried to murder him a terrible number of times?

But the boy in the mirror, even though he was a few years younger than the one Harry had seen in the Pensieve, had the same proud and frank look. No doubt: Voldemort was his past, present, and future.

xXx

If she had been alive, Merope Gaunt could have developed incestuous love for her son. He was only seven years old, but damn he was already handsome. His round cheeks promised to hatch in hard cheekbones. His thin, pale lips knew how to smile charmingly. To be fair, Harry might be projecting on him images of his older self, reading in his childish features the charisma of the Head Boy he had met in the Chamber of Secrets.

But the candidates for adoption themselves say that he is pretty, that his face is refined ... No, it's not that. What amaze us are in fact his eyes.

Tom's eyes were a very ordinary brown but they alone did turn Tom into a harmonious and complex whole in perpetual echo. It was his eyes which gave him his ghostly appearance, his strange delicacy.

With time, Harry had understood exceptional eye color seduced without difficulty, without even wanting it. Blue or green eyes couldn't help but naturally catch your attention.
Wasn't the only thing people had remembered of Lily Potter her green eyes? Anyway, that was the feeling given by everyone who had known her. Harry had always been sad and frustrated people described James as an amazing, brave and funny guy while his mother was just a beautiful red-haired green-eyed girl.

*Well, Slughorn was a big fan of her, even though she was Muggleborn. But that's not the point.*

The point was Tom Riddle's eyes did not have the color advantage. Their delicate contour and their almost inconvenient depth for a child were attractive by themselves. It was as if they were doing everything they could to compensate their banal color. They were all the more captivating.

As two chasms, they sucked the world out and promised an astral vertigo to the one who dared to plunge into them. They invited you to let go, to leave your bodyshell to penetrate into the abyss. In this intra-ocular world, light could not enter. The great depths were a nocturnal and icy place, where the man who had lost his way had little chance of returning to the surface. Torn to shreds without noise nor eddy by a horde of nameless creatures, the one who met Tom's gaze suddenly felt cold.

xXx

Tom Riddle at seven was not really handsome: his features gave off something too powerful. From a distance he was identical to every child. His shape could not be distinguished from the others'. But as soon as one approached him, his presence made the world's edges vibrate.

*I'm a charismatic person, it's true,* the reflection murmured, an indescribable gleam in the eyes. *But I'm a so complex being that I attract and frighten at the same time. Call me "Will-o'-the-wisp"!*

There were those who were attracted by the child's aura. Little Margaret, nine years old, had a crush on him. Harry had noticed it, not Tom. Yet the little girl eyed him greedily. As for Ivy, the cook, she always granted him a larger portion than the others', saying eating was the beginning of happiness.

There were those who were frightened by his presence. This was the case of Mrs Cole and of some adopters. Tom looked too smart for a child, his gaze was too serious. Observing their reflection's stretched features, Harry suddenly realized it was partly *because of him*. The boy harbored in his head a conscience more than twice his biological age and that was what tormented some adults.

*What's scary isn't Tom,* Harry understood, dumbfounded. *What's scary and appealing in Tom's eyes is me! The reason he stands out is me!*

*I don't understand a word of what you've been thinking!* Tom interrupted him. *Answer me, what was it in our fingers? Harry, tell me!*

xXx

Tom was certainly not as abnormal as Mrs. Cole claimed but he still was an authoritative kid. He asked for Harry's answers in the same way he had ordered Dumbledore in the Pensieve to prove he was a wizard. Harry realized the wardrobe that would temporarily take fire, impressing the future Lord Voldemort, was precisely the one in front of which Tom was standing. Tom was ... Harry censured himself just in time.

*I don't understand, Harry!* Tom grunted. *What is "dumbledore"? And "voldemort"? Why do you think my wardrobe will be in fire? What did we feel in our fingers just now? Answer me, I know you know the truth!*

The boy was so angry his lips twisted in spite of himself. His reflection no longer showed a
harmonious face but a tortured look, a mouth that spoke to itself, a child who sought answers in eyes he could not see.

Tom could stare at the mirror as he liked, it was not Harry in front of him but his own reflection. What was Harry like? Did he have an appearance?

*Harry,* he called as calmly as possible. *Harry, tell me if you know anything, please.*

This controlled thought did not hide all those which fuss ed before, after, and behind it. They went too fast for Harry to assimilate them, but they meant the same things: a state of panic, a feeling of betrayal, of incomprehension. Something was wrong and Harry, for one reason or another, had answers.

Harry could not give him a proper answer. His thoughts were as messy as Tom's. In their common head there was a tiring and stifling cacophony but he could not make a decision.

*I'm afraid,* Tom thought at the same time he physically shouted "Speak!" to his reflection.

The reflection only shrieked when he did so and closed his mouth when he did so.

*Please don't shout aloud,* Harry finally replied. *Don't you think we already have a bad reputation?*

*Speak,* thought the child silently. *You won't leave me, will you? I'm scared. Am I going to die? What was this electric current? Why aren't you answering? You usually know everything!*

**xXx**

For the first time in his life, Tom Riddle wanted his Harry to be palpable, to be a real boy ... If he had been, Tom could have stir him, slap him, or lock him up in the wardrobe and throw away the key. But as Harry only existed in his head, it was impossible to force him to do anything, which was maddening.

Who was Harry, what was he doing there? And why did he used words that did not seem to exist, like "pensieve" or "dumbledore"? "magix," why did Harry think that Tom was doing magic?

Had Harry, who had hitherto been his infallible ally even when he disagreed with his actions, turned against him? Did he, as some of the orphanage's kids, think he was mentally ill? That was what "doing magic" meant, wasn't it?

Yet if the others said he was nuts, it was precisely because of Harry! When he spoke to himself, it was because he was too enthusiastic and forgot to keep his thoughts for himself. And if his eyes frightened people, it was because they also belonged to Harry, his imaginary friend. It was as if he had four eyes.

Harry, always reassuring, intrinsically familiar, his other self, Harry thought incomprehensible things that were necessarily related to the strange tingling in their fingers a moment earlier.

*What if Harry was the devil? What if he did not exist? What if Tom was crazy?*

**xXx**

All those years, Tom had never wondered where did Harry come from nor why was he with him. Either he had been very lucky at birth, or he had been chosen – he especially liked the latter – but he had not dared to dwell on it too long, lest his benefactor should be taken away from him.
He had never talked about it to anyone for Harry had advised him not to. Harry had asserted that the other people did not have two consciences and that they would take fright. By the way, both remembered the teenager who was abandoned by his parents at the orphanage because he was mentally disturbed. Even Mrs Cole did not want him, she had lead him to the asylum.

Why would Tom try to find out from where his greatest good came, when it was so easy to just enjoy it? He did not care where Harry came from, if he came from somewhere, as long as he was there. Harry was himself, just as he had two arms. He was not going to reject his left arm on the pretext he already had a right one.

Of course, he had gathered some informations about Harry over time, effortlessly. Harry was a boy like him. His tone was more serious, more mature than his own. He had not, however, the keen voice of the priest: he was a grown-up, but not too old. He knew a lot more than Tom. Tom had been lucky, for he did not see himself being friend with an inferior person. He trembled with fear when he imagined he might have been assigned a foolish conscience, like Billy Stubbs' one.

Harry loved telling stories and making lame jokes. He was often very talkative even though sometimes he did not think for hours and let Tom take care of himself almost on his own. Almost, for Tom just had to call him for his friend to show up.

It was quite strange, but they did not have the same tastes even if they shared the same taste buds. Harry mentally drooled as soon as he heard the word "cheese". Tom found it disgusting but he always forced himself to eat his plate clean because he had noticed it made his friend happy.

Once, the voice had told him: In another life, I have suffered a little too much from hunger to endure the sight of food that will be thrown away.

As time went by, Harry had let out enough clues for Tom to understand he had had a life before him in a distant world. It seemed logical because Tom was only seven years old when Harry was ... more.

He found it even more brilliant. Besides being smart, protective and always available, his friend came from elsewhere! Tom was truly privileged, chosen by the gods.

Nevertheless, little Tom was who he was. Even if he literally loved Harry he had not until then judge it useful to try to learn more about his past life. It was not important, as long as Harry stayed forever in his head. Why should one be interested in one's own identity? He was his friend, he was his other self, and according Tom these titles define his identity just enough.

xXx

It was stupid to think Harry didn't exist and I had created him, Tom admitted. He uses words I don't know, he taught me stuff I don't know. It means he has a life apart from mine. I can't believe he's the devil either. The devil is wicked. Harry is my friend. But he still hides things from me. I don't like that.

You calmed down? Harry asked softly. I wanna make it clear: my jokes aren't lame.

Explain to me, Tom thought in a whimpering tone that was meant to be arrogant. If you're not the devil or an invention, tell me everything. What was it in our fingers? You know things.

That's true, Harry conceded. But you're so young ...

Tom was still a child, but did not Harry act like Dumbledore, overprotecting him, hiding the truth from him? It did not do him any good. And then, why not just tell him? Not everything, of course,
but ...

Who is Dumbledore? Tom asked again. You think a lot about him.

I can't tell you everything, Harry answered, mobilizing his weak qualities of Occlumens.

It was pretty absurd to try to close his mind to himself but it was better than letting Tom learn that ...

Learn what?

Harry sighed so hard that Tom's body sighed with him. He felt exhausted when he had just got up. They had not even pee.

Come on, we go to bed and I tell you what I can, he said.

The boy nodded to his reflection, put his horn comb on the bedside table and lay down. He closed his eyes so he could concentrate the best on his other self's whispers. His breathing slowed down, as if he were going to fall asleep. He could almost imagine a ghost with cold lips whispering in his ear.

You know, what we felt in our fingers just now? Well, it was magic. You're a wizard, Tom.

xXx xXx xXx

Harry told Tom everything he could – it was a lot and very little at the same time. He spoke first about magic and about the wizarding world coexisting with the Muggle one, the non-magical one. Magic first manifested itself at childhood, often when the little wizard was upset and could not find a solution to their problem. Tom did not manage to tame his hear with his comb, so his magic had helped him.

But children don't control their powers well, so you absolutely shouldn't try to use them. It could cause a disaster, Harry insisted.

From time to time, Tom would feel this mysterious tingling and his spikes would disappear. If he was angry, windows would simmer. He would have to wait until he join the school of wizardry to control all that. Anyway, without a wand, he would not go far.

Okay, okay, I got it! Tom whispered. How is school?

There was no magical primary school: either the children went to a Muggle school, or they were home-schooled. Tom would join the local Muggle primary school next September.

At eleven, the wizards began their training at a school of wizardry. United Kingdom's most famous one, Hogwarts, was located in Scotland. It was a boarding school where you stayed for seven years and learned all kinds of things, but above all how to master and cleverly use magic with a wand.

As soon as Harry felt his thoughts venturing too far, he would rely on futile information. There were plenty of them, and Tom greedily listened to them.

Hogwarts students were allowed to own a pet, an owl, very useful for mail, a toad or a cat. There were two official exams organized by the Ministry of Magic: the OWLS, at the end of the fifth year, and the NEWTS, which put an end to the last year. At seventeen, a wizard was of age and could choose to continue his studies in a specialized school or to take a shorter training, or ...

Harry, Tom interrupted. How do you know all this?

You believe me, then? Harry was surprised.
Despite himself, he remembered his conversation with Dumbledore at the end of their second private lesson. At that moment, he had already been astonished by the ease with which Tom Riddle had accepted his wizard statute.

He immediately tried to think of something else, hoping Tom had not had a glimpse of the future. It would be disastrous if he learned that Harry came from that late.

*The worst thing would be that he discovers what kind of relationship we had in my old life,* Harry thought, conjuring in his mind imposing images of kittens.

xXx

It seemed the other boy had not noticed anything, for he replied:

*I believe you, of course, since I don't lie to myself. And you are me. I believe in myself. Who is Dumbledore?*

*Why are you this interested in him?*

*Why don't you answer me?* Tom retorted.

*You won,* Harry admitted. *Well, there's nothing wrong in telling him-Dumbledore is the greatest wizard of all time. He's the Head m-He's a Hogwarts teacher.*

*Oh, Tom said. I knew it.*

Harry pretended he believed him, Tom pretended he believed Harry believed him and so on. For a few moments, neither of them thought distinctly, then Tom exclaimed:

*Stop doing that, I look like a fool!*

Harry was quietly smiling, satisfied. The boy's scandalized tone made him grin harder, so much that a laughter escaped his lips.

*If someone hears us laughing by ourselves, we're going to be put in the asylum,* Tom scolded him.

Harry calmed down.

*As you must have suspected, I also am a wizard,* he said soberly.

*Did you study at Hogwarts before you were reborn?* Tom asked, as if he daily met people with magical powers.

Harry wondered again at the ease with which Tom had appropriated the new terms. It took him much more time to believe Hagrid.

*You could say that,* Harry said evasively.

*Are you dead?*

Harry hesitated. Yes and no. He was not even sure himself.

*How is that possible, yes and no?* Tom insisted.

*Thinking is inconvenient when someone hears all your thoughts!*
I know what you mean, the child pointed out. You're not sure if you've died, and now you live with me. Did you have a body before?

Of course. There are ghosts at Hogwarts, but I was a normal boy, with one body and one conscience, before. Not like you.

What were you like, then?

It had been a long time since Harry had thought about his previous appearance. He had become accustomed to his new existence as a spirit not entirely incarnated. He saw himself as a kind of scientific aberration, a pearly thing floating in Tom's brain, or somewhere in the metaphysical void of his heart-soul. He almost had difficulty believing that before he was alone in his head, and that he had a body of his own. This kind of life now seemed decidedly lonely. How could he have spent his days without another conscience keeping him company, without Tom?

xXx

Harry stared at their reflection in the mirror and answered, carefully choosing his words:

That's strange but I looked a bit like you. I had black hair, I was fairly thin. Not very tall.

Tom smiled with satisfaction.

Stop it, we look stupid, Harry joked.

I'm just glad you looked like me, said the boy. This is normal, we are one. It's easier to imagine you as my twin.

What if we go down to eat breakfast? Harry suggested, making Tom stand up. Mrs. Cole will scold us. And talking so much made me hungry.

Tom refused to go down to the dining room until he had finished grooming himself. He was, as Harry had predicted, scolded very loudly for arriving so late, and was entitled only to a glass of milk and an old piece of bread. But he did not care.

He was a wizard! And Harry was like him!

It was only a pity, a real pity, he could not use his powers yet. Maybe if he insisted, Harry would teach him a few tricks...

I wouldn't dream of it, Harry commented implacably. And now it's "b" and "d" writing time!

But you know I can't distinguish them!

Exactly.

xXx xXx xXx

The following days, Tom, usually so assiduous, was completely lost in his thoughts. With glassy eyes fixing imaginary worlds, he was constantly mumbling. As soon as someone asked if he was okay, he would answer with a dark look. He said he was very busy and, above all, "leave me alone! I'm thinking".

He made Margaret cry and the little girl called him a wicked boy before running to her room. Harry vaguely reprimanded him but he himself did not like her very much. Nine years old, was not it a little
early to look at a boy with greedy eyes?

In fact, Tom was spending his time discussing magic with Harry. As he could not use it, he consoled himself by learning as much as possible about it. That way, when he enrolled in Hogwarts ... because Harry had promised him, after the Muggle school – he pronounced the word Muggle with contempt – they would go to Hogwarts! No one would know he was Muggleborn. Everyone would mistake him for a child of a wizard family, a child who would almost know everything about magic before even having started school.

Oh yes, he had to wait a few more years and he would be on his way to the world he belonged to, the world of magic!

xXx

Until this day, he had never dreamed of leaving the orphanage before age. Indeed, most children, either orphans or abandoned one, did not leave before. They were educated until fourteen years old, and then they started working. When they turned twenty-one, they packed up their meager belongings and left the establishment for good.

He had thought he was condemned to live in this hole for fourteen years more, that is to say two times his age, an eternity. The few candidates for adoption looked for babies. And when a couple took an interest in him – after all, he was clean, cute and well-bred – Mrs Cole dissuaded them with an anguished look.

In any case, he had never wanted to be adopted. He preferred the semi-liberty which was at present granted to him, than the forced love of unknown parents. He respected and needed no one but Harry and he was confident that it would stay the same all his life.

On the days when living at the orphanage saddened him too much, he had made great fugues plans. Even though Harry pretended he would never help him escape, Tom knew he would not let him down, for if one of them were to die, the other one would not survive.

But now Harry promised him a much grander future than Oliver Twist's! When he would turn eleven, he would be taken out of there. All he had to do was wait patiently. Accompanied by Harry, he would move to Hogwarts, this gigantic enchanted castle, where he would learn hexes, counter-spells and the art of potions!

xXx

He was so anxious he thought about it all day. Unfortunately, there was always a fool to get him out of his reverie and remind him that he still had to live in mediocrity for four years.

“Get out, Dennis!” he shouted at the only boy he thought owned a brain at the orphanage, Dennis Bishop.

What's wrong with you? Harry asked, astonished.

Tom ignored him.

"Oh, calm down, Tom," the tall, fair-haired boy replied. “It's curfew time, I wanted to warn you.”

Tom looked around with amazement and realized it was dark. He had just spent an entire hour talking with Harry about magical brooms.

“Thank you for letting me know. I'm sorry for my reaction, you surprised me,” Harry said with a
smile that looked strange on Tom's lips.

Tom went back to his room, mentally complaining about his imaginary friend who was taking too many liberties with his body. Harry, for his part, lectured him about his bad manners.

They had a hard time falling asleep.

Before, Tom did not really hate his life at the orphanage because he believed it was the only one he could have. And what's more, it was not luxury, the other kids were foolish, but Harry was with him, so it was fine. However, since Harry had told him stories about the incredible wizarding world, where he could achieve so much more than in this one, he had begun to hate the place where he lived.

It was so frustrating to know that all this existed, that Diagon Alley was somewhere in the city, without being able to go there! It was so frustrating to know you are an exceptional being without being able to show it to others or even to show it to yourself.

As soon as his thoughts became too bitter, Harry was there to reassure him.

You'll see, Tom, it'll soon happen. In the meantime, tomorrow you start primary school, so we need to rest.

xXx xXx xXx

You fine, you're not stressed out? Harry asked worriedly.

Who do you take me for?

But of course, Tom could not lie to him. Harry heard his messy thoughts, he felt their damp hands and their heart beating hard, indicating the child's anxiety. He knew Tom would not take his cheap words of comfort well though. Then he simply pressed his right arm.

Over the years, they had implicitly agreed that Harry could use their left arm to express himself. He rarely did it because it was strange for both of them, but in some special moments they pretended to be two separate people and Harry would put their left hand on their cheek or shoulder.

These gestures simply meant: "Even if you don't see me, I'm here."

“Tom, hurry up,” Anne called. “And come here, Billy! Is that for real? These brats, oh my Lord!”

Anne was an old woman who had spent her entire life in the orphanage. When Tom was still a baby, Harry remembered that she mended socks and knitted sweaters and scarves. When Tom started talking, she was the one who looked after the stocks of soap, of food and of all the products children needed in everyday life. When Tom stopped using diapers, she looked after the newborns. And when Tom had learned to dress by himself, she was the institute's ambassador.

At Tom's first day of school, she was her legal representative.

Billy and Tom followed her obediently. All three went in the school, glued to each other. Becoming a schoolboy did not happen every day. But what really intimidated them was all those unknown children around them. Indeed, apart from the mass, they never had the opportunity to meet any.

Some seemed to be their age, others were older. There were some who ran everywhere, calling each other. There were some who squeezed their satchels against their chests with an anxious look. All were accompanied by a woman: their mother or their nanny.
From time to time, something reminded Harry that he now lived in the middle of the 1930s, could it be clothing style, of course, basic technology or social injustice, which was much more noticeable than it was in the time he came from. No man worked at the orphanage, it was a woman's job. And, probably, no man accompanied his daughter or his son on their first day of school, it was his wife's task.

xXx

Anne hurriedly led the two children into the primary school's corridors. She seemed to be familiar with the locals, never hesitating when turning. Tom would have liked to take the time to examine the surroundings, but they quickly found themselves in front of a door, where, according to Harry, "Headmaster's office" was written. Tom believed him on his word.

Anne and the Headmaster spoke for ten minutes, as Tom and Billy stayed in the corridor. It was a very ordinary primary school, with long corridors, worn staircases and classrooms filled with desks. The walls and furnitures were pink, beige and yellow, colors supposed to give the illusion the place was bright and welcoming.

Harry looked around him with big eyes, as curious as Tom. If one thing really astonished him, it was that the school was mixed, but he did not develop this thought furthermore, not wanting to arouse Tom's suspicions.

Anyway, the boy was too busy looking inside an empty classroom to pay attention to Harry. Everything was exactly like in the books! The wooden desks, with their pitches for the inkwells, the windows along the whole length of the room, the platform behind the professorial desk and the indispensable blackboard, where the chalks would soon squawk. There was a colorful map of the United Kingdom hanging on the wall and a large picture of, Harry guessed with a shudder, Royal Air Force planes.

Harry, even in a Muggle school, you do learn a lot, don't you?

Muggles aren't stupid, Harry sighed. You'll see, school, it's very interesting.

Tom nodded. He trusted Harry completely. But Harry was far less sure of himself than he seemed to be. His own recollections of elementary school could be summed up in one activity: running fast enough to escape Dudley.

xXx xXx xXx

Tom quickly adapted to his new environment. The teacher had seated him in the second row, a little on the left. He was fine with that. She had also put Billy beside him, most likely so the two orphans did not feel lost. But Tom did not need Billy, who was a simpleton.

Your typical Muggle, not like Harry and I, Tom thought fitfully, before rectifying himself, for he could hear Harry's furious thoughts: Sorry, sorry, Harry! But you must confess, he's a moron.

He decided to prove to the teacher he did not need her patronizing. It was not because he was living in the orphanage that he was bound to be victim of bullying. He was not like Billy, who still had no friends after three days. At the end of his first day at school, he, Tom, knew the names of half his new comrades, all of whom had naturally come to him, attracted by his charisma.

Harry nevertheless forced him to walk the way every morning and every night with Billy Stubbs.

We live in the same place and we go to the same school, Harry said. If you want to look like a
normal child, act like a normal child. Billy isn't mean.

Okay, Tom replied reluctantly, but his other thoughts left no doubt of what he thought of this chore.

So he went to school with Billy. As soon as they crossed the dark school gate, though, Tom run to their classroom, despite Harry's silent protests. And in the evening, as soon as Billy and he get in the orphanage, Tom disappeared into his room without having said a word to the other boy.

Harry did not dare ask him for more, for Tom was already blowing these daily trips up out of all proportions, saying they already exceeded the limits of his goodness.

xXx xXx xXx

After a week, Tom moved so easily in their classroom that he seemed to have been at school for years.

Most of the time, he did not talk to the girls because he had discovered that, unlike to the orphanage where you could talk to everyone, it was frowned upon at school. Yet, if he was in front of a girl, he would hold the door for her and if a girl dropped her gum, he would lean over to catch it. It was not kindness. That was how one behave if he wanted to be integrated just right.

Harry congratulated him for his upbringing and Tom congratulated himself for his cleverness.

Soon, he established himself as a perfect pupil. He worked conscientiously, learned to read and write at a prodigious speed and often raised his hand to answer the teacher's questions. He made brownie point after brownie point. Instead of exchanging them for a picture when he had ten, he put them in a small box he kept in his wardrobe.

Harry knew this box, it was the one that contained, in Dumbledore's memory, the little treasures stolen by Tom over the years. For the time being, it only had in it well-deserved stamped coupons. Harry still had hope: Tom could not become Voldemort.

He never forgot to congratulate him, each time he got all of the answers rights:

Well done, Tom!

And tirelessly, the child answered: Thank you, Harry.

xXx

Tom had first found that the school system was fun, with its ringings, recreations, exercises, homeworks and specific equipment. He liked the blackboard's cleaning brush, which every evening a pupil was charged to dust. He liked to see his comrades shyly raise their fingers and start all their sentences with "Mistress".

He was happy to have his own desk, in which he left his notebooks, his reading books and his writing tools. At lunchtime, he was sometimes offered a glass of milk, in which he dipped the orphanage's cookies.

But for him the class's rythm was too slow – he did not realize he was the one who was too fast, due to Harry's experience. He had been pleased to discover a new place of socialization, outside of the orphanage and of the church, but he was already dead bored.

It was too easy. It did not take much for his comrades to feed from his hands. In the schoolyard, kids from other classes invited him to play marbles – Harry noticed they were made of clay – or
hopscotch or clapping games. The teacher herself was always praising him. And the exercises were a piece of cake.

_Hogwarts_, he kept repeating all day long. _Hogwarts_.

_Soon_, Harry could only answer.

But Tom remained silent.

As months passed, his excitement of the beginning had subsided. He used to bombard Harry with questions about witchcraft but now he had nothing more to ask or to tell him. What good is it to have powers, if you’re stuck in school with Muggles, reading brainless stories where little girls pointed their finger at dogs, repeating "Look, Dick, look." and where the famous Dick replied "I see, Jane, I see."

He was angry with Harry for telling him about magic. He had done so too early or too late. He should never have told him. If Tom had not known, he would not have suffered every time he opened his eyes in his bed and noted it was not a four-poster one.

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To Be Continued...

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Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and reviewing, see you in 10 days!
The first incident (1934-1935 / 7-8 years old)

Chapter Summary

Christmas time doesn't mean Christmas mood in this story!

Chapter Notes

Heya! Please be aware the end of this chapter could sadden you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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The first incident (1934-1935 / 7-8 years old)

Chapter 3: A saliva quilt

Christmas was at the corner, with its kitsch decorations and its family atmosphere. Like Harry, Tom was not a fan of the end of the year period. It reminded him that his parents were certainly dead and that his only relatives were other orphaned kids with whom he did not get along.

And there was his birthday. Tom did not like his birthday. On December 31st, everyone was celebrating New Year Eve, and he, who should have been the party king, was completely forgotten. He did not understand why he had to be happy to grow up, unless it meant he had less time to wait before quitting the orphanage.

Until then, Harry had always done his best to make the day enjoyable, offering him gifts whose contents Tom had known for weeks, for they shared one mind and one body.

That year, however, Tom was afraid that his eighth birthday would be very gloomy. Harry tried to start a conversation with him, pinched his cheeks and rolled his eyes, but Tom refused to answer him. He did not know why, but he held Harry responsible for his dark mood and his constant anger.

It was the first time they had been fighting for so long and without a real reason.

xXx

“Tom! Tom, what did I just say?”

Tom, once was not custom, jumped. Without realizing it, he had let his eyes leave his sheet of paper to venture into the grooves of his desk, which they have followed like two shipwrecked guys carried
away by the water. He still held his penholder in the air. Purple ink dripped gently on his writing board.

He was angry at Harry for not calling him to order.

*I called you!* Harry protested immediately.

All faces were turned towards Tom, no one laughed. The schoolchildren of the 1930s were unquestionably quieter than those of Harry's time, for they dreaded the painful punishments they risked if they disobeyed ... and they also had more respect for the order. Some, however, smiled with eloquence.

Even though Tom was not an annoying bespectacled know-it-all, they were glad he was scolded. It warmed their heart to have proof that the polite, handsome, well-bred, intelligent orphan was not absolutely perfect. Billy, who was not as smart or as integrated as Tom, did not hide his joy.

*Kids are cruel*, Harry thought, making a face.

"I don't know..." Tom replied finally, erasing Harry's frown.

"… Mistress" Harry added quickly.

*Don't speak in my place!* Tom annoyed.

*It's no use worsening your case, you idiot! Wanna get your fingers hit? Wanna sit on the corner?*

“Well, Tom, you'll copy ten times "I need to concentrate in class". I'll give you a model at the end of the lesson. You will also give me back your Cross of Honor. Well, children, now ...”

xXx

Everybody went back to his writing sheet. In two seconds, the smug smiles had given way to expressions of intense concentration. Tom did not even bother to decipher the stupid sentence they had to calligraphy.

He felt humiliated. He felt like the other students were silently laughing and making fun of him. And why? Because he was thinking about Hogwarts! All this was Harry's fault.

*I don't think so,* Harry snapped at him.* I'll help you write your lines, if you want, but focus now.*

*Shut up,* Tom squeaked.

*Whatever you say,* Harry calmly said before he stopped thinking.

It was much easier than before. He just had had to get the hang of it. Now he could fade as often as he wished. As soon as he wanted to fly away from reality, he only had to imagine an impalpable and translucent entity folding back on itself. It was often a kind of long pearly fluid, like a wizard memory, which curled up to form a tiny blue pearl.

This time, he chose to visualize an immense wave laced with foam, like a horse's mouth full of spit. The drool flowed everywhere, sprinkling the sky with viscous postilions, and then, gently, retracting. The imperious ocean called back its waters: the heavy wave wrapped itself up like a saliva quilt then died, devoured by itself.

The scene worked and Harry's presence slowly decreased.
It was not really like falling asleep but rather like putting yourself on standby to protect yourself from the outside. He was then huddled in a corner of Tom's brain or heart, as if in an underwater shell, and the sounds of the world came to him deaf and nebulous. It was comfortable but a bit sad.

Lately it happened to him more than before.

And in those moments of extreme solitude, where Harry was almost cut off from his other self, the only thing he could do was screaming with rage and helplessness. Why had Tom learned so early that he was a wizard? Why could not Harry avoid the fatal events he felt would soon occur? Why did he reincarnate in Tom, if he could not change the course of events, if he could not save himself and save Voldemort?

*What am I supposed to do?* he lamented.

**xXx**

That night, Tom did not ask Harry to help him with his lines so Harry let him be. Their relationship had rapidly deteriorated. Tom's attitude toward him was maddening, but he kinda deserved it.

He should never have told him about magic. It was too late to have remorse but if he could have kick himself, he would have done so. Tom was turning bad and Harry was the one to be blamed.

More than once, when the child was very young, the Chosen One had thought of strangling himself or throwing himself from his cradle to put an end to his days. By sacrificing himself and the infant, he would have preserve the wizarding world from two wars. It would have been so simple! He would only have had to smash this skull, to spread his foggy brain on the ground and never would anyone have heard of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Why would he have returned in the past if it was not to accomplish this act?

He had often raised his chubby arms towards his neck. During a walk, he had sometimes rolled to the side, hoping to overturn his pram, but he had never went all the way. What had stopped him was not the fear of disrupting the space-time continuum – he was not even sure he was in the past for real – nor even the fear of committing suicide: it was the absolute wrongness of murdering a baby.

Did he have the right to kill Tom when he had not done anything wrong? Could he kill someone who had just been born and had not even realize he was alive?

Harry had not eaten the dying creature in Limbo to kill it afterwards. The nature of the world in which he had ended up was of no importance. If he was there, it was to change Tom, to turn him in a better man. That was his mission. At least he was persuaded of it at first. Then he had let Tom grow up, loving him as his own son.

But he obviously was a poor educator. He had blown up everything by telling the boy they were wizards. From that day, Tom had been dissatisfied, almost disgusted with his modest daily life. Since he had discovered the existence of magic, each day he had become colder, each day he had become more and more Voldemort.

The only thing that has kept Harry going was that the boy had still never lost control of his magic. As long as he did not discover how to use it, as long as he did not try to tame it ... Then it would not be too late. As long as Tom caused no fatal event, Harry would not have to kill him.

For the Chosen One remembered word for word what the Pensieve's Tom had said and it frightened him every time he thought about it.

"I can make things move without touching them. I can make animals do what I want without"
training them. I can make bad things happen to people who are mean to me. I can make them hurt if I want to."

His own Tom was different. He had benefited from his affection and his tips. Even though he was stubborn and capricious, Harry loved him. Tom was loved, Tom loved him, was not that enough to say he was no Voldemort? To allow him to live?

xXx xXx xXx

“Merry Christmas, children!” Mrs Cole chanted.

"Merry Christmas, Mrs Cole," all the kids answered, including Tom – but it was Harry who had spoken for him.

Stop doing that! It's not your body!

Oh, Harry sighed ironically. Where is my Tom who said "Harry, you're my best friend" all day long? The one who begged me to tell him the story of the princess and ...

Shut up!

You frankly has a bad temper. Do you know that's not a good thing for your heart?

Even if he was angry, Harry had to be the grown-up, the one who set an example. Tom had been difficult lately but he only acted as a spoiled child. And Harry was trying to convince himself that a child, even little Voldemort, could not be bad. Violence, hatred, endless anger, all this belonged to adulthood, all this happened later. Harry did not know from when one could be called a bad person, but he was sure a eight years minus a week old boy could not be called that. Eight years old was so young ...

As it was unproductive to have a row with himself, Harry went by the Christmas tree.

xXx

On December 25, the orphanage's children just received small things, except for the year they entered school. Next morning, Tom and Billy would unpack gifts which would have more value than a pair of socks or a second-hand comic book.

But Harry did not find a gift with Billy’s name by the tree. He had a bad feeling.

Maybe she forgot it, Tom commented dryly, talking about Mrs Cole.

It's impossible. It must be something you can't leave under a tree for a night.

We don't care. Let's go back to our room.

Harry and Tom fell asleep at the same time – as always – but as independently as possible. Things were not improving.

Harry no longer understood why he was in Tom's body. To kill him was not his mission but to give him love was not it either. Were the past eight years part of a nasty curse destined to make him crazy?

Was he the victim of a sterile hallucination without a purpose?

xXx xXx xXx
“A rabbit!” Billy cried. “I've always dreamed of owning a pet rabbit!”

Mrs Cole watched him holding his brown rabbit in his arms with the benevolent look she reserved for the boarders she particularly appreciated. She liked Billy Stubbs. He was a child without problems, whose look was as dull and naive as a child's look had to be.

Not like— Mrs Cole turned. Tom was behind her. He looked at Billy's pet with fear. Was he afraid of rabbits?

But his eyes were not filled with mild fear but with real terror, as if Billy was cuddling a monster. His haunted eyes stared at the animal as if it had tentacles, mandibles, thin hairy legs and eyes all over its body. It was perhaps even worse than a monster: a monster's corpse. It was a disemboweled thing with twisted limbs, covered with violet and sticky fluids and garlands of knotty intestines, which Billy Stubbs crushed cheerfully against his chest. Tom looked like he would throw up.

Seriously, what was wrong with this boy?

“Tom?” Ivy asked him. “Tom, is everything okay?”

"I'm fine" Tom replied calmly.

"Why are you like that?" he asked Harry with as much authority as concern.

But Harry could not answer him. Confused pictures paraded chaotically through his mind. They were going so fast, they made Tom feel dizzy too.

"I don't feel very well" Harry added in a troubled voice. “I'll refresh myself upstairs.”

Harry moved away from the rabbit at full speed, as if the rodent was going to throw himself at him and tear his fingers and toes off one by one. He was already on the stairs when Ivy shouted:

“And your gift, you don't open your gift?”

Tom wanted to go back to retrieve his gift but Harry forced him to go up. Over his shoulder, he articulated with great difficulty:

“Later, Miss Ivy.”

xXx

“What is happening to you?” Tom cried as soon as they had shut their room's door behind them. “Why are you so weird?”

“Don't speak aloud!” Harry replied, resisting the urge to slap himself.

"That's what you're doing!" Tom exclaimed.

He threw himself into the bed but Harry got up immediately.

“What are you doing?” Tom grumbled.

_I wanna refresh myself and you come with me_, Harry explained silently, making an effort to calm his nerves.

_Do I really have the choice?_ the child muttered. _Harry's really weird-It worries me-Are you afraid of rabbits?_
Harry did not deign to reply. He got them to the boys' washrooms. In front of the mirror, he sprinkled himself with water, but it did not calm him down. His thoughts all revolved around the rabbit, the rabbit and the rafters, Billy and a quarrel, accidents, and what deep shit had he landed himself into?

“Why are you freaking out?” Tom cried. “Answer me! What's wrong?”

“Stop speaking out loud!”

“You give me no order!”

Breathing deeply, Harry and Tom resumed their dispute silently, their eyes riveted on their reflection, looking desperately for each other.

*But why is it so complicated-Why now-Why does it happen?* Harry wondered. *Tom, stay away from this rabbit, okay? Don't touch it!*

*Why? What's wrong with you?* Tom asked inquisitively. *Tell me!*

"Don't give me any orders, Tom!" Harry shouted, slapping himself this time.

They heard footsteps on the other side of the door. Quivering, they realized someone had heard them argue. It was over. They would be sent to the asylum.

*Everything is your fault!* Tom accused Harry. *You hit me, how could you!*

*I hit myself, okay?* 

Harry heard all the negative thoughts that were jostling in Tom's conscience and they were not pleasant. He recalled he was the adult one. Then he sprinkled himself with water again, closed his eyes, loosened his fists and finally calmed down.

*Sorry, Tom, I didn't want to hit you. It was meant for myself. I feel better now. Let's go down to see who heard us and to open our gift, alright?*

**xXx**

His cheek still red, Tom went downstairs and found he had been given a jump rope. It was beautiful, with his wooden yellow and green striped sleeves and his leather cord, but Tom made an internal grimace.

*Who does she think I am? A girl?*

*Come on, it's so pretty, isn't it?*

*Harry, you're talking like a girl, Tom sneered.*

His anger momentarily forgotten, the child had a mental epiphany.

*Maybe you're a girl? Harry, Harry? Harriet? Are you sure you had a willie like me in your past life?*

*Tom, it's not funny,* Harry smiled despite himself.

He was relieved, finally having a relaxed chat with his soul. It had been an eternity and he had missed it.
“Do you like it, Tom?” Ivy asked, all smiles. “Mrs Anne, Mrs Cole and I thought you could exercise in the garden or in the school playground.”

“Thank you, Miss Ivy, thank you, Mrs Anne and Mrs Cole,” Tom politely replied with an angelic smile. “I enjoy reading a lot, but I’m sure I’ll love the skipping rope.”

“What a charming young man!” the cook said, waddling. “Isn’t it a pity, Mrs Cole, that no one have adopted him yet?”

Tom did not listen to the rest of the discussion. The advantage of his banter with Harry was that he finally had a good excuse to start talking to him again. He would never confess it to Harry, at least not explicitly, but he had missed him. Sometimes he even wondered why he had sulked for so long.

Harry, are we going to test the jump rope?

Let’s go, Harry replied almost naturally, for he was also thinking “So he missed me-Tom’s so cute!”

According to decency, you had to pretend you hadn’t heard, Tom winced.

xXx

“Come home soon, Tom, it’s very cold!”

“All right, Mrs Cole,” the child closed the garden’s door.

Did you hear what she said to Anne? She called me mad, he grumbled.

Well, how many normal people would come out on a day like this? It must be 0º! Harry exclaimed, hugging himself.

Tom pulled away at once. He was not cold. And how gross, Harry was giving him a hug!

If it were 0º, it would be snowing. Anyway, how does a jump rope work?

Harry took control of the child’s body to show him, and soon enough both were awkwardly crumbling. It warmed them up and did not keep their minds busy so they kept talking. They had both missed their carefree plays immensely.

Why are you afraid of Billy’s rabbit? Tom asked.

Harry tried to close his mind as much as possible.

It’s ... It doesn’t matter, Tom. I’m sorry, I panicked. It reminded me of a bad memory, that’s all. I’m truly sorry.

Harry was not telling him the whole story but Tom did not find any rabbit image, any traumatic scene in Harry’s memory that could have explained his reaction. As he ventured a little further, he caught a glimpse of some prophetic words he could not understand, for Harry refused to share them with him.

This rabbit story was really weird. Harry seemed to be less afraid of Billy’s pet than of Tom himself. There was however nothing to fear. Tom loved animals.

You’re lying but I don’t care, the boy thought. It’s better to reassure Harry-I don’t want him to feel bad-Truth isn’t so important-I missed him-I don’t want us to argue anymore.
When did you become so mature? Harry whispered. Before, you'd have had a full-blown breakdown! Thanks Merlin-He doesn't wanna know more-Close your mind, Harry.

I'll turn eight in a few days, Tom simply replied, ignoring his friend's other thoughts.

Who do you think heard us in the bathroom earlier? Harry asked, unable to keep the question for himself.

I believe it was a boy.

xXx xXx xXx

The holidays passed peacefully for Tom and Harry had almost reconciled. They were not as symbiotic as they used to be, but little by little they put aside their differences and rediscovered how comforting it was to always have someone with you. In a way, they re-tamed themselves.

Harry eventually thought he had worried for nothing. It was natural that a relationship, even with a brother or a son – he did not know exactly how to consider Tom – could go through periods of conflict. It was like when Tom had had his two years old crisis: it had passed and this time again, it had passed. After all, they were doomed to have a common destiny, whether in their previous or later lives.

Sometimes, however, he was in doubt. Was he underestimating the potential threat Tom Riddle was? Was he blinded by his happiness at having finally found a family? But his vicious mind always furnished him with arguments he hastened to approve. Tom was a child, Tom just needed love. Everything was going to work out. Everything had already worked out. Indeed, no one had told Mrs. Cole about their schizophrenic crisis in the bathroom and Tom had reverted to his capricious and adorable previous self.

Since he had found no good reason to keep Tom away from the rabbit and since Tom did not seem to want to harm it, he allowed him to spend time with the animal. What was at first a stroke from time to time quickly turned into hours of watching the rabbit frolicking in their room and running after it, when it tried to run away.

Harry would have liked to keep the rabbit as far away as possible from Tom, but he obviously could not reveal what he knew and he did not have the heart to leave the animal locked up all day. Indeed, after a few days, Billy had already get tired of his pet – which he had named Turnip.

"It's only eating hay. And its eyes never blink!" he had complained to Mrs Cole.

"It's a rabbit, Billy," she had sighed.

"Fortunately, Tom volunteered to take care of it," Ivy had added.

Anne had said nothing. She was too busy painting the portrait of three hideous toddlers.

xXx

Harry still was afraid for the rabbit, but at the same time he was wondering how Tom could kill such a cute animal, especially since he had declared himself its genuine owner.

When they played with Turnip, Harry listened to the boy's thoughts scrupulously. But not once did he detect a desire to hang the rabbit from the rafters.

Tom isn't Voldemort, he kept repeating himself when Tom was not paying attention. After all, when
he was younger, we often had fun with stray cats, and he never hurt them. I freaked out, but Tom's bad behaviour was just caused by err ... pre-teen hormones. Everything is fine now.

Tom turned eight years old without any fuss. Harry would have given him a gift but since they had not stopped arguing during the previous weeks, he had not dared to use the child's body to go and buy him one. To be forgiven, he animated their right and left arms and hugged himself.

We look really stupid, Tom grumbled, pretending to struggle.

You must confess, you love it when I hold you in your arms.

Tom did not reply consciously, but Harry smiled with ease when he heard slightly embarrassed words in their skull. They remained in this strange position for long minutes.

xXx xXx xXx

Turnip was fond of Tom. As soon as the child opened its cage, it ran to sniff his fingers and waited for the piece of carrot or apple Tom would inevitably give it.

Margaret sometimes came to play with them but Turnip was scared of her. Even if she was older than Tom, she did not have the gentleness animals appreciated.

Tom was always quiet. His gestures were smooth, as fluid as those of a priest. He never had to put his hand in the cage for Turnip always came to him, as if it was answering to an *Accio*. And when Tom caressed it between the shoulder blades, it was as if it was Turnip who was undulating while the child's fingers remained motionless.

Harry admired his dexterity but his bad feelings often haunted him.

However, after two long weeks at the orphanage, they would go back to school without any significant incident having occurred. If Turnip had been a test of Voldemortration, Tom had done well. The last before school started again, Harry finally relaxed. The future seemed radiant once more.

*Turnip is still alive, Turnip isn't dead!* he roared at a time he was curled up far away from Tom's mind.

xXx

Are we done with homework?

Harry, you were there all the time ... Of course we did them all, Tom sighed mentally.

What do you think will happen to Turnip during the day? Billy is also going back to school.

Tom freezed. He was shelling green beans with Ivy, the cook.

“Are you okay, Tom? You didn't cut yourself, did you?”

“Everything is okay, Miss Ivy. I was wondering what was going to happen to Turnip.”

After a short silence, the cook replied:

“You should talk to Billy, it's his rabbit after all. You finished with those?”

Ivy plunged the shelled beans into the warm oil, singing something that looked awfully like "Hotess,
we want to eat. What have you got to give us? I have rabbit, hare's stew and cabbage soup!"

Tom, fortunately, was not listening. He was shelling his beans, wondering how to bring up the topic with Billy.

xXx xXx xXx

“Billy, what are you going to do with Turnip?”

Billy was making his bag for school. He put down his rule, his penholder, his inkstand and his tatty notebooks.

"Tom, you don't go into my room without knocking," he said in a reproachful tone.

"I respect your living space if you respect your rabbit," Tom replied immediately.

Don't talk to him like that, Harry grumbled.

I do what I want. He started it!

I remind you we had to discuss it calmly, like big boys.

Leave it to me, Harry, that's not your problem.

Harry indignantly shrieked, but he did not dare to take control of Tom's body.

"It's just a rabbit!" Billy cried. “And you're misplaced to play the mistress with me," he added with a mocking smile.

“What do you mean?”

“You're a model child, but you're so weird! You care more about a rabbit than about other people! At school, you're faking all the time. Everyone loves you, but I do know you're abnormal.”

“You repeat that and I hit you!” Harry got annoyed.

Why do you get upset? Tom asked, interested. I thought we had to be reasonable.

“You're weird, Tom! I don't like you and Elliot, Beth, Jack, Eric and all the others in the orphanage, they do not like you either! Unlike those at school, they know you're a shady guy!”

“Nonsense!” Harry cried once more. “Margaret is in love with me.”

Beuh! She counts for nothing, Tom grumbled.

"Why did no one adopt you, then? Mrs. Cole, she doesn't like you, you know. On the other hand, she loves me.”

"All this has nothing to do with Turnip," Harry said wisely, as Tom tensed in him.

xXx

Billy stood up, abandoning his school stuff on the floor. He was taller than Tom. But Tom would never be afraid of another child and certainly not of a Muggle one. With Harry, he was invincible.

"That's what I dislike about you! You always speak like an adult, you think you're superior to us.
But you were abandoned by your parents. You're the same as us, so stop it!"

Tom moved back a step. He was not impressed at all, of course, but Harry had forced him to do so. They had not come there for a fight.

"Stop controlling me," Tom murmured to Harry.

"Don't speak aloud," the teenager squeaked.

"I knew it!" Billy shouted, stunned and frightened, pointing at Tom. "You are crazy! They put them in the asylum, the likes of you!"

"You don't know what you're saying," Harry said, fighting against Tom.

"But I do," Billy sniggered, a gleam of triumph in his eyes. He sat down on the floor to pack his bag.

"What do you mean?" Harry and Tom said in unison.

"I heard you, when you spoke to yourself in the bathroom," the other child said calmly. "You've got a problem, Tom."

Tom did not think. He threw himself at him and tried to hit him, but Harry stopped each of his punches. It was a strange scene, as if Billy was surrounded by a Shield Charm.

Stop doing that, I'll kill him!

Tom thought in a deafening, mute cry.

Exactly!

"You see? You can't even give me a punch. You're possessed by the devil!" Billy laughed, but his eyes betrayed his fear.

Harry let Tom's little fist fall on the other child's cheek.

"Ouch! You're crazy!" the latter yelped, rising, his eyes full of tears.

Tom fell back. He had hit someone for the first time. Until then, Harry had always forbidden him to use violence. Billy left his room in a whirlwind and fled into the petticoats of one of the establishment's girls.

It didn't go as well as I had expected, Harry commented as they walked back to their room.

Well done for him. If only he wasn't such an arse.

xXx

That night, Harry and Tom locked Turnip in his cage, assuring him everything would be fine. Even if they would spend the whole day at school, they could take care of him after homework. They would stop on the way back home to buy him a treat, as Harry had allowed Tom to stop making the trip with Billy, for he had finally admitted Billy had an IQ equivalent to a mailbox's.

But even if we play with you, in the evening ... during the day, you're going to have a life like mine, Tom thought, stroking the rabbit. It would be better for you if you could be free and go somewhere else. Billy is so daft, he doesn't understand what it is to be misunderstood. Poor Turnip. Ivy will maybe kill you for dinner. If I were you, I would kill myself. I prefer it when I decide. And when I'll die, I'd have decided to.
The rabbit was looking at him with his large, round and black eyes, like two marbles, and Harry felt as if he had nodded.

xXx xXx xXx

The next morning, as expected, Tom and Billy didn't go to school together. The first day of school slowly passed. During the breaks, the pupils talked about their holidays or their Christmas gifts but Tom did not participate in the conversations.

He was worried about Turnip, all alone in his cage. If Turnip had, like him, a second conscience, at least he would not be bored.

*It's lucky I had Harry at birth-I don't know what I would have become without him.*

*Stop stressing for nothing,* Harry snickered, uncomfortable. *And the right answer is C, not A.*

Tom distorted his questionnaire absentmindedly, but his thoughts were all turned towards the caged rabbit.

When they came back home that evening, they were greeted with panic.

"Tom!" Mrs Cole yelled, disheveled. "You closed Billy's rabbit's cage yesterday, right?"

"Yes," Tom replied in surprise. "Billy never takes care of him."

*Why are they panicking, Harry?*

*I don't know,* Harry replied, but his other thoughts indicated otherwise.

Tom did not have time to linger over it, for Mrs Cole had approached him. She seemed ready to slap him or to tear her own hair away.

"Are you sure the door was closed?"

"Why?"

"The rabbit has disappeared," old Anne said, giving the bottle to a baby.

*Did we close the cage, Tom?*

*Of course. We wouldn't have made such a mistake.*

"He couldn't get anywhere," Ivy said. "But we searched the ground floor, and it's nowhereto be found."

"And the floors?" Harry asked.

"How could he climb the stairs?" the cook said, puzzled.

"They are smart, rabbits," Tom commented.

xXx

Billy, hitherto silent, pointed at him.

"It's you! You got revenge!"
"Don't be foolish," Anne growled. "Why would Tom released the rabbit?"

"Billy told me Tom and he had a fight last night," said Mrs. Cole. "Tom would have hit Billy."

"He gave me a punch!" Billy exclaimed, rubbing his cheek.

Tom did not deny it.

"Why did you do that, Tom?" Ivy asked.

_We can't tell them he told me I was crazy._

_No, we can't_, Harry admitted.

"That's between he and me," the child cautiously said.

"Tom, what have you done to the rabbit?" the Matron inquired.

"But I didn't do anything! I properly closed the cage's door yesterday!"

"The rabbit likes Tom. If Tom looks for it, it'd perhaps reappear?" Ivy suggested.

Harry and Tom nodded and began looking for Turnip with all the others. Billy looked at them with hate and fear, as if he were sure Tom was at fault.

When they had searched all the rooms downstairs and upstairs, Harry felt a terrible urge to vomit. He knew what had happened. Not in details, but he knew where to look for Turnip. He felt dishonest to hide what he knew from Tom, but he could not tell him. If Tom learned Harry knew almost everything about his life, about his future ...

_You've grown attached to Turnip, compared to the beginning_, Tom remarked, interpreting his friend's confusion as anxiety for the rabbit's lot.

_I hope nothing bad had happened to him_, Harry said, nauseous and guilty.

When Mrs Cole ordered them to check the attic, it was Tom who climbed the ladder leading there, not him. Tom had no idea what he was going to find, but Harry knew and it was enough for their common heart to contract.

_Don't go, Tom_, he pleaded, unable to stop himself.

_Why? If Turnip is there ... Harry, are you okay? My heart hurts..._

_xXx_

Tom pushed open the door. It was dark in the attic, but the light coming from the ground's opening illuminated the room just enough to see its shapes. The furniture's illuminated angles glowed in the darkness. On the ground, a few lamps with broken bulbs were jumbled and many cartons were stored in the corners. The air was drenched with dust and must.

The rafters gleamed gently. At one of them hung a flaccid form.

_What is it?_

_Let's go down, Tom, there's nothing to see here_, Harry implored, trying to look away.
No, wait, what's that, over there? You see it, right?

Tom ...

The child did not obey and he came nearer, despite Harry's soft protests, of Turnip's hanging corpse

It was a pitiful and monstrous vision that would mark Tom for life. The worst part was most likely that there was a jump rope with colored sleeves around the rabbit's neck.

xXx xXx xXx

With this incident the near-happy days of Tom Riddle came to an end. The boy was not truly accused – an eight-year-old couldn't have done such a thing, especially since he had spent the day at school – but Mrs Cole could not bear to see him anymore. He had not hung the rabbit, it was impossible. It was rather as if he had induced the animal to hang itself with his own jump rope. It was worse.

On the other hand, even if he had discovered the dead body of the rabbit he had taken care of every day, he did not look upset. He looked surprised, perplexed, perhaps even horrified that the crime weapon had been his own jump rope, but he had never looked sad. It was as if he had expected this incident to happen and he'd just found out that yes, it had happened.

The Matron often bitterly thought of December 31, 1926, the cursed day when a dead woman had come to give birth to a diabolical child.

Anne had buried poor Turnip in the garden and everybody had moved on. After all, it was only a rabbit they had picked up in a farm. It was the same as if they had eaten it, less the pleasure of taste. However, if the incident itself was quickly forgotten, the behavior of Tom's entourage towards him changed significantly.

Billy Stubbs had asked the mistress to change places, and when he came back to the orphanage after school, he purposely made a detour to avoid Tom. Margaret no longer sought to seduce him. She had chosen herself a new lover, an eleven-year-old boy who often played ball in the neighborhood. And nom Ivy did not allow Tom to enter the kitchen, frightened he would steal a knife and kill a child.

Dennis Bishop, a boy Tom respected, was the only child who didn't avoid him. He sat beside him during meals and asked him math questions, to which Harry answered correctly, even though Tom's heart was not there.

xXx

Immersed in his shell, Harry had tried to sort out this story, in vain. He was twenty-four hours a day with Tom. He would have realized if if the boy had taken his jump rope to hang a rabbit.

But the words of memory-Mrs Cole often came back to him: "Billy Stubbs's rabbit... well, Tom said he didn't do it, and I don't see how he could have done, but even so, it didn't hang itself from the rafters, did it? ... But I'm jiggered if I know how he got there to do it. All I know is he and Billy had argued the day before."

There was only one explanation. Yet, even for a wizard, it sounded crazy. Turnip had hung himself. He had obeyed the indirect, mute orders of Tom:

"It would be better for you if you could be free and go somewhere else. Billy is so daft, he doesn't understand what it is to be misunderstood. Poor Turnip. Ivy will maybe kill you for dinner. If I were you, I would kill myself. I prefer it when I decide. And when I'll die, I'd have decided to."
And the Pensieve's Tom Riddle had said:

"I can make animals do what I want without training them."

But Tom did not want Turnip to hang himself. It was an accident, the first accident.

Harry locked it up in the depths of his mind. Tom did not have to know. For, contrary to what Mrs Cole thought, Turnip's death weighed heavily on his heart, and he often fell asleep weeping softly.

Then Harry was forced to hug him so they both managed to dive slowly into a long night of nightmares.

Basically, Tom was convinced that Turnip had obeyed him, that it was his fault if he had died.

*I was only thinking about it, it wasn't for real... But he did it nevertheless. I didn't mean it, Harry, I swear I didn't want him to ...*

*Stop talking nonsense, Tom,* his friend said gently. He was feeling guilty for lying to him but he had no choice. *Even if you're a wizard, it's impossible and you know it. Now count sheep, you have school tomorrow.*

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**To Be Continued...**

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Chapter End Notes

So you know, I wasn't happy killing poor Turnip.  
Next chapter will be the last one taking place in the orphanage.

Hoping you still enjoy this story <3  
All your reviews make my heart beat faster ;)

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The other incidents (1935-1938 / 8-11 years old)

Chapter Summary

It's summer time. Tom is 10 and he goes in the seaside.
It's summer time again. Tom is 11 and he goes in the countryside.

Tom is a little brat and he is desperate to go to Hogwarts.

Chapter Notes

Hey! Thank you everyone for following this story! I'm making progress pretty fast in the translation (can't complain about it ;) ) so here is a new chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The other incidents (1935-1938 / 8-11 years old)
Chapter 4: Their Biped King

Tom, don’t go too far away, we're going to be scolded.

Arh, you're not funny, Harry. Come on, come here, Tom insisted.

Harry sighed but let him take possession of their body. Tom was now ten and a half, it was summer and they were at the sea. Harry was certainly an overprotective dad, but he had to admit that Tom, who asked him to tie his shoelaces for him back in the day, had grown up. By the way, did he really have the right to forbid him anything? He was a squatter, but it was neither his life nor his body.

We're not going too far, okay?

Okay, okay, Tom said evasively, before starting to run on the pebble beach.

As they moved away from the other children, the snatches of voice gave way to the murmur of the ocean. It was immediately calmer, eerier, too. The beige and ocher pebbles crisscrossed under their feet. The green sea licked their shoes and darkened the beach’s color. Some seagulls uttered their absurd cries far above them. The blinding sun, lost in the midst of a cloudless blue sky, did not warm their shoulders.

Near the ocean, there was nothing but emptiness and wind.

Stop, Tom, we're so far away from the others!
Tom ignored his friend and continued to follow the shore. He had awaited this summer outing with impatience. It was the opportunity to have Harry for himself, without anyone interrupting their discussion. In the orphanage or in school, it had become almost impossible.

**Xxx xxx xxx**

When he was younger, he had always been left alone. He just had to be a good choirboy and they let him close himself off and live in a chatty silence. With Harry, they had spent countless afternoons exploring the orphanage and its surroundings without anyone ever holding them to account.

But the more he grew up, the more he was requested. Childhood stopped early at the orphanage, around the time one entered primary school. Tom had to bring the bags of potatoes back, help fold the laundry and scour the bathtub. With school, homework and housework, his spare time and intimate discussions with Harry were considerably shortened.

He was not the only one who was assigned chores, of course. However, he was the only one who was systematically supervised. It was very annoying, as if Mrs Cole or Anne were afraid he would set fire to their orphanage if they did not keep an eye on him. He was no longer trusted. Yet, Eric Whalley, who was only eight years old, set the table by himself. When there was a knife in his hand, no one looked at him madly. Tom was scarcely allowed near a tablespoon!

When Tom complained about being watched constantly, Harry hammered it was not without reason. Tom deserved it. If he behaved otherwise, he would have much more freedom.

**XXx**

It’s been a long time since Ivy had slipped sweets into Tom's pockets with a complicit smile. All the staff and children of the orphanage had developed a great animosity towards him and, unfortunately, Harry could not entirely blame them.

Of course, he found it unfair that after the rabbit event, Tom was not called a "fool" or a "devil" behind his back, but straight in the eyes. After all, Turnip’s inexplicable death had deeply traumatized Tom, much more than the others.

However, from that cursed day, the boy had multiplied the little wickedness, finally living up to his bad reputation. Perhaps it was to take revenge on the world, or because it amused him. In any case, he qualified his thefts, mockeries and jostling of simple games, which did not fail to drive Harry insane.

Stop that! He got angry when Tom summoned a yo-yo, a thimble or a harmonica from a fellow’s pocket.

What? I didn’t do anything, it came by itself, the boy replied, hiding his booty in his former brownie points’ box. If it really bothers you, you only have to stop me. It's useless to lecture me if you don’t act afterwards. You're as guilty as I am. And, frankly, this is peanuts, I don’t understand why you're freaking out.

Harry sighed and let it go. Tom had become a naughty kid since Turnip’s death. Could his little misdeeds be chalked up to sadness? He did not know. If his interventions were pretty mild, it was pure selfishness: he feared Tom would turn against him. He would not stand it.

So, even if he disapproved of the incidents caused by Tom, that memory-Mrs Cole had described as "nasty things" – a pot falling to the ground, a book reduced to dust – he found Tom a thousand and one excuses. He convinced himself easily, for he wanted to believe it, that the little wizard was not a
scoundrel but a victim, that all these dirty tricks meant nothing more than a deep boredom.

**Xxx xxx xxx**

Lost in thought too, Tom entertained himself by levitating a pebble. Despite himself, Harry was impressed. He would never be able to do so wandlessly or nonverbally.

For two years magic has been numbing their fingers’s tips daily, pleading to be released. At first, Tom had not know how to channel it, because Harry had not wanted to tell him. They’d had a lot of fighting about it and Tom had learned to control his powers on his own.

He now had enough willpower to move objects or, more interestingly, to influence animals and people. He attracted them without having to display persuasive arguments, without even having to speak. All he had to do was look at Muggles in the eye and they told him what he wanted to hear.

It did not happen often for each time he abused his powers, Harry gave him the silent treatment for long hours, sometimes for whole days. And he'd rather give up magic, which he would still learn at Hogwarts, than lose his only friend, his sole equal. What's the point of living, if it was not to share his life with Harry?

*Harry, in spite of our quarrels, I love spending time with you*, he thought softly, blowing his pebble up.

*Me t...* the other boy began to say, before shouting aloud: “Look out!”

Tom jumped, almost fell, but Harry caught him.

“What’s the matter?”

"A snake,” Harry whispered. “The explosion noise may have disturb it.”

*Serpents have no external ears, we've read it in* The encyclopedia of reptiles, *don't you remember?* Tom sneered. *He probably felt the implosion’s vibes through its stirrup. It’s a small bone.*

For a few seconds they watched the big snake with a yellow belly lying between the warm pebbles. Its scales shone like new shoes, its eyes were wide open and it seemed to take a close interest in the young biped who had dared to disturb his nap.

"We're leaving," Harry said, forgetting to think silently.

He initiated a movement of withdrawal but Tom refused to move.

**Xxx**

The child was not afraid of animals but it was the first time he saw a snake. When you grew up in a shabby orphanage in London, the only wandering things you meet are three-legged cats or narcoleptic pigeons. A snake!

*Harry, what kind of snake is he?* he asked, his eyes fixed on the undulating creature.

*I dunno Tom. Come on, we're leaving, he's not gonna hurt us-Quick, we can't stay-If Tom learns that-*

But Tom did not move. He hesitated between fascination and repulsion.

*It's not like a cat or a rabbit. It's impossible to know what he's thinking. If he thinks-What's Harry*
hiding from me?

Harry nearly sighed but it was not the time to be exasperated. He was not particularly afraid – after all, as a last resort, he just had to speak a few Parseltongue words and the story would be settled – but he did not want Tom to learn so early that they were able to ...

Come on, let's go! he thought.

He is beautiful and terrifying at the same time-I'd love to caress him-understand what happens in his triangular head-I wanna-

“Come on, let's go!” Harry shouted, interrupting the child's reflections.

xXx

“Who are you talking to, Tom?”

Harry and Tom turned as one towards the location of the voice.

It was Amy Benson, a girl who was always hanging out with Dennis Bishop. Tom liked Dennis, he was the only one of his fellows he respected. He was older than him, very calm and a science lover.

However, when Amy arrived at the orphanage a year ago, she immediately started to cling to him with all her soul, and Tom had lost his only friend. Unlike Dennis, she was whiny and annoying, with her little bunches and her gnawed nails.

"Dennis!” she screamed when she noticed the big reptile. “Dennis, help!”

Dennis appeared. He looked at the scene and calmly said:

“Oh crap ... Amy, get away slowly, go back with the others. Tom, don't move, I'm coming.”

“Stay away!” Harry shouted. “I can handle this on my own. It's not dangerous.”

How can you handle it? Tom asked curiously. What are you hiding from me, again? Okay, it doesn't look evil but--

Don't worry about that. For now, they absolutely have to go, okay?

I trust you.

"Come on, we'll deal with it," Tom said, looking very sure of himself.

"Who is 'we'?" Amy responded, moving backwards with small stressed steps. “You're talking rubbish, you're bragging!”

“Tom, no need to bluster,” Dennis sighed. “I'm coming, okay?”

The snake observed their exchange with interest. Well, these bipeds were very strange.

xXx

“It's moved!” Amy groaned.

Under her feet the pebbles slipped and she fell.
Tom, this sucks, Harry grumbled. We must take care of this snake.

And how do you plan to do this? You're the big one!

Don't worry, we just need Dennis and Amy ...

But it was too late. Dennis had reached Tom and Amy had risen at full speed to throw stupidly at his friend. She had buried her face in Dennis' jacket, as if it would make the reptile disappear.

“Dennis ...” she whimpered.

“Hush, you two!” Harry said authoritatively, placing himself between them and the serpent.

The animal did not look very hostile, but still ... he had no choice. He concentrated on the hypnotic patterns of his scales and the Parseltongue came naturally to him, although he had not spoken it for more than ten years.

~ Hello. We mean you no harm. We'll leave you alone, ~ he hissed.

What are you ...

Shut up, Tom!

~ You speak our tongue, ~ replied the serpent, as astonished as a cold-blooded animal could be. ~ Help me. ~

Why did ... Tom began.

Please, Tom, let me focus.

~ We'll help you if you let the other two kids go, ~ Harry said.

The serpent nodded impatiently. He did not need all these bipeds. That one would be powerful enough to help him.

xXx

"Amy, Dennis, go tell Mrs Cole I'm coming back soon," Harry ordered.

“Are you okay, Tom?” Dennis replied. “And why were you whistling?”

"It looked like he was talking to the snake," Amy groaned, still clinging to the tall blond boy. “I'm afraid, Dennis, let's go.”

“Look, I don't need you, the snake won't hurt me.”

"You're mad, Tom," Dennis said. “I am responsible of both of you.”

Harry sighed. He did not have all day. The serpent seemed to agree.

~ We snakes don't have the sense of time. Yet I get impatient, ~ the reptile hissed.

~ Well, they will follow us. ~

~ Brave or reckless are they, ~ the serpent concluded, moving away.

"It's going away!" Dennis exclaimed, astonished and relieved.
"Tom spoke to him," Amy said, on the verge of tears. "The others are right, Tom is sick of the head."

Dennis gave her a stern look but did not comment. He took her hand and was about to go back to the encampment when Harry announced very naturally:

“We have to follow it.”

*But why, Harry?* Tom thought. *And you don't react to what Amy just said?*

“But why, Tom?” Dennis asked. “It left and anyway Mrs Cole've said the train ...“

Harry looked Dennis right in the eyes. He began to find these two children very annoying.

“Shut up, Dennis. I must follow the serpent. You, follow me, or go back to the camp, it would be wiser.”

Amy pulled Dennis back but the boy went after Tom, muttering he could not let him follow a wild animal on his own.

xXx

*Harry, you can talk snake language!* Tom finally beamed after a few minutes of walking. *It's so cool! You're so cool!*

*You're also fluent*, his other conscience confessed. *You und erstood what you were saying, right?*

*I wasn't aware. It's wicked.*

Tom was so happy he did not find it strange that Harry knew they shared the same gift. Anyway, Harry always knew everything.

They continued to walk in silence, if Amy's occasional groans were omitted. The snake led them to a steep cliff Harry recognized immediately. It was there that Dumbledore ... It was inside that ...

This cave was only one thing for him: the hiding place of a Horcrux protected by a horde of aquatic Inferius. But if Voldemort had chosen this place to seal Slytherin's Locket, it was precisely because something had happened there when he was a child.

"And then ... on the summer outing – we take them out, you know, once a year, to the countryside or to the seaside – well, Amy Benson and Dennis Bishop were never quite right afterwards," Mrs. Cole had said in Dumbledore's memory.

*Holy shit-Why didn't I realize it sooner?-I should have gotten rid of them–Before the past happens again-shityshityshit-

*Harry, why are you panicking?* Tom worried. *What's going on?*

~ The entrance is blocked, ~ the serpent said, ignoring his interlocutor's mood. ~ Young biped, clean some stones. ~

"Help me clear the entrance," Harry ordered, putting himself to work reluctantly, his mind polluted with terrible thoughts.

He was leading Dennis and Amy to a sinister event, whatever it was. He knew it, but it was too late. What could he do except knocking them out? It would be ridiculous to kill them in order to avoid
them being shattered by what was going to happen in the cave.

Dennis and Amy exchanged a disturbed look but they did as asked. They were more frightened by Tom's abnormal behavior than by the snake.

xXx

Harry did not listen to the things echoing in Tom's head. He was obsessed with what would happen when the cave would be accessible again. In his old life, when he was in sixth year, he had never wondered what the young Voldemort had done to traumatize two kids. At that time, it was a thing of the past. Now, he wished he had asked himself more questions.

_I hope it's nothing serious-Oh Merlin, please tell me it's nothing serious-Not like Turnip's story-Oh, please-

Harry, what's so bad about this cave? Why are you thinking of Turnip? Harry!

Like every time something serious happened, Harry did not answer.

After a few minutes, the three children had moved the stones blocking the entrance, revealing a long and dark corridor that sank into the cliff. Harry remembered this cave so well he did not think it was necessary for them to go back there again. The events of June 1996 – Dumbledore, Dumbledore, Dumbledore – filled his mind as if they had happened the day before. He could have drawn a map of the cave with his eyes closed.

~ Thank you, ~ the serpent hissed gratefully. ~ Follow me. ~

The animal entered the hole without looking back. Harry hesitated for a moment, but Tom pushed him forward. Why was Harry so scared? The serpent was not unkind, he probably wanted to reward them for their help. What could he offer to a human? Raw shrews?

Excited by the idea of receiving a snake gift, Tom hurried. He could hear behind him the clumsy steps of the two kids. He did not realize that the more they advanced, the more Harry was terrified, as if he foreshadowed a horrible accident.

xXx

"... all we got out of them was that they'd gone into a cave with Tom Riddle. He swore they'd just gone exploring, but something happened in there, I'm sure of it."

Mrs Cole's words spun into Harry's head. He was in such a state of shock he did not even try to hide them from his other self. History was repeating itself ... Everything was exactly the same ...

Like the evening Dumbledore and Harry had looked for the Horcrux, the cave was dark and very wet. But the corridor leading to the main cavity seemed shorter. In any case, the great underground lake appeared too quickly to his taste. The snake whistled contentedly before disappearing into the lake. It had abandoned them.

Harry wondered how an animal that needed heat to survive could live in such a place. Besides, did a snake could swim? More importantly, was it too late to go back?

He did not have time to ask himself any more questions for, suddenly, the lake began to move. Its previously smooth surface was covered with a thousand waves, as if underwater things were slowly rising from the depths.
Harry was about to cry to the children to run away, to run without looking back, thinking that an army of Inferius was coming for them, but he did not. Voldemort would drown the corpses to protect his Horcrux many years later. What was clouding the lake at that time were dozens of...

“Snakes!” Amy exclaimed. “Dennis, we leave Tom here, come on, we're leaving ... Dennis! A snake is already too much, but look, this is madness, come on, Dennis!”

The little girl was pulling her friend's sleeve, deforming his worn-out jacket, but Dennis did not move. His eyes were fixed on Tom, who was himself hypnotized by the surreal spectacle offered to him.

It's incredible.

xXx

A multitude of serpents were moving towards their shore in the same movement. Their soft bodies drew on the lake a half sun with green and undulating rays. Tom was not afraid. He was downright happy.

Harry could talk with snakes. Harry was terrific. Thanks to him, at only ten and a half, Tom could see an amazing scene, of which no adult, no Muggle had ever been a spectator. So many animals without limbs rushing towards him! Him, the heart of a snakes' gathering!

Why was Harry so stressed? Like Tom, he should be delighted to finally be the center of the world!

Stop panicking, you spoil my happiness! the boy grumbled, but his friend did not reply in a coherent way.

Tom ignored him and concentrated on what was going on around him.

The last reptiles had accumulated on the bank, clustered on top of each other like freshly caught fishes. But they did not die of a slow and painful asphyxia. On the contrary, their lively eyes shone like thousands of yellow insects, piercing the darkness of the cave.

Amy and Dennis are not supposed to die-nor hurt-what if they get raped by them-what if-

Amy had stopped whining. She was just pressing up against Dennis, making as little noise as possible. No doubt she thought they were done. Yet the serpents were not interested in them. Their triangular heads were all turned towards Tom and they started to whistle.

~ Young biped, you saved one of us. ~

~ You saved us all. There was a scree, and now there is an entrance. ~

~ We can go hunting. ~

~ You speak our language, you are a serpent. ~

~ Thank you, young biped with forked tongue. ~

~ We will never forget. ~

Some snakes, the closest, crawled towards him and slowly rolled around his legs.

Don't move, let them do it, Harry told him, sighing in relief.
Serpents would not attack the other children. Amy and Benson were safe, at least physically.

Surprised and amazed, Tom held his breath.

The reptiles moved up his childish chest to whistle into his ears. Their cold, thin and viscous bodies seemed like a single and immense serpent, of which he was the unlucky prey. Except he was not a chick ready to be swallowed. He was their bipedal king, the serpents were hugging him!

On the journey back, neither Amy nor Dennis spoke a word. Their extinct, big and blind eyes looked crazy. Before they took the train, Harry asked them to keep the secret, even if he knew they would never dare to talk about what they had seen in the cave. For Muggles, this scene could have come out of Hell. Even wizards would have accused Tom of dark magic.

When she saw the shock in which Amy and Dennis were plunged, Mrs Cole accused Tom of the worst. Harry defended himself as best as he could. This time, Tom had done nothing wrong.

XXX xxx xxx

Throughout the rest of the summer Tom only could leave his room to go to the bathroom or to the dining-room. He was fine with that, for he was no longer obliged to do the chores and could spend whole days practicing Parseltongue.

In addition to being a wizard with powers highly developed for his age, he had the rare ability to communicate with snakes. The best, of course, was that his Harry was also able to do so. How many chances did he have at birth of be attributed such a perfect second conscience?

He thought Parseltongue was difficult to speak, especially in the absence of a true serpent. He did not understand how he could speak a language without having ever learned it ... Harry might have told him stories in Parseltongue when he was a baby, and whistling and squealing might have stayed in his memory.

Harry.

No, that was English, the Chosen One said. Please try again.

He mentally whistled a nursery rhyme, as if to taunt his friend.

~ Harry, stop it! ~ Tom grumbled in Parseltongue.

That's great, Tom! Now, in your head.

~ Harry? ~

~ Perfect! ~ Harry whispered silently, wondering if teaching Tom Parseltongue was really a good idea.

But they were locked in their tiny room all day long and it was definitely strengthening their ties. And Harry found it so rewarding to be Tom's idol again!

XXX xxx xxx

Tom entered his final year of primary school with a light and beating heart. Another year and then, farewell, Muggles! He now knew almost everything – at least, everything Harry had wanted to tell him – about magic. He had studied the qualities of each of the four Houses, taking into account the fact Harry was a Gryffindor, and had finally decided himself for Slytherin. Indeed, Harry had told
him the Sorting Hat would give way to his desires, if he expressed them strongly enough.

He knew lists of potion ingredients by heart, often enumerated the most dangerous magical plants – those they worked with from sixth year – and half playing, half serious, he practiced to pronounce he most common spells' formulas.

It was really a mystery but Harry entrusted his knowledge to him with much reluctance. His arguments varied according to the time of day. Sometimes it was because all this was long ago, and he could not remember. Sometimes it was because Tom was going to get bored if he was too far ahead of the program. Sometimes it was just because, and Tom, don't argue.

However, Harry had trouble resisting his soul's supplications and promises. After a thousand "Harry, please, please ...", he would give in and teach him, with a nostalgic smile on his lips, how to pronounce Wingardium Leviosa.

The only things I've to hide from him is my identity and the time I come from. Knowing two or three things before entering Hogwarts, won't hurt him. There is no reason...

So Harry was fooling himself, refusing to see that yielding to Tom's whims was not helping him.

xXx

During the final year of primary school, Tom learned absolutely nothing Muggle. Everything he saw at school, Harry had already taught him somehow over time. Harry encouraged him to talk to his new schoolmates, who looked smarter than average, but Tom refused. What good is it when he would abandon the non-magical world the following year?

Harry often corrected him on this subject.

Tom, you won't leave the Muggle world. Even though Hogwarts will be like your home, you'll have to go back here for the holidays.

Only for summer vacation, Tom said.

Hogwarts is first and foremost a school. Your home is ...

My home is when I'm with you. So my home is everywhere. I'm so excited to go to Hogwarts with you!

How can I resist?

I'd tell you if I knew it, the child replied with a satisfied smile.

xXx

On December 31, 1937, Tom celebrated his eleventh birthday.

For the occasion, Harry had obtained permission from Mrs. Cole to prepare a cake. The Headmistress watched him make it, with a strange expression on her face.

The kid made his own birthday cake. Well, it was pretty sad and foolish, but Tom Riddle was a disturbed one. But when did he learn how to make pastries? It was not an orphanage activity, least of all a school's one. He was possessed by the devil! And say he would stay with them until his majority ...
Once the cake came out of the oven, Tom glared at Mrs Cole so she would leave him alone, but she did not move.

*Let it go, Tom, ignore her*, Harry sighed, irritated by his other self's childish attitude. *Happy Birthday!*

*You're right. Happy birthday, you too. Make a wish.*

*But you're going to hear it. Besides, aren't you the one who has to make a wish?*

*Make a wish, Harry, or I'll stab Mrs. Cole*, Tom threatened him, pointing to a chopper hanging on the wall.

*Tom!*

Harry tried to hear his friend's thoughts, but the latter had become very talented in hiding them. It was impossible to know if he was serious or not.

*Make a wish*, the child insisted impatiently.

Harry chose to believe he had joked a moment earlier.

*Um, will I wish that Tom stay as cute as now or ...*

The rest of his thoughts became blurred, they went too fast. When he thought about it seriously, he had many things to wish for: to go back to his time, to see if everything was fine, to find out whether he was in the past or in a dream, to understand why despite his willingness the sinister events happened anyway, to understand why he could not hate Tom, when he was Vold ...

*I wish to stay forever with you*, he whispered.

*You're stupid, that's not a wish, that's the truth*, Tom replied, cutting himself a piece of cake.

*xXx*

Mrs Cole glanced at him and went out of the kitchen. She rushed to Anne in the living room. The old woman was telling a story of pirates and parrots.

"And then William opened his mouth and ..."

"Anne," Mrs Cole interrupted.

"Wait for one second, children," the story-teller said, rising from her chair. "Is everything okay, Mrs. Cole?"

"It's Tom Riddle, Anne," the Headmistress said anxiously, walking up and down the little room. "He smiled to his birthday cake. And I saw him, yes, I saw him, he ate a piece with his left hand and another one with his right hand. He's ambi ... ambi ... I don't remember how you say it, the illness, when you can use both of your hands. The devil."

She twisted her fingers with irregular phalanxes, as if a demon itched her too.

"Go to bed, Mrs Cole," Anne advised her. "A small glass of gin and sleep. This is New Year Eve, why are you fretting like that?"

The Matron nodded and disappeared into her office, with unequal steps. Anne went to the kitchen, to
check Mrs Cole's claims.

Tom Riddle was quietly sitting in front of his empty plate, lost in thought.

“Tom, turn off the light when you leave the kitchen!” she told him, before returning to William the parrot and Rocko the one-eyed pirate.

Xxx xxx xxx

Time was flying for Harry and passing too slowly for Tom. The latter found the weeks were interminable and the months eternal. Every evening he made a small cross on the General Post Office calendar hidden in his wardrobe.

He had had it one day Harry and he were making a small detour through the city before returning home. They were distributed for free, but as he liked to be a smart aleck he had taken it in the postman's basket, causing his conscience to complain.

You're out of order, Tom! Harry had immediately been irritated.

It was forr fun, it's nothing bad, Tom had answered.

Of course, he could have waited patiently to be given one but he had wanted to test Harry's reaction. And he had been very pleased to see his other self had reacted exactly as he had anticipated. They had no secrets for each other.

Only 152 days to go before Hogwarts! he thought, crossing the 2nd of April.

He carefully put back the calendar into the wardrobe. If anyone found out he was counting the days, he would be asked why. Then, could he resist confessing to them his great secret, to show them his powers?

Don't even think about it. You saw in what state you've put Amy and Dennis? Tom, seriously.

It was a joke, Harry, the boy growled. I have no time to lose with Muggles.

xXx

Harry was afraid but he could not analyze this feeling. As soon as he felt bad, he was forced to get rid of this feeling. Tom was no longer a little boy. He was very attentive to his soul's slightest disturbances and, if anything worried Harry, he was immediately aware of it. Which means the Chosen One never could sort out his fears.

However, the few times he was curled up on himself, he thought about them in vague terms. Dumbledore's visit, how was it going to happen? Would Hogwarts please Tom? Was Tom really going to become Voldemort? And could Harry do something about it, would he be able to kill him?

Tom's childishness was nothing but nasty kid's misdeeds, even if Harry saw them all as possible signs of a deep evil. Robbing a free calendar announced the destruction of entire villages. Jostling a brat, making Margaret's skirts fly, throwing ink on his neighbor's back, these actions contained in germ an extreme blood theory and a will to dominate the world.

Basically, Harry knew that for now, the universe had nothing to fear from Tom Riddle. The future Voldemort still had respect for him, his mentor, and would not do anything that could make them fall out forever. A lifetime with a sulking soul would be pretty boring.
But when should Harry think of a more radical solution? By the time Tom would be interested in Dark Magic? When he would kill for the first time? When he would create his first Horcrux?

The question, however, was not so much when Harry should put an end to their life, but if he would be strong enough to do so. Killing Tom would be equal to committing suicide and, above all, to losing a piece of soul he cherished against all odds.

And the weird rabbit incident ... The cave with Amy and Dennis ... both times it was not Tom's fault. I was rather mine.

Xxx xxx xxx

The summer of 1938 was finally there. That year they were taken to the countryside. Seeing Tom move away in the tall yellow grasses, Amy and Dennis made an uncomfortable grimace. Tom did not notice them and disappeared into the fields. After three minutes, he began to grow bored.

He loved the countryside less than the seaside.

The countryside was peaceful, with its birds's songs and dull insects. The countryside was luminous, golden and ocher, it exhaled a feeling of well-being and of tired romanticism. It was suffocating.

On the other hand, the sea was never calm. Always agitated by a repetitive and yet every time new movement, it breathed. The waves kissed the sand, biting more of it with each stream. The sun could not warm the salty sea breeze. Whether sandy or pebbled, the beach could be yellow and burning, it always seemed a bit blue and cold, as it was contaminated by the water and the sky's color. The sea was sublime, an anguished black blue mass, waves crashing against the rocks, caves sheltering snake's tribes.

Besides that, the countryside was a little girl thing.

I assure you, it's nice, the countryside, Harry walked happily.

He liked the clean and heavy air, due to the lack of wind. The sensation of the wheat brushing his fingers was pleasant and the crickets's sound soothed him. And when some butterfly frolicked in his field of vision, the scene was perfect.

While Harry was enjoying himself – absolutely disinterested, Tom had left him their body – they came face to face with a little garter snake. Or was it a viper? Harry no longer remembered which one was venomous but he did not care. Serpents would never hurt him. Apart from the Basiliks serving the memory of ... 

He censured his thought and crouched in front of the reptile.

xXx

~ Hello, you, ~ he greeted it.

The snake turned his head away.

~ I'm digesting, young biped, ~

~ Have you had a good meal? ~ Tom asked curiously.

If snakes had eyelids, this one would have narrowed his eyes.
~ You have two heads, ~ it commented.

*What's it talking about? This snake is crazy. We're leaving, Harry. It's not gonna hug me. I told you, the countryside sucks.*

*Wait, it intrigues me!*

~ How is that? ~ Harry asked. ~ I have only one head, until proven otherwise. ~

~ In my nest, there was a two-headed serpent, like you. ~

~ What happened to it? ~

~ One of its heads ate the other and it died, ~ the snake hissed with disdain.

~ I have only one head, ~ Tom awkwardly defended himself.

~ Believe what you want, smooth talker. Now, let me digest my vole in peace. ~

xXx

Tom walked away from the serpent, thoughtfully. Many questions about his potential dual-mindedness were jostling in his head, but he did not expect Harry to answer.

He went back to the wooden tables where the other children were snacking. Mrs. Cole did not ask where he had gone: she simply handed him a slice of bread and a few squares of chocolate.

He ate silently, while Harry remembered the late 1930s were coming. The stock market crack of 1929 had given way to the huge economic crisis called the Great Depression.

Tom had grown up during a period of anguish and restriction. Yet neither Harry nor he had really felt the crisis' effect. Okay, they rarely ate meat and had never had new clothes, but it had not been so terrible.

Was it because neither of them felt the need to possess things or to live in opulence? No, that was not that. Tom positively dreamed of a luxurious existence and he liked to collect trophies.

What made Tom going on was the promise of Hogwarts. He knew his grieve was only temporary and he would one day escape from the Muggle hole where he lived. Like a fanatic, he waited, day after day, for his time to come. And for now he was champing at the bit.

Xxx xxx xxx

As the end of the summer came closer, Tom's and Harry's interactions became tenser. The kid sometimes asked him enthusiastic questions about the cauldrons' materials, the wand's cores or the limits of magic. But he often shouted at him mentally, blaming him for having lied to him.

*Hogwarts doesn't exist! It's a world I invented, and I also invented you, because I'm mad, I'm sick!*

*Hey, no way*, Harry denied. *I know these appointments are disturbing, but you can't expect Muggles to understand.*

*They're so thick, they're the ones who are crazy!*

The doctor had just slammed the door of Tom's room. He started talking to Mrs. Cole in the corridor, but Tom did not try to listen to their conversation. It was the third time since the incident with Billy's
rabbit that the Matron had asked a doctor to see him.

She secretly hoped that one of them would detect an abnormality in Tom's behavior and take him away, either to conduct tests on him or to lock him up. But Tom had always pretended to be an exemplary child before them, and the blokes were leaving very puzzled.

Mrs. Cole introduced them to him in the same way: "This gentleman is there to check if everything is okay. Don't worry, it's a control visit."

Even if I would have loved to do that, Tom had never replied: "Why am I the only one who has to go through these check-ups?". Harry had always stopped him to do so.

Don't look for trouble. You can't do anything about it. Adults don't understand you, it happens a lot, you know.

But Tom did not really listen to his other conscience's reassuring words.

xXx

You lied to me, Harry, he accused. It's always doctors for the madmen who come and never wizards.

And his other thoughts, much less coherent, clashed with each other.

And what if Magic existed but Hogwarts did not want me-and how would they know I'm a wizard-and what if my parents were both Muggles-and I'm taken to the asylum and I never come back-and what if they discovered Harry-and what if I'm ripped off Harry-I would kill them, I would kill them, I would kill them ...

Calm down, Tom, please, Harry said. He will come. There are only a few days left.

Three, Tom added. Three days before September the 1st.

The Headmaster won't be long.

After all, Harry whispered to himself, Billy and Eric don't stop scratching themselves and they started to get a fever. Dumbledore will come soon.

Yet, when Harry was almost inaudible, in a corner of Tom's mind, he began to doubt. What if Dumbledore did not come to get Tom? How would the boy react on September?

And what if Harry was the source of evil, what if he was actively creating Voldemort? But it was impossible, how could he have been in Tom's head in 1938, when he would not be born until 1980? Everything was only a dream, but everything was too realistic, too well organized, to be a dream ...

Fortunately, on the morning of August 30, while Tom and Harry were reading, they distinctly heard Mrs. Cole shout:

“... and take the iodine upstairs to Martha, Billy Stubbs has been picking his scabs and Eric Whalley's oozing all over his sheets – chicken pox on top of everything else!”

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To Be Continued ...
Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, Tom jerks off for the first time.

So you know, there will be some smut in this story. I'll have to add a few tags ...
See you soon and please leave a comment if you wanna make me happy ;)

There were some voices, then the door of Mrs Cole's office closed itself after a long moan, as only a door with unoiled hinges could do.

Is it him? Tom asked, very excited.

I'm not sure, Harry said cautiously. -It must be Dumbledore-damn it, he took his time-

The child got up, all excited, with the idea of going downstairs to spy on the Matron's and the unknown man's discussion but Harry held him back.

You won't make a good impression on him, eavesdropping. Don't forget, he's a wizard, he can't be fooled.

But I wanna know what she says about me! If she talks to him about Turnip or about the other problems, he won't take me with him-I've waited all my life-This old bird would pay for that-

Tom, you're a wizard, Harry interrupted, sliding into bed. Your place at Hogwarts is safe. And now, we'll resume our story, okay? I wanna know what'll happen to Arthur.

He'll succeed in removing Excalibur, obviously , Tom whispered with disdain but he took his novel and pretended to read, although neither he nor Harry were deceived.

All his thoughts were directed towards his room's door which refused to open. He was so tense his magic escaped him for a moment and his wardrobe trembled violently.

Finally, someone knocked twice.

xXx

"Tom? You've got a visitor. This is Mr Dumberton – sorry, Dunderbore. He's come to tell you – well, I'll let him do it," Mrs. Cole said, as lucid as an old dying fish, before leaving.
Dumbledore entered the room with his extravagant purple velvet robe and his long brown hair.

Harry and Tom devoured him with their eyes. The first, because god had he missed the wizard, even if he hadn't care for the agonizing creature in Limbo. The second, because he had waited for that day all his life. Tom narrowed his eyes in spite of himself. So that was a wizard.

*I'll never wear purple robes,* he said indignantly.

*Me neither,* Harry confessed with an invisible smile.

After examining Tom from head to toe, Dumbledore came closer to him, his hand outstretched, and asked:

“How do you do, Tom?”

*Go ahead, shake hands with him.*

Tom hesitated – despite Harry's obvious affection for him, he did not trust the man – but he followed his friend's advice.

Dumbledore sat down on the hardwood chair next to his bed. They looked like a sick person and a visitor in the hospital. To look less fragile, Tom straightened up. He put his book on his bedside table.

"I am Professor Dumbledore," Professor Dumbledore said.

“Professor?” Tom repeated, wincing.

xXx

*Didn't you tell me it was the Headmaster who would come to get me? The doctor of last time was also a "Professor", according to Cole.*

*No,* Harry denied, panicked. *In my case, it is Hag – the gamekeeper who has fetched me. Dumbledore is a teacher. The Headmaster can't pick up everybody, you might have misunderstood.*

*I was sure that...*

Tom was stressed. He did not like this man very much. He had believed real wizards to be as frightening as the Muggle tales's ones, dressed in smart suits, long black cloaks and a mist of mysteries. This man looked mad, typically the kind of people who were kept in the asylum.

“Is that like 'doctor'? What are you here for? Did she get you in to have a look at me?”

*Stop that, Tom!*

*How can we know this man is telling the truth? He may work in the hospice!*

*I tell you he's a Hogwarts Professor, so calm down!*

*You know him then? Aaaah, I remember now-Dumbledore, you were always thinking of him-I don't remember why-Why now?*

*Please focus, Tom.*
"No, no," Dumbledore assured him with a smile Harry and Tom found fake.

"I don't believe you," the child replied. "She wants me looked at, doesn't she? Tell the truth!"

He uttered these last three words in a shrill, almost shocking tone. It was an order that Tom, despite Harry, was used to give.

xXx

I did teach you some manners, didn't I? Harry shouted silently.

I don't like that guy. I've waited four years to go to Hogwarts! Why haven't they sent the man you got? Dumbledore is downright shady.

That's no reason to disrespect him. I totally trust him, okay? Isn't that enough?

When they realized their internal quarrel had to be visible, they blinked, softened their tense mouth and forced themselves to look at Dumbledore, who displayed his usual soft smile.

This man is powerful, Tom admitted, but exactly like you, he hides things from me. I don't like it.

One doesn't judge someone without knowing them, Harry grumbled. Shit - Everything happens like the first time - History repeats itself - Why am I there, then?

Okay, I'll talk to him and I'll see.

"Who are you?" the child asked in a suspicious tone.

Is that what you call striking up a discussion? Harry sighed.

What did you want me to say? If you're so smart, you can do it.

"I told you," Dumbledore replied, with patience. "My name is Professor Dumbledore and I work at a school called Hogwarts. I have come to offer you a place at my school – your new school if you would like to come."

Hogwarts! You were telling the truth! Tom exclaimed. It's crazy, this is the first time I hear this word out loud!

He was so happy, so amazed to finally have a proof Harry had not lied to him, that he jumped from his bed and stepped back as far as possible from Dumbledore, as one moves away from a painting to see it better. As if to verify that all this was real. The older wizard did not seem surprised.

Then Tom remembered he should not be aware of the school of witchcraft's existence, let alone of magic. It was better to continue to act the part of a misunderstood child.

Wise decision, Harry encouraged him, even though he knew Tom's little-to-be monologue would seem badly familiar.

And truth be told, Tom used the same words as memory - Tom did.

xXx

“You can't kid me! The asylum, that's where you're from, isn't it? 'Professor', yes, of course – well, I'm not going, see?” the boy exclaimed, caught in the game. "That old cat's the one who should be in the asylum? I never did anything to little Amy Benson or Dennis Bishop, and you can ask them,
they'll tell you!"

"I am not from the asylum," Dumbledore corrected him. "I am a teacher and, if we sit down calmly, I shall tell you about Hogwarts. Of course, if you would rather not come to the school, nobody will force you —"

Tom sat down fast.

Take me! he cried mentally. I've been waiting for you for years! Dumbledore, let's go right now!

"I'd like to see them try," he said mockingly.

"Hogwarts," Dumbledore continued, "is a school for people with special abilities —"

"I'm not mad!"

Please shut up, Harry got angry. We know you're not nuts.

If I don't look kind of surprised, he'll find it suspicious, Tom explained slowly, as if he was the big one.

"I know that you are not mad," the wizard said. "Hogwarts is not a school for mad people. It is a school of magic."

There was a silence. Tom was as frozen as an ice cube. His eyes alternately fixed each of Dumbledore's, as if he were trying to detect the lie in one of them. In fact, Harry and he were inwardly fighting over the control of their body.

You're still going to talk rubbish, let me talk at your place, Harry said.

It's my body, it's me he's come to see, he doesn't know you're here, Harry!

Well, he's waiting for a reaction!

"Magic?" the child finally whispered.

What was all the fuss about? Harry sneered. You should've let me talk-It's like in the memor-shit-

Stop thinking! I'm enjoying this moment. Why do you always have to spoil everything?

It was one thing to be convinced you were special, it was another to hear it. Until then, Tom still had a very small doubt about his status as a wizard. He never had been able to destroy the tiny probability that Harry was a clever and misleading spirit, whose aim was to torment him. But he was indeed a wizard, he was really extraordinary! Why did not his friend share his joy?

xXx

"That's right," Dumbledore confirmed.

I knew it! the boy roared without a sound.

"It's … it's magic, what I can do?" Harry asked, for Tom was too busy jumping mentally.

Why do you tell him that? I look dumb. Of course it's magic, the child thought.

We're not supposed to know we have powers, remember? Harry retorted.
Then he remembered with despair that memory-Tom had expressed his doubts in exactly the same way: "It's … it's magic, what I can do?"

"What is it that you can do?" Dumbledore asked politely.

Tom decided to please Harry who wanted the big show. He had a monologue in mind that would impress Dumbledore for sure, if that was what his soul wanted, what Harry wanted. The Chosen One sadly listened to words he knew by heart and that he had provoked in spite of himself.

*Tom had so badly misunderstood what I wanted-if only I could stop everything, he thought, as if he could not stop his other self.*

“All sorts. I can make things move without touching them. I can make animals do what I want them to do, without training them. I can make bad things happen to people who annoy me. I can make them hurt, if I want to.”

Tom shuddered, his tongue jammed and his hollow cheeks colored: Harry had gotten out of his torpor and prevented him from uttering worst phrases. But the child pulled away. He wanted to scare Dumbledore.

“I knew I was different. I knew I was special. Always, I knew there was something.”

*Stop that, Tom!*

*My special thing is you, it was an implicit compliment,* the child pointed out.

Harry could not blame him any longer. That was Tom Riddle’s big problem: he was adorable.

XxX

He listened, impassively, to the adorable Tom ordering Dumbledore to prove he was a wizard. Dumbledore asked him to call him "Sir" or "Professor." The boy did it at once. The wizard appeared satisfied, took out his wand and pointed it at the wardrobe.

*Harry, that's a wand, isn't it-oh hey what is he doing - my stuff?*- 

Tom jumped up when his cupboard caught fire. His thoughts were a panicked enumeration of his books and clothes.

*Calm down, Harry said softly, it's not going to burn. Dumbledore isn't a cruel man. He just wanted to give you a lesson.*

*It's still very mean,* the child commented breathlessly, not screaming, which disrupted Harry.

Had he screamed in the Pensieve? Yes, Tom had yelled. In any case, according to Harry, he had yelled. But was it his memory that played tricks on him?

“Aren’t you afraid for your belongings”? Dumbledore inquired with curiosity.

Tom did not answer and walked to his shaking wardrobe. There was something wrong again. In the Pensieve, the kid has asked where he could find a wand, hadn’t he? The Gryffondor did not remember, he was not sure...

*I'm afraid, Tom said. Why is it trembling?*

*Don't worry, Dumbledore's magic won't hurt you.*
He put fire to my wardrobe! the child replied indignantly. You call it a fair act?

Not having much to say for the defense of the wizard, Harry opened the inflamed wardrobe and took out their old treasure box. It contained, unsurprisingly, some objects collected here and there: a harmonica, a thimble and a yo-yo, as well as all the brownie points Tom had accumulated over the years.

Dumbledore gave them a little speech about robbing, controlling magic, about the ethical and cool school Hogwarts was. Tom listened to him half-heartedly. He already knew all this. Harry had told him everything in more details. Hence, he just had to say "Yes, sir," and to rage inwardly.

Why hasn't he noticed all my brownie points, my pictures and my tickets of honor?

xXx

"I haven't got any money," he said, more to put an end to Dumbledore's speech than out of real anguish, for he knew there was a fund for those who needed it.

The professor handed him a leather purse. Tom was so anxious to look at the coins Harry had described him that he forgot to thank Dumbledore.

Is that a Galleon? he asked, looking at a large golden piece.

Yes, the biggest and the gilded coins. But remember, you're not supposed to be aware of anything!

Yes... Then, I have to say...

"Where do you buy spellbooks? he inquired, answering himself: On Diagon Alley. Now he'll give me my list. Will he come with me?-I don't want him to, Harry will be enough-Harry will be much more discreet than him.

As in the Pensieve, Dumbledore agreed he could buy his books and other school supplies on his own. He explained to Tom how to get to the Leaky Cauldron but, of course, Tom did not need to listen. Harry knew the way.

The more he compared Dumbledore and Harry, the only two wizards he knew for the moment, the more Tom found the first displeasing. He thought all his fellows would be like Harry and him: mischievous, reckless and secretive. But Dumbledore was just a joker. Very powerful, certainly, but imprudent. If he had been in his position, Tom would never have let a child go to Diagon Alley unaccompanied, especially if that child was Muggleborn.

Dumbledore was totally unconscious, unlike him who had two consciences.

xXx

"Was my father a wizard?" Tom asked curiously. "He was called Tom Riddle too, they've told me."

I would love to know who my parents were!-Damn ut you can't help me, Harry, can you?-But maybe him, he knows -

Harry imperceptibly curled up. He had always been afraid of letting the few information he knew about Tom's parents leak out. If Tom learned the whole story, he would want to kill his father. But could Harry stop him, when this crime would avenge the pitiful Merope Gaunt? He himself had so many times wanted to kill Peter Pettigrew, and many more times skin Bellatrix Lestrange alive.
Yet his murderous impulses had never been anything but impulses while Tom's anger could easily become an act. Harry knew Tom could do it, he was destined for it. The boy should not know.

"I'm afraid I do not know," Dumbledore said softly, before getting up.

Too bad, I thought he would learn me something new! Tom groaned. I still don't like him--I don't want him to leave, though. He could at least tell me I'm super mature for my age--that my powers are awesome--that he doesn't regret coming in this hole to recruit me--

Then, to held back the first of flesh and blood wizard he had met, Tom confided to him one of his secrets and Harry let him do so, justifying himself this way:

He doesn't think wrong--He only needs some attention--He's a kid--I've been like him--Hagrid was so much warmer with me--

"I can speak to snakes," Tom said with a proud smile. "I found out when we've been to the country on trips—They find me, they whisper to me. Is that normal for a wizard?"

He knew his ability was not common, Harry had told him. That would shut Dumbledore up.

Why in the countryside? Harry asked him. Our first snake was at the sea, with Dennis and Amy.

No, at the sea, it was you who've spoken to the snake, Tom retorted. The first time I've spoken to a snake, it was this summer.

"It is unusual, but not unheard of," Dumbledore replied, looking up into Tom's face for what was so disturbing.

It was not the fact he was a Parselmouth. It was in his eyes that there was something disturbing, as if there were shared, as if his conscience was constantly oscillating between two poles. The child seemed haunted. But it was impossible...

"Goodbye, Tom," he said chillingly. "I shall see you at Hogwarts."

He did not close the door behind him.

Xxx xxx xxx

Harry and Tom spent long minutes analyzing their encounter with Dumbledore. Tom found his cursed child show very funny, his friend was much less enthusiastic. Apart for a few details, it had been the same scene than in the Pensieve. Of course, he could not explain to Tom what was troubling him so much, which annoyed the child a lot.

What's the matter with you? Harry, we're going to Hogwarts! Be happy! Why care about the inflamed wardrobe or the old fool or even Cole? Tom groaned accusingly. What's wrong? Seriously, he haven't been impressed by my powers and I'm not complaining about that, so why are you acting like a brat?

Sorry, Tom, Harry sighed. I can't tell him--Tom shouldn't know--Pensieve--Hey, Tom! What do you think: we ask Mrs. Cole if we can go to Diagon Alley today?

With his purse in his hand, the boy ran out of his room. Harry hid many things from him, he had known for years. But as long as he remained faithful, he could have secrets. After all, Tom also had secrets Harry did not know.
What? Harry asked with astonishment. What can Tom keep for him?-I wanna know-Come on, tell me Tom! Tom, tell me!

But Tom ignored him. He knocked at Mrs. Cole’s office, mentally chanting a silly rhyme to annoy Harry, and went into the room before being invited to. The office was as shabby as the rest of the establishment. The furniture was worn and mismatched and the chairs shouted: “I'm uncomfortable!”

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The Matron did not seem to have noticed them, which was incredible, as the room was only slightly larger than a cupboard.

She may be dead, Tom suggested with hope.

Don't talk nonsense, we wouldn't be alive but thanks to her!

Thanks to her?-Harry doesn't make sense-Oh, chocolates-they look so good-

Harry prevented him from helping himself to chocolates and came nearer to the Matron, who was slumped in her rickety chair.

"Mrs Cole," he called, anxiously. “Everything alright?”

She nodded gently, without looking into his eyes. Harry noticed there was a sheet of virgin paper and a dirty glass on her desk.

Pensieve's images immediately filled his mind. Mrs Cole having been too curious, Dumbledore had hexed her. She was Confunded.

Pouah, Tom silently cried. She stinks of alcohol! Look at this bottle, doesn't surprise me she is in this lame state!

You're right, she must be drunk, Harry added. Let's go.

The boy and his other soul escaped from the orphanage in unison.

Xxx xxx xxx

She's going to scold us, when she'll realize we left without her authorization, Tom thought nervous.

Despite his boastfulness, he did not walk so regularly in London. After school, he sometimes made a detour by the city but he relied on Harry's indications. If left alone, he would be utterly lost.

You remember where it is, huh? he insisted. I'm not afraid, it's just that...

Tom, this is it.

Tom looked up and read aloud:

“The Leaky Cauldron. Yay, as welcoming as the place we come from!”

You don't judge a...

I know, I know, Tom grumbled as he walked in the pub.

The door had not closed yet behind him but his eyes were already everywhere, in search of grand
magic and extraordinary things. He was terribly disappointed. The furniture was as basic as the orphanage's and on top of that it was dirty. Hooded and shady people drank funny mixtures in a dirty and greyish decor and the worst part was that there was no carafe pouring water on its own or self-cleaning glasses. It only smelled of dust and misery.

_Cockroaches-glasses covered with fingerprints-is this pub really held by wizards?-Is that really my first contact with magic?_

"Hello, little one," Tom the bartender said. "You there to pick up your stuff for Hogwarts, I guess?"

"Yes," the child replied in a disdainful tone. "Happy someone notices finally."

"You alone? Come on, I'll show you how to get to Diagon Alley," the wizard suggested as he passed to the other side of the bar.

"I don't need you. I know how to do it," Tom said, before making for the inner courtyard.

"Thank you," Harry added over his shoulder with a slightly twisted smile for Tom wanted to keep a contemptuous expression.

__xXx__

_You didn't need to be so mean, _the Gryffindor grumbled. _Now we're stuck._

_Are you sure they're the right bricks?_

_Yeah, but one needs a wand to open the archway. You can blame your excessive pride._

When Harry was going to force them back into the pub to ask for help, a woman and her children entered the small garbage yard.

"Are you stuck, my boy? she asked gently.

"Yes," Tom replied sadly, as if it were splitting his heart to admit it.

The woman smiled at him, walked over to the wall and tapped the same bricks Harry had tried to strike, caress and demolish earlier. This time they rearranged themselves to form a passage.

_Wow_, Tom whispered, but he kept his face neutral. _It's like you said. It became an arch. Brilliant!_

"Are you gonna be okay by yourself? the witch worried. "These two can't do anything without me and yet they are..."

"I'll be okay," Tom interrupted. "Thank you."

And he made his first steps into the magical world.

__xXx xxx xxx__

Unlike the Leaky Cauldron, which had not impressed himself at all, Diagon Alley was exactly as Harry had described it: fantastic.

All the shops lined up on either side of the alley promised marvels and wonders. He was so excited his thoughts swirled at a dizzying speed. He was reading every sign, observing every wizard who passed by him – it was crowded, only two days before the start of the school year – and commented everything mentally, giving Harry a big buzz.
Where is Florian Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour?

Oh, err... my memories were perhaps confused, Harry panicked. Let's go a little further.

Tom went further into the aisle, noting the names of the shops he wanted to visit. There were so many! But it was a strange sensation to be in a place he had dreamed about all his childhood. He knew every sign by heart. Flourish and Blotts, Eeylops Owl Emporium, Madam Malkin's, the Apothecary, Quality Quidditch Supplies: all these names looked like reminiscences, as if he had already been there as a child or in another life.

Hary had described so well the shopping alley to him that it was as if Tom had already walked it.

xXx

When they passed in front of Gringotts, Tom stared at the goblins in uniform patrolling over the steps. That was hot stuff.

Will I have to open an account?

Oh, errr... I don't know, actually. We'll see later, right?

And you, how did you manage when you were eleven?

My parents had left me some money, Harry said awkwardly.

Maybe mine have too. Let's go!

But Harry pulled Tom away from the bank, assuring him he was too young to worry about his finances. What if Tom made a scandal to access to the vault of his friend Harry who-lived-into-his-head?

They finally arrived in front of an ice cream stand Harry did not know, Ricardo Regal's ice cream.

It's not Florian's, Tom commented, surprised.

But it will still be very good. I've got mixed up, that's all.

Tom did not try to find out more because he was hungry. Harry and he ordered an ice cream which five flavors changed randomly.

"That will be one galleon, please," Ricardo Regal said.

With assurance, the little wizard handed him a big golden coin and began to eagerly lick his ice cream. It was delicious, it was magical. He was so happy to have a taste of his world at last!

xXx

Well, first, we have to buy a wand, Harry said when they had finished their ice cream.

Let's go to Ollivander's, then, Tom ordered, resolutely heading for the wand shop as if he were going there regularly.

"Good morning," he said tentatively, when the door closed behind him.

Harry had described the shop to him many times, but it was not the same to be there for real. In spite of himself, he found the place intimidating. It was small and gloomy, but the silence which reigned
there, in comparison with the hubbub of the exterior, made the place mysterious, holy.

As he examined the green boxes piled on the shelves, a young Ollivander appeared.

"You're heading to Hogwarts in two days, aren't you, little sir?"

Tom nodded.

He's not as old as I thought, he commented.

"Don't you think he looks like a wise and honorable wizard? I tend to see him older than he truly is," Harry answered cleverly.

"Measure him, please," the artisan asked the vacuum.

Magical measuring tapes came out of his desk's drawers and began to measure with precision the length of Tom's left forearm, his spine, the space between his eyebrows and the size of his wrist.

This is just to show off, isn't it?

I don't know, but it was the same sketch for me, Harry confessed nostalgically.

The shop was a special place for him and certainly for every wizard. It was there that one meets his wand, where one synchronises for the first time with his aura. While Tom raised his arms so that Olivander calculated the distance between his ribs, Harry finally located the green box he had been looking for since they had entered the store. He was almost certain it was the one containing his future wand. Suddenly he felt like standing on tiptoes to get it back, but he knew it had to stay there for half a century.

xXx

Ollivander finally summoned his measuring tapes back, consulted them, mumbled a few arithmancy formulas and grabbed a holster at the bottom of a pile.

“Well, well, try this one. Swirl it, go ahead…”

Tom grabbed the wand with confidence for Harry had already explained the procedure to him several times. He turned his wrist, expecting to see red sparks spring up, but nothing happened. He felt very foolish.

Maybe it's a mistake-I'm not a wizard -I'll be sent back to the orphanage -My purse'll be taken back-

It's normal it doesn't work the first time, Harry comforted him. For me too, it took time to find the one.

After twenty minutes of unsuccessful attempts, Tom wanted to yell at the seller. Why did he take all his measures, even the most intimate, if it was to chop the wands at random?

“A tough customer, isn't it? Ollivander mumbled, handing him a new wand. “Try that one, then. Holly, 11 inches long, rather supple, easy to handle…”

Harry recognized it at first glance. It was his wand. So Voldemort had tried it before him! He resisted the urge to catch it, to make it roll between his fingers, to conjure a Patronus. It was Harry Potter's wand, not Tom Riddle's.

Yet, when Tom got hold of it, they both felt a powerful wave of magic in their arms. It had been so
long since Harry had experienced this strange harmony between a piece of wood and his hand! It was like going home after a very long day. It was good. For the first time in a decade, the flow of his magic surrounded him like a protective spiral, causing the atmosphere around him to vibrate, modifying his perception of space, as if everything was now within his reach.

There were sparks. Even through time, the wand had recognized his master. While Olivander was nodding in agreement, something suddenly was off. Tom's muscles clenched, as if he had violent cramps. Sweat dripped behind his ears and his tongue suddenly secreted an abnormal amount of saliva. All his pores were opened at once, in a exudation reflex, liberating physical and metaphysical lymph.

*It rejects me! It rejects me, but you felt it too, eh? It had accepted me! What is the problem?*

*I-I don't know Tom-Calm down-

xXx

"Let go of that wand," Ollivander gritted nervously. "You're going to hurt yourself. It's curious, really curious, almost strange... "

"What's so curious?" Tom asked imperiously, throwing Harry's wand on the desk. "It seemed to work well!"

"At first, yes, no doubt... But it has changed its mind. Don't take it badly, it's not unusual. Try this one instead. Yew, 13 ½ inches, rather stubborn, that said... Perhaps..."

Just as Tom closed his sweaty hand on the wand Olivander held out to him, a bunch of sparks exploded.

*It's the one! Harry, it must be it, I've never felt so good! And you?*

*Oh, it does suit you*, Harry whispered, his eyes fixed on the wand that would kill his parents.

"You see, that wand and that one," Olivander said, pointing successively at the wand in Tom's hand and at the one on his desk, "have a feather from the same phoenix. They are somehow twin. Perhaps the other one will one day recognize its true owner. It's curious, very curious, however, that one but not the other..."

After placing several Galleons on the desk, Tom left the wizard to his rant. He had no time to waste and so much to do!

The rest of the afternoon was devoted to his other school supplies' purchases: spellbooks, a cauldron, vials, a scale, a portable telescope as well as many clothes. Tom did not follow Dumbledore's and Harry's advice and got everything brand new. At the end of the day, he had not enough money to buy himself a pet, let alone a trunk.

*How am I going to carry all that? I only own a Muggle schoolbag!* he lamented, picking up all his bags.

*We'll cope with it, but it serves you right*, Harry snapped.

**Xxx xxx xxx**

The morning of the first of September finally came. Anne had told the other children that before dying, Tom's mother had enrolled him in a very remote boarding school, and that he would only
come back during the summer now.

No one, not even Margaret, pretended to be sad. Everyone was relieved to say bye-bye to the strange kid who spoke by himself and who caused inexplicable and frightening incidents.

"You know how to get there, don't you?" Mrs Cole asked, still a little Confunded. “Everything’s okay, come on.”

Harry had kept his word: at the Leaky Cauldron, just before they had returned to the Muggle world, he had thrown a Reductor Curse on Tom's purchases so they fit in their messenger bag. He just hoped the robes would not be too fucked-up when turned back to their initial size. After more than ten years without magic, it was already a feat he had managed to cast a spell correctly.

So they took the bus to King's Cross with only Tom's bag tightly squeezed in their lap. It certainly attracted less attention than the enormous trunk Harry had wandered with during his schooling.

*How can wizards lack so much practical sense?* he wondered when they saw a wizard family dragging five or six trunks.

*Harry, they don't need practical sense! We don't need it, we have magic!* Tom replied, amazed.

xXx

He knew King's Cross rather well, as they used to take the train for the countryside or the sea every summer at this station, but it was the first time he had ever been there alone. He felt free. That night, he'd be at Hogwarts! It was a day he had waited all his childhood, so to speak, all his life. He hardly realized that his new existence awaited him, just a few steps from him.

*Platform 9... 10... That's it!* he exclaimed mentally, with the burning desire to point at the barrier.

Harry smiled. He did not bother to explain to him one last time how to get to Platform 9 3/4 and completely abandoned him their body.

No Muggle seemed to notice the overexcited boy who leaned resolutely on a solid metal ticket box, a schoolbag glued to his chest, and no one realized that a moment later he had disappeared.

Tom let out an exhilarated laugh when he saw the Hogwarts Express, whose scarlet locomotive was spitting large clouds of steam.

*I'm really going to Hogwarts! Harry, finally, the time has come!*

xXx

In the train, there was an empty compartment where he would be able to talk to Harry with ease. The latter told him how important it was to socialize, but the kid did not listen to him.

*If it is to get on my nerves and spoil my joy, shut up,* he growled.

Three seconds later he was babbling again:

*All those blissful parents who watch their children go to Hogwarts... Oh, look at this one, she's crying! She's certainly jealous of her siblings going to Hogwarts and not her. She's tall, she must be at least eleven though... maybe she's a Squib! That'd explain why she's staying on the platform! Harry, are you sulking?*
Harry did not speak to him during the whole journey. Curled up, he listened to Tom chatting with other children who had sat in their compartment. Tom answered to them politely but, and Harry could not help but find it amusing, he insulted them vigorously in his head.

_This boy is a dumbass, my word! And that one with his treats isn't better. Come on, Harry, don't pout, you're the only one who is interesting enough! I'm dead bored. Even if they're wizards, they're still kids. Harry, Harry, what flavour is this one?_

He was holding a Bertie Bott's bean whose color was a delicate bogie green. Just to contradict, Harry told him the candy was mint flavoured and carried it to their mouth.

_You traitor!_ the child thought indignantly. _You got revenge, now, stop sulking. Pleaaase._

Harry finally consented to reintegrate his conscience and they locked themselves in a chatty silence.

_xXx_

The hours passed. The students sharing their compartment judged Tom depressing and went to visit other schoolmates. Tom was pleased to be alone, watching the landscape becoming more and more wild, while harassing Harry with questions whose answers he knew by heart.

When he literally recognized the last few kilometers before Hogsmeade, he took out his miniature dresses from his bag and thought:

_And now?_

_Don't worry_ , Harry sneered, taking out their wand without looking at it – this wand made him sick.

_“Amplificatum,”_ he murmured.

The robe which was smaller than a post-it note turned back to a normal size. It was a bit crumpled, with a sleeve slightly shorter than the other but, on the whole, it looked like a robe.

_Magic is wicked,_ the child said, putting on his uniform with delight.

_xxx xxx xxx_

Just like Harry the first time he had seen Hogwarts' shape, Tom could not hold back a happy grin. The castle, with its towers with pointed roofs, its large and old stones, its narrow windows scattered over the walls, commanded respect. It was sublime and it was home.

Harry had told him that first years were traditionally taken to school by boats, but Tom and he were surprised to be lead to the carriages drawn by the Theastrals.

_Didn't you tell me that..._

_It must have changed since I was a student_ , Harry quickly retorted.

_That's right, it's been almost twelve years... You're not gonna cry, are you?_

Harry would have given him a little punch if it was not for the three other students in their carriage. They were third year and looked smarter than the kids who have shared their train ride.

"What House do you belong to?" Tom asked.

The three friends looked at him for the first time.
"Ravenclaw," said one of them, pointing at his blue and bronze necktie. “And you?”

“Don’t you see he’s a first year?” another intervened, before bending over to Tom. “Hey, little one, what House do you want to be sent?”

"Ravenclaw isn’t bad," Tom said cautiously.

"Did you hear that?" the first boy laughed. “Ravenclaw is the best, you’ll soon realize it!”

Some wizards are stupid, Tom thought with amazement. I thought everyone knew Slytherin was the best one.

I never said that! Harry protested.

Yeah, I know. Gryffindor is good too, for people like you.

What does that mean? Hey, Tom!

But Harry knew very well what Tom meant by that, because he had access to all his thoughts.

xXx

After getting down from the carriage, Tom insisted on caressing the invisible Theastral who had brought them there. Some pupils looked at him in terror. Some, those who saw the winged horses, gave him a shy smile.

Stop bragging, Harry grumbled, but he was disturbed by something else.

Hagrid was the one who had domesticated the Theastrals, he was sure of that. So why were they already pulling the carriages in 1938?

When they reached the castle's gates, they were inspected by a man Harry did not recognize, but who was probably this time’s caretaker.

“Your pockets! Why do you have a messenger bag?” the wizard barked, looking suspiciously at Tom, as if his bag contained dangerous artefacts.

"I had no trunk," Tom replied brusquely.

The wizard nodded, cast him a Revelation Spell and, satisfied, pushed him into the Entrance Hall.

xxxxxxxxxx

It's beautiful, huh?

It's like you said, Tom whispered. It's like I imagined. To say you lived there for seven years... And to say I'll live there for seven years too!

In the Entrance Hall, a teacher had gathered all the first years to explain the Sorting Ceremony to them. Tom was not listening at all, he preferred to look around himself, amazed. He suddenly recognized Peeves, the poltergeist.

It was the same as for Diagon Alley. Harry had told him so much about Hogwarts that he felt like he had already been there. Besides, some portraits greeted him, as if they had seen a former student, Harry, into his eyes.
Tom, listen to what the professor...

Harry, look, Peeves is putting wax everywhere!

Don't pay attention to him. If he notices you have noticed him, he won't leave you alone. Come on, it's time to see the Great Hall.

Tom followed his schoolmates without looking at them. He was trembling with impatience, and when the professor pushed open the Great Hall’s doors, revealing the immense hall, he was nothing but euphoria.

xXx

Candles hovered above the tables, as Harry had promised. The ceiling imitated a peaceful and starry sky, as Harry had told him. Four long tables, at which older students were seated, represented the four Houses, and at the front, at the High Table, the staff was seated.

The golden plates were empty, for the Feast would not begin till after the Sorting Ceremony. With disdain, Tom noticed that the other first years were stressed, even frightened. He had only one desire: sit on the stool, put on the Hat and be sent to Slytherin! The House of Snakes would then bring him to glory.

He wanted to do great things and nothing would stop him, because his faithful Harry would always be with him to counsel, assist and comfort him if something went wrong. Of course Harry had told him a scary number of times that all the Houses had their qualities and flaws and that it would not be so bad if he was sent to Hufflepuff but... Harry himself had a preference for Gryffindor.

He had praised his own House's virtues so much Tom did not find it interesting to be part of it. It was as if he had already been a Gryffindor: he knew everything from the Common Room with its brown leather armchairs and its warm hearth, to the dormitories decorated in red and gold, to the fraternal atmosphere that reigned between the students. He wanted to discover the mysterious Slytherin and Harry's macabre stories would not stop him.

“Tom Riddle!” he was finally called.

Some students stupidly laughed at his name.

Don't mind them.

No need to patronize me. We're used to this, with the other kids in the orphanage. Let's go.

xXx

The child sat on the stool and put the Hat on his head. The artefact was so wide it covered a part of his face, as Harry had described to him and a voice rang inside his skull. It was a strange experience. They were now three in there, it was getting quite busy.

Would we have already met? the voice said.

No, Tom thought, dumbfounded. He added, to Harry: This hat is nuts, isn't it?

Harry did not answer. He tried to make himself very small but he had the impression the Hat had already noticed his presence. He hoped the artefact would not tell Mr Dippet. It would make things complicated if they learned that a student had two consciences, and that one of them came from the future.
But... Well, if you don’t want to confess anything, the Hat renounced. I see an already seasoned heart, a will to prove yourself. A lot of bravery, but also intelligence, a certain coldness, an impressive maturity for your age. Hum, Gryffindor could help you enjoy your...

Gryffindor! Tom protested. Slytherin, send me to Slytherin, you pointy... hat!

I maintain what I said, there is a large part of you telling me that Gryffindor could... But so be it, then...

“SLYTERIN!”

The Slytherin Table applauded him loudly. Some of the pupils greeted him and congratulated him when he sat down, but as soon as the dishes appeared on the table, everyone began to drink and eat without paying attention to him.

Tom helped himself to all that Harry recommended to him and began to eat, thinking.

What did he mean by Gryffindor? Besides, how can your house help me? Enjoy what?

Hum, Harry answered, hesitating. I think it meant "enjoy your youth", something like that.

Pff, the only thing Gryffindor has to do with me is you.

It's still half your soul, Harry replied.

I just have to split my soul in two, then, Tom said casually. Hey, what's going on, why is our belly so twisted?

Sorry, I'm not hungry anymore.

Xxx xxx xxx

After the Start-of-Term Feast, the Head Boy and the Head Girl accompanied the first years to the Slytherin dungeons. They stopped before a bare wall, dimly lit by two torches. The other ten new students were puzzled, but Tom was displaying his usual superior air.

"You need a password to enter," he informed a little girl who seemed terribly lost.

“How do you know that? You've got a sibling in Slytherin?"

“I know it, that's all.”

Stop showing off, Tom. If you haven't heard, the password is "bifid tongue", that means...

"Forked", thank you Harry, but I do have a brain too.

The Slytherin Common Room was remarkably similar to Harry's time's one. The black and dark green leather armchairs were perhaps brighter and the pictures hanging on the walls sharper, but overall, it was the same dark, cold room.

Tom was a little tensed being under the lake, with no other light than candles. All this made him think of a posh orphanage but he did not show his angst to Harry, lest the latter rushes to the Headmaster to get them transferred to Gryffindor.

The Head Boy showed them the first-year boys' dormitory, reminded them not to divulge the password to anyone and abandoned them without further ado.
“Amplificatum! Amplificatum! Amplificatum!” Harry repeated, tapping each of the miniature stuff Tom was pulling out of their schoolbag.

Their canopy bed was quickly congested with school supplies and clothing.

And now, what do we do with all of this?

You’ll have to buy a trunk, I guess, Harry sighed, sliding his wand into their bedside table's drawer.

I'd rather keep it under my pillow, Tom said as he opened the drawer.

What use will it be if you can't cast a spell?

But you, you know magic, Tom put his wand under his pillow. Why is he looking at us?

“You can already cast some spells?” the blond kid who had settled himself on the next bed was astonished. “You must come from a Pure-blood family.”

Harry, what's a Pure-blood?

Harry grimaced mentally. How did he put this? All these years he had conscientiously left the Blood Theory out of their conversations, not wanting to give Tom bad ideas. He had not even spoken to him about the House Elves' condition.

Harry! Harry?

Harry panicked. Not knowing how to react, he sank into his comfortable bubble, as if ignoring Tom's interrogations would make them disappear. He soon realized it was a mistake that would cost him dearly.

xXx

“What is a Pure-blood?” Tom asked the other boy.

The latter, who had hitherto looked impressed, did not conceal his contempt.

“You're a Slytherin and you don't even know that?”

He came closer to Tom, most likely to scare him, but Tom did not move. He did not even get up.

Harry, what are you doing? This guy is looking for trouble. What is it, a Pure-blood?

Harry immediately emerged from his bubble and his magic, through Tom, crackled, as if to dissuade the other Slytherin from coming closer to his protégé.

Harry, shit, what's a Pure-blood? What is his problem?

"You're Muggle-born, aren't you?" the other Slytherin laughted, without noticing his bed's curtains were waving while there was no airstream in the dormitory.

Tom was worried, he did not understand why the other guy was bugging him. Fortunately, Harry took control of their body, assuring him that he had nothing to fear. Tom sighed. He had absolute confidence in Harry. If the other guy had insulted him, it would never happen again.
"No, I'm not a Muggle-born," Harry replied firmly. “I know more about dark magic or about magic in general than you, so I'd strongly advise against provoking me.”

The other Slytherin gauged him with a look that was intended to be threatening, but Harry let out a laugh. The kid was beardless and surely unable to cast more than ten elementary spells. Tom sneered silently with glee. Harry was an extraordinary guy.

"I'm from the Avery family," Albert Avery finally said, his face humble again.

He held out his hand to Tom, who shaked it without hesitation.

"I'm Tom Riddle," he said, scrutinizing the other boy's reaction.

*Does my name evoke anything? - What a pity, it doesn't look like it - I was sure my father was a wizard -*

Harry censured his thoughts, which were all about the Gaunts and the Riddles, which inevitably annoyed his friend.

*It's useless to hide your thoughts from me, I know what you're thinking. I know you Harry, you thinking my father is no wizard, right? You think I'm pitiful, clinging to my family name.*

*You're wrong , Harry retorted, I don't find it ridiculous. But is that really important?*

It was not the right thing to say.

*Don't you care about my parents? Tom said, shocked. I wanna know and I'm sure I can find answers here. We'll have to go to the library as soon as possible.*

*Yeah, we'll go there ASAP , Harry whispered, pulling the blankets over their body.*

*Ah, and what is a Pure-blood, by the way?*

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**To Be Continued ...**

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Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, tell me what you think about this chapter if you want to!
First and second years (1938-1940 / 11-13 years old)

Chapter Summary

Tom makes himself at home at Hogwarts. He is terribly interested in his family, in the Blood Theory and in masturbation.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.
Maybe he knows my father then! Sphinx, does that ring a bell with you?

Tom, I...

But Tom wasn't listening to his friend anymore for Slughorn now had all his attention. If this teacher knew his father...

"I..." he began.

"Oh, no, I'm so stupid," Slughorn said with a sly smile and a vague gesture of his hand. “Sphinx's name isn't Riddle but Puzzle, how could I be so wrong? Well, in any case, Mr. Riddle, pay more attention. My subject requires a lot of concentration.”

All the rest of the class, Tom properly wrote the methodological advices Slughorn dictated to them, but his heart was not in this. Several times, Harry finished the sentences he had stopped writing along the way.

Do you really think my father was no wizard?

I don't know, Tom, Harry got a little irritated. And it's not flobberworm but wormwood.

Tom scratched his parchment.

Xxx xxx xxx

Throughout the month of September, Tom's mood oscillated dangerously between two extremes. He was, half the time, ecstatic to finally be at Hogwarts. The castle itself was dreamlike. And the other half of the time, he was depressed and mad at Harry.

Between the classes, he walked in the corridors on whose walls were hanged animated portraits, opened every door on his way and searched, following Harry's clues, the closest secret passage. He sometimes took a staircase several times in a row, only to see where it was going to lead him and, as soon as he had the opportunity, he would sneak into the Park to wander around the edge of the Forbidden Forest or to look for the Lack's extraordinary creatures Harry had told him about.

He also had had no difficulty in obtaining a new scholarship from Professor Dippet who, unlike Dumbledore, was very easy to manipulate. Tom had look at him with puppy-dog eyes, had played the part of a Muggle-born orphan having spent his first Galleons with too much enthusiasm and the wizard had granted him another purse on the spot.

"Take care of it this time," he had warned him. “Diagon Alley is a place encouraging inconsiderate expenditure, but I shall be less forgiving the next time.”

"It won't happen again, Professor Dippet," Tom had replied, eagerly slipping the purse into his pocket.

Harry had then drove them to the Owlery, where they had borrowed a school owl to order a trunk and a few treats Harry was nostalgic for.

So life was much nicer than the one he had led at the orphanage, even though it was strange to have to share a dorm with other students. Fortunately, his dormmates understood he was more of the introverted kind and left him alone.

None of them had thought of mocking him. Albert Avery had probably advised them not to do so. Albert was a pedantic child but he was smart enough to recognize a stronger wizard than himself,
and from the first night he had felt Tom was not your ordinary kid.

xXx

As for the classes, Tom was very mixed. The professors were not incompetent, far from it – Harry had assured him they were much better than some himself had had – but they seemed to think that first years did not own a brain. Consequently the lessons were frightfully slow. The worst part of it was that most of his classmates were genuinely struggling, especially the Muggle-borns. When one of them raised their hand to ask for explanations about a notion or a wand movement which was the easiest thing in the world, Tom was internally raging.

Stop shouting mentally, Harry reproached him. The others don't hear you but I do and it isn't nice to endure your complaints all day long.

But Harry, they're as stupid as Billy Bishop or Elliot Frank! How can you stay so calm?

They are children, some of them have never heard of magic until last month. I've gone through the same thing. Please be patient, everyone is progressing at their own pace.

Neither had I held a wand before this summer! And yet, look!

With an angry wand movement, Tom sent his pen to the ceiling.

"Congratulations, Mr. Riddle!" a very young Flitwick chirped. “It was a beautiful movement, though a little brusque. Ten points for Slytherin!"

The Gryffindors groaned. It was another thing that annoyed Tom. Harry had portrayed him Hogwarts as a great home but reality was not so pretty. Gryffindors and Slytherins hated each other, Ravenclaws believed themselves the elite and...

So you had to ask the Sorting Hat to put you in Hufflepuff, Harry teased him.

Tom did not deign to reply.

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All these years, Harry had sold him such a sweet dream, he had told him so many times how the school worked and what he would be studying there, that Tom could not help but be a bit blasé. Everything his schoolmates had the chance to discover, he felt as if he had already seen it in another life.

If Harry had kept the secret, if he had not told him anything, maybe Tom would have been sincerely happy to enter Hogwarts. Perhaps, like the other boys, he would have sought to make friends, he would have had difficulty doing his homework, and would have eagerly tasted all the dishes of the dinner.

Well, you gotta try this. Why don't you taste it? Harry asked, pointing mentally at a stew dish.

You told me you didn't like it, that it was a super heavy dish...

Yeah, but as we don't have the same taste, here we go.

Harry made a gesture towards the dish but he could not catch the spoon. His arm was stuck in front of him, as if he had no elbow nor wrist. Harry tried to fight Tom to free his arm but it was as if he had a cast. Albert looked at him anxiously.
“Are you okay, Tom?”

"Yeah," Harry mumbled. “Cramp."

Stop blocking me , he got annoyed. Don’t you see Albert finds it weird?

Don’t use my body without my permission. I don’t want to taste this stew, Tom replied, but he consented to help himself to the dish he found, in spite of himself, rather good.

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As a child, Harry and Tom had been fighting hard and their relationship had never really been quiet. However, the more the school year progressed, the more frequent were their clashes. It was always about the same problems: Harry did not want to talk to him about the Pure-bloods, Harry did not understand why Tom was not trying to make friends, Harry did not understand why Tom was looking for his last name in all the school's registers.

It was very tiring.

The Christmas holidays arrived in the blink of an eye. When Professor Dippet asked them if they were going home for the hols, Harry and Tom responded in unison, which had become sadly rare.

“No, I’d rather stay at Hogwarts, if that's possible.”

"Of course, Mr. Riddle. I don't worry about you, your professors can't stop praising your talent.”

Dumbledore, who was passing by, glanced at them before disappearing behind a wall.

What does he want? He's the only one who doesn't like me.

He's just more impartial than the others, that's all , Harry grumbled.

What do you mean, that I'm fooling the others? That I don't deserve respect?

Not at all!

“Mr. Riddle, is everything okay?” the Headmaster suddenly asked.

The Slytherin boy rearranged his face, which had twisted under the effect of his internal dispute, and responded with delicacy:

"All is well, Professor Dippet. Good day to you, and thank you for allowing me to stay for the holidays.”

xXx

Tom finished his homework in one day. He had planned to spend his two free weeks searching for information about his father. He was very intrigued, it had to be admitted, but what prompted him to do this research was Harry's attitude.

As soon as they evoked Tom's family, in one way or another, Harry would close on himself and refuse him his thoughts. The Slytherin had no idea what he could hide from him. How could Harry know anything about his parents? And if he was actually aware of something, why would not he tell him about it? Who could have been Tom Riddle Senior?

xXx
Harry had been curled up for many hours and it began to weigh on him because, despite the rottenness of his other conscience, he already missed his company.

*Tom, what do you think about taking a break?*

*But I haven't looked into this one...*

Harry sighed. For the fifth consecutive day, Tom had insisted on spending his afternoon peeling books from the Library, looking for a Riddle. He had begun with the shelf from the bottom and gradually traced back to those closest to the exit. In five days, however, he had progressed only a section and a half.

*It will take you years to open and close all the books of the Library, are you aware of that?*

*So what? I have seven years in front of me,* Tom replied wickedly.

*Tom... If your father had been a wizard, he would have left more obvious traces in the school than his name on a borrowing card!*  

*How do you know? You, for example, your name as nowhere to be found, and yet you've been a pupil here, haven't you?*  

*Thin ice-and shit-I wasn't very special,* Harry said hastily. *On the other hand, I'm sure you can find people of my family in registers or on trophies.*  

*Maybe my father wasn't very special either,* Tom retorted, upset. *That doesn't mean he doesn't deserve to be find by his own son.*  

*I never said that. Come on, I'll help you,* Harry whispered, drawing a book to him.

**xXx**

At the end of the Christmas holidays, Tom, harassed by Harry, put an end to his investigation.

*I don't think it's good for you to want to prove at all costs your father was a wizard. What does it change? I, too, am an orphan and...*  

*But you know your two parents were wizards, you know what they looked like! I know nothing about my mother, not even her name. At least I know my father's name. I wanna know where I'm from, it's normal, right?*  

Harry was not listening.

*What did you say? How do you know my parents were both wizards?*  

*You... you told me, no?* Tom hesitated but in the background, his thoughts revealed Lily and James Potter's faces.  

*How do you know their faces?* Harry asked, his intestines twisting in every direction.  

*Sometimes you think of them. I've overheard your thoughts, that's all. What? What does it change? They're not ugly, you don't have to be ashamed.*  

*Nothing at all,* Harry replied quickly. *I was surprised, that's all.*

While Tom was too busy to have diarrhea to pay attention to him, Harry thought it was rather ironic
that Tom already knew the faces of people he would kill decades later.

**Xxx xxx xxx**

The rest of the school year passed without noticeable events. Tom had established himself as the most gifted student of his promotion. His maturity, his politeness and his quietness gave him a mysterious aura, which attracted as much the professors as the other pupils.

Many were watching him discreetly and smiling when his good answers earned him praise and House points. Unlike Hermione, Harry thought, he did not look like an unbearable intellectual nerd, but like a bright, studious and relatively humble boy.

He was also taken for a dreamer, for he spoke little and often looked deeply in thoughts.

Although his results were excellent and his obsession with his father and the Pure-blood had died, Harry was worried about them. Their relationship had not really deteriorated, but their ways of thinking were becoming increasingly different. Tom had grown up. When he was younger, he was counting on Harry to protect him and to sell him the dream that one day they would leave the orphanage. But now that he and Harry had spent almost a year at Hogwarts, Tom did not need him as much.

He often turned him down when Harry offered him help.

*Let me do it alone. I'm sick of you doing everything.*

*But you don't hold your wand right,* Harry replied, giving himself the impression of being Hermione.

Had he grown old without realizing it? He no longer felt as a teenager, after all these years educating and monitoring Tom.

*It's my body, why do you always have to stick your nose into my business?*

Harry laughed.

*Your body? Tom, we share the same body, so I have the right to intervene from time to time, don't you think so?*

*Whatever! You already had a body before, I saw it. So why did you come into mine, eh? Could you not haunt someone else?*

*He saw my body-How is it possible-Have you seen my body?* Harry asked, flipped out.

**xXx**

Tom sank back into his chair and dropped his wand next to him. He smiled slyly, looking very pleased with himself. Albert Avery, Byron Mulciber, Nath Rosier and Callum Nott, who shared his dorm, gave him a questioning look but did not intervene. They were used to Tom's strange behaviour. From time to time his face changed at full speed, as if he were struggling with contradictory emotions.

It was part of his character, surely. Tom was definitely an abnormal guy and, when he spent long minutes scrutinizing his reflection, as if looking for someone else in it, he was outright scary.

But the Slytherins did not judge personal fads, what mattered to them was grandeur. And even if Tom Riddle was weird, they still were fascinated by him for the boy definitely had a lot of power.
His magic was incredible for his age. He certainly had not lied when, at the very beginning of the school year, he had claimed to know dark magic.

Tom Riddle would become an exceptional wizard and the other Slytherins, who did not have his capabilities, had every interest in not getting on his way. Then they pretended not to see the glimmer of madness that sometimes danced in his eyes.

_Harry, you're very bad at hiding your thoughts and emotions, you know that?_ Tom snickered. _So yes, after all this time spent with you, I know what you look like. Bespectacled, green eyes, black messy hair...

_Shit-That sucks-What c...

Why do you mind so much?_ Tom asked curiously. _It always intrigued me, you seem to have so many secrets... Does that have anything to do with the hooded man?

What are you talking about-

_Looks like it has something to do with him_, Tom concluded. _You know, your previous life interests me. In fact, I don't understand how it is that you are here, with me. There must be a reason for that. I don't understand why, if you died only twelve years ago, I didn't see your name on any trophy, any book, any desk._

_I told you, I was not special._

_I don't believe you. If you reincarnated in me, it's because something unimaginable happened at the end of your life. Fortune doesn't do this kind of things at random._

Harry muttered they would talk about it later, somewhere else than in the Common Room, for they were definitely attracting attention with their constipated expression. He grabbed Tom's wand, trying to force him to practice a hex they knew by heart, but his magic overflowed and he unintentionally cast a Disarming Spell.

_XX_

_Shit, you're not supposed to be able to cast that_, Harry lamented, when he saw a third year's wand jump in the air.

“Hey, my wand!” the latter cried, rising to pick it up, but it once again slipped out of his hands as Tom had just whispered a little _Accio._

_Fuck, you're a bsolutely not supposed to be able to cast this one, Tom... You promised to keep this for yourself. Accio, seriously...You have no limit?!_

_Oh, shut up. Look, he comes towards us. He doesn't look nasty._

The third year stood before them, curious.

“Wouldn't you be the first year prodigy? Riddle, right?”

Tom looked at him up and down and felt Harry tense as if he had walked on a lego block.

_He doesn't look sane, this guy_, Harry grumbled, examining the emaciated face of the unknown boy. _Don't talk to him, Tom. I forbid you to do it. You listening to me?_

It was one of his flaws that Tom could not bear. Harry had the unfortunate habit of forbidding him
certain actions without explanation, as if he were afraid of what might result from them. Out of contrariness, Tom decided to prolong the discussion.

“That's right, I'm Tom Riddle,” Tom said, ignoring the panic of his soul. “Here, your wand.”

You're really freaking out for nothing, Harry. I must admit he is frankly ugly, but he's perhaps very intelligent. And you harassed me for months to make friends.

But not him-I have a bad feeling-

"Thanks,” the older boy whispered, slipping his wand into his pocket. “Very beautiful magic, for a first year. I could teach you other tricks, if you like.”

What do you think? Tom asked.

He inspires me no trust, drop it-Tom, this guy is really, really a fishy one-You know my answer, anyway-

Okay , said Tom mentally, but aloud, he pretended to hesitate:

“Maybe. What's your name?”

“John Lestrange,” said the future father-in-law of Bellatrix Lestrange born Black, shaking Tom's hand.

In the summer of 1939, Tom returned to the orphanage with a heavy heart. In spite of his disappointments and frustrations, he had grown attached to his dorm, to the other Slytherins who manifested respect and fear in front of him, and to the freedom granted to model pupils.

The school's rules were not strict enough to prevent him from hanging out in the corridors at night, avoiding the Head Students and the concierge, old Fox, as he was called. Harry tolerated his nocturnal escapades for the simple reason that he had confided to him he too had often wandered around the castle long after curfew. Why did he allow him with much reluctance what he himself had done without scruple being younger, Tom did not know. It was an adult thing.

Throughout the train ride to London, Tom and Harry remained very silent, each ruminating his problems. While Tom was totally revolted, having to return to the Muggle world, Harry was desperate to remember the exact date that would mark the beginning of the Second World War. He had had to learn the chronology of the conflict in primary school but he sadly did not remember a thing.

Had the USSR and Germany already concluded their non-aggression pact? Had Germany already invaded Poland? When would the Nazis put the final solution in place?

What was certain was that he would not find answers in History books. Like all the others, he would have to wait for the events to happen.

Harry suddenly noticed Tom was in deep conversation with John Lestrange, who had just entered their compartment. He had made himself as small as possible, for fear of accidentally showing images of Bellatrix Lestrange, Sirius, Narcissa Malfoy, Tonks, Neville's parents, or so many others who were definitely not from this time. He had retreated so far away from the world that it took him long seconds to understand what Tom and his new friend were discussing.
“Are you really interested? If you want, you can come to my house this summer, we have a lot of books on the subject.”

"I'd like to," Tom muttered, "but I won't be able to."

“Are your parents strict?”

“We'll say that, yes.”

"A respectable family, then," Lestrange smiled gently. “I can summarize the Blood Theory for you now, but we have to stay discreet. Some people may misunderstand.”

xXx

He got up to close the door of their compartment, he cast a Silence Spell and he sat down. His long straight hair formed two curtains around his face as he leaned over to Tom and his eyes were fixed in his. He had large violet circles streaked with pink veins under his eyes.

“You must know Pure-bloods are the only wizards whose magic is intact, immaculate.”

Tom nodded.

“Half-bloods, their veins are soiled but they can still serve the cause, especially if their Muggle blood has been diluted after a few generations.”

"I agree," Tom said, even though he was himself a Half-blood, even though he was now almost persuaded to be a Mud...

"Mudblood," John snickered, "that's a name that's good for..."

"Muggle-borns," Tom finished.

*My mother died in childbirth, she can't be a witch-My father doesn't exist anywhere in Hogwarts-The Bloody Baron doesn't know his name-My features aren't familiar-I'm a Mudblood-

"These are the Blood Theory's foundations. Pure-bloods must naturally dominate other wizards, but also all magical creatures. House Elves, hybrids, vampires, all must submit to Pure-bloods, it's the normal course of things. And at the bottom of the ladder, there stand the Muggles."

Tom shuddered. If John learned he was going to spend the summer with the Muggles he despised so much...

*If he discovers I live with muggle orphans, he'll think less of me-He may plunge my head into the loo, as he did for...

*Hey, Tom, you weren't talking about Blood Theory, were you?

*Don't mind me, Harry, it's not your business.

*Tom! Tom!

But the child did not reply. John's thesis was as frightening as it was convincing. Was not it natural that the purest, the strongest, the healthiest were at the very top of the hierarchy? Was not putting everyone on the same level genuine violence? However, he, who was not a Pure-blood but who nevertheless supported their cause, to which world did he belong?
The summer in the orphanage would have been unbearable if Tom had not had two brand new distractions.

The first one was the *Blood Theory*. Why had Harry, who was so smart and so sensible, refused to talk to him about something so important? John's thesis was as simple as it was obvious, even though Tom was struggling to worship it with his whole soul, for it did not really favor his caste: Half-Blood or perhaps Mudblood. It must also be said that Harry found this theory abominable.

The second one was an inopportune reaction of his body. He vaguely remembered that, as a kid, his penis had sometimes become hard in the shower or when he was fiddling with it for fun but Harry had always reassured him as best as he could. It was normal. When he had his own wee-pee, it sometimes hardened too.

During this summer, however, these spontaneous erections became more and more frequent. And Tom had noticed something else: he began to grow hair on the pubis.

Harry had weighed up the pros and cons and had quickly concluded he preferred to talk about puberty with Tom rather than about atrocious theories. If it could distract his friend, if it could push back his questions about Muggles' right to live, he was ready to tell him how one makes babies.

*Harry, here we go again... Are you sure it's normal? And there's liquid this time.*

Tom had just woken up and he was already annoyed. His pants were all sticky and the thin hairs around his sex were stuck with a transparent substance.

*It looks like glue, he thought. *Harry, is that some kind of blood?*

*XX*

Harry tried to remember his first morning hard-on but he failed. Did it happen in Little Whinging? If that was the case, one thing was certain: he had not called Dudley for help — and certainly not Vernon or Petunia. And if it had happened at Hogwarts, did Ron and he had had a newly pubescent boys' typical discussion? He could not remember and it depressed him, as if this memory gap was proof his previous life was definitely behind him.

How long has it been since he had *really* thought of Ron and Hermione?

*That's normal, Tom. It means you're growing up,* he said reassuringly, pinching his other self’s cheek.

Tom immediately regained control of his arm. Harry did not take his anxiety seriously and it was bothering him.

*No, really, I won't have an "erection" as you say, every morning of my life. And last night, during dinner, it was awful. Are you sure it's not blood?*

Harry smiled. He should not have.

*Don't jerk me around, Harry. It's not your body, you don't realize how unpleasant it is to grow up. Sometimes I'd like to be like you.*

*What do you mean? Dead?*
No, just a soul. At least, you, you don't have a pig-headed sex, at least you don't have to suffer these bizarre bodily reactions.

You'll see, soon enough you'll take pleasure in having a bon-getting an erection.

Yeah, sure, Tom replied dubiously. And how do we clean this up, the Muggle way?

Exactly.

xXx

By the end of the summer, Tom had absolutely forgotten John Lestrange and his reactionary thesis. He had become addicted to masturbation – or, as Harry said, to "handjob".

He had changed his mind. It was a habit, Harry had been right: erections were fantastic. Obviously, the first times, he had not known what to do with this embarrassing part of his body. But since he knew how to relieve his painful sex, he wondered how he could have lived without it.

As soon as he had a free moment, he locked himself in his room, slipped under his sheets, lowered his pants and his underpants and touched himself. Or rather, Harry touched him.

It had not been easy to convince Harry to show him how to do it. While he was more experienced than Tom, this selfish person wanted nothing to do with it.

It's too creepy, Tom, as you often say, it's your body. I can't imagine myself doing that... the Chosen One had stammered, terribly embarrassed.

Harry, Tom had protested. You wiped my bottoms when I was a kid, you're peeing all the time with me, you are me. My cock is also yours, there is nothing strange in that. Remember, three days ago we had colic and it didn't bother you, did it?

It's not exactly the same thing, Harry had sighed as he had ran their hand through their hair.

Don't do that, you're messing up my hair.

See, you don't want me to touch you, Harry had said triumphantly.

You're more childish than I am. Come on, please, I don't know how to do it and you've always taught me everything. Harry please, please...

xXx

Harry had hesitated. It was basically wrong to touch a twelve-year-old's penis, even if he did it on a daily basis to urinate. It was wrong, because Tom was a kid and a male and Voldemort. It would not be masturbating, it would be jerking off someone else, masturbating Tom Riddle... He had no right to do this, Tom was like his brother and his son but, at the same time, he was a part of Harry, he was himself.

Harry, I want to do it and you know how to. I hurt myself, last time, remember? And admit it, you also wanna touch yourself, right? Think of it as your old body. I will make myself very small, you won't notice me...

On a whim, Tom had threatened to never get up until Harry would help him satisfy his sexual needs, and all the while their penis had not mollified, as if maintained by their conflict.
I... I'll show you just once, okay? Harry had finally accepted, telling himself he had no other option. Tom was stubborn enough to let himself die of hunger, thirst and erection if Harry did not yield to his blackmail.

Next time, though, you'll do it by yourself while I'm in my corner. It's not normal that someone else, someone you don't like, touch you there, do I make myself clear?

Harry, you're me. If you can't touch me there, who could?

Harry did not want to be drawn so early into a discussion about love, sexual relationships and the unusual fact of having a double personality, so he had got on with the job.

He had felt funny. He touched Tom's penis every time they pissed, he cleaned it daily in the shower but it had never embarrassed him, for he knew everything about Tom. He had never blushed with shame at what had become his almost-body.

But that was different. He touched their sex, which had grown bigger for some time, for reasons that titillated his moral conscience. He touched a sex that was not really his. It was his future murderer's, it was a child's and another male's. Could this gesture be considered pedophile, homosexual or incestuous? Was it a deviant form of Stockholm syndrome? In that case, was he the victim or the torturer?

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But at the same time... It had been so long since he had felt such a pleasure! How many years had he not masturbated? For how many years had he not thought of sex? A hardly pubescent boy's masturbation from the interwar period had little to do with a teenager's sexual act from the 1990s but it was not bad, on the contrary.

He had forgotten how sensitive a new penis was. He just had to touch it with the pads of the fingers and it reacted, scattering stars throughout their body. It was extraordinary to rediscover self-pleasure, an act he had thought belonged to a bygone past, to which he had not granted a single thought for more than ten years. His awkward touches had quickly turned into frank and decisive movements, his moral principles eclipsed by his deafening pleasure.

It had come back to him at once. He had not paid any attention to the outside world, nor to Tom's moaning. He had been entirely absorbed by the pleasure, by his warm hand, by the hardness of a sex which was not his, by that pink head which swelled, swelled, swelled...

Tom's pre-adolescent hands had been possessed by Harry's invisible adult ones. It was as though, after so many years of standing back, pretending to be a disembodied conscience, Harry had suddenly decided to display himself fully. Tom had not censored any of his movements, he had totally abandoned himself to him and Harry had taken the opportunity to totally inhabit their young body.

The fingers on this penis were his. The quivering lips were his. The chest breathing erratically, the hot breath escaping from their mouth, the sweat in their pores, the saliva on their tongue, the rubbing against the rough blanket, the buzzing in their ears, the thin veins on their sex, the tremors in their tense toes, the flattened hair on their forehead, the closed watery eyes, all that, it was him and him alone.

He had ejaculated in a silent cry, back arched and feet curled, and a little transparent liquid, which was not quite sperm, had sprang from his urethra and smeared their sheets.
It was great, Tom had said after a long mental silence. You do know how to do everything. I can lend you my body whenever you want.

That was the last time, Harry had grumbled.

But that only was their first mutual handjob.

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On September 1, 1939, Tom entered his second year of Hogwarts, having forgotten all about the Blood Theory, at least in appearance. He had years before him to dig up the question which, albeit very interesting, did not provide him any pleasure similar to ejaculation. For the moment he was enjoying his youth.

Jerking off had become some kind of ritual between Harry and him, a somewhat shameful secret that bound them more intimately than ever. Tom could not have shared those moments with anyone else. There was only one being who knew how to please him: it was his imaginary friend.

What was unbelievable was that Harry came exactly at the same time as Tom did. They had to be the only people in the world who could boast of such a synchronization... but after all, they were a single soul cut in half.

So, when Lestrange tapped him on the shoulder a few days after the beginning of the year, Tom gave him a half look. He was busy boring Harry to death about a possible magic medium which could increase their pleasure.

There must be something which... I dunno, a way to postpone the ejaculation?

Hey, aren't not a little young for that? Harry groaned. Let me eat in peace.

His other thoughts, however, indicated he knew more than he pretended to and, above all, that Tom's whimpering amused him in spite of himself.

You betrayed yourself, my dear, something like that does exist, Tom grinned. Do you think we can order it by owl?

“How are you, Tom?” John insisted, making himself a place beside him. “So, did you see what had happened to the Muggles?”

The Second World War, Harry let slipped, forgetting to censor himself.

He who was a moment earlier joyful and carefree, had just been struck by a historical flash. Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, the first day of school.

“Second World War?” Tom repeated, in some kind of interrogation.

How do you know that? In primary school, we only have learned about the World War.

See, before being written in textbooks, History happens daily, Harry said sarcastically.

“Still too early to call it like that, right?” John replied. “But yeah, Muggle UK and Muggle France have just declared war on Muggle Germany. So you know, they're fighting for bullshit. All this because Germany has invaded Poland... At least, we wizards aren't fighting for plots of land! Our fight is legitimate.”
There's also a conflict on the wizard side? Tom asked Harry, who was thinking the Second World War was much more than a territorial conflict. But how could Lestrange, a wizard, a Pureblood, imagine that?

Oi, Harry, I'm talking to you.

Uh, we wizards have Grindelwald?

Oh yeah, we saw his name in the newspapers, he's the dark wizard guy.

“You support Grindelwald? You agree with his cause?” Harry asked, knowing in advance John's answer.

If you know he supports him, why do you ask?

Because, Tom-I hope it will prove to him Lestrange isn't a respectable pers-

Harry, I don't give a damn about him now.

“Of course I do!” John was appalled, as if it were obvious. “He is strong. He has already submitted Durmstrang, it's just a matter of time before Hogwarts falls in his hands.”

"I wouldn't want that," Tom pointed out. “Hogwarts is my home.”

John gave him a suspicious look.

“You look like a Gryffindor, watch it. And don't be stupid, if Grindelwald beats Dumbledore and Dippet, Hogwarts will be his, but he'll only banish the Muggle-borns. We'll have nothing to fear and your beloved castle won't be demolished. After all, he just wants to apply Salazar Slytherin’s principles.”

Before joining his friends, he added:

“If you're a true Slytherin, you should choose the right side.”

Listen, Tom, Grindelwald will lose. Dumbledore is the greatest wizard of all time, so it's him we've got to support.

Tom did not ask Harry how he knew. If he said so, it was true.

In the following months, Tom listened more attentively to his fellows' conversations, and Grindelwald's name often came back.

He did not subscribe to the Daily Prophet for Harry had told him it was a waste of money, but Albert gladly lend him his copy. The dark wizard rarely made the headlines, for all the attacks which were attributed to him were committed against Muggles.

As soon as a gore story or graphic pictures were published, Harry lost his appetite but Tom could keep eating his toast as if nothing had happened.

Come on, it's not against us! Eat, we must grow up, Tom said, stuffing a toast into his mouth.
Tom, you're a Half-blood or a Muggle-born, don't you realize that according to Grindelwald you're less than most Slytherins?

Well, if nobody knows, I'm worth as much as any Pure-blood. Anyway, you say he'll lose, right? Nothing to fear, then.

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During his second year, Tom learned a great deal about Harry's story. He did not know why, but their masturbatory sessions loosened up his friend's mind. Whenever Harry allowed himself to touch him, his repressed thoughts became clearer and more intelligible than the rest of the time. But the most interesting thing about all this was that Harry was unaware of it.

And Harry was an incredible storehouse of information.

And so Tom, who was much more gifted than his friend for Occlumency, learned a lot about him behind his back. For that, he had to sacrifice the immediate pleasure of handjob and keep his mind lucid, but what he learned was a thousand times more exciting than ejaculating.

Just as during the summer he had favoured the new enjoyment of masturbation over the Blood Theory, he was now more interested in his other half's story than in self-pleasuring.

Well, it had to be said that the few memories he had patiently collected could have come straight from a novel. Harry had hidden so many adventures from him all those years!

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His parents had died shortly after his birth, murdered by a powerful hooded dark wizard, who often haunted their nightmares. For one reason or another, Harry had spent his childhood martyred by his adoptive family. Tom finally understood why he had never complained about the living conditions of the orphanage. His cousin, his aunt and his uncle starved him, made him sleep in a cupboard and had turned him into their House Elf. They were, however, terribly rich, for their house was full of machines Tom had only seen in cartoons. How could Harry not hate Muggles?

And all that time, Harry did not know he was a wizard! Unlike Tom, he had not been able to cling to the idea that he would go to Hogwarts and do great things... He had had to wait, but Tom was not sure he had interpreted correctly, the arrival of a sort of giant with a pink umbrella to learn he was special. And there was a pig tail story.

Through the visions, he met two recurring faces, among dozens of others: two Gryffindors, a girl with bushy brown hair and a red-haired boy. But there were so many more faces, figures, some blurry, most of them very clear, proofs Harry had been, during his lifetime, extraordinarily surrounded.

Very different voices pronounced his name with familiarity, young, elderly, feminine, male voices, belonging to nonhuman creatures, belonging to the dead, every one saying "Harry Potter" as if it were a famous name, as Merlin or Grindelwald. All this bothered Tom because he did not understand how such a popular person could leave no trace at Hogwarts. Unless if he had been a ghost...

But there were other memories, much darker, much more hidden, even more disturbing and much more confused, as encrypted. There were corpses, a werewolf, a graveyard, Dementors, a three-headed dog, a mirror, a Troll, funny objects – a tiara, a locket, a cup – there were memories who looked like Tom but who were not him...
Throughout the masturbations, Tom developed a tempting theory. Harry was a renowned Seer who had been killed by a dark wizard, certainly Grindelwald, because he was able to see the future and thus cause his defeat. That would explain so much!

Why did he always seem to know everything in advance, why he was frightened when he saw Turnip, why he knew Tom was a Parselmouth, why he had announced the fall of Grindelwald, why he knew about the Muggle War, why he often panicked for no reason... Why he did not want Tom to know too much about magic, about his parents, about the Blood Theory, about himself.

He knew something about Tom's future, something Tom did not know.

So the Slytherin boy jerked himself off every night, and sometimes he forgot to keep a cool head and indulged in the obscene pleasures Harry and he were confusingly offering themselves.

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Every night, Harry convinced himself it was the last time. What he was doing was absolutely immoral. If he had had a body of his own, he would have been denounced, condemned, and a Dementor might have kissed him, into the bargain. What was he thinking?

But he was a part of Tom's soul and, unless creating a Horcrux to separate their two consciences, one could not condemn him.

It had to be admitted that it was really a good outlet. For a few minutes he felt free from all thought, he was nothing more than a body, freed from his endless and unanswered questions. His hand, Tom's, knew what it was doing. It repeated the same pleasant movements, as if hypnotized, and it was never tiresome, it always felt good.

It was so simple to immerse yourself in the flesh, to go to sleep exhausted, with heavy limbs and deaf ears! Why would he wonder if what he was doing was wrong when all the events in Tom's life were repeated, despite his willing? If he could do nothing for Voldemort then, at least he brought him a sensual dimension, foreign to his first version.

And during these blessed moments, Tom and he formed one single being, as if this sinful pleasure reconciled their souls. During these moments of embrace and narrowness, Tom seemed to think of nothing but of being in harmony with Harry and this was what the Gryffondor wanted more than anything. I prayed that Tom and him would always be in harmony and, above all, that Tom would never grow up.

To Be Continued ...

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, following, commenting! :D Hope you still enjoy this story.
Third and fourth years (1940-1942 / 13-15 years old)

Chapter Summary

Grindelwald is more and more powerful. Tom is obsessed with the Chamber of Secrets and Harry (I'm sorry guys) is still a dickhead. Harry quickly meets an old and dear friend. Their handjobs become desperate. Tom wants more than he can get.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Third and fourth years (1940-1942 / 13-15 years old)

Chapter 7: As if a raptor were struggling in it

“Grindelwald is close to Hogwarts!” Nath Rosier declared, buried in a Common Room's couch.

All eyes were on the usually taciturn Slytherin.

“How do you know?” asked Andrea, a first year that often hung out with them for she was Callum Nott's sister.

“It's only a matter of time. He had a fortress built on an island, to lock up his opponents,” Nath indicated showing his copy of the Black Knights, a newspapers whose editorial line was more than doubtful. “Don't you think he doesn't want to put the best UK school's teachers in jail? Durmstrang is already his. If he overwhelms Hogwarts, Beauxbatons and the other wizarding training sites, he will soon dominate Europe. John Lestrange agrees with me.”

The Slytherins all seemed satisfied with his analysis and emitted sounds of contentment, but Tom had a mental block on the prison.

A prison? If I were a dark wizard, I would dead kill my opponents. Why spend money on keeping them alive?

Nurmengard will be useful-After all, it'll have an important prisoner as a guest-How ironic-And Voldemort is the one who will kill him-Elder Wand-Holy shit, Harry thought at full speed.

Images of a fair-haired young man with a charming face in a window, images of an old scraggy wizard in a cold cell, ran through his mind. He repelled them as best he could. How was it that, after all this time, scenes of his first life still slipped out of control?

Fortunately, Tom did not pay much attention to his friend's state. He had not been wondering
systematically who the unknown faces belonged to for a long time. He had other things to do these days.

"Nurmengard will be useful," he repeated hesitantly.

It was the only thing he had clearly heard, the rest of Harry's thoughts being too confused.

"Exactly, Tom," Byron Mulciber smiled. “I didn't know you were supporting him.”

“Not really”, Harry denied fiercely.

I've already told you, stop speaking aloud in my place, Tom protested, but he immediately asked, You're not supporting him because you know he'll lose to Dumbledore?

Uh, wait, let me think, Harry nervously laughed. Yes, that must be this. In any case, it is certainly not because the ideas he fights for are totally fucked up.

Yeah, okay, that's an argument, Tom admitted. But the fact he is going to lose justifies our position: it's useless to be on his side.

How ironic, Harry thought again.

If Tom Riddle learned he would lose to a baby a few decades later, would he not support himself?

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"You don't officially support him then," Byron reasoned, "but like us you're interested in his crusade, aren't you? 'For the greater good' is a beautiful slogan. Anyway, I can't wait for him to take old Dippet's place.”

He stretched out and sank back into his chair with a soft smile.

"You don't know what you're saying,” Harry objected, his fingers suddenly clenched on his wand. Why? Tom was surprised. You must confess that Dippet isn't worth very much.

Respect, do you know this word? Harry sighted, only half credible for he himself thought the Headmaster was a bit...

A bit dumb, you can say that, Tom said clearly. What's their problem?

Two girls in his grade, Elizabeth and Gwendolyn, stared at him as if he had just announced he was a fag.

"For you know more, Tom?” one of them asked. “Looks like you think he won't win.”

“You don't talk much, but you seem to keep yourself informed,” the other one said with a puzzled expression.

Harry, is that what you call making friends? Sometimes you should refrain from trying to socialize me.

Uh, let it go, I'll deal with this-what am I afraid of, they are a bunch of kids-

Harry crossed his legs, as Tom used to do to appear detached, and said, with conviction:
“He'll fail, yeah. I've got my sources.”

The two girls shared a look.

Tom Riddle was brilliant, incredibly brilliant for a third year that, according to rumors, did not come from any notorious Pure-blood family. He was also very strange, almost mad. Sometimes, like that evening, he asserted improbable things with as much assurance as if he were a Seer.

Neither Elizabeth nor Gwendolyn could determine whether they wished to follow him everywhere to enjoy his captivating aura or whether they'd rather not to have to deal with him.

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"And on what do you base yourself, exactly?" Albert intervened, at once amazed and appreciative. "The Dark Knights suggests he is well on his way. He may have giants and many other creatures whom light wizards did not bother to rub shoulders with."

One needed to have some cheek to prophesy Grindelwald's defeat when he was at the height of his fame.

"Hogwarts won't fall," Harry said simply, irritated.

It was both an affirmation and a threat. Hogwarts was Tom's and his home, a place full of memories and of hope. Albert shuddered. He had felt, like the others, Tom's magic crackling around him, dancing in the air like electric fireflies. The atmosphere seemed heavy, as if a thunderbolt would soon cut the sky's flesh in two to pour cloudy viscera on the earth.

It's downright absurd to imagine Grindelwald could beat Dumbledore.

Do you really think it's Dumbledore who will defeat him? Why not Dippet or the Aurors?

Tom received only a confused and terribly familiar mumble:

I can't talk about it, it's just a feeling, that's all.

"If you say so," Albert finally whispered, shrugging. “Anyway, I still think he's trying to locate Hogwarts. He must have heard about Slytherin's little gift.”

"Ah," Rosier sighed, "if he could get rid of Mudbloods for us..."

What Albert is babbling about?

The Chamber of-errrrr-Tom, I don't know, Harry muttered. He's just boasting.

Tom did not believe him for a second.

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"The Chamber," he sneered, pretending to be self-confident.

If he had made a mistake, Harry will have a hard time.

That's it, yeah, Harry said dubiously, his voice muffled by stress. You and I are going to have a discussion about what can be said to other people.

I'm making friends, okay? Tom retorted. If I seem to know less than them, it wouldn't do.
"So you also know about that," Albert said with annoyance.

Did not Tom Riddle have any flaws? It was maddening and terribly fascinating. Since their first night in the dorm, he had not changed. Well, he had grown up. His face had become more angular and delicate, his eyes deeper, his hands bigger.

Henceforth, he certainly had hairs on the pubis, under the armpits and perhaps on the chest. His penis had probably lengthened, his testicles swelled. He might already masturbate, even though it was difficult to imagine the model pupil indulging in such a sin.

But he still gave off the same hazy aura, so irritating and intriguing for his interlocutors. He still had the same presence, as if the air around him gently hugged his shape, as if as soon as he was born, he had been gifted with something divine.

Albert was definitely one of the people Tom attracted and frightened without wishing to.

"Well, who can lend me his Defense's notes?" Albert asked as he grabbed his bag. "There's something I didn't quite grasp."

The Slytherins went back to their homework, looking like hardworking students who had not spent long minutes discussing a dark wizard's potential victory.

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Having already completed his essay about the most common aquatic creatures, Tom returned to the dormitory. He secretly wanted to be alone with Harry, in order to find out what this Chamber story was about and why Harry, once again, was aware of events which had not happened yet.

*I can't tell you that*, Harry said before Tom had explicitly asked him a question. *This is a top secret secret.*

His silly memory had the good taste to impose images of Sean Connery in *Goldfinger*, a James Bond movie Vernon Dursley had watched something between three and four hundred times. Too concerned about the mysterious Chamber, Tom did not notice he had just seen excerpts from a film that would be released twenty years later. Well, it was not as if he had already had the opportunity to watch a film, since cinema and television were not luxuries an orphan could afford.

He took off his shoes, threw himself into his bed, pulled out the curtains and enquire:

*For Merlin's sake, where do you come from? Why did you know about my wardrobe?*

*What do you mean? Which wardrobe?* Harry asked, totally lost.

In response, the large wooden cabinet in their orphanage's room danced in their mind.

*I'm talking about that wardrobe*, Tom got annoyed. *I remember the first time we discussed magic, I was seven or eight, a kid. At that moment, I didn't understand, but now that I'm thinking about it... You already knew it was going to catch fire, years before it did. And it's always like this.*

*You're wrong, you get your memories muddled*, Harry protested hastily. *It was a long time ago, as you say, you were a kid! I don't remember saying that.*

*You liar, you always lie to me when it comes to important stuff. Spit it out, you knew Dumbledore was going to burn it. You knew it well before he came to see me. Besides, you knew it was Dumbledore who would come, how is that even possible?*
His head buried in his pillow, Tom looked like a sulky child.

*No,* Harry denied fervently, shutting his other thoughts into a fictitious corner of his mind. *How could I have known? I just like Dumbledore a lot so I was hoping it was him who... Well, I guessed, sort of, you know? Intuition?*

Tom chuckled and grumbled:

“Pull the other one.”

He wanted to weep with anger. Harry did not trust him enough to tell him he was a Seer?

*I swear to you I'm no Seer,* Harry murmured, running his hand through his friend's hair.

**xXx**

Tom seemed to relax a bit.

*And I do trust you, Tom. When I told you about magic, I warned you there were things...*

Yeah, I remember, things you couldn't tell me, Tom finished. *But why? And where did you get all this information? Were you an Unspeakable?*

Harry let out a laugh. He had never imagined himself working in the Department of Mysteries.

*Absolutely not, I'm just an undecipherable boy,* he said posh.

Tom patted his cheek, as if to scold him.

*Okay, and Nurmengard, then? Can you tell me more?*

Harry hesitated for a moment.

*It shouldn't be a problem. When... when I was alive, Grindelwald already planned to build a prison, you know. This fortress story is a bit of ancient history, so what surprised me is that it took him so long to complete this project. See, he was underaged when he had engraved the Deathly Hallows' symbol on Durmstrang's walls- Ooops, I shouldn't have say that-*

He would have liked to cast a Memory Charm on Tom. The only problem was that in doing so he himself would lose his memories.

*What are the Deathly Hallows? And how do you know all that about Grindelwald?* the Slytherin asked, pulling the quilt over them. *Did he kill you?*

Harry consciously eluded the first question.

*No, Grindelwald didn't kill me,* he said honestly. *What a crazy idea- He just was a powerful wizard, and it was better to know what he was plotting, to keep yourself informed about his doings.*

*Oh, Tom moaned. I thought it was Grindelwald, the man in your nightmares. The man I often see at night too.*

**xXx**

Harry swallowed and the throat noise echoed in the dormitory and in their ears. Thousands of pearls of sweat immediately formed in the palms of their hands and under their armpits. It looked like they
were not liquid but solid, as tiny marbles threaded on their hairs. He wanted to smash them, but he knew he would not enjoy that. Indeed, for they were only solid in appearance, they would dissolve themselves before he had time to touch them.

Anyway, he was very hot and their robes were sticking to him like a gigantic leech. It was as if jaws with three tooth rows were bitting him and would only let go after being sated. And his socks were suckers that kept him immobile and prevented him from struggling against his destiny. He could not repel the creature glued to him, shining and blind, who possessed only one orifice and one function. The leech in its black and yellow rings, its body without a limb covered in translucent secretion, was fat and heavy as a heart.

Harry had never fully realized he shared his dreams with Tom. It was so obvious, however, for he sometimes remembered dreams that were not his. This idea was awfully terrifying. For when he was awake, the day of May 2, 1998 seemed incredibly distant, almost unreal, but as soon as he fell asleep, he found himself on a battlefield.

His nightmares were overflowed with corpses reproaching him for not honoring them enough, for playing house with the one who was responsible for their death.

Had Tom seen...? Cedric? No, Harry was not dreaming about him since Sirius's death. Had he seen the faces of Sir-Dum-Mad-Dob-Snap-Fr-Rem-Criv-?

Why did you never tell me? Harry asked.

I knew it would bother you. Even I, I have some restraint. And all those... corpses, that foggy figure, hardly human, drinking unicorn blood in the middle of the forest... It scares me too.

Harry felt a surge of affection for his other self.

You know, the man of my nightmares doesn't exist, he said softly. He can't hurt us.

Tom took advantage of his friend's weakness to slightly force his mental barriers but he did not find either shame or guilt. Harry was telling the truth. Even so, Tom was not a fool, there was something else. The nightmarish silhouette could not be a mere invention. However, the boy had his whole life to crack his soul's secrets.

Well, then, if we can't talk about you, Grindelwald, or the monster of the night, what about the Chamber, hmm?

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It was not until the spring of his third year, almost a season later, that Tom finally discovered what the Chamber of Secrets was.

As he had pretended to know it, he could not ask his classmates to tell him the legend, if he did not want to look like a fraud. He had therefore tried to find all the references to a "Chamber" in the library's books but the initiative had been as exhausting as it was pointless. It was the same as his father, Harry or the Blood Theory: as soon as something interested him, the information played hide-and-seek with him.

All the while Harry did not help him. He had simply refused to tell him anything, as if it were a matter of life or death, so that when Tom threatened to throw himself from the top of the Astronomy Tower, the Gryffindor had replied:

Jump, at least I won't have your death on my conscience.
It figures, Tom could not help but specify, letting himself fall on the floor of the tower. If I die, you die too, don't you? Once dead, you can't regret anything.

Not sure, Harry smiled grimly. If I'm already dead, who knows what could happen.

Maybe next time I'll reincarnate in you? Are you certain you don't wanna try?

Ignoring his friend's deafening complaints, Harry had gone down the stairs of the Astronomy Tower, which, though it had never seen the shadow of a Death Eater, reminded him of future bad memories.

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In short, Tom had in vain developed a thousand strategies, some so skilful that they consisted of getting himself a detention so he could ask the caretaker questions about the castle's hidden room or of cutting his finger to distract Harry and break through his mental barriers. He had not succeeded in convincing him to share his knowledge.

All this reminded him furiously of the odd reluctance Harry had had when teaching him magic. He seemed to be afraid that Tom would misuse this knowledge, whereas Tom was just curious.

What gift could Slytherin have left in the castle that Grindelwald could use to eradicate Muggleborns? A weapon? But why a "chamber" in this case?

It's a legend, Harry had repeated a scandalous number of times.

So why don't you tell me, if it's just a story? And why isn't it mentioned anywhere, if it's legendary?

Tom closed *Hogwarts: A History* with an angry movement. The librarian, Raphael, raised his eyes for a moment and resumed his job.

*I'll ask Raph, he knows all the books of the library. He'll tell me for sure.*

*Don't you dare . It would badly affect your reputation,* Harry warned him.

*But why is it so serious?*

'*Cause I say so. Listen to me for once!*

xXx

Tom did not understand. Harry usually ended up giving in to his whims, he was a kind Gryffindor after all. If he was so blinkered this time, he surely had very good reasons to hide the truth from him.

Was Harry really a Seer? Had he foreseen a fatal future he was trying to avoid? However, it would not explain why he was aware of the existence of a gift left by Slytherin.

But the Sorting Hat had almost sent him in Slytherin... With his temperament, it was hard to conceive, unless... maybe he was from a family of Slytherins! Unfortunately, it could not be. The two wizards Tom had briefly seen during his masturbatory epiphanies looked like bloody typical Gryffindors, ignorant of Salazar's plans.

What if Harry was like Slytherin's great-great-great-great-grandson?

That was an economical explanation. If Harry was Slytherin's descendant, it was natural that he could talk to serpents, that a well-kept family secret had been transmitted to him, that he was so gifted, that he had a love-hate relationship with Tom...
And, Tom dared to think, what if Harry and he were also related? After all, Harry had told him they looked a bit alike and their stories overlapped each other in a troubling way. That would explain why, at his death, Harry had moved to his body, for blood ties were the strongest ones.

What if Harry was his father? For a few seconds, Tom thought he was going to start weeping with joy. If Harry was his father, it would justify his behavior at once protective and severe, his willingness to see him progress, his paranoid fears...

However, although he had no experience of classical family relationships, Tom was certain fathers and sons did not mutually masturbate. No, it was not that. If he really was his father, Harry would have told him, at least to put an end to Tom's obsession with his first name, during his first year.

Yet I'd love to be bond with him... Perhaps not as father and son but as brother. It would mean that I, too, would have Slytherin as an ancestor.

xXx

Harry had not listened to his friend's monologue, for following someone else's thoughts, even if that someone else was a part of your soul, was a difficult exercise. He had left Tom to his reverie, catching only here and there isolated syllables.

Yet he clearly heard Tom's last wish.

What the fuck? You, to be descended from Slytherin?

Had all his efforts been futile? He had done everything I could so that Tom knew nothing about the Chamber of Secrets. He had resisted all his insidious promises, his low blows and his shameless cuddles. Long winter months fighting against him and all this so that Tom could come up on his own with the idea he was the heir of Slytherin?

Tom took Harry's excitement for enthusiasm and hastened to explain his reasoning.

Well, I thought you were probably linked to Slytherin, as you're a Parselmouth and as you know his secret. And since you and I have a powerful, almost familial bond, that also turns me into a Slytherin's descendant in a way. Easy-peasy, right?

Harry nearly fainted. Tom's reasoning was as twisted as it was logical.

I'm not descended from Slytherin, Harry denied. I'd rather speak to him about the Chamber rather than let him elaborate theories as dangerous for my mental health-FUCK-

You said it, Harry, time to play fair. You can't go back, tell me now, Tom ordered.

Harry sighed. If Dumbledore, somewhere, was judging his actions, let him be convinced Harry had done everything in his power to delay the moment when Tom Riddle would discover what the Chamber of Secrets was.

xXx

That's all? Seriously? Tom asked, dubious. You talked about ... thirty seconds.

His heart was slowly filling with anger and incomprehension. Harry had made a mountain out of a molehill.

Slytherin had a fight with the other three founders. Before leaving, he told them he had built a
hidden chamber containing a thing capable of killing Muggle-borns. He had added that only his heir would be able to find and control this thing. Tom summarized. And this thing is a monster.

Basically, that's it, Harry said uncomfortably. He stirred in their chair as though he were willing to fly away. But wherever he went, he could not escape Tom.

And this Chamber has never been found, even if the castle has been searched several times over the years?

Yeah.

Harry was so agitated that the Ravenclaw at the next table gave him a worried look.

Why, Harry, Tom said with a tremor of rage in his silent voice, have you refused to tell me that for months? I was expecting drama, blood, corpses...

Shut up, that's improper, Harry winced. This story isn't to be taken lightly, I-

MERLIN'S PANTS! Tom cried suddenly, leaping up. You believe it! Or rather... He narrowed his eyes as he gazed at the books lined up on the shelves. You don't believe it is a legend, you know it's true.

Harry was going to protest – in reality, all his thoughts were already contestation, denial and disapproval – but Tom shouted.

Stop lying to me! I know I'm right, I know you too well, Harry! You're treating me like a kid!

His face was tense and red and the girl next to him began to fidget, obviously regretting having sat this close to the strange and prodigious Tom Riddle.

Tom... Harry pleaded. I have my reasons. Now you know it's not much, let go, okay?

He headed for the window and, discreetly, animated their left arm to caress Tom's right hand. Slowly, his invisible and yet incarnated fingers stroked the palm of their hand, in a tender, familiar gesture which had always appeased them.

If you insist, Tom finally sighed, I won't try to learn more about the Chamber. After all, what use could I make of it?

XXX xxx xxx

Tom kept his word. Weeks and months passed, and he, the one who had badgered Harry until he told him the legend of the Chamber, stopped thinking about it. Reassured, Harry turned back to be the faithful friend he had always been.

When the other Slytherins were talking about Grindelwald's progress, Tom never joined them. He pretended indifference and keenly studied. He did not want to spend hours speculating on a wizard in whom he had not faith.

Sometimes he checked in the Daily Prophet that the dark wizard had not been arrested, even though Harry had promised him that on the day it would happen, they would not learn it through a newspaper article.

It will be spectacular, one of the best duals of the century. Let's focus on Transfiguration now.

It's so easy it's not even funny, Tom pouted.
To prove his point, he carelessly tapped his quill with his wand. The feather obediently turned into a blue jay. The little bird began to flutter in the Common Room, happy and astonished to have suddenly come to life.

After having followed it with his gaze for a few moments, Tom pointed his wand at it without warning and whispered:

“Reducto.”

The blue jay blew up.

Some pupils cried out, disgusted. A fifth year which had had the misfortune of being seated below the bird jumped up, dusting the feathers, legs and viscera which had rained on him.

“Watch out!” he shouted, looking daggers at Tom.

The latter did not even hear him, for he was madly lectured by Harry.

What's wrong with you? How could you?

You're such a ponce sometimes, why are you so upset? It wasn't a living being but a quill!

By the time you killed it, it had become an animal!

At least, before it died, it had the opportunity to flap its wings, Tom said. Its short life was more charming than a quill's. It should have thanked me.

You're vile. You make me wanna puke.

Tom knew it was no hyperbole. His stomach was knotted up as if a raptor were furiously struggling in it.

I'll get some fresh air, Harry said.

Before leaving the Common Room, he sheepishly smiled at the poor prejudiced Slytherin and cast a cleaning spell towards him. But he was less talented than Tom and so he heard, just before the wall closed behind him, a girl complaining about bloodstains.

xXx

To litterally share your life and body with somebody else presented a major disadvantage: it was impossible for one to escape the other. As he strided along the corridors, Harry remembered with some nostalgia his fight with Ron in fourth year. All those embarrassing moments due to the fact they slept in the same dorm, followed the same classes and ate at the same table!

But it was nothing compared to being angry at yourself. Harry wanted to be alone, really alone, but wherever he went, Tom stuck to him.

Where're you going? the Slytherin boy asked without his usual self-confidence.

His thoughts reflected his uncertainty. Harry's thoughts hurt him for if he had already prayed for Harry to have his own body, it was not to escape him. On the contrary, if Harry became material, life would be so much funnier. They would no longer be involved in their strange relationship, they would no longer have access to their respective thoughts, but as they already knew each other by heart, they could play guessing games and bicker for real.
And instead of being foolishly dragged by his other self's movements, as he was now, Tom could run after him, catch him by the arm, cry out to him that he was sorry, that he had made a mistake, that he was just bored...

*You blew up this bird because you were bored?* Harry winces, as he walked out the castle's doors.

*I didn't think it was going to die. I thought it was just going to... disappear, become nothingness. How could an unborn thing die?* Tom confessed, inhaling deeply.

Harry and him enjoyed the fresh air rushing into their body. They felt cleansed. Harry expired slowly as he watched the park, looking for Hagrid's hut in spite of himself. If the gamekeeper had been there, in that time, the Boy Who Lived would have taken a bite of any of his granite cookies without even asking what it was made of.

*What does it feel like to die?* Tom wondered.

Harry was genuinely going to tell him he did not know for sure, not being your ordinary dead person, when he caught sight of Hagrid's silhouette in the distance.

**xXx**

It was impossible and yet... it came back to him. How could he have forgotten? The student who would be accused of having opened the Chamber, the one who would be expelled at the end of his third year but for whom Dumbledore would create a new post, so that he could stay at Hogwarts... Hagrid!

Without thinking, without listening to Tom or to his common sense, so intensely moved at the sight of the familiar gait, Harry ran to the other student.

"Hagrid!" he called, forgetting who he was.

The young Gryffindor turned around and Harry – Tom Riddle – took a step back. Hagrid had changed so much! In fact, it was the opposite. He was still a beardless first year, a child.

"Who're yeh? How do yeh know me name?" the half-giant asked him suspiciously.

*Hey, Harry, who's that, an old friend of yours? But he is younger than me and you died long before his birth, how could you know him? He is huge, blimey. And what dialect is that?*

Tom watched the stranger with curiosity, while Harry was looking for a way to extricate himself from the situation.

"Er... I made a mistake," he mumbled. “Sorry about that.”

Neither Hagrid nor Tom believed it.

"Where were you going?" Tom asked, for he had noticed the other pupil's embarrassment.

The boy named Hagrid held in his hand what looked like a dead hen.

*That's rich. If it's someone you know, you can't blame me for accidentally killing a bird anymore, Harry.*

"It's a chicken, isn't it? To feed what kind of animal?" Tom asked again.

"Doesn' concern yeh," Hagrid grumbled, obviously very uneasy. “Go back ter the castle, 's cold.”
“What are you going to do?”

"Walk a’ound," the Gryffindor said evasively, swinging his hen.

“And you're not cold?”

Hagrid mumbled something about his resistant blood and headed for the Forbidden Forest. Tom would have followed him but Harry forced them back to the castle, promising him he would forget the blue jay if Tom forget about Hagrid.

*Hey, Harry, you're talking drivel. Aragog doesn't mean anything,* the Slytherin gently commented, hugging himself.

He was eager to be warm, now that he had made peace with his soul.

**Xxx xxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxx**

*Ho, Harry...*

*Yeah, I know, me too...*

*Go ahead, please!*

*But I'd rather... push it to the extreme...* Harry whispered, erratic.

*Harry, Tom moaned, it's torture, Harry... I beg you...*

Harry finally accelerated the movement, defeated by his friend's gentle lamentations and by his own weakness. His right hand went up and down ever faster on their penis, taking with it the thin skin with its swollen veins, each time covering and uncovering their teen glans.

Tom's hands had grown since their first wank, and they were so used to the shape of their sex that they now hugged it as the skin hugs the bones.

Harry opened his eyes feverishly, and glanced at the spectacle. He still found it strange to feel like it were his hands, his sex, but to look at a body that was not his. He could not hold back a decadent thought: when he was wanking, who was he really jerking off?

*Harry, it's unbearable, Harry...*

"Tom," Harry whispered aloud, losing all coherence.

*Tom, he repeated, making an effort to stay silent.*

*I like it when you say my name out loud, you know that, you cock-tease-Oh, Harry-*

Their lips twisted to pronounce the name of their other self, but no sound came out.

Tom suddenly took possession of their right arm and frantically wanked. Harry let go. It was so intense that for Tom it burned and hurt. But it did not matter to him for he wanted to please Harry, and Harry loved it rough, when the sensations were so violent they blended. Then, as he awkwardly jerked off like a madman, he did something he had never dared to do, something he had never really thought about.

**xXx**
His right hand still clinging to his penis as if it were the only link he had with the world, he violently took possession of his left arm, which was usually reserved for Harry. He used it to tenderly touch their cheek. It was not a gesture he made: it was a gesture he consciously borrowed from his double.

In some ways, it was much more intimate, much more obscene than the act of masturbation. It came close to narcissism and self-love. It was like kissing his reflection.

Harry understood that this caress was entirely from Tom. It was as if Tom were there beside him, as if that amorous hand were not his own hand but a hand belonging to a body that was not his.

The Gryffindor would have wanted to tear his arm away so that it would not be connected to his mind, but he obviously could not, so he contented himself with that shy touch. He even turned his head to kiss his hand.

From the outside, the scene must have seemed ridiculous and downright creepy: a fifteen years old boy was violently wanking and tenderly kissing the palm of his hand.

But Tom and Harry knew their lips were Harry's, and their fingers were Tom's. This bodily casting was unstable and ephemeral. The next moment, who opened their mouth to lick the fingers that sank into it?

It's so good-Harry-your mouth-fingers-Tom-your sex-your tongue-our saliva-

Which one of the two consciences produced these confused thoughts? But, at this point, could we still speak of two entities, wasn't there, precisely, confusion?

Harry, kiss me, Tom pleaded. Why, why were we born like that-Harry-

Harry did what he could. He too suddenly wanted his old body back so he could huddle Tom tight, and kiss him, and touch him, and swallow him, and suck, suck any part of his body. As it was a fanciful wish, as his mouth would never rest on his penis, even though it was before his eyes, he just licked Tom's lips, and both pretended they had not one mouth but two.

xXx

In turn, sometimes at the same time, they inhabited their lower lip, their upper one, the tip of their tongue, imitating as best they could a shared kiss. They were biting and biting again, and their common hand always clung to their penis as if it were not their's but another's.

They were drooling and one of them spread their spit on their chest. But it was not enough to simulate a tongue on their skin. Then Harry plunged their fingers into their oral cavity and Tom spat on them with all his soul. They lovingly coated themselves with this trivial and holy secretion. If they could have swim in it, they would have done so.

Harry wanted this hard penis so much! At that moment, he would have given everything to be in his first body again and thus to be able to do something else than masturbate Tom. He could not take it anymore. He took control of their right arm, spat into his hand and took the helm back of their wank.

His hand covered in saliva slid over their penis like a throbbing anus and in their head, images of penetration of one by the other, of the other by one, impossible images, fed their despair and their arousal.

Harry, we're gonna explode-your sex is so hot-so hard-your hand-yes-fuckkkk-Tom-Tom-Tom-

Their sex swelled to the maximum, the veins became violet and in their urethra they both felt this
incredible sensation of squirting building up.

They finally ejaculated, eyes wide open, each wanting to capture his other soul's orgasm. Their sperm maculated their stomach in some embarrassing whitish trails. They eventually let go of their softened sex. A few drops appeared at the tip of their glans when they fell back on the mattress, panting.

*I wanna lick them away,* Harry thought. *It sucks.*

He could have cry, but instead he sighed. Could one feel guilty and happy at the same time? He was too exhausted to think about it but he was very grateful to Tom for accepting his sick and unhealthy fantasies.

*You're welcome,* the Slytherin whispered with weary amusement.

After a moment of dizziness, he grabbed his wand in order to clean his sperm, but lost himself in thought in the meantime, gazing at his red, sweaty and dirty body as if it were his lover's. Harry was so beautiful.

"*Scourgify,*" Harry said for him, wiping out the evidence. *It really sucks.*

**Xxx xxx xxx**

The more time passed, the more dangerous were their handjob sessions. Harry remembered guiltily that *the first time* he had already felt he was overstepping the mark. He had promised himself it would not happen again. But he had not resisted, unable to refuse anything to Tom.

Forbidding him to masturbate would have be unfair, no parent would do that. By the way, a couple of handjobs would not turn him into Voldemort, on the contrary, they were a good outlet. Moreover, it had been so long since Harry had touched himself...

At first, then, he'd done that for Tom, and a little for him. But it was only very recently, since the beginning of fourth year, that this selfish satisfaction had turned into a truly shared act. They now wanked as if they were two distinct persons, and no longer as if they were the same soul.

The worst thing was that Harry could not pretend this perversion did not exist, for he could distinctly hear Tom formulate the same desires: while they had always thought their bond was miraculous, they now suffered from having only one body.

*Harry, could you stop thinking about all this? You're so depressing.*

Harry blinked. What if Tom had heard...

*Don't worry, you worrywart. I didn't listen to everything, you're so slow I can't follow your thoughts. And I had also some day dreaming on my side of things. Or are you implying I'm an eavesdropping thug?*

*Thank you,* Harry was nestled on the mattress.

He squeezed a pillow in his arms as if it were Tom and Tom beamed, as he could also imagine he was cuddling up to Harry, as if they were in bed together.

*That's the case,* Harry pointed out. *We're in bed together.*

Tom did not bother to answer him intelligibly. *What does it feel like to be this way with somebody?*
he wondered instead.

xXx

What do you mean?

In bed. At night or... I dunno. After afternoon sex.

Harry frowned. He would never have thought Tom Riddle and Ron Weasley would one day use the same expression.

Ron, was he one of your friends?

Yeah.

Irk! Tom suddenly exclaimed, his mind invaded by a picture of the redhead. You really dared to compare him and me? You're not afraid of dying, are you?

Harry wanted to jockily punch himself, but he did not have the strength to move. Tom let out a mental laugh, then he became serious again.

Well, you didn't answer me. What's it like to be like that with someone else? For real. Unlike us.

Why do you ask? Are you interested in this kind of things?

Harry worried in spite of himself. If Tom had a crush on someone, he had not noticed. He began to list their grade’s girls, then the fifth year’s, then the fourth year’s, but he remembered almost no face.

Look, I didn't bother to remember them either, please stop that, it's annoying, Tom grumbled, feeling a headache coming. And for Merlin’s sake, me, a crush? I don’t like people, didn't you notice?

No need to be ashamed, you know, Harry teased him, grinning. This stuff is pretty standard for your age. For me too it had started in fourth year-

Ah! So you can answer me! I wondered if you were still a virgin..

Harry did not take offense, he just rolled his eyes. Tom bring them back down immediately, complaining it was wasted energy.

Well, then, who was your first girlfriend?

xXx

Harry agreed to tell him his short and tragic story with Cho Chang, omitting of course the name and face of Cedric Diggory. There really was not much to say and he wondered how he could have been attracted to her so much.

It just ended like that? Tom asked in a disappointed tone. But before you died, you were seeing someone else, right?

No, Harry lied but his foggy traitorous mind betrayed him, showing a somewhat fantasized and curiously blurry picture of Ginny.

He had forgotten her freckles’ positioning, the exact length of her hair, and how she put make-up. It had been more than fifteen years since he had last seen her, and almost as many years as he had not missed her, at least not as a girlfriend.
Who is that? Tom asked, irritated. *Am I wrong or does she just look like...*

Yeah, she's Ron's sister.

*And Ron was your best friend?*

Yeah.

*Your kink is incest*, Tom said, in amazement. *I can't believe it.*

Not at all, Harry retorted on the defensive. *We even haven't slept together, anyway.*

So you're a virgin, Tom grinned, looking very pleased that his friend had never had sex.

*Why are you so happy about it?*

Because you and I share another common trait, Tom explained.

*Great, it's nothing to be proud of at all*, Harry muttered. Nevertheless, maybe you, someday... soon...

What was he going to say? That maybe someday Tom would lose his virginity? Maybe he'd fall in love, he'd have kids? It was absurd. For cosmic balance, Harry should do his best to prevent future Lord Voldemort from procreating.

xXx

One day what? What were you gonna say?

Maybe you'll want to... I don't know, go out with a girl, do this and that.

Tom wanted to laugh out loud, but there was nothing funny. Had Harry not understood?

*How can you think of something like that? If I asked you how it was to be in bed after sex, it was precisely because I'll never know.*

You have your whole life ahead of you, Harry argued, trying to pinch their cheek, but Tom pulled away.

I'll never go out with anyone, the Slytherin boy said. *Don't misunderstand me, it's not that I don't believe I'm worth it.* On the contrary, I sincerely think I'm more gifted, more mature, more intelligent than all the other students and almost all the staff.

*How are your britches? Aren't your calves swelling?*

Tom pretended Harry had not talked.

To put it simply, I don't think dating is useful. Why would I want to share something like that with someone else?

I don't follow the logic, Harry admitted, even though he knew where Tom was coming from.

*Why would I want to kiss, to hold hands, to have physical contact with another person? What's the point?*

It's not only physical, Harry corrected him. *It's called 'feelings'. You just haven't met...*

Tom cut him off.
It will never happen. The only person worthy to see is you. And you're already here.

xXx

Harry did not know what to say. Tom did not have to be embarrassed by his presence. If one day he fell in love, Harry would make himself the tiniest. He would not listen to them, would not spy on them, he would leave them as much intimacy as possible.

Are you thick or something? Tom suddenly roared, giving a punch to his pillow. I want no one to be intimate with me! The one I want next to me is you! And as it isn't possible, I'll stay a virgin.

In order to unwind, he kicked his blanket, pushing it back to the end of his bed. It collapsed miserably on the floor.

So why did you ask what it was like to go out with a girl, to be in bed with your lover? You're not making sense, Tom, Harry replied with anger.

They were so relaxed a moment ago and now their magic throbbed into their veins, bristling their arms's and legs's hairs.

For I wanted to know in what state you had left your previous life, if there was a girl, if you were missing someone. If you were still in love.

Tom uttered these last words with contempt.

Is that your business? Harry replied piteously. Okay, forget what I just said, it kinda is your business. To answer your question, no, there is no one. Ginny, Cho... it was a long time ago now.

All right, Tom agreed as he put on his underpants. Come on, shower time.

Under the burning stream of water, the two boys calmed down. There was no good reason to their dispute, which was a sign of growing frustration. Their relationship, which has not been a chaste fraternal friendship anymore for a long time, led to nothing, but they both clung to it as if it was their sole purpose in life.

To Be Continued ...

Chapter End Notes

See you soon! Tell me how you feel about this chapter if you want to :)
Fifth year (1942-1943 / 15-16 years old)

Chapter Summary

A girl invites Tom to a New Year's Eve party but Tom is not interested. Tom gives a frightening birthday present to Harry who acts like a dick (sorry guys). Something happens in the girls' bathroom and Harry needs to sacrifice a part of himself ...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

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Fifth year (1942-1943 / 15-16 years old)

Chapter 8: Too much calmly

“Tom, may I have a word with you?”

Tom slipped a bookmark into his book, closed it, put it on the table, uncrossed his legs and finally looked up.

Who is that? he asked Harry.

Harry looked at the girl standing in front of them, a hand on the hip. Her long black hair was so sophisticated that the whole thing had to held by magic solely. She was beautiful, no doubt, but her face was spoiled by her contemptuous expression: she looked like a dark-haired version of Narcissa Malfoy.

Slytherin. Sixth year, I think.

One year older than us, then, Tom pointed out with disdain, as if it were a flaw.

"My name is Walburga Black," the girl made her hair shine, Merlin knows how. "John speaks highly of you. For someone who has no background, your powers and opinions are pretty respectable."

What does she want? I'm already fed up of her.

I dunno, Harry stared at his godfather's future mother.

He could not believe his eyes. How could this girl become that bitter old witch whose portrait would shout insults all day long? On closer observation though, she was obviously related to Sirius. Harry was almost certain she would marry her cousin, but fuck could not he remember his name.

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As long as it isn't on me she has her heart set on, Tom thought absently.
Tom heard, Harry panicked immediately, shit-crap-shit-Merlin's bearb, I wasn’t listening to your thoughts, you’re a true pain in the arse, Tom sighted. I heard you talking about marriage and nothing else. Your secrets, whatever they are, are well kept. Anyway, I hope she won’t try to seduce me.

If one did not know she would become a horrible shrew, Walburga was far from being a bad match, according to Slytherin's criteria. She was cute, came from a wealthy Pure-blood family and did not look too simple-minded.

But Tom did not show an interest in her and Harry did not ask him why, for he knew he would replied something like “Harry, marriage isn't an option for me unless you resurrect. Only then will we talk about it again. Now please shut this big mouth of yours”. And it was definitely not a discussion Harry wanted to start, knowing it was bound to give him a headache and to make him want to hang himself. And well, Walburga was waiting for an answer.

Tom stayed silent despite Harry's complaints. He had no desire to meet Walburga – she wanted more than friendship and he had nothing to offer. The girl did not get downhearted.

“The other Slytherins and I are organising a New Year Eve party. It's a sixth and seventh year tradition, but you can come. You can even be my partner.”

"It depends," Tom said to his inkwell. “Who else will attend?”

"Only those who are worth the trouble," Walburga proudly announced, before embarking on a long list.

Each name was followed by a small remark justifying the guest's invitation. Pretending he did not care about worldly things, Harry withdrew into himself but, in reality, he listened very carefully to what Sirius' mother said.

xXx

While Tom had been at Hogwarts for four and a half years, he had stayed an antisocial person. Of course, his dormmates strangely worshiped him, John Lestrange often came to talk with him, and the girls shyly called him in the corridors, but he never struck up a conversation himself. According to him it was a waste of time.

As long as he was respected by his peers, he did not see why he should participate in their frivolous discussions and armchair debates. Sometimes he half-listened to them and took a perverse pleasure in silently and methodically finding their arguments' flaws, which made Harry laugh and shudder at once.

He did not need friends, only devoted people who, if things went wrong, would willingly sacrifice their time or, in the worst case, their lives, for him. But he had absolute self-confidence and faith in his other soul: how could things go wrong for them?

In short, Tom being as sociable as a taciturn bear, Harry had never had the opportunity to hear or speak with the ancestors of the people he had known in his old life. It was so frustrating!

He had often seen faces as familiar as they were disturbing, expressions that brought him back straight into the 1990s. Every year he watched Gryffindor table and inevitably spotted a bunch of red-haired Weasleys – but who of them was Ron's grandfather, he had no idea.

Hagrid, who had not spoken to him since the incident in the park a year ago, still wandered around
with dead bodies of animals, probably destined for Aragog.

He might also have run into Fleamont and Euphemia, his paternal grandfather and grandmother, but it had perhaps been just fantasies on his part. Yet every time he saw a dark-haired boy or girl in the corridors or in the Great Hall, he devoured them with his eyes. To say he had always dreamed of meeting his family and he probably lived in the same castle as other Potters!

But since his slip-up with Hagrid, he had mercilessly repressed his through-time family reunion desires. He was not there as Harry Potter. Harry Potter did not even exist in this world. Nobody, except Tom, knew his name.

xXx

Harry was keeping his ears open, wishing to hear a loved patronym, but the more Walburga monologued, the more he felt cheated. The witch was only talking about Slytherin fellows, and the names of Potter, Longbottom, Weasley, or Lovegood did not cross her lips.

“Abraxas Malfoy is one of the organizers. He's taking his NEWTS in june but everyone knows Malfoys don't work. He's getting married this summer. Like any genuine Pure-blood, he has been engaged since his birth, but that doesn't stop him from having a girlfriend from time to time.”

Oh, Harry realized in his corner, so this blonde seventh year is Malfoy's grandfather.

"Lucretia Black, my cousin, will come. We are in the same grade and she is very brilliant – not as much as I am, though. I don't know if Druella Rosier will be there. She spent the summer at home and took a liking for my four-year-old brother, Cygnus. I think she plans to spend the New Year Eve changing his diapers.”

Harry nearly choked. Thus Druella Rosier and Cygnus Black, Bellatrix's, Narcissa's and Andromeda's parents, had fell in love so young ...

"I didn't invite Alphard, my other brother. He is only in second year, in Slytherin of course. I must say he is a weird one," Walburga snorted.

Tom wondered vaguely what she meant by that, but Harry had his own idea, although he could not share it with his other self.

Sirius had once told him it was thanks to his uncle Alphard, who had left a fair amount of gold to him, that he had been able to take an apartment after graduation. This was one of the reasons why Alphard had been removed from the Black tapestry. Harry had always liked to imagine him as a former rebellious teenager.

"Nor will there be Orion, my second cousin. He is the same age as Alphard. We don't get along very well, to tell the truth.”

Harry gasped. Orion was Sirius' father. Perhaps an unfortunate marriage explained why Walburga had turned into an old hag. Harry would not have been delighted to marry his cousin Dudley either.

If they are not invited, why mention them? Come back here, I'm so bored I could die.

Maybe she wanna impress you, Harry suggested.

The Slytherin girl was now badmouthing Cedrella Black, who was no longer a Hogwarts student.

You wanna know something hilarious? Even your lame jokes are more interesting than her, Tom
chuckled. Which is not to say little.

Harry rolled his eyes and Walburga looked at him with fascination, nodding fervently.

xXx

"You think it's absurd, too? Even though he comes from a Pure-blood family, everybody knows they are poor as House Elves."

I forgot all about what she was saying, Harry was lost.

Tom, it was very rare, laughed mentally so hard that his physical lips twisted. Fortunately, Harry did not share his laughter and prevented him from laughing aloud.

What's so funny?

Tom tried to answer him but his thoughts were all very messy and Harry did not understand anything, which made him sigh with annoyance.

"I totally agree with you," Walburga said. "I can't understand what Cedrella sees in this Gryffindor bloke."

Two minutes later, while Walburga was still busy talking poorly about her cousin, Tom finally calmed down and agreed to explain the misunderstanding.

You rolled your eyes and she thought you disapproved – I disapproved – her cousin Cedrella's engagement with Septimus Weasley. Then she once again misinterpreted your sigh.

And? Harry was still confused.

John's and the other Pure-bloods' ideas... you dislike them but you sometimes accidentally seem to defend them, Tom developed. It's as if you encourage me on this way despite yourself. It's as if you drive me towards the opinions you fight against. Don't you find that's ironic and funny?

"So you will come?" Walburga finally asked, preventing Harry from lamenting his fate.

xXx

Tom looked up but before he had time to refuse, the girl added:

"I must warn you, there won't be any fifth year except you, not even your friend Albert Avery."

"We're not friends," Tom protested automatically, wondering how she knew Albert.

For my part, I'm only mildly surprised. With her knowledge, she could be the Sorting Hat.

She doesn't hang out with Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs though, Tom proudly moderated Harry's comments.

Harry laughed sceptically.

Why, do you?

I don't rub shoulders with anyone, which means I'm fair with everyone. Except with you: I favor you.

Stop flattering me, it's useless, Harry teased him. I won't do your essay f-
I mean it! Tom was furious. Others are worthless compared to you.

That's the problem, Harry thought for himself.

After a surprisingly long silence, the witch opened her mouth again:

“Really, you two aren't friends?” Walburga had her doubts about Tom's word. “So what kind of relationship do you have with him?”

Is she still talking about Albert? Tom asked, puzzled.

I think so, but her question sure is a strange one...

As Tom did not answer – how could he explain to her that Albert was like a pet for him? – Walburga leaned over the table with a naughty smile and whispered in his ear:

“You know, to tell you everything, John thinks you are ... a ponce.”

Thanks Merlin, she did not notice the brief wavering in his eyes. Not knowing what to answer, Tom slowly crossed his legs, a neutral expression on his face.

xXx

Were you aware such a rumor was spread? he asked calmly.

Unlike the majority of his schoolmates, he did not consider being attracted to an individual of his own sex as a shameful and laughable flaw. For him, it was equally strange to be a homosexual or a heterosexual, for he had never been aroused by anyone. How could one envisage penetrating or being penetrated by someone else than oneself? How could the sex act be healthy, when it inevitably blended the boundaries of two distinct entities?

If he had been born a few decades later, he could have fervently proclaimed himself an asexual and an autophile, for he only loved and wanted his own person. But as the 1940s still got paedo and poofter mixep up, he accepted the term "homosexual". And yes, he certainly loved people of the same sex, though he would never say it out loud. To display his intimacy, his love for Harry, was as indecent as walking with your guts out in the open.

Harry listened to his friend's thoughts with excitement. His Tom was much more open-minded than his past version. Tom was salvageable. Harry still could rewrite History.

How could I? I hate to break it to you, but I'm not exactly your independent person. What you don't know, I don't know either, Harry said lightly.

That's a blatant lie. You often know very much more than I do, Tom insisted.

Even though I'm awesome, I honestly had no idea people said that you, Tom Riddle, was gay.

Who would've believed that? Tom Riddle, Voldemort, gay, honestly?

Tom snorted and stared at Walburga with the coldest expression of his repertoire. It was not even contempt but frank indifference. Feeling uncomfortable, the Slytherin girl took a step back.

"I shouldn't have to justify myself. You ought to have realized nothing was more baseless than this rumor if, as you said, you are really more brilliant than your cousin Lucretia. As this is obviously not the case, that's reason enough to turn down your invitation.”
He stood up, shoved his book into his bag and left the study room without a last glance at Sirius Black's future mother. An ancient misanthropist had most likely more social skills than he had.

xxxxxxx

On December 31, 1942, Tom celebrated his sixteenth birthday alone with himself and, as every year, he was fine with that. Unlike last year, he even had the luck to be the only occupant of his dorm. Indeed, almost all the students had returned home for the holidays in order to forget Grindelwald by choking on gift paper and on hypercaloric food. The only other Slytherins left in the castle were the sixth and seventh years who attended the much-vaunted New Year Eve's party.

Walburga, who was now giving Tom the cold shoulder, and her gang had been actively partying in a dungeon loaned by Slughorn for hours now. Harry and Tom did not give a fuck. In their quiet dorm, they stuffed themselves with sweets while chatting animatedly.

Come on, tell me what it is, Harry pleaded, decapitating a Chocolate Frog.

Tom ignored him superbly. Harry sighed aloud, began to tickle himself and remembered, a little too late, that Tom was not ticklish – but he was.

Stop, time out, time out! I'm choking! Please! Harry begged, twisting on the ground, a headless Chocolat Frog struggling between his teeth.

Hoisted with his own petard, Tom continued to tickle himself.

After five minutes of pure torture, during which Harry tried desperately to escape his own diabolical fingers, rolling on the carpet in all directions, Tom finally grew tired of teasing his ribs. It was, after all, a childish activity.

xXx

“Merlin's tits, I thought you were going to kill me!” Harry breathed heavily, slumped in their bed, his arms spread and his eyes fixed on the canopy.

"I'll never do that,” Tom objected seriously. He added, a few seconds later: “I like it when we talk aloud.”

It sounded like an observation but it was in fact a near prayer.

Your voice-Not two intertwined minds-two distinct people-I want-Harry-say my name-

No, no and no, Harry said firmly.

Come on!

Well... We'll talk aloud if you tell me what it is.

The aim of the game was precisely you guessing all by yourself, Tom replied in an amused tone. I don't understand the problem. You can literally read my mind. You're remarkably useless at this, though.

Yeah, okay, Harry admitted. In my defense, the only thing I can say is that you're a very good Occlumens, whereas I am useless, as you say.

Can you blame me for not being the failed twin? Tom asked dramatically, without an ounce of
Harry sighed, but once again tried to force his friend's mental barriers to find out what he had in store for their sixteenth birthday.

Ever since they had entered Hogwarts, Tom had claimed they would now celebrate their birthday in turns, for he found unfair to be the only one to age. Each summer, one of them spent an entire afternoon withdrawn into a shell while the other one was busy buying Salazar-did-not-know-what. That year, it was Harry's turn to grow old, and he was itching to find out what was Tom's surprise.

Sadly, in sixteen years, Harry had made poor progress in Legimency. He was wasting his time. He therefore decided to recapitulate what he knew about the mysterious gift, hoping his predisposition for the Auror profession would help him to solve this enigma.

*It's Muggle, since we haven't been to Diagon Alley. It's small, since I don't remember we carrying anything big on our way back to the orphanage. It is non-perishable, otherwise he would not have bought it six months in advance. And it's flat enough to be hidden under our bedside table.*

There was little clue.

xXx

At midnight, the Slytherin New Year Eve's party was in full swing – Harry have heard alcoholic voices in the park shouting "Happy New Year! Cheers!". Tom finally allowed him to slip their hand under the bedside table, drawing a small rectangular flat package towards them.

*It's a book, isn't it?*

*Open it, Tom rolled his eyes, faking exasperation. Happy birthday, by the way.*

Harry tore up the gift wrap. In his trembling hands laid a black leather notebook with a bookmark that read "Winstanley's Bookstore & Stationers, 422 Vauxhall Road, London."

*It costed me a small fortune but it's premium leath ... Harry?*

xxxxxxxxx

Harry left Tom Riddle's diary in their bedside table's drawer and a week later he had not touched it not once. His mistrust in the harmless object aroused the suspicions of Tom. It was not the first time Harry had been acting in an incomprehensible way. He seemed to be afraid of the notebook, even repulsed by it, which did not make any sense.

The diary had caught Tom's eye, the boy had not hesitated to spend all his muggle savings into it. He has really wanted to make his other self happy. It was the kind of gift he would have liked to receive himself.

*You have so many things on your conscience ... I thought that writing could take a weight off you mind, allow you to express yourself freely. This is the first time you hate one of my gifts, he said in a vexed tone.*

*I don't hate it, I--*

*You're a terrible liar, you're wasting your breath ... it's a figure of speech. You've kept my children's drawings but you haven't even looked at the diary since I gave it to you.*
I didn't have the t–

I know you inside out, Harry. Why do you persist in lying to me when I know almost everything about you? You don't like it. Spell it out.

Even if you gave me The Monster Book of Monsters, I would be happy with that, Harry reassured him awkwardly.


It's not published anymore, Harry lied, blaming himself for his slip-up.

Okay, whatever. Now, can you explain once and for all why this poor diary makes you wanna puke?

xXx

Harry knew his irrational reaction saddened and annoyed Tom but he could not see the diary for what it was. However, in order to put an end to his other self's paranoid questions, he forced himself to write into it once a week. At first he only wrote down some insignificant thoughts, fearing that Voldemort's first Horcrux, which looked just like his Tom now, would arise at each line.

But this had never happened because, contrary to the diary of his second year, this one was very ordinary. The words shone for a moment on the paper but they did not disappear. No window opened to show him nightmarish memories and his questions remained unanswered.

With perseverance, Harry finally got used to writing in his diary every Sunday night. The harrowing duty became a pleasant ritual. Tom had been right: Harry enjoyed writing. He was now waiting for his writing time with a slight impatience.

He had convinced himself it was not a mere hobby but a revolutionary act. Filling the diary, he was thumbing his nose at Fate, he told her to fuck off. The first version of Tom Riddle's diary had remained blank, but this one would be blackened by childhood memories and questions about the world, like any self-respecting autobiography. If the object fulfilled its main function, it would not become a Horcrux. At least that was what Harry believed.

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His relationship with Tom, weakened after their sixteenth birthday, resumed with greater intensity in the spring. Harry updated his diary several times a week now. On the evenings he was not writing, he was in bed with Tom, trying outlandish positions. Nevertheless, although their masturbatory sessions were still as decadent as they were addictive, they left a sour taste in their mouth.

Like any teenager specialist in handjob, Tom was starting to want more, even though he had no idea what that meant. Harry made it good each time, their overlapping ghostly gestures were incredibly exciting, but there was something missing, something his schoolmates, laughing and whispering at the same time, often discussed by the fire.

If only Harry could slip out of their body, if only he could give him a blowjob! When Tom closed his eyes and sucked his own fingers, imagining they were Harry's, he knew it was smokes and mirrors. Sometimes he had the impression he was fooling himself. He was laughable, possessed by a devil. Twice his anxiety was so bad he had gone limp just a few seconds before coming and had rolled up into a ball in their bed.

In those moments, Harry controlled their arms and cuddled him but it was just hot air. How could a being who was not even a phantom, a being that solely existed in his head, could give him the
physical comfort he so badly needed? Why was Tom, despite his soulmate's presence, despite their unconditional love, condemned to solitude? And if this sterile devotion was a dead end, could one really blame him for wanting to commit suicide when the being he loved was as perfect as he was impalpable?

xXx

Harry pretended to ignore his other self's torment for he had no solution to offer. He himself was torn in two by a thousand demons, though they did not spoke to him of impossible love as much as of moral perversion. Four years after their first handjob, he had not yet figured out anything.

How could he accept and even beg for their lonely pleasures? Why, against all odds, did he find Tom's body beautiful, worse, attractive?

Tom was no longer a child but he still had not changed sex and Harry still was not gay. He was infinitely more captivated by a pretty bird's curves than by the square shoulders of Winky Crockett, Slytherin Quidditch Captain. In reality, except his or Tom's penis, male attributes were for him like water off a duck's back.

He was not gay, always had had a hard-on while with Ginny, Tom was only ... an isolated case. He was a part of himself. So it did not really matter, right? Was it a crime to love yourself? Does not every person yielding to the delights of masturbation dedicating himself to a homosexual and self-erotic act?

Concluding there was ultimately no problem was cheating though. Although they shared the same body, Tom was clearly a being in his own right, and Harry had always seen him as a son or as a little brother. Their age gap was now so small they were more like twin ... but this did not make the situation more moral, quite the contrary in fact.

"Incest!" a voice shouted. "Narcissist!" another replied. "Lunatic!" One last yelled.

But the vilest murmur was the one saying "Tom Marvolo Riddle: I am Lord Voldemort."

xxxxxxxxx

Spring passed, unstable but sweet, it was now June.

As the OWLS period approached, Tom's and Harry's mood grew darker and darker. The first had exam stress for he had set himself a nearly surrealistic goal. He intended to achieve a faultless performance and get a list of ten O's. For the latter, the month of June 1943 meant only one thing: Myrtle would soon die. The Chamber of Secrets was about to be opened. Tom was going to accuse Hagrid of having letting the Slytherin monster loose on the students.

The death of Turnip, the episode of the cave, the few misdeeds perpetrated by Tom, his curiosity for the Blood Theroy were certainly regrettable incidents, but compared to a Basilisk and a Horcrux ... Since Tom's birth, It was the event that Harry had feared the most. How would the diary, to which Harry had become attached, be transformed into a Horcrux?

He only had a vague idea of the process. One had to kill someone, but what else? If he could prevent this tragedy ... but if everything went exactly as it had the first time, if Myrtle was to die, would the time to kill Tom have finally come?

A much more frightening question tormented him, however: what if, despite the murder, despite the Horcrux, despite the proof that Tom was incontestably Voldemort, Harry forgave him?
He would not only be the accomplice of an abominable act, but the real culprit, for, unlike Tom, he knew what was going to happen and he did not even try to fight fate. The only way he had found to avoid the tragedy would be to lock themself up in the Room of Requirement during the whole month of June and, of course, it was not part of Tom's plans.

On June 13, 1943, while Tom was passing his last OWL, History of Magic, Harry had his mind focused on the Chamber of Secrets. It was already mid-June, how was it possible the Chamber had not been opened yet, that Tom had not even discovered its entrance? He suddenly remembered there had been several attacks throughout the previous Tom Riddle's fifth year. It had not been the case in this world.

The mad hope that Myrtle Warren would not die began to germinate in Harry's belly. It was not so absurd, when he thought about it. After all, Tom had not talked about the Chamber since their mid-year conversation, and he obviously had no interest in eradicating Muggles or Muggle-borns. In fact, was there really a reason for Myrtle to die?

Without realizing it, Harry allowed his anxious thoughts to resonate a little too hard in their skull and Tom immediately complained about it.

*Let me focus.*

Harry apologized and resumed his thinking in a fetal position but he did not manage. He had only one hurry: that Tom finished his exam to ... he did not really know, but he needed to leave the Great Hall urgently.

Tom sighed and his neighbors looked at him. He could not remember the date when Morgan le Fay had created the Vale of No Return, all that because of Harry who was thinking of ...

He frowned. Harry was all curled up on himself, like whenever he thought of something secret. What could he think of during an OWL so important to him?

*Harry?*

*Hm?*

*When did Morgana create the Vale of No Return?*

*What the hell is the Val of—*

While Harry, caught off guard, was wondering in which century Morgana had actually lived, Tom skilfully slipped into his mind and saw the words "Chamber of Secrets" dancing everywhere. If there had been only these words, perhaps he would have returned to his essay without a trace, but there were also pictures.

Clear pictures that could not be mere dreams or hallucinations. Vivid pictures like striking memories, haunting and beautiful pictures, showing a huge green and black room whose ground was covered in water, a haunted and magical underground room, an immense serpent coming out of Salazar Slytherin's mouth, the kind of things that could only belong to stories ...

Harry finally realized Tom had set a simple but effective trap for him and tried to push back the images of the Chamber of Secrets, but the damage was done.

*Morgan le Fay, bollocks!* he exclaimed. *You cheater! cap-crap-crap-
But hiding the facts you know how to open the Chamber and you've even already opened it, that's not cheating according to you?

I don't kn-

Stop lying, it's unbearable! Tom cried, lips clenched, hand so tightly pressed on his pen that it broke in two, spreading ink on his parchment.

The supervisor turned to him and Harry gave him a twisted smile that disappeared immediately. Tom stood up, put away his belongings, and sent his essay to the Great Table with a flick of his wand.

xXx

There was at least half an hour left!

I couldn't concentrate anymore, Tom made a face, walking the corridors at full throttle. To say I haven't bothered you with the Chamber as I promised you, and to say you betrayed me ...

But I didn't, it was not a key info-

Harry stopped dead. Which one of them had taken them to the the second floor's girls' bathroom? Had his feet unconsciously led them to Chamber's entrance? He did not even try to censor his thoughts for he knew Tom knew now. It was too late. The 13th of June, 1943 had finally come.

Indeed, Tom felt this was the place to be, as if he had always known where the Chamber of Secrets was. Just like the first time he had been in Diagon Alley or had seen Hogwarts, he seemed to recognise the place.

He might have forgotten, but his other conscience remembered. If Tom scratched deep enough, he could make Harry's first life's memories his own. They shared a sole memory after all.

In their head, Harry was fidgeting like a fly caught in a jam jar.

Let's get out of here! he pleaded, in the same way as he had done, almost ten years earlier, when they had been sent to look for Turnip in the attic.

Tom ignored him and watched carefully the empty place, which was so mundane it shone. The only remarkable thing was the way the sinks were arranged, in a circle in the middle of the room.

An intuition, like a sense of déjà vu, urged him to touch the taps. He was sure of it now: that was the way to do it. Everything was really going on as if he was reliving a forgotten scene, as if somewhere deep in his soul he had always known how to open the Chamber. What was truly incredible was that he had never done it before that day.

Tom, if we leave, I tell you everything you want. Something horrible will happen here, Harry lamented as he imagined the Basilisk gushing from the hole under the sinks to rip apart the fresh corpse of Moaning Myrtle.

xXx

Tom did not listen at all. For a long time, he had had absolute confidence in Harry but it was always the same song: beautiful promises, aimless lies. Anyway, what so terrible might happen if they opened the Chamber? If it contained a monster that only the heir of Slytherin could control, they were not in danger, for Tom was certain of that, Harry was indeed the heir of Slytherin. This was the only possible explanation for the facts he knew the legend and he knew how to open the Chamber.
For Merlin's sake, he had already opened the damned thing! And Harry spoke Parselmouth, and he was so … Lost between fury and admiration, Tom found no adequate word to characterize his friend.

Harry might not have managed to control the monster in his day, but Tom was much more cautious than he was. He had to see with his own eyes what was for the moment only a foggy memory, a fleeting image. Harry had seen and Tom had not, Harry forbade him to do what he had done being a student … It was so unfair! Tom had to open the Chamber, he could not help it, it was his duty.

A god above him might have bewitched him, that might be why he was born. Whatever, he had to do it.

When he found the snake engraved on one of the faucets, his heart threatened to explode. The tips of his fingers, as the first time he had felt magic buzzing in him at the age of seven, was all numb. It was awesome, his body remembered. He felt so powerful he wanted to laugh like a villain.

*How does it work, Harry? Tell me.*

*Tom, let's go!* Harry ordered trying to take possession of their body but the result was disappointing at the least.

He was far too desperate to maintain the effort. Each step he took toward the door, Tom took it back, bringing them back to the sink with a casual gesture.

*What are you afraid of? The Chamber looks so beautiful, if I can open it I wi-*

*In the Chamber lives a monster, Tom! A Basilisk who kills with a simple look! If you release it …*

*Do you really think I'll do that?* Tom asked.

His other thoughts were encrypted and Harry did not try to decipher them.

*Y- No! Let it sleep and Hogwarts will not close. You think it's going to help you get ten O's? Why are you so interested in it?*

Tom hesitated. He did not know why he was so attracted to the Chamber, but he felt like it might provide answers to questions that were still unformulated. If he did not open it, he would regret it all his life. And besides, there was …

*What do you mean? Why would Hogwarts close?* he said quickly.

*The last time it was opened …* Harry replied reluctantly, *the school has almost closed and yet there was no dead.*

*This time either. It's just curiosity. Be assured, I don't want to kill anyone,* Tom said too much calmly.

xXx

Harry wanted to cry out of despair. If he Stupefied himself … but that was impossible, their wand would not comply. How could he go backwards, when he was cornered? All his efforts had been in vain. The story was already written and it was definitely a tragedy.

So he gave up. As in a dream where he did not control any of his actions, he ordered the engraved little serpent to show them the entrance of the Chamber. He threw himself, hoping to die, into the
gulf which had opened before them. And when he found they had survived, he asked the bronze snakes to open the door that would lead them to the Basilisk.

Hypnotized and terrified, his mind blank, he stepped into the immense subterranean chamber, accompanied by their footsteps’ echo. He finally arrived at the foot of Slytherin’s statue where no red-haired girl was laying. Inexplicably, Ginny's absence made the scene gloomier.

Tom, who hitherto had gone with the flow, suddenly got a grip on himself.

There he was, miles under the castle, in a sanctuary for serpents, in a secret place only a few chosen ones could reach. He madly like the idea and devoured the room with his eyes. The columns were surrounded by undulating reptiles, with stone eyes. The ceiling was reflected on the wet ground and before him stood the Marble Founder, as imposing as a holy figure.

He wanted to bow so much, but part of him, perhaps Harry, was fighting against the grotesque gesture. So he straightened up and whistled, very simply, inspired by a god or by a devil:

~ I am the heir of Salazar Slytherin. ~

What happened next was so unreal he was convinced he was suffering from hallucinations. The mouth of the statue opened noiselessly and a gigantic serpent fell on the floor, splashing his robes. At the sight of the first scales, Harry came out of his trance and fled, his eyes on the ground, his survivor's instinct coming out on top.

xXx

Why had he brought Tom down there? The Basilisk was going to kill them, and it would serve them sodding well right, seriously, what was he thinking? Why was he unable to deny Tom anything? Why was he always the one provoking the incidents?

I am Voldemort? Harry wondered as he ran toward the exit. In fact, Tom Riddle was never bad-was he just possessed by the Devil, by me? And shit, am I going to kill Myrtle?

His old hauntings took advantage of his current weakness to invade his mind. His scar was a chasm of dark magic, he could talk to snakes, he had opened the Chamber, he had seen so many scenes of torture and of murder in his dreams, he was constantly angry, he had so many secrets, he was already Dead and yet he was still there, in the world ...

He had eaten the Horcrux, he had reincarnated in Tom, he had grown mad about the child, he touched him, he sucked him, he led him to the dark ...

Harry found himself stuck in front of the long tunnel leading up to the surface. They were going to die here. It was perhaps for the best. Nobody else would die. Tom Riddle and Harry Potter had already done enough damage on Earth.

I don't understand what you've been thinking since earlier, Tom interrupted, chaos in his head. Why don't you talk to it, to him?

Fuck, don't you see he's starving? You think you can reason with a beast that hasn't eaten for years? Harry replied, shocked.

He looked up and the hole of light, all up there, seemed to be another planet. The Basilisk was behind him and he could picture his enormous head a few meters from his back. Only a few seconds left and ...
We can't fly away, he sighed. If you have a last request ...

Breaking out in a panic, Tom’s mind was full of incoherent final words, words of love and insignificant insults mingled. The Basilisk snapped his jaws.

~ I will not harm you, ~ he said in a near impatient tone. ~ Close your eyes. ~

Tom closed his eyes, gasping. The Basilisk, one of the most fearful creatures in the world, did not seem to want to kill him. It was surreal. Maybe he was already dead.

Am I really special? Why would the king of reptiles spare my life? Did he recognize me, like the snakes in the cave? Does he know I am just like him, for I can speak Parseltongue? Or does he see Harry in me?

Goddammit, Tom, this is not the time to toot your own horn, we may die! Harry hissed, but he was not so convinced of that anymore.

The Basilisk looked like to come in peace.

~ Master left me here a long time ago, ~ continued the creature. ~ Turn around. ~

Tom did as asked, his eyelids still closed, and he felt the snake's cold breath on his face. Knowing opening his eyes would earn him certain death oddly excited him. He was so close to the precipice, he was terribly eager to throw himself into it. He could not even conceive that one could cease to exist.

"What does it feel like to die?" was a question he often asked himself and to which Harry, who was already dead, had nothing to answer him. He only had to open his eyes and ...

Tom, cup the crap!

How is it that you have come back from Limbo, why death did not kill you? Tom asked, wisely keeping his eyes closed. I know you can't answer me, but I feel like I'm immortal, I can't picture myself dying one day.

xXx

~ He said someone would come. Someone came, ~ suddenly hissed the snake, leaning his thorny head to touch, with an absurd delicacy for such a great beast, Tom's outstretched hand.

~ You felt lonely, ~ the blind Slytherin said.

~ I felt lonely, ~ the serpent said.

Harry was on the brink of hysteria. Nobody was going to die and Tom was now a psychologist for snakes. The world had gone mad.

He just needs company, you know, Tom petted the sharp scales. With h is gaze, building friendly relationships is not easy.

He doesn't need friends, he's a Basilisk. A Ba-si-lik.

And you are a scaredy-cat.
Harry nearly laughed. It was preposterous. He, a coward?

*This Basilisk has tried to kill me and he has almost managed to*, he said. *I don't really hold him close to my heart.*

*If even the oldest of the snakes didn't succeed in killing you, then you must be immortal,* Tom whispered with admiration, not at all disturbed by the fact that the animal he was cuddling had attempted to assassinate his friend.

He asked out loud:

~ Would you help me get out of there if I visit you some time in the future? ~

~ I am bringing you up there, you and your other self. Get on me. ~

A moment earlier, his scales were darting like peaks but they faded under Tom's fingers to turn into a negotiable surface. The Slytherin did not hesitate and climbed on the triangular skull. As soon as he was protected from the murderous gaze, he opened his eyes, jubilating.

*Those who are afraid of Basilisks obviously have never sought to meet them. This one is much more amiable than the countryside's snake we bumped into when I was a child.*

*He's so nice, so sweet, and his eyes are so deadly and his canines are so sharp,* Harry ironised, but Tom did not take offense, so busy was he mentally praising the monster's qualities.

*Tom, if he's so helpful, that's because you ar-*

*I know,* Tom cut him. *I am the heir of Slytherin.*

He just had figured it out, but again he felt like he had always known. So Harry had nothing to do with Slytherin, so it was he, Tom Riddle, raised in a Muggle orphanage, who descended from the illustrious Founder. How could he have ignored it until then, when it was so obvious?

When they saw the hole of light above them, Tom patted his mount's scales. The Basilisk wove more gently than a boat on a lake. If he controlled such a powerful creature, his future could only be remarkable. Perhaps could he even use his mortal look to ...

xXx

~ Thank you, ~ he hissed, jumping on the bathroom's floor. ~ I'll come back. ~

He watched the door. If someone came in ...

~ I'll wait, ~ said the Basilisk.

*Tom, send him back to the Chamber,* Harry whined, without taking off their eyes from the door.

They suddenly heard a clinking at their left. The door of a cabin opened wide, showing a girl wearing large round glasses and whose eyes were filled with tears. She was about to say something but did not have time for Harry had thrown himself on her:

“Look out!”

His school bag opened accidentally and Tom's notebooks fell on the floor around them. Just as Harry spotted Tom's diary under Myrtle's leg, the Basilisk, probably attracted by their chaotic fall, turned his head towards them. Harry immediately closed his eyes and shouted to Myrtle to look away but it
was too late, all the elements were already in place.

The big yellow eyes met Myrtle's. The girl let out a small cry before her heart withered and died. Harry had kept his eyes tightly closed, but he had felt as if he had been torn from himself all the same. He had shaken incontrollably. Beneath him, Myrtle had also been squirming in all directions, struggling against an invisible force.

And then, it was over.

Harry came round several minutes later. A glance at the sinks informed him they had taken back their former places as if by enchantment. The Basilisk had disappeared in the meanwhile. Since he did not have a clear head, he tried to adjust his glasses and eventually remembered Tom Riddle did not need any.

Tom.

Tom, are you there? Tom?

His head was dangerously silent.

Tom! Answer me, Tom!

Distraught, he looked for his other self around him but, of course, he was nowhere to be seen. On the other hand, a few inches from him, there was a corpse.

xXx

"Holy shit," he breathed, feeling Myrtle Warren's wrist, looking for her pulse, finding none.

He got up at full speed, rushed into Moaning Myrtle's cabin and find the ghost quietly floating above the throne. Harry thought this shape suited her better but it was most likeky because that's this way he had always seen her.

"Myrtle, you're dead," he said in a whisper.

The young girl opened her mouth wide, and began to cry loudly, calling him names between her hiccups. Harry apologized, gathered his belongings and left the crime scene, looking for Tom in every corner of his skull.

Why was I in such in pain, while my eyes were closed? Where has Tom gone? Is the Horcrux ...?

He rushed into his dorm, jostled several students in passing without apologizing and emptied his bag on his bed. He drew the curtains and eagerly skimed through the diary, looking for the current date.

The page was blank. He then realized that the previous ones were as well. The diary was good as new.

If it has worked ... No matter how, if there is a piece of soul in this Diary, if Tom is inside ...

Harry grabbed a pen and wrote hurriedly, full of hope and fear: 'I am Tom Marvolo Riddle.'

The paper absorbed the words but no one answered him, even to call him a liar. For one reason or another, the contents of the diary had disappeared, along with Tom's soul. Harry did not try to understand why and began to weep, locked up in the body of a boy that no longer existed.

xXx
Night fell. At dinner, professor Dippet announced that a Gryffindor girl had just been found in the bathroom, dead. Rumors quickly spread and students and teachers were indiscriminately accused. The Slytherins asked Harry for his opinion, but he was totally out of touch with reality.

Tom could not have died. They were born under the sign of a blessing – or of a curse, he did not know – but in theory, neither could die as long as the other was alive.

And yet, Tom was dead.

That night, when Harry, stuck in a body that was not his own, saw the Diary on his bed, he cast a Reductor Curse on it, unable to bear his sight.

*It doesn't work*, he thought, and immediately he exclaimed "Tom!", as if the notebook was going to reply.

If *Reducto* had had no effet, it meant the Diary was no longer a common diary. Something had really happened in the bathroom.

He reverently opened the birthday present he had hated so much one day. If Tom was in there, then Harry would protect the Horcrux all his life. If Tom's soul lived between these pages, then the Diary was sacred. But if he could get Tom out of there ...

He wrote 'Tom?', his quill barely touching the paper, fearing at the same time to hurt his friend and to be deluding himself.

The words faded away.

"Where were you, tosser?" Harry read out loud, imitating Tom's disapproving tone.

Tears slipped out of his eyes – of Tom Riddle's eyes – and were absorbed by the paper.

'You're so gross', the Diary commented.

xxxxxxx

It took many days to figure out how to get Tom's soul back. Tom's soul had completely crept into the Diary. Harry tried countless spells but none worked. Through the paper, Tom repeated to him several times he was not in a physical place, so it was useless to shout *'Accio Tom Riddle!'* at the drop of a hat.

Eventually, Harry understood he only had to hold the Diary without believing it, as if it were not an object but something immaterial, as if he really had a soul in his hands, and Tom could slip away. Every time he felt Tom climbing into his arms, he thought he had succeeded, but Tom always went back to the Diary, as if he could not quite get out of it.

One night, finally, his friend's reassuring voice echoed again in his head and Harry collapsed with relief. He had reincorporated a piece of Tom Riddle's soul, in exchange for a little bit of his own. He was not sure how he had done that, but when he had felt in his veins Tom coming back to his heart, he had mentally projected his own soul towards the Diary. And the charming Horcrux had agreed to give back most of Tom to Harry at the cost of a big chunk of Harry's soul. Henceforth, two fragments of soul cohabited in the Diary.

Neither Tom nor Harry had emerged unscathed. However, the main thing for them was that, be it in their body or in the notebook, they were finally reunited.
They spent the rest of the night exchanging words of comfort, promising themselves to never be separated again, and repeating how scared they were for each other. The next morning, though, reality caught up with them. They listened in silence to Professor Dippet's speech, which informed them of the school's potential closing down.

xXx

Aurors had been searching the castle and the girls' bathroom for five days, Mediwizards were analyzing Myrtle's corpse. But nobody, except Tom Riddle, had some idea who the culprit was.

Harry was vaguely surprised that they had not thought of questioning Myrtle's ghost, but he did not feel concerned by the investigation. He had sacrificed a bit of his soul to have Tom back and this half suicide had taken him away from the world of the living. Myrtle's death caused him no pain – after all, he had always known her in her ghostly shape. He felt like his heart had been grinded. There was nothing left of it but crumbs.

He knew what he had to do, though. With unusual callousness, he suggested accusing the Acromentula Rubeus Hagrid was keeping in a trunk.

Tom did not need to be asked twice. He felt nothing about the half-giant but disdain. Hagrid had the reputation of being an idiot who did not care about laws and who was partial to the bloodthirsty creatures of the Forbidden Forest. He was a perfect culprit.

Moreover, Tom would be relieved to not see his silhouette again, for it constantly reminded him of an unexplainable moment, a year and a half ago. Harry had called out to Hagrid as if the latter was an old friend he had not kept in touch with. Tom did not like inconsistencies and this episode of his life was definitely one.

If on top of that it was Harry, the Seer who knew everything, who suggested it ... If the expulsion of a single student enabled him to keep his only home, Hogwarts, open, Tom did not have to hesitate.

Dippet listened to his story and believed it. Rubeus Hagrid, with his giant blood, his liking for monsters and his barbaric manners, oh yes, it could only be him. The Headmaster sent the Aurors back to their offices. He declared that Myrtle Warren's funeral could be organized. He also explained to the Daily Prophet that the involuntary assassin's identity had been discovered thanks to the testimony of an excellent student, the Slytherin's Prefect.

Tom was given a decoration and all the professors congratulated him for his courage, for it was not simple to denounce a fellow student. Only Dumbledore believed in Hagrid's innocence. Every time Tom met Dumbledore's eyes, he had the impression the wizard suspected him, but Harry himself told him not to worry. If one were to discover the truth one day, it would be decades later. They had nothing to fear.

In reality, Harry just did not care. Nothing mattered to him except, perhaps, Tom's delight when a small plaque with his name on it was put in the Trophy Room. The first Riddle to leave his legacy at Hogwarts!
Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, please share your thoughts if you'd like to!
Sixth year (1943-1944 / 16-17 years old)

Chapter Summary

During summer, Harry leads Tom to Little Hangleton. They discover a lot of things about Horcruxes. Tom want to use this dark process to give a body to Harry ...

Chapter Notes

Warning: There are some gruesome descriptions in this chapter. Please remember this is a work of fiction, it doesn't reflect my personal convictions at all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sixth year (1943-1944 / 16-17 years old)
Chapter 9: A permanent digestion of dead bodies

It’s a very bad idea.

Have you always been such a coward?

Being brave also means knowing when to go back, Harry said, feeling like Hermione.

You think about her so much that I can’t believe nothing happened between both of you.

I never thought at her like this, Harry made a face. She was my best friend. And she was going out with Ron.

Lately, you’ve been very disposed to talk to me about your first life, Tom observed, collapsing on a stump. Why I am so breathless when I’m the very personification of youth?

We don't work out a lot, Harry teased, breathing the air with delight.

He could clearly have enjoyed the moment – hiking on the heights of a lost village – if he had not known what was coming. The road led to the House of Gaunt and the worst part of this story was that it was Harry who had taken them up there.

Since the creation of the first Horcrux, he felt different and indifferent. If Tom asked him question he knew the answer to, Harry would gladly reply to him, even if it could be compromising.

It was as if the mission he thought he had when he had reincarnated – protecting Tom, stopping him from becoming Voldemort, doing everything he could to change the story – had been canceled.
Whether he struggled or not, events kept happening and he could not do anything about that. But what once made him feel helpless was now a status quo he calmly accepted. He could not save Myrtle, he could not save Tom and he could not save himself.

Yet the closer they got to the House of Gaunt, the more he realized what he was about to do. How could he have given in to Tom's whim? Why had he dragged him to a new murder?

xXx

Tom had always been a bit obsessed with his origins. During his first year, he had sought his surname everywhere at Hogwarts, in vain. Harassed by Harry, he had finally come down to never know where he came from. He had persuaded himself it did not matter as long as his imaginary friend stayed with him forever. Harry was his family's only member.

His old obsession had been reborn two months earlier, when he had received an Award for Services to the School. Seeing his name in the Trophy Room had reminded him he was perhaps not the last of the Riddles. Old questions then began to echo in his skull: Which one of his parents was Muggle? Why had no one ever come to get him? Why was he, the heir of Slytherin, born?

On the train to London, he had once again asked Harry if the name of Riddle did not evoke something to him. He had not expected Harry to tell him, in a detached way, where Tom Riddle Senior was living.

Tom had not been upset. Since the little Gryffindor girl's death, Harry was imperturbable. To retrieve Tom's soul from the Diary he had torn a large part of his own. This self-mutilation had made him as sensitive as an ice cube.

In short, the Slytherin had simply ordered him to reveal what he knew about his origins. Harry had not argued. He had told him his mother was descended from Slytherin, for she was a Gaunt and his father, whom he resembled very much, was a rich and handsome Muggle.

When Harry had dropped the name of the village where the Gaunts and the Riddles lived, Tom had begun to prepare his expedition to Little Hangleton. Harry, who previously would have attempted by all means to dissuade him from going, had even helped him organize the trip.

This convenient Harry being very convenient, Tom did not try to find out why he was so well informed. The main thing was that Harry shared what he knew with Tom.

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Tom, don't go, Harry suddenly ordered. I should never have told you all that. If I've hid what I knew from you, it was not for-

Shut up, will you? Tom interrupted. I don't believe in your lies anymore. You are distraught. I know you lost the thread because of the Diary. But don't worry, this time there will be neither Basilisk nor dead body. I only want to see from what kind of people I come, so I can understand why I'm on Earth.

Harry sighed and fell back into his lethargic state. He felt like he was Imperiused. It was not unpleasant. He would never have thought that owning a Horcrux could make him so careless.

Xxx xxx xxx

Are we there? Tom asked dubiously, as they arrived in front of the shabby hovel where his mother had grown up.
Harry indicated the doormat on which three snakes were rotting. One of them was quite fresh, the other two were partly eaten away. Tom approached, hesitating between fascination and disgust. Settled down on one of the bodies, a large blue insect was munching flesh with zeal. Ants were picking up the small bits which were too small to be eaten by the beetle. Then they head back to the west, where the entrance of their underground shelter had to been.

The show was hypnotizing. Following the leader, a parcel on the back, the ants climbed the obstacles and skirted the boldest reliefs without ever stopping, as if they were a single organism cut into several pieces. To their right and going in the opposite direction, their congeners with empty legs formed another line. These one had already dropped off their load in the anthill and were coming back to help them out.

How did they find their bearings in this gigantic world? Did they communicate through their antennae? Were they presently passing messages to one another, oblivious to the presence of the huge voyeur?

And did not the enormous blue bug see these profiteers in a negative light? Would it abandon his meal and have a bite of a crispy ant? Or was this plundering inevitable, natural, in his opinion?

The scene was trivial and repetitive but Tom was struck by a revelation, as if he was in front of a religious painting. To stay alive, one had to feed on death, it was as simple as that. To plunder the corpses, to trample them, to act as if they had never been animated bodies but only dead flesh, it was not cruel, it was life. Some had to die so he could survive, for his heterotrophic cells were renewed only at the cost of other lives.

He was not a plant, a little water and light were not enough for him. His situation did not sadden him though. That was how it was. His flesh existed only because he ingested other flesh, only because he was incessantly recycling matter. He was even glad to be a necrophagus. He wanted to grasp one of the snakes and eat it raw. Leaving this body, this food, slowly molding on a doorstep had no sense.

Everything had to be reingested, one inside the other and the other inside one, for the world was a permanent digestion of dead bodies.

xXx

Was it not thanks to a similar principle, an equivalent exchange, that Harry and he had lost part of their souls? The girl was dead but they got through it. Tom's soul had been torn from his body, but instead of fading into the air, it had passed into the most alive thing of the room, the Diary in which Harry had poured out his thoughts for months.

But why had Tom's soul broken out firstly? He assumed it had to do with the protective gesture Harry had had for Myrtle. By throwing himself on her to protect her from the Basilisk's eyes, he had intended to sacrifice himself, while Tom had spent long seconds praying for her to die.

This dilemma had separated them deeply, so much so that one of their souls had been sacked of their common body. Roughly speaking, everything had gone pretty well, considering it was an impromptu experiment.

During the few moments when Tom had been nothing but a wandering soul, he had taken possession of the Basilisk, had made him close the Chamber, and had sent him underground. Exhausted, he had then landed in the Diary, which was glittering and beating like a heart.
It was unfortunate that a person had died for his research, but other ones will soon have to die so he could reach his goal. Unknown lives, mortuary faces, it was not so important, compared to the possibility of seeing Harry at last. All in all, he might become a vegetarian. By sparing a certain number of animals, he could, in return, steal some human lives, for all the beings of the Earth were interchangeable, except one, and this irreplaceable being existed his skull only.

xXx

For his part, Harry had thought a lot about what had happened last June. He had come to a similar conclusion. In order to create a Horcrux, taking a life was not enough – if it had been the case, all humanity would be immortal. One had to feel remorse at the very moment when the act was done.

That was what was so terrible in the creation of a Horcrux. It was not enough to kill. The murderer had to feel tearing apart by this death. He had to be ready to die because of it.

Tom's soul had been ejected from their body because Harry had been ready to sacrifice himself to save Myrtle. If he had not thrown himself at her, if she had died without anyone protecting her, Tom would have stayed in their body, end of the story.

So the Horcrux had little to do with dark magic. On the contrary, it reminded Harry of his mother's sacrifice. No one wanted to talk about it and wizards were very afraid of it, but only because the Horcrux conferred a cursed immortality, an immortality reluctantly achieved. Who would want an existence full of remorse, a life even Death did not demand?

The Basilisk's eyes kill anyone who looks into them. Myrtle died. I was torn apart, I didn't want her to die. My sorrow snatched Tom from me. His wandering soul slipped into a close and worthy object: the Diary he gave me, the Diary I had filled me with my thoughts. He woke up a few hours later. At that time, the Diary became a Horcrux. In order to take back most of his soul, I had to put a piece of mine there. Now the Diary contains a small piece of his soul, a bigger fragment of mine.

But how did the sinks return to their place? Why was the Diary in our bag? And why was the Horcrux created, if Myrtle's death was not a murder but an accident? Who is the culprit?

XXX xxx xxx

~ Who are you? ~

Tom turned around. Lost in their thoughts, Harry and him had not realized someone had come behind them.

~ My name is Tom Riddle, ~ replied the teenager in Parseltongue. He looked at the unknown man.

The guy was dirty, poorly dressed. His eyes were glassy and haunted, his lips split. His long and messy hair dangled in his back like lianas. Behind him, a horned animal, its throat cut, was levitating, pouring blood on the ground.

Tom noticed that some ants had lost interest in the snakes and were packing together under the slaughtered creature. The blood spattered them hard. One or two ants drowned in the scarlet puddle, but none left until having drunk the vital elixir.

A deer, Harry commented, without looking away.

Tom shuddered. The fresh game's sight and smell were stomach-churning but what really upsetted him was Harry's lack of reaction. Harry had always been the most sensitive, the most naive. Since the bathroom story, something had broken in him. Tom's experiment had been a success but it had
cost him dearly. Was it really worth trying again?

Try what again?

Tom did not answer.

~ What are you doing here? Go away, ~ Morfin Gaunt grunted after a long silence.

He did not seem surprised that Tom could talk Parselmounth. He might have not realized it. After all, he did not seem disturbed by the fact that he only wear one shoe and that his beard looked like alopecia areata.

If Harry's calculations were right, Morgin had left Azkaban more than a decade ago, in 1928 or 1929. The prison seemed to have destroyed what little mental balance he had received at birth.

Morfin walked past them without looking at them and opened his house's door with a shove of the shoulder, crushing the dead reptiles under his bare, dirty feet. The big blue insect flew away and buzzed for a moment around the throated deer before disappearing into the forest.

Tom went inside and horrified, he looked at his ancestors' home.

xXx

I can't have a link with this place. How can this man be a Pure-blood? How can he be descended of Salazar when ...

The half-full plates emitting strong rotting smells, the dust covering everything – the floor, the furniture, the lamps – the bits and pieces lying around, everything made him nauseous. Could one really live in such a slum?

Ask him, maybe he knows, Harry suggested, half seriously. His name is Morfin.

Tom maintained a reasonable distance between Morfin and him – he did not want to get fungus – and questioned him:

~ You're Morfin, aren't you? ~

Tom's uncle was busy cutting up his game, but he looked up to him.

~ And you, who are you? Go away, or I'll cut you into pieces. ~

He's right, we might be better off going away, Harry said.

We came here so he could talk to me about my mother, Tom retorted in an exasperated tone.

Harry did not argue any more for he was thinking of something else. He was almost certain that Pensieve-Morfin had recognized Tom. Yes, he remembered that Morfin had confused Tom Riddle with his Muggle father. There was no doubt, Morfin had shouted, he had even thrown himself on Tom.

The fact that Tom had found the Gaunts thanks to Harry and not thanks to genealogical books had probably changed the story. Perhaps Tom's first version had come later in the summer, with a haircut that resembled his father's, one day when Morfin was particularly lucid.

Some elements were therefore modifiable. It was not over yet. This thought did not lighten Harry's mood as much as it would have done a few months earlier though.
~ I told you before, my name is Tom Riddle, ~ Tom replied. ~ Tell me what happened to my mother. ~

~ I dunno your mother, ~ Morfin said, resuming his dismemberment.

~ She was Merope Gaunt, ~ Harry breathed in spite of himself, driven by an unhealthy curiosity. ~ ~ Your sister. ~

Morfin dropped his bloody knife. With horror, Tom watched him pick it up, wipe it vaguely on his jacket and, muttering, got back to his sordid activity.

~ Merope, this slob ... This little tart ... Father died because of her ... The prison, because of her ... ~

After a long silence, in which he played absent-mindedly with the dead animal's nostrils, he stood up and groaned with anger:

~ You're the Muggle's son, aren't you? I remember now. Riddle ... To say he's still alive, that dirty ... that dirty ... ~

He fell back on his chair. His knife slipped from his hands again, but this time he did not bend over to pick it up.

~ Where is the Locket? Where is Merope? If she were there ... I could beat her, she would cook something for me. Merope ... ~

He was whining, occasionally accusing 'that Muggle bastard on his hill'.

Harry wanted to leave. Despite his new heart of stone, he was shaken up by the pitiful scene. Morfin was already unstable before Tom's birth but the prison, his father's death, his sister's betrayal, all that had finished him off. Harry did not even understand how he could have survived until Tom's visit.

_You're right, you can't get anything from him_, Tom sighed. _Let's get out of here. Besides, will you one day explain to me how you know all this about my family?_

_Oh!_

Tom immediately understood what had taken his friend's breath away. Morfin had abandoned his meat on his chair to catch something on the extinguished fireplace's mantle. Morfin was kissing the little object with fervor, and each of his infectious licks made it brighter.

_It's a-

A ring_, Harry said, without hiding his fright. _In the Pensieve, wasn't he wearing it to his finger?_

_xx_

In Harry's panicked tone, Tom understood the ring was invaluable. Why Harry knew it was a mystery he would solve later. For the moment, he needed the ring. It was like when he had seen the engraved snake on the girls' bathroom's faucet. This ring attracted him terribly and he would heed his call.

_Tom, no!_ the Survivor shouted angrily.

_I hasn't been obeying your orders for a long time. I'm not your son_, Tom said softly, pointing his
wand at Morfin.

Harry struggled with all his might but since the creation of the Horcrux, he was unable to compete with Tom. He looked helplessly at the scene. The Slytherin boy Stupefied his uncle, who fell face down, his nose buried in the hearth's ashes.

*I'm not gonna kill him, why are you such an unsufferable git? I would get more use for that ring than him,* Tom cleaned the object by waving his wand and slipped it into his pocket. *I'll also take this just in case.*

The ring and Morfin's wand in his pocket, Tom headed for the neighboring hill, where, according to Morfin, the Riddles lived. During the short journey, he did not pay attention to his other conscience's cries of distress for he already had a lot to think on his side.

For many years, he had been desperate to find his biological wizard family. A black bile was rising in his esophagus, though. Considering the unhappy condition of his uncle, Tom was no longer surprised that his mother had died giving birth to him. Even if they were descended from Slytherin, The Gaunts had nothing to do with the powerful Pure-blood families John had described to him.

He hoped, therefore, to be more impressed by his Muggle family. He had inherited the face of his father and the latter was rich: he might not be as badly welcomed at the Riddles' as he had been at the Gaunts'.

**XXX xxx xxx**

He had never been so strangely welcomed in his life. The first time he had rung at the Riddle Manor, an old woman had slammed the door in his face just as she had seen him. The second time, an old man had opened the door. He had given him a large senile smile.

“Tom, we were waiting for you. Mother is not going to be happy, you are late again,” the Muggle had whispered, before signalling him to follow him.

*He-Mother-What?*

Harry had not known how to calm his soul's confusion.

*Tom, he's a doddering old man.*

*But he called me 'Tom'-Mother-He said-

Tom did not remember to have even been expected somewhere for dinner. Even if it was a sweet and ephemeral illusion, he followed his grandfather pretending to be his son who had come home a bite late, pretending to have always lived there.

Unlike the House of Gaunt, the Riddle Manor boggled his mind. Everything was almost like in his dreams: high ceiling, old tapestries, posh furniture and labyrinth of corridors. But the quiet paintings were undoubtedly Muggle ones.

They came in a large and austere dining-room, where the table was set up for three people. The lady who had slammed the door in Tom's face ran to them, looking exasperated.

“Thomas, what were ... ” she gasped. ”What are you doing here?” she asked Tom, dragging her husband to a chair. “Did your parents never teach you not to walk into strangers?’”

*She knows who you are,* Harry noticed.
"Obviously.

"My parents are gone," Tom smiled in a charming way. “They abandoned me at birth.”

"That is unfortunate, but these things do happen," Mrs Riddle commented without an ounce of compassion. “Excuse us but you have to go. We will have dinner. Furthermore, in this day and age, it is not recommended to hang out in the streets at this hour.”

"The Germans' bombs don't scare me," Tom sighed with exasperation.

"So you're an unconscious young man. Go away or I call the commissioner.”

Tom, we're not welcome here.

And this Muggle cow is the height of rudeness. Maybe him ... Tom came near the old man with a soft, empty look, who did not seem to understand what was happening.

He was just smiling foolishly, waiting patiently for his wife and son to sit down to have dinner.

xXx

“Don't go near Thomas!” Mrs Riddle ordered, protecting her husband with a wave of her arm.

Tom backed away.

“But I am...”

"I know who you are," Mary Riddle admitted with regret. “You're the son of this ... crazy woman, aren't you? The one who lived in the old house they have been trying to destroy for years. Why don't you go there and beg for money? The maniac who lives over there is your uncle after all.”

“I've been there.”

“Well, go back there!”

"I'd like to see my father," Tom smugly said.

The old lady straightened up and laughed briefly. The sound barely resonated in the large room.

“Your father! You think Tom ... “

“I'm Tom too.”

"You think my son would like to see you? He will not be long, he should already be there. Wait for him if you want to, but don't move a muscle and don't do anything strange. You probably inherited your mother's ... defects," Mary Riddle's voice was quivering.

She was still standing in front of her husband's chair.

Damn, she looks like Petunia, Harry thought.

Tom did not ask who he was referring to. It must have been the Muggle woman he had grown up with, the one who had condemned him to live in a cupboard all his childhood. One day, Tom would go see them.

Don't even think about it.
Tom sighed and moved on. If they ever visited people of Harry's first life, they would surely meet his old friends, Ron and Hermione, not his adoptive family.

*Tom, it's you who want to find your origins, not me. My friends are far away now,* Harry whispered, hoping Voldemort would never go after his two best friends.

One Boy-who-lived was already enough.

**xXx**

In a corner of the dining-room, a large clock was sinisterly ticktocking. Six and then seven minutes passed. At the very moment Tom was about to leave, unable to stay longer in the same room as his grandparents, a man finally came.

Tom recognized him at first glance because it was like seeing himself in an aging mirror. High cheekbones, brown eyes, pinched mouth and auburn hair cut clean, Tom Riddle Senior and his son looked unbelievably alike. For this sole sight, Tom congratulated himself for having come to Little Hangleton.

*You have the same face,* Harry pointed out in a dumbfounded tone.

He had already seen Tom Riddle Senior in the Pensieve but to see him in real life .. it blew his mind.

*You too, you look a lot like your father, Harry.*

*If you age, you'll have the same wrinkles, the same-*

*Why 'If I age'?* Tom asked with amusement. *Why on earth wouldn't I age?*

He did not listen to Harry's answer because his father had sat down. Tom was looking at him, trembling with anticipation.

**xXx**

"Mother, who is he?" Tom's father eventually said, his eyes fixed on his empty plate.

"He is this woman's son."

*He doesn't seem thrilled to hear that news,* Harry was observing Tom Riddle Senior's scandalized face.

Mrs. Riddle shot a triumphant glance at Tom before sitting down in front of her husband. Her son's delicate purple complexion had not gone unnoticed.

“Why are you here ?” Tom asked Tom, his head still down.

*These people are so witless,* Tom was surprised, but he calmly replied, with the touching tone he used to charm his teachers:

“I just want to understand why I was brought up in an orphanage.”

“You've been abandoned?” the Muggle man said lightly, before turning to Mary Riddle. “Mother, I am genuinely sorry for the wait.”

“Next time, introduce us to your companion.”
"Come on, Mother, we're not even engaged."

"Times are changing and you are not so young anymore. Go and kiss your father."

Tom Senior, thirty-eight years old, rose reluctantly and kissed his father's cheek, who looked at him without recognizing him.

"I'm very pleased to meet you, my name is Thomas Riddle. I don't know if you've already met Tom, our son? Come, my dear Tom."

I-

He confuses you with-

Harry, I know it, just shut up. Must you shatter my illusions?

The rest of Tom's thoughts were confused but Harry immediately recognized what was gnawing at his stomach: the visceral need to be accepted.

xXx

Even if old Thomas was a decrepit old man, Tom could not help but be moved by his tender gaze. No one, not even Harry – for his green and dead eyes were no longer part of the world – had ever looked at him like that.

These are the eyes of a parent, he thought standing still, forgetting Mary Riddle and Tom Senior.

"He is sometimes a bit capricious," Thomas Riddle finally said, with a spark of pride in his eyes, "but he's a good son. Please, sit down. Remind me, you are Mister ...?"

Tom Riddle Senior, although he got used to his father's senility, could not hide his pain. As he did not know what to say, he stood foolishly, looking wounded. His mother came to his rescue and motioned to him with her hand to sit down.

"Thank you, Thomas," she said to her husband with a sight. "My son, the starters are on their way, Cathy is in the ..."

"Shut up!" Harry suddenly exclaimed, his other self's sorrow being an acid in his viscera. "I came here to meet you. I wanted to understand where I came from, why ... why I am alive, why you are alive! My mother is dead, but why didn't you raise me? I've always wondered who my parents were and now that I find my father, he only worries about his stomach. And you, how can you be so hurt by the fact your father doesn't recognize you, when you are not interested in me, your own son?"

Tom Riddle Senior made a face and muttered that he had not eaten all day and 'compared only the comparable, will you'.

Tom was restless. He had just had proof Harry was unwaveringly supporting him despite their many differences. It was something that pleased him more than having met his biological father. Harry, wherever his soul was hidden, loved him to the point of forgiving him all. Harry, whatever that future was, would always be with him, in him.

Moreover, Tom had always been immorally excited when Harry's magic was vibrating under their skin, as it was at that moment.  

As soon as he was reincarnated into Tom, Harry had chosen to behave like a parent and, in order to
do so, he had to put an end to his teenage crisis and bury his extraordinary angry potential. In
everyday life, he repressed his power more or less well. Yet he had something enormous in his heart,
something that even death could not destroy. Then, when he allowed his emotions to run their
course, it was as if all this patiently accumulated energy was suddenly released by all their skin's
pores. And it made him fantastically alive.

The idea that Harry was a different being from himself excited Tom and always made him want to
hug him so hard he would break into pieces. But, of course, it was impossible, for Harry did not have
a body of his own. Oh, how he did not care about the other Riddles! Was not Harry the only being
that mattered?

*Your father is alive and ... he doesn't give a damn about you. You have a family and ... And ...*

Understanding that no Riddle intended to answer him, Harry unconsciously clenched his fists. He
now released spores of magic as a toxic plant. The chandelier slowly oscillated over them, and the
Riddles, even the grandfather, looked embarrassed, even frightened. Harry felt no pity for them.

There was no doubt: after Tom Senior's return to the village, the Riddles had resumed their old life,
as if the son had never married Merope Gaunt, as if he had never become a father.

*xXx*

While Tom, a baby, then a child and then a teenager, had spent his time wondering who might be his
father, Tom Riddle Senior had taken back his privileged position in Little Hangleton without
worrying about his son's fate – without recalling his existence.

Merope had perhaps been a miserable person, but she at least had the capacity to love madly. She
had loved her rich and beautiful Muggle to the point of not being able to deceive him any longer with
a love potion. She had naively believed he would stay with her to look after the unborn baby,
thinking that after some romance he had fallen for her too.

The torment she had felt when he had abandoned her, Harry could only imagine. He knew,
however, that she had sold Slytherin's Locket, her only good, to survive until her child's birth. Her
task done, she had died, dedicating her last words to her baby and to the man she had so foolishly
loved. Even though Tom had never been able to meet her, even though she was no Lily, Harry
thought she had taken on her role as a mother as best she could.

Unlike her, Tom Riddle Senior had not given a fuck about his responsibilities. Of course, he would
never have slept with the witch if he had not been drugged, but in any case a child was born, a child
whose veins were defiled by his cowardly blood. One thing was certain: he was no James.

*Harry, you're hu-

*Shut up!* Harry yelled, but he also felt like a hand was gripping their heart, in order to bust it open.

Was it because of his anger or of Tom's fear?

Mary Riddle, momentarily taken aback, regain his ability to speak.

"The cook will bring the starters, please ..."

"I won't leave before having heard what you have to say!" Harry snapped.

Tom Riddle Senior's eyes widened. He looked like a complete cretin. He was sweating stupidity
while his Tom ...
"What I have to say to you?" the Muggle man repeated. “Your mother, this slattern, trapped me! Without her artifices, I would never have ... Without her diabolical magic tricks, you would never have stood there! If you want money, I'll give some to you, but afterwards, go away, I really had a long day.”

He rummaged his coat's pocket, took out a wallet but he dropped the object. He fell to the ground, dead.

xXx

Everything had happened in a flash. Blinded by the fury of his other self, Tom had pointed Morfin's wand at his father to impress him, to be taken seriously finally but Harry had shouted the Death Curse.

Neither of them could believe it. They stared at what they could see from the fresh corpse: a pair of legs in gray pants, resting strangely on the chair. The rest of the body was on the floor, hidden by the table.

*Why did you do that?* Tom asked with horror and admiration.

*Why did I do that?* Harry wondered, but he felt very calm, almost empty.

He did not regret his act. He had just killed a man, with the same spell that had snatched his parents from him, but he felt no guilt. In reality, with this crime came a revelation: Tom had never intended to kill the Riddles. It was him, Harry, who was going to do it. If he was not destined to commit triple murder, he could never have cast so easily an Unforgivable Curse. It was like when, at the end of his third year, he had invoked his Patronus for the first time on the other side of the lake, without hesitation, without being afraid.

His mission in this world was certainly not to save Tom but, on the contrary, to turn him into Voldemort. He wanted to laugh.

“*What have you done to him?*” Mrs Riddle chirped, coming to her senses. “Cathy, Cathy! Cathy, call ...”

She was getting up out of her chair when Harry pointed the wand at her and killed her. In the first version of the story, the three Riddles had been found around the dining table. Harry would respect that detail.

The sight of his grandmother's corpse did not do much to Tom. Without her, Earth would surely be better. The Slytherin wanted to approach the dark mass of his father's body, but Harry forced him to look at the last Riddle at the table. After having dazily stared at his wife and son falling to the ground, the old man had turned his head towards Tom, realizing at last the teenager was not his son but a stranger.

*No, not him,* Tom whispered. *He welcomed me as his own son. Harry ...*

"*Tom,*" Thomas Riddle murmured, his eyes tearful. “*Tom, it's you, isn't it?*”

Tom lowered the wand. He would not kill the last member of his family, it was too great a sacrifice. If he hid the corpses, if he modified the memory of the old man and retrieved his belongings at the orphanage, he could move to the Manor with him. He did not mind being mistaken for another one if he was so gently welcomed, if he had a home of his own.

Lost in his reverie, still a bit stunned by the two murders committed by his usually virtuous second
conscience, Tom noticed a second too late that Harry, the Gaunt ring clasped in his left hand like a rosary, had raised the wand towards Thomas Riddle.

'No!' He wanted to scream but at the same moment, from his mouth escaped an old incantation, like an echo:

“Avada Kedavra.”

Xxx xxx xxx

Tom being in a daze, Harry took it from here. He went to the kitchen and used Legimency to make Cathy, the cook, believe that her day's work was finished. When she would discover the bodies the next day, she would go down to the village to shout to anyone who wanted to hear that the three Riddles were dead.

While leaving, Harry made enough noise to catch the gardener's attention, and while leaping from the garden gate, he heard the door of Frank Bryce's cabin squeak.

Everything went as planned … or rather as the first time. But Harry was not grieving, on the contrary, he was almost enjoying reconstructing the events as faithfully as possible. It was not quite a game, it was rather his duty.

He felt like a slaughterhouse worker who do his work conscientiously but who sometimes feels a cruel and inappropriate pleasure in killing an animal. This feeling of superiority, which had no reason to be, was bitting his stomach on his way to the House of Gaunt. He was no God but he knew Tom Riddle's whole story before it happened. He was no God, but he came close to it.

He successfully modified Morfin's memory, canceled the Stunning Spell which was keeping him still, gave him back his wand and flew away.

At no time was he afraid of failing, even though he had never changed someone's memory in his previous life. Being in such a deep shit should have troubled him, but everything was very easy, almost too much. It was really like his first corporeal Patronus: he had committed his first murders with disconcerting simplicity.

He suddenly decided to Apparate instead of riding the train. He had not used this means of transport since the Horcruxes' hunt but not for a moment did he consider the risk of Splinching. The short feeling of suffocation was not as disturbing as he remembered, and he reappeared in the courtyard of the orphanage without any problem.

No one asked him where he had spent the day and he locked himself in their room without talking to anyone, not even Tom, who still was groggy. He put on his pajamas and the cursed ring, and he felt, inside the piece of jewellery, two discordant hearts gently pounding. Around his skin, the warm ring calmed him down and made him feel less broken.

He had created the second Horcrux.

Xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx

From the Start-of-Term Feast, people noticed there was something different about Tom Riddle. He who had always been very quiet, not to say asocial, cordially greeted all his schoolmates. He even shaked a few hands here and there. He replied kindly when asked about his OWLS results and seemed worried about Walburga's health, who had turned red when he had kissed her hand.

The murders eventually make one ugly but Tom's first *Avada Kedavra* had only accentuated his
astral presence. Some followers were now fluttering around him all the time, as if he were the sun. It did not seem to bother him. He even went to the little events to which Slughorn had striven to invite him for a few years. He had, however, setted a condition for his circle: he should not be called by his name or surname. He was done with the Gaunts and the Riddles. Had he really been obsessed with his origins during such a long time? He could not believe it, it seemed so insane.

"But how should you be called?" Walburga whimpered. She was eating out of the palm of his hand since he had promised to attend their New Year Eve's party.

Harry shuddered in spite of himself.

"What's the use of calling me if I'm already here?" the Slytherin boy smiled.

"To--, I mean, you have matured so much during the summer," Walburga said, before being dismissed by a distracted hand gesture.

Tom's smile disappeared at once.

*Why do you seem so relieved? Did you think I was going to allow her to call me 'My Refined Sugar' or 'My Little Marsupial'?* he inquired suspiciously.

*I must say, I was afraid you'd give yourself a ridiculous nickname, Harry half lied. Do I still have the right to call--*

*Of course you can call me Tom, the Slytherin sighed, raising his eyes to heaven. You are special, must I repeat it one more time, after so many years? But I'm Tom' only for you.*

*Why do you wear it then, if you don't want to have anything to do with your ancestors?* Harry asked, playing with Marvolo Gaunt's ring. Tom never took it off.

*You know why.*

That was the truth. Harry knew.

**xXx**

The ring represented the murders that Harry, the allegoy of innocence, had committed for him, to defend him. It reminded him that he was only at the beginning of his quest. That he was not done with the corpses but that the result would be worth all those sacrifices. It whispered to him that he was the last of the Riddles and that if he did not want to die alone, he had a lot to do. It was proof that he had finally found a meaning to his life.

Whenever they took off the Horcrux to shower or jerk off, Harry was thinking that he should never have let Tom live that long. If he had opened his eyes, figuratively and literally, in the Chamber of Secrets, neither Myrtle nor the Riddles would have died. Yet, in both cases, his heart could not help but object, Tom had not been fully responsible for the crimes.

However, Harry was not so sure Myrtle had died by accident anymore. It did not fit his theory about the Horcruxes' creation. And he could not be mistaken, to create a Horcrux, to tear your soul and store a piece of it in an object, you had to simultaneously want and not want to kill. Two fundamentally contradictory impulses had to express themselves at the same moment with the same intensity: such a murder could not help but separate a soul in two.

That was why it was so easy for them. While they shared a single body, they constantly had drastically different desires. When Harry had killed Thomas Riddle, Tom had prayed, screaming
with all his soul against this murder, and as the Death Curse had touched the old man, he had felt all the bones of his body liquefy. An inaudible cry had resounded in his skull, his heart had broken in two. He had thought he was dying.

It was exactly what Harry had felt when the Basilisk's eyes had met Myrtle's. There was only one explanation: Tom had wanted the death of the Gryffindor girl. How was it possible? And why would he want to kill her? Did he know what a Horcrux was before the opening of the Chamber?

Harry did not know and he refused to think about it, for he had no desire to accuse Tom of anything, himself being guilty of triple murder. Had he even the right to blame him, when he had murdered three people almost in cold blood?

The Boy-who-lived had thus abandoned moral questions to take an interest in the theory of the Horcruxes. For example, he was surprised that the piece of soul's size contained in the artifact could vary. The Diary contained a good half of his soul but only a crumb of Tom's. The Ring, on the other hand, housed a big chunk of Tom's … and Harry had no idea if he had lost something on the way.

He was sure of one thing: the bigger a soul's fragment in a Horcrux was, the more insensible you became, or, to be more precise, the less you felt. Indeed, if Harry had felt surprisingly empty after Myrtle's death, it was because the Diary had rid him of the feeling of anxiety. Since his reincarnation in Tom, he had been constantly worried, he had worried for Tom, for their future, for their incestuous relationship but the Horcrux had rescued him from this permanent anguish.

For that was the role of a Horcrux. In the same way that a Pensin stored the most unpleasant memories out of the body, a Horcrux took charge of the destructive feelings, those that prevented one from living. In ridding oneself of those evils which devour the intestines, was it not evident that one could get immortality?

According to Harry, the little piece of Tom's soul that resided in the Diary was nothing but his desire to be the heir of Slytherin. He could easily imagine that Tom's desire to find his family was slumbering in the Ring.

Unfortunately and against all odds, the fact that Tom had relieved himself of these two wishes – having the dignity of a Pure-Blood and having a family – had not kept him away from Voldemort. Taking advantage of the newly liberated space in his now selfish and cold heart, a more sneaky, less childish wish had germinated immediately, a vow which had nothing to do with the first Voldemort but which, ironically, would push him to the same fate.

He wanted Harry to come alive and for that, he was ready for anything.

Xxx xxx xxx

Tom had long believed that being the heir of Slytherin or that finding his father would make his existence precious and indispensable. But the Gaunts, Pure-blood descendants of Slytherin, and the Riddles, rich Muggles, emitted the same decaying smell.

He had imagined, inside him, that he was born out of an act of love. He had to be the result of an impossible love story, much like Harry's and he's. But although his mother had died to give life to him, it did not mean she had desired him. When Tom listened attentively to his other self, he felt like she had gotten pregnant just to have a way to pressure Tom Riddle Senior.

He had been wrong to look for a reason to live in other people, as he had been wrong to be fascinated by the Blood Theory which gave him a secondary social rank. He could, if necessary, use this dogma to achieve his aims, but his goal had nothing to do with the enslavement of the lower
For the only thing that gave a meaning to his life was that he was born with Harry. This anomaly made his existence a miracle. Unlike the other orphans, the other Half-Bloods, unlike the Pure-Blood folks, he had been destined from birth to something great.

Harry could have been reborn in Walburga Black, John Lestrange or Albert Avery, yet he was there, in him, Tom Riddle. He knew so much about the Gaunts, the Riddles and souls that could not be anyone else than a guide. He who would lead Tom to the truth, by hook or by crook.

*Oh, Harry, evil genie or guardian, I don't know what you really are, but I love it above all when you moan my name while scourging yourself for doing so-*

*Tom ... Let us come in peace, okay?*

The Slytherin smiled and let out a little desperate cry when Harry's hand on their cock made them ejaculate.

xXx

While Harry was recovering from their solitary hanky-panky, Tom cautiously resumed his questioning about souls. He took care to carefully encrypt his thoughts. If Harry learned that Myrtle's death was not as accidental as it had seemed ...

This was not exactly what he had tried to do but at the same time the unexpected experience had a rather satisfactory result. The Diary unquestionably contained a piece of him and of Harry, which meant it was possible to separate the soul from the body by murder.

Indeed, through his fifth year's readings, he had learned that killing could, under certain circumstances, divide the indivisible. Of course, it had immediately caught his attention. He had always longed to embrace Harry one day. Yet he had not sought to know more about the matter, for he was aware that neither Harry nor the librarian would appreciate his interest in a process that was obviously Dark. In short, revising his OWLS as if his life depended on it, he had put the idea aside.

However, on the day he had opened the Chamber, when the Basilisk had brought him back to the surface, he had vaguely hoped that someone would be in the bathroom. He had not known exactly what to do. When he had felt his soul leave his body, he had thought he could go to the corpse, but he had only been able to possess the Basilisk and then he had thrown himself into the diary.

When Harry had killed Thomas Riddle, Tom had, in spite of his sorrow, used the occasion to try to animate the dead body of his father, but he had had to fall back on the ring, which was pulsing in Harry's hand.

Obviously, a piece of soul torn from the body could only occupy a living being or an object so precious it was nearly alive. That was not what Tom had wanted to do, but it was getting close. If he learned more about how, in three months, he had twice broken his soul, he would surely find a way to give Harry a body. He would invent a new protocol. It was within his reach: after all, he had made two soul transplants almost accidentally! He was a genius!

This new caprice consumed him like an acid and he felt like he was sweating frustration. All his classes were of no use to him, and no professor gave him answers. Dumbledore would not teach him how to bring a man back from the dead. Even Slughorn, Head of Slytherin, did not seem to be fond of Dark Magic. But Tom's interrogations were purely theoretical, it was not as if he intended to create other soul's receptacles ...
Against Harry's will, Tom had tried to discuss the matter with his classmates, but they all had looked at him with disgust. Even those who infallibly supported Grindelwald had shuddered at the idea of separating a soul from a body. It was worse than a rape, much worse than a Dementor's kiss. It was crossing the line with divinity. It was not a question of darkness but of madness.

"Are you serious?" Mulrber Byron had said.

"You should take it up with John. But even him, I don't know if he would be able to help you," Nath Rosier had grumbled.

"Why would you want to do that?" Albert had asked fearfully.

"I just have questions," Tom had argued. "I am certainly not the only wizard wondering if it is possible to remove the soul, to place it elsewhere than in its original body."

"You ... You know you'd have to kill to create what you're talking about?"

"Yes, I do. Again, I remind you these are mere questions."

"And are you ready for that? Ready to kill to become immortal?"

"That's harmless curiosity, I tell you," Tom had repeated, but his classmates had not seemed to believe him, and had moved away from him with fear.

_I'm not reaching for immortality_, Tom had been mentally surprised. _Why do they all think that?_

_Please because it is the primary purpose of a Horcrux_, Harry had dropped. _And shit shit shit—_

So 'Horcrux' was the name of a soul stored in an object, Tom had thought, stroking his ring, amazed. The word was as mysterious as the process it designated. For if Tom intended to use it to offer a flesh to his soulmate, its first aim seemed to be to confer immortality. So, was he already immortal? The idea was pleasant and frightening at once. An endless life where he could never see Harry's face, he was not sure if he wanted it.

He had to find a way to divert the process, but for that he had to learn more about the Horcruxes. And Harry was not particularly cooperative. If only he found someone to help him, someone who had enough confidence in him to tell him the truth ... He had to check his hypotheses: he would not risk Harry's life because of an error of reasoning.

**Xxx xxx xxx**

Tom waited several months before daring to approach Slughorn. He methodically prepared his deal, establishing himself as leader of the Slug Club, building with his fellows and his teacher if not a friendship, at least a relationship of trust.

_Are you sure you want to do that?_ Harry asked suddenly.

_I'm just ordering candied fruits_, Tom protested, frowning. _Even you, Saint Harry, can not blame me for such an innocuous act._

Harry weighed the pros and cons and eventually confessed:

_Candied pineapples are what Slughorn likes best._
That's all it was? Did you need to be so dramatic? Tom sighed, crossing out his order. How do you know?

He had ... told us about it? When he was my teacher?

Tom raised an eyebrow but did not insist. He watched as the school's owl flew to Honeydukes before returning to the dormitory. The next evening he would talk about the Horcruxes with Slughorn, whether Harry wanted to or not.

Harry did not want to but he had not enough strength to fight against Tom lately. He did not know exactly when it had begun, but his presence was gradually decreasing and this decline, like a headache, prevented him from thinking about painful things. It was much easier to get carried away by events, to acquiesce to everything Tom said and to just feel their hearts beating in unison.

It must also be said that with his new carelessness, the prospect of a conversation on the Horcruxes no longer frightened him so much. He knew Tom's goal was not to create other Horcruxes but to find a way to hijack the process and Harry could not lie to himself: he wished Tom would succeed.

Xxx xxx xxx

As soon as Harry opened the door of Slughorn's office, he was assaulted by a disagreeable impression of déjà vu. Everything was as in the Pensieve: the Potions Master buried in a large armchair, his feet resting on a velvet pouf, a glass of wine in his hand, and the five boys sitting on the carpet, turning as one man towards Tom.

The only thing missing was the box of candied pineapples, but Tom held it in his hand.

"Tom, we were waiting for you!" Slughorn exclaimed.

Tom smiled, handed him the box of sweets and sat down in the middle of his fellows, next to Albert. Nothing happened for five long seconds and he realized they were waiting for him to speak. As Tom made an inventory of all the jokes he had already made, Harry came to his rescue:

"Sir," he said politely, "is it true that Professor Merryjoy is retiring?"

Have you not found anything better? Tom sighed mentally, but he was relieved he had not had to intervene on his own. He was too focused on his future discussion with Slughorn.

The latter pointed at him with a reproachful finger, but his malicious expression showed how much he appreciated his audacity.

"Tom, Tom, if I knew, I couldn't tell you. I must say, I'd like to know where you get your information, boy; more knowledgeable than half the staff, you are."

All the boys laughed, while Tom wondered vaguely how Harry, who was with him all the time, could hold information himself did not have.

"What with your uncanny ability to know things you shouldn't, and your careful flattery of the people who matter – thank you for the pineapple, by the way, you're quite right, it is my favorite –"

The Slytherins giggled, but Tom's face remained neutral.

"– I confidently expect you to rise to Minister for Magic within twenty years. Fifteen, if you keep sending me pineapple. I have excellent contacts at the Ministry."
So you were right for the pineapple. In fact, Tom realized, he isn't complimenting me but you, through me. I doubt, however, that you have the capacity to become Minister for Magic.

_I doubt it myself_, Harry admitted, wondering if in the present – if his present still existed – a statue of him had been erected.

He was a bit ashamed of this reflection.

xXx

The evening progressed slowly. Tom laughed at the right moments and spoke from time to time but he spent most of his time thinking about Harry. If he found a way to install him in a body of his own ... In someone else's body, maybe ... But whose?

None of the boys around him would fit. He wanted Harry in Harry Potter's body and if he had to lose a part of himself in his experiments, it was not that bad. He had already lost a lot the year before, but the diary and the ring were only first steps.

Harry pretended he had not heard anything. It was crazy how he had gotten good at burying his head in the sand.

The small clock finally struck eleven o'clock, and Slughorn dismissed his guests, not realizing that one of them had remained behind. Harry wanted to clog his ears, but obviously it was impossible. So he listened to Tom pronounce the phrase that had haunted him much of his own sixth year:

“Sir, I wanted to ask you something.”

“Ask away, then, m'boy, ask away...”

"Sir, I wondered what you know about ... about Horcruxes?" Tom stammered, for Harry, at the last second, had tried to stop him from speaking.

It was too late but, if one thought about it, the day Harry had masturbated Tom for the first time, it had already been too late.

The rest happened as in his memories. Slughorn hesitated, Tom flattered him, Slughorn gave in to him and Harry felt like the time he had seen this scene in the Pensieve: Tom seemed to have prepared this moment for weeks, which was true.

” – But, of course, existence in such a form ... few would want it, Tom, very few. Death would be preferable.”

The thirst for knowledge was now apparent on Tom's face, he could no longer hide his greed. True, it would be a cursed form but it still was a form, it still was a ghost, it was better, according to him, than death. He refused to believe that Harry no longer existed in this world and that his presence in their head was comparable to the light of a star that had long since disappeared.

And Slughorn had taught him everything he wanted to know: it was possible to make the experiment several times, without messing up their souls too much. He had at least four other chances.

XXX xxx xxx

All the rest of their sixth year, Harry spent a lot of time cloistered in his corner. Being curled up in a ball made him less nervous than before. On the contrary, since his soul had lost a bit of its substance, he found it comfortable to be folded upen himself, as if it enabled him to collect his disintegrating
Images and words of their discussion with Slughorn sometimes danced in his mind, reminding him that Tom, despite his sweet promises, had asked if it was possible to divide his soul into seven, that Tom, despite his love for Harry, was undoubtedly becoming Voldemort.

But Tom ... Like the group of students who followed him everywhere, Harry had completely fell under his spell. He had not fell in love of his aura of power, but of his unsuspected sweetness, of his incongruous ingenuity, totally foreign to the first Dark Lord. Tom had remained, deep inside him, the child who asked him to tell him stories because he had not yet learned to read.

However, Harry did not doubt Tom was destined to become evil. And that was his fault. He had spoiled him too much, then he had subsued him too much, he had lied to him, then he had left him too much freedom, and then he had locked him up in their so exclusive relationship that no one else would ever be interesting in Tom's opinion.

The worst part of it was that Harry enjoyed, with a guilty pleasure, being under constant attention. He had never loved, he had no recollection of having ever been loved in such a sickly fashion. When he had told Ginny he was leaving for a dangerous mission, she had replied she would not hold him back for after all, he was like that.

But that was not true. More than anyone, Harry had always wanted to meet someone who would simply be ... someone who would be like a mirror. Then he would just have to hug his reflection to feel at last complete. And that double was Tom. Tom who wanted to create other Horcruxes for an unknown reason, since he had never wanted to be immortal.

By the end of Tom's sixth year, everyone had heard about his dark projects and no one dared to call him by his first name. But, as it was necessary to designate him in one way or another, they started to call him 'You-know-who'.

To Be Continued ...

Chapter End Notes

What's beautiful as love, merry as a fairy and rainbow colored as a rainbow?
A REVIEW <3
Seventh year (1944-1945 / 17-18 years old)

Chapter Summary

Tom leaves the orphanage for ever, Harry is mysteriously ill, Tom sacrifices something in order to cure him.
Tom doesn't want to grow older, for some reason he visits the Basilisk again, for some reason some secrets are revealed at last.
The two teens' sexual intercourses grow bolder somehow, Harry is kinda happy but not completely coz well Tom is a bad boy.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Drama! As always, A LOT happen in the chapter, so keep calm and read slowly ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Seventh year (1944-1945 / 17-18 years old)

Chapter 10: Images of computers, of modern vacuum cleaners or of dishwashers

Tom could not hold back one last look at the ominous building behind him. The establishment had never come close to a home but it was there, between these walls, that his first memories with Harry survived.

Each room was inhabited by a childhood ghost. He only had to look at the little courtyard for a few seconds to see himself as a kid, jumping clumsily his rope on a cold Christmas morning.

Since he had slammed his room's door a moment ago, a surprising nostalgia had been surging inside of him. He had though the Horcruxes had made him stronger but he clearly had an unsuspected sentimental stock.

Even if he had been coming back there only once a year, during the summer holidays, even if he hated its moisture, its pipe sounds and its squeaky floor, the orphanage was the only place where he had had a room of his own, an intimate refuge in which one of his fellows had never entered with indifference.

That morning he had woken up for the last time in the tiny wrought iron bed where Harry had told him so many stories in the evening and where he had later experienced his first masturbation. Rather
than going downstairs for breakfast, he had preferred to finish sorting his things, in order to leave the place as soon as possible. Oh, there was not much left in his orphan's room. Over the years all his possessions had accumulated in his Hogwarts dormitory. Throwing away the child's drawings lying under his bed as well as his worn-out, coveted by no one, clothes had only taken a few minutes. He had been delayed, however, by the discovery, under an old pajamas, of a shoe box containing the worthless objects he liked to nick when he was younger. The bottom of the box was carpeted with curiously well-preserved brownie points. He laughed when he realized he had not kept his promise to Dumbledore. He had never given back the yo-yo, the harmonica and the thimble to their respective owners and he would never be able to do so for they were long gone now. He did not even remember their faces, let alone their names.

Beneath the box he had found a 1938 General Post Office calendar. He had run his finger over the impatient small crosses in pencil, marking time till Hogwarts. How this excitement seemed distant, almost dreamed! Hogwarts was no longer an imaginary world but the very concrete place where he had lived for six years, a place which had, after all this time, lost some of its magic.

The day he should leave his bed, quit his dorm and bid farewell to the Slytherin Common Room was not far away. But the wrench he would feel at that moment would have nothing to do with his current twinge of regret.

Tom finally started walking, leaving definitely behind him the ugly Mrs Cole, the old Anne, Ivy the cook and all the orphans who had gradually replaced those with whom he had grown up in spite of himself. Before taking the bus to King's Cross, he promised to himself he would never think of Turnip again. The rabbit's death was part of a period of his life he did not want to trouble himself with anymore.

Xxx xxx xxx

September 1944 was a particularly difficult month. Although Harry and Tom had never enjoyed their time at the orphanage, leaving it had marked a turning point in their life. Time was running out: they had begun their last year at Hogwarts, and when summer would come, the castle would cease to be their home. This deadline depressed both of them for it constantly reminded them that they had nowhere to go and that one was the only family for the other.

The NEWTS program was intense and the teachers were more demanding than those of Harry's time. He could not follow the lessons. He had to watch, with frustration, Tom answering perfectly Dumbledore's and Flitwick's complicated questions, mastering spells without batting an eye and winning House points daily. Tom had not only caught up with Harry, he had easily overtaken him, and Harry had not seen it coming.

Backed by his six years of study, the Gryffindor boy had always considered himself as Tom's private teacher. He had never realized that, unlike him who rested on his laurels, Tom was maturing and discovering new things every day. It was not astonishing that he could now write perfect Defense essays without soliciting his help.

Anyway, Harry would have had trouble giving him the right answers for he was dying one piece at a time.

It had started a little before the summer holidays, in April, May or June, he could not tell for sure. It had risen imperceptibly every night and, at the beginning, he had not even really realized it. He felt more tired, less inclined to conversation, and he strangely enjoyed being withdrawn into himself, but he thought then, so naive, that it was nothing serious, a kind of cold, if a soul without a body could catch one.
But the more time had passed, the worse it had become. At the end of the summer, he had spent almost half his days rolled into a ball, responding only weakly to Tom's insistent interrogations. He no longer had the strength to masturbate, he did not even want to. In reality, everything happened as if he was slowly moving away from reality, with hesitant but inexorable steps. He was immortal, he had no body, but his soul was extinguishing like a firefly at the end of its life.

xXx

During the last days of September, Tom was in a permanent state of panic. He had planned to re-immers himself in his spiritual experiences at the end of his schooling. One more year pining for Harry, he had told himself, it was not much, he would be patient. He had not expected Harry to die before he had time to change the Horcruxes' protocol. And yet, for some unknown reason, Harry was dying in his head, in his heart, at every moment, and he did not know what to do to hold him back.

If Harry was material, Tom could have touched him, held him in his arms or brought him to the infirmary. He could have gathered his limbs scattered on the ground and sewed them back to his torso, reconstructed his spine by patiently stacking the twenty-four bones. But as Harry was only a soul, as he only existed for Tom, he might as well try to catch the dancing dust in the rays of light.

xXx

On the evening of September 30, Tom softly brushed his soft sex through his pajamas, but without much conviction. Harry had not been responding to his advances for several weeks. It was impossible to blame him, knowing that just thinking had become an effort for him. Yet Tom sillily longed to come one last time with Harry before he died, so he could have a date to commemorate.

Harry, he thought in a low voice, for each too strong thought weakened his friend a bit more.

I'm not dead yet, Harry whispered. You pamper me too much.

He did not even notice the banality of his reply. He had always imagined his death would be violent but out of the ordinary. Voldemort would kill him after having teased him, after having smeared his clothes with sweat and blood. Before Avada Kedavra would touch him, Harry would shout a last provocative word. The people who loved him would cry and that day would become a historical date.

If he had been told in his first life that he would die in Tom Riddle's arms … and that Tom would be the only one to weep over him ...

No matter how much I consider it, I can't understand what is happening to you. Something must be happening. An immortal entity, a soul, can't perish without a reason! Tom exclaimed in despair. You have already died once, but you have resurrected, you have returned, which proves you can not die. And let's not forget that part of your soul is hidden in the Diary. How could you be disappearing, when you have a Horcrux?

Harry did not know. When he did not have a migraine, he tried to understand what was happening to him, but he could not explain his mysterious decline. If only he had been given a little more time, he could have ...

The Diary, he realized suddenly. Give me the Diary.

Tom did not argue. He unlocked his drawer and took out the notebook. For the first time in days, Harry took possession of their body. His arms seemed heavy and his legs made of lead but he was valiant. He grabbed a quill and plunged it into ink. He wrote, on a blank page, 'My name is Harry
'My name is Harry Potter,' Tom mentally read. This Diary is no Horcrux, but vulgar prankster object. Why would it repeat it is called Har...

He had just understood. How could he not have thought of it earlier?

How do we do it? How did you do that? he asked in a feverish voice.

Tom, it's dicey. There may be another solution. To tear away a piece of your soul won't--

If you think I will not sacrifice a piece of my soul to save you, you're a dumbass. You did exactly the same thing for me, after the Gryffindor girl's death. Do you think I love you so little? Do you really think that faced with an unexpected solution, I won't do anything? Now, explain to me, Harry.

Tom using a verb like 'love' told more about his distress than any speech could. Harry had to survive until he gave him a body. If Harry were to die and he, Tom, was condemned to an eternal and solitary life, then he would be really cursed, then the Horcruxes would be the most disgusting objects he would know, for they would link him to a world Harry no longer haunted.

But if he poured his soul into the Diary, he could re-integrate part of Harry's, in exchange, for the Horcrux did not distinguish their two souls from each other. And it did not matter if he became less human or if his body was strangely affected, as long as Harry came alive again. What was the use of being immortal if his soulmate was not?

Tom felt the Horcrux climbing into his arms like a poison. It was like having his hands plunged in a pool of mud and leeches stuck under his skin, slowly conquering his heart. Was Harry's piece of soul lying between the Diary's pages so full of darkness? For what was infiltrating his veins was a mixture of fear and anxiety, something which should definitively have remained out of his flesh. It hurt like hell. Harry had never said it was so bad, self-mutilating your soul.

What was he losing, in the exchange? Which of his feelings made its way through his phalanxes to reach the Diary? How much would it cost him to keep Harry alive?

Doesn't matter, he repeated to himself.

When the transfusion was over, and when the Diary contained only a crumb of Harry but a large fragment of Tom, the Slytherin teen did not feel tired at all. He then experimented the first one of his innumerable nights without sleep or rest.

The next morning, October 1, 1944, Harry awoke in great shape. Having almost his whole soul back, he suddenly became aware of how crumpled he had been lately. He could spread himself in Tom's entire body without feeling as if he were going to pieces, he could think without fear of disappearing at some point or another, swept away by the flood of his thoughts. With his soul, also had returned some negative feelings but he had welcomed them with relief. At last! At last, he felt guilty about having killed, more than a year ago, the three Riddles. At last, he was hopeful, fearful and willful. The night had transformed him, he felt alive again.
On the contrary, Tom, whose body now housed only a quarter of a soul, awoke as if dead. His reflection could have been a stranger's and Harry did not recognize him either, even though he whispered some comforting words in his ear.

The teenager was not hungry but went to the Great Hall out of habit. His fellows glanced anxiously at him, proof they had also noticed the strange reddish sheen of his eyes and the extremely drawn skin on his cheekbones. His face seemed ready to explode at any moment. Walburga, who was going to invite him for the New Year Eve's party, did not dare to approach him.

Harry shuddered as he heard the students whispering in the corridors about the surprisingly changed face of 'You-Know-Who', but for the umpteenth time he postponed their suicide time. If Tom had lost his beauty, it had been to save him from death.

*I am not superficial enough to judge a fruit on its wrinkled skin,* he said to himself.

But from what state of decay did an apple become a poison? And if Tom was a fruit, was Harry a worm that, bite after bite, ate him up from the inside?

xXx

Once the shock had passed, Tom quickly accommodated himself to his loss of humanity, for it had offered him a new sharpness. Since his awakening, all his thoughts were wonderfully logical, like a serpent's or an automaton's, like Harry's after the Riddles' murder. He had swapped the gentleness of his face, the senses of hunger and of sleep for an increase of intelligence. He had not lost out on this.

*Now I know why you were dying,* he whispered during Charms.

*Go ahead,* Harry shivered … Immediately, the wand of yew sent the cup to be duplicated flying.

"Mr. Riddle, focus, please!" Flitwick said to him.

Harry apologized, *Accio-ded* the cup back, waved his wand and said: “*Gemino.*”

Nothing happened.

Tom sighed. He took possession of their body and duplicated the cup with a casual gesture. He was automatically praised by Flitwick.

That was another consequence of the soul transfer. Since the day before, his wand was at his beck and call, as if it were reading his mind, but it was very capricious with Harry. As if it had suddenly realized there was something wrong with its owner.

Something was tormenting Tom. The more he lost his soul, the more his boundaries with Harry became uncertain. Were they merging or coming apart? Were their souls blending or were they moving away? It was angsty, for he had no idea.

Without stopping to multiply cups, he resumed his mental conversation:

*I said I had discovered what was going on.*

*And I said I was listening,* Harry said.

*Today, it's been exactly seventeen years, nine months and a day since you died. Which means-*

Harry understood.
... that I've spent as much time in this life as in my prior's. That we are exactly the same age. And that tomorrow ...

Yes, tomorrow I will definitely be older than you are.

XXX xxx xxx

Winter passed and Harry forgot he had nearly snuffed it. It was strange that his soul had weakened when his birthday had been coming up, but souls were funny things. He could not believe that from now on his second life would forever be longer than his first one. He could not believe he had now spent more time as Tom Riddle than as Harry Potter. However, Ron, Hermione, Sirius and all the others seemed to belong to an extraordinarily distant past. Only one character of his previous existence was still haunting his nightmares and it was the same guy he shared a body with.

In short, after ruminating murders committed a year and a half earlier, Harry recovered his personality of yesteryear, but Tom ... Oh, Tom did not regret having lost a bit more of his soul, on the contrary! Something, a dark desire, rose in him like an immense wave's thud, and the Slytherin could not tell whether he should contain it or, on the contrary, precipitate it.

He still wanted to find a way to embody Harry but he was more and more attracted to Horcruxes in themselves. Their creation was so simple and their magic ... Oh, it was fascinating. To put his soul in symbolic objects, to be able to take back pieces of it and to still be able to animate his own body! Was not this being God, controlling space by being in several places at once and saturating time, being immortal?

Becoming immortal, yes, the idea excited him madly. How could he not have been charmed by this possibility when he had discovered it? How could he have thought Horcruxes would only be a way to get Harry out of him? Horcruxes would be a path and a goal at once. They would be his life. And what a life he was going to have, what a life he already had ...

He was never hungry but never full. He was never sleepy but never rested. And almost every morning when he woke with the impression he had not slept, a thought shouted at him like a noisy insect: One day older than Harry.

To be forever older than the one who had once been his big brother was infinitely depressing. By dying at seventeen, Harry had made himself immortal while he, Tom ... Tom was aging. On December 31, 1944, he was eighteen years old. Despite his two Horcruxes, his body was going to change, to rot, his bones would crumble and his skin would wrinkle like old parchment. The age of Harry, seventeen years old, was acme, the perfect age for it was rimbaldian, the age Tom should have stopped growing old! But no, he had crossed the threshold and was going downhill, walking a way leading him to adulthood.

Although Harry shared his body, although he blew out the candles instead of Tom every other year, Harry would not grow old with him. His still teenaged soul, stuck at an ideal age Tom would never be again, would accompany him until Tom would be an ageless old man, with an ugly face, a bald head and a dead body that could not die.

Harry had eternal youth, Tom could only pretend to immortality. Unfortunately, Tom was not afraid of dying but of aging. For Harry himself was already dead but he would never grow old.

Oh, how dark was his mood!

XXX xxx xxx
“Colorless, odorless ... If I didn't know you – but I do know you, Tom – I would swear your vial is full of water!” Slughorn marveled, brandishing the small container so the whole class could admire its transparency.

"Professor, I would never have dared to insult your expert nose," Tom replied.

Some of the pupils had an uncertain smile, unable to know whether he was complimenting their teacher or whether he was actually mocking his imposing nose. Slughorn did not notice the ambiguity of his pupil's answer and attributed twenty points to Slytherin.

“A labeled sample on my desk please, and empty your cauldrons. No need for me to remind you that as tempting as it is, it's very dangerous and formally forbidden to steal and use a potion made during classes.”

*Tom, what the fuck are you doing?*

Harry struggled to take control of their body. It did not make sense, Tom's mutilated soul should not be able to compete with his, yet their body and wand were obeying better and better to their legitimate owner. Powerless, the Boy-who-lived saw his own hand slid a Veritaserum vial into their pockets. Was he condemned to be a spectator of his life, or rather of Tom Riddle's?

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Harry harassed Tom all day to find out what he meant to do with the stolen Veritaserum. He reassured himself as he could, figuring Slughorn had judged the potion perfect, which at least made it not toxic. And Tom had only stolen a few drops, just enough to make someone talk. But all the same, it was very frustrating to live in the same head as him without succeeding in reading his mind.

Suddenly Harry found himself in Myrtle's bathroom.

*Tom ... he called,* but the Slytherin did not answer.

Tom opened the Chamber of Secrets with such indifference that Harry shuddered. At the end of their fifth year, almost two years ago, Tom had been quite feverish at the idea of diving underground to meet the Basilisk. That day he jumped into the tunnel with as much emotion as a pebble.

He went through the Underground Chamber without a glance at the impressive columns or at Slytherin's statue.

What were they doing here? Was it related to the Veritaserum?

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~ Come here,~ Tom said, and the order reverberated sinisterly in the room.

The stone mouth opened, revealing sharp scales with disturbing reflections and Harry immediately closed his eyes.

Tom reopened them immediately.

*Close your eyes, for fuck's sake!*

*Drink the Veritaserum or I keep my eyes open.*

*You wanna die, right?*
I can not die. To be reduced to the state of mist or of hardly existing spirit doesn't frighten me. But you are afraid of that, aren't you?

Why do you do this? Harry asked, trying to look away, but Tom still brought their eyes back to the Basilisk, which was slowly falling from Slytherin's mouth like an endless tongue or a particularly compact stream of vomit.

Seeing that Tom would not answer him and that the whole body of the serpent was on the ground, Harry did not think for a moment more and put his hand in their pocket, took the vial, uncorked it and poured it entirely into his mouth. When he swallowed, Tom finally closed his eyes.

Just in time, for both of them felt, without seeing it, the Basilisk's enormous head a few paces from them. If Harry had waited a second more, both would have died, or close enough.

Oh, should he have refused to drink the potion? By this way, Tom Riddle, the future Voldemort, would have been reduced to a vaporous and harmless state! It was not too late. In reality, he still could open his eyes. But he did not. While this was a perfect opportunity, he could not bring himself to kill his protégé. Was that the story of his second life? A story of cowardice, or of love?

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~Time has passed,~ whistled the Basilisk, pressing his head against the boy's arm.
~ A girl died after meeting your eyes,~ Harry said against his will.
~ Would you have come earlier, if a girl had not died?~
~ I ... I would never have come back, but my other soul would have,~ Harry replied, the Veritaserum pushing him to speak, like an alcohol loosening his tongue.
~ Your other soul is my friend, ~ the serpent said.
~ He's my friend too,~ Harry said, unable to stop himself.

~ Are you afraid?~ the Basilisk was surprised. Its sharp scales brushed the tender skin of Tom's fingers.
~ I'm not afraid of you. I'm afraid of my other soul,~ Harry confided in awe.

The serpent did not reply. It whistled what sounded curiously like a little song. Was it the way Basilisks celebrated? Was it so happy to have company at last?

He's glad I've come back, it's obvious. Do you know how rude and insensitive you can be sometimes? Tom sighted, sitting down on the stone floor.

He whistled back. Soon the room neither Harry nor he could see, for their eyelids were closed, resounded with rustling as distressing as they were supernatural. Harry had never listened to something so weird, the musical saw ghostly orchestra on Sir Nicholas' birthday and the double male snoring escaping from Dean Thomas' bed taken into account.

~ I appreciate your company,~ Tom said suddenly, as though awaking from a trance, ~ but I came down here to find solitude.~

~ This room is a temple, and I only am a guard,~ replied the serpent with some regret. ~ Commune with yourself and with your other soul. I'll wait for your next visit.~
Tom and Harry listened to the Basilisk getting away in a damp strum. The return to near-silence was somewhat eerie.

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“Harry, who are you?” Tom asked as soon as he heard the stone mouth closing itself.

You know I can't answer you, Harry thought, but at the same time he said aloud: “I'm Harry Potter.”

It works, Tom thought with amazement. The thoughts of the one who has drank Veritaserum may be doubtful but from their throat comes only the truth.

"Why do you do that?" Harry exclaimed, before Tom had time to ask a new question.

It's none of your business, Tom retorted, but to his dismay, his mouth said:

"I have been gathering information about you for years now. I know so much and so little about your old life and, I must say, I have long been afraid of discovering the terrible secrets you seemed to keep. However, in September, when I thought I was going to lose you, I reproached myself for my own cowardice. As horrible as the truth may be, it was part of you and it would die with you if you ever died. How was I going to survive? Even if I was the only custodian of your memory, I did not know whole parts of your story!

"You couldn't be an ordinary teenager and I had to highlight your singularity. May I say I love you, if I know almost nothing about you? So, as soon as I was certain you were out of danger, I patiently waited for my time. How make you tell what you had deeply buried into your memory? I had too much respect, too much love for you to violate your mental barriers and to risk damaging your soul a little more. But I knew that Veritaserum was on the NEWTS program and that we were going to prepare it.”

Tom paused, breathless, but the Truth Serum compelled him to resume.

“We are in the Chamber of Secrets to visit poor Basilisk but also because his eyes frighten you and I wanted you to make the choice to drink the Serum. In the unlikely case you'd refuse to drink it, I could have tried again to separate soul from body. For if our body is mortal, our two souls are not. What would have happened if we had kept our eyes open? Now tell me~”

Extraordinarily, Harry managed to cut himself off.

“No, you tell me! If you want so much to discover my secrets, is it only out of love ?”

"There's something else, of course," Tom replied, mentally insulting his friend. “I constantly spot anomalies, inexplicable events making me think you've already lived my life. I no longer believe you are a Seer, for a Seer does not seek to modify Fate. But then why did you reincarnate in me? If you had already been there, if you have knowledge of the future, tell me, I beseech you! Will I be able to offer you a body? How will my experiences end?”

"I don't know why I came back," Harry growled evasively. “And, in my old life, you never wanted to give me a body, so I don't know whether you will succeed. And I don't know anything about your experiences.”

The Veritaserum did not find his answer satisfactory, so Harry was forced to add: "That said, you will create other Horcruxes. There will be six of them ... seven. Six.”

Oh, Tom startled in his head. I will therefore be able to separate my soul many more times. But why
is Harry hesitating about the number?

He decided to leave the matter aside, for, interesting as it was, it was not the most important at the moment. What he really wanted to know was ...

“Where do you come from?” he exclaimed before Harry had time to take possession of their phonatory apparatus. “From a parallel world? When were you born? Are you truly human?”

"I'm human, I guess I belong to the same world as you do, and I was born in 1980," Harry said. “31st of July, 1980.”

1980, Tom stammered. The future, you come from the future.

Harry felt his womb twist as if a Basilisk was struggling into it. His intestines were all knotted up as if venom was destroying the tissues. He had finally said it.

xXx

Their chat lasted the time of Veritaserum, but neither of them knew how to evaluate it in minutes or hours. Underground, in the cold, timeless dwelling of an immortal serpent, Harry confided almost all his secrets to Tom, but he managed to hide the most important ones from him. Confessing against his will irritated him and frightened him at first. He was eventually glad to talk about people whose faces he had not seen and whose voices he had not heard for more than eighteen years.

He talked about his childhood at the Dursleys, about Hagrid's arrival and about his instant attachment to Ron Weasley. He described the episode of the Troll in the bathroom and his friendship with Hermione and Ron. He talked about the mirror of Erised, the philosopher's stone, Lockhart and the opening of the Chamber of Secrets, about Sirius Black, the Triwizard Tournament, about 12, Square Grimmauld, the Order of the Phoenix, Dolores Umbridge and the Ministry of Magic, about Severus Snape, Dumbledore and Voldemort.

Oh yes, he talked about Voldemort, who had come back from the dead to spread trouble, pain and death again. He accused the Dark Lord of killing his parents, Cedric Diggory and Snape, of having precipitated Sirius', Fred's, Mad'Eye's, Lupin's, Tonks', Colin Crivey's and so many others' deaths.

He succeeded in saying all of that without once mentioning the Death Curse that had ricocheted on the front of a baby, the evil scar shaped like a thunderbolt and the prophecy linking the Dark Wizard and the Boy-who-lived. In his version of the facts, it was as if Voldemort had never been destroyed on October 31, 1981, as if he had simply disappeared for some time before coming back stronger than ever.

It looked like Harry had always been in the wrong place at the wrong time and that his misfortunes had been nothing but regrettable coincidences. Listening to himself, he almost persuaded himself that he had not survived Avada Kedavra twice and that Voldemort had never really tried to kill him.

The Veritaserum allowed these omissions for Tom did not ask him any direct questions about Voldemort: he was terribly excited by the Future. Harry's time seemed so different from his own that he wondered several times whether all the things his friend was mentioning would really exist a few decades later. It sounded like science-fiction.

To entertain him, Harry summoned in his mind images of computers, of modern vacuum cleaners or of dishwashers each one more chrome-plated than the last. All the things he had repressed, for fear of compromising himself, came back into his mind and thoughts were jostling to cross his lips. There was so much to say and Veritaserum made him loquacious.
Tom eventually got tired of the description of unimaginable Muggle inventions. He was aching to ask a question, a question of which he already knew the answer.

“What kind of person will I become? I'll survive until your time, for I am immortal. And we were at least acquainted, or you would never have known so much about my childhood.”

He knew for Turnip, for the wardrobe on fire, for my family, for the opening of the Chamber and even for the Horcruxes. How can a stranger from a distant time know me better than I know myself?

Not this question, Harry begged, as words rushed into his mouth:

“You were Voldemort. You tortured and killed so many people. You killed my parents and a lot of my friends. You were no longer a man, for you had yielded to madness. I regret Veritaserum obliges me to tell you that, for one day I'll have to kill you to stop you from committing all these atrocities. I should have done it a long time ago.”

“But you don't hate me.”

"No, I don't," Harry said gently.

XXX XXX XXX

Tom slowly swallowed all the information Harry had given him in spite of himself. Did he regret having learned so much about the future? He felt like he had cheated at the game of life, as if he had read the last pages of a novel to check if the hero would not die. Was his life worth living, now that he knew what was going to happen? Should he abandon his plans and devote himself to something else? He could be a baker or a Shaolin monk.

But at the same time, could he fight against this life that was destined to be his, despite Harry's goodwill? Like Oedipus, Orestes, and Antigonus, he had been condemned before he was born, because of his first incarnation's excesses. While the other one had had the choice of committing sins of death and violence, he, Tom, could only follow his path, disillusioned copy-cat or mime artist at whom nobody laughed.

Yet, if his pathway was clearly marked out for him, was not it advantageous to have knowledge of it? All he had to do was recognize the signs to know where to go. Indeed, the story of the Dark Wizard Harry called Voldemort, Tom was going to incorporate it and to make it his own. He would carefully cut it into small pieces, devour it and turn it into flesh or into waste. This divine knowledge, he was going to turn it into something other than simple knowledge: he would make a model out of it.

That is what he had decided after seven days of thinking. He was going to reproduce what he had already accomplished in his first life but I would do more than Voldemort. The latter had lost a lot of time looking for the entrance of the Chamber of Secrets and for the Horcruxes' protocol. He had broken the back of the work for him. Tom would not only be his worthy successor; he would also be his rival.

While Voldemort seemed to have created Horcruxes for the sole purpose of immortality – why such an attachment to life when nothing and nobody kept him on Earth? – Tom would have a specific purpose. He was going to put Harry into matter, as a sculptor models his most beautiful piece of art. He was going to create Horcruxes in order to see the day a blessed child would come into the world: baby Harry Potter.

He would kill his parents and take him away from the frightful Muggles who would be about to raise
him. He would take care of his education, just as Harry himself had done for him. Oh, was not that a lovely story?

In any case he was not afraid of becoming a being who was no longer a man, if it was for Harry. Yes, all the things Voldemort had done aimlessly, all those lives he had wasted by amusement, Tom would do them to extract Harry from himself. And if he failed, he still could kill Lily and James Potter and steal their newborn.

A Dark Wizard effortlessly accomplishing feat on feat, and taking care of a green-eyed baby! How he could not wait to meet Harry! How he died inwardly, knowing it would happen thirty-five years later ...Thirty-five years, nearly twice the length of his current life. He would have to keep himself busy in the meantime.

xXx

We could masturbate during all these years. It would be a nice hobbie, Harry offered hopefully.

Since he had recovered almost all of his soul, he was again overflowing with libidinal energy. And as he had mysteriously less grip on Tom's body, jerking off suddenly took on a whole new taste. Neither of them had ever tired of their sexual routine, pleasant and reassuring, but they did not complain about the sudden change on the last day of September.

They had long swam in confusion during their handjobs, kissing and masturbating without actually knowing to whom belonged precisely this lip, this hand or that penis. Now, they dissociated their respective actions with ease. They sometimes had the maddening impression of being in two distinct bodies but connected by an umbilical cord, siamese brothers controlling top or bottom, left or right.

Horcruxes had separated their souls without taking them away from each other. On the contrary, like twins who had just been born, they clung desperately to each other, panicked and amazed to learn they had never been a single being.

Oh, how sweet were handjobs, now! The frustration of feeling lonely while they were two was now far behind them. Sometimes Tom, his eyes half opened, thought he saw a ghostly shape enveloping him, an almost palpable figure whose eyes shone like gemstones.

In order to keep his illusion going, Harry readily offered him mental images of his old body, a material conducive to the most insane fantasies. While their hand was shaking up their poor sex, with a style and rhythm defined years before, composite visions paraded before their eyes.

This time Tom was imagining he was dressing up Harry.

He had sometimes fantasized of removing his clothes one by one but, strangely, this stripping had only moderately aroused him. Perhaps it was because he could not believe Harry had once been made of flesh and blood.

Harry's form of existence was so floating that the thought of undressing him made him laugh more than it made him hard. It was so improbable, a surrealist picture Frenches might have produced after the First World War. Why would he take away the little substance Harry still possessed? To undress him was risking making him disappear.

In the reverse direction, it was very different. The jellyfish drifting in the dark waters of his mind was gradually taking on bones and skin. With each garment Tom mentally put on him, Harry gained a few more kilograms, settling into a body, suddenly subjected to the law of universal gravitation. To dress him was to force him to have enough consistency to be able to wear clothes. It was to see in
him more than the clue of a person who was not born yet, or who was already dead.

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Tom took all his time – he had only slipped socks on Harry for the moment – and admired with delight the advance of his work. It was taking shape, he said to himself, taking a step back and forcing Harry to stand upright so his naked buttocks were fully exposed.

Suddenly Harry disappeared. He reappeared immediately, as if the image had had a glitch.

Sorry, the Gryffindor apologized, your hand is so gifted, I've momentarily lost the thread.

Tom rolled his eyes. Despite his two amputations of soul, his attention span remained longer than his other self's.

Stop your drama act and put me on my underpants, Harry told him, founding this fantasy particularly funny.

Come on, who had a hard-on at the idea of dressing someone? Was the first Voldemort fucked up too?

When Tom put the underpants on his living sculpture's arse, he suddenly trembled with a secret desire. In recent times he often thought – without wanting to – of this incongruous act. Dirt did not bother him. He would have eaten from the ground had he been certain Harry had trampled it, he would even have plunged his face into human guts, if they were Harry's.

Sticking his finger between his buttocks was nothing compared to the many intestinal problems he had had in his lover's presence. What was holding him back then?

"Go ahead, Tom," Harry whispered in a low voice.

The Slytherin no longer hesitated. He sucked his physical finger – and mentally swallowed Harry's penis – coated it with saliva – and spat mentally on Harry's glans – carried it to his buttocks – mentally positioned himself behind Harry – palpated curiously the contour of his anus – teased Harry's mental anus with the head of his cock – and carefully pushed it into his hole – and brutally took Harry.

In their head, they were making love passionately and unrealistically. No first time, heterosexual or homosexual, had ever seen such a fluid and perfect penetration. Tom's penis, lengthened thanks to the limitless power of imagination, sank in Harry's nice and pretty rectum, without a sound, without a hitch.

He just had had to lightly press the head of his sex against the orifice and it had entered into it like into water. Harry felt no pain – he was not going to invent it – and chose to follow Tom in his irrational delirium. It was kind of a game: who was going to succeedly maintain his mental image until coming, while their two real hands were busy making them lose their head?

Inconsistent as possible, but always unfailingly present, their scene of illusory copulation took fantastic turns. When Harry pushed their index finger a little more in their arse – in truth, two phalanges, it was already burning quite a lot, he could not imagine a dick could get in there – his fantasy-body suddenly found itself in Tom's place. They had swapped places.

Tom allowed Harry to penetrate him without a word. He dared to invent himself a terribly narrow anus and an obscenely sensitive prostate. Why deprive himself of such a fantasy, when he had every right in his spiritual kingdom?
When the sperm rose along their urethra, both chose to come simultaneously in their mind and they also ejaculated in unison in real life.

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It has been more than two years since Harry had felt so happy. Their fifth year had been full of angst, for he was fearing for Myrtle Warren's life. Their sixth year had begun with three murders committed by his own hand. Their seventh year had also started badly enough: he had almost died.

But since he had regained energy, taken back a large piece of soul, revealed much of the truth to Tom and, most of all, since they were exploring their anal orifice and were creating in thought the least practicable and the most decadent fantasies, everything was going great.

The future seemed full of hope because nothing, no dramatic event was in sight for a long time. The next Horcruxe – but of course Harry would stop Tom in time – should wait for the old collector Hepzibah Smith to be created, which meant they had at least six months in front of them. Maybe even a year.

He had even caught up with his academic backwardnesss and was able to follow the classes, thanks to the clear and patient explanations of his other self. At the moment, their only horizon was the NEWTS.

The picture, however, was not as charming as Harry was persuaded it was. Even if he did not allow it to show through, Tom was still secretly obsessed with his predecessor and his dark group. He himself was always followed by a horde of devotees, who looked like old foxes lurking around a sick hen. But the hen was not dying and it cackled smugly, despite Harry's interventions. It had given itself a frightful name, a name which, paradoxically, would be so much feared that no one would dare to pronounce it later.

"I'll do great things, my friends," Tom said during the break.

The young Orion, who had taken Walburga's place in Riddle's gang, hung on his every word. He seemed ready to draw a piece of parchment and take notes. The other Slytherins smiled knowingly.

They knew Tom would become a great wizard. With his charisma, maturity and talent, he could easily interfere in high society. Abraxas Malfoy, who had graduated two years ago, had promised Tom he would have no trouble getting a place in the Ministry, even if he did not come from a Pure-blood family as himself.

But if there were so many flies buzzing around Tom, it was because being part of his entourage gave many other privileges than his company. The members of You-Know-Who's gang were feared and respected. No one denounced them when they caused an accident – as if there were never witnesses. To be with Riddle was an advantage for those who could not exist on their own.

“Do you intend to put back Pure-Bloods in the place they deserve?” asked a boy whose name Tom had forgotten.

“If it helps him to achieve his goals, Voldemort will lead you to your thrones.”

Excuse me? Harry squeaked.

Don't be afraid, I have no interest in blood purity. You are the purest being I know and you are a Half-Blood. I am a Half-Blood.

So why?
It's simple, Tom replied impatiently. Acting alone would be nice but difficult. A group is less vulnerable than a single man for a group is not a person. A group can't die, Harry, it is an idea, it is a torch. The legs of the salamander disappear without jeopardizing the reptile, for each member can give way to another one. And these small insects that will gravitate around me will guarantee me a Fate without faux pas.

But what do you want to accomplish that requires so many people? Harry exclaimed. A body, if you want to give me a body, you don't need to have a sect!

Voldemort is my past, present, and future, Tom whispered in reply.

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If Tom did not have such a desire for power, Harry would certainly have supported him body and soul in his quest for a body. But Tom, whose soul had been twice mutilated, had a desire for power that made him lose sight of his original purpose. Knowing he would make seven Horcruxes had given him unshakeable confidence in his own abilities. He no longer was afraid of anything and nothing would stop him. According to him, it was absurd to relive a story belonging to the past. That was why his world had no value for him.

Why would he feel guilty about swatting a few people on his glorious path to Harry? He would go on a crusade all over the world and it did not matter if he should steal the secret of a Siberian Shaman or burn a forest so that a flock of birds would fly away. All he would have to do, he would do it, and without any hesitation, and without any regret, for no thing on this Earth still belonged to Time.

If everything had already existed, if what he lived in 1945 was nothing for Harry anymore, if the small villages would be deserted when the technological era would come, why pay attention, why care for them?

Everything around him was ephemeral. While he would go through the years without faltering, the people he had rubbed shoulders with were going to die in the blink of an eye – according to Harry, they were already revenants. Yes, for Harry, the fact that all these students were young and alive might be frightening, because in his first life, they were ancestors or skeletons.

Tom brushed the stone wall of the corridor with his fingertips and the students following him scattered, uncomfortable. Tom Riddle was always so disturbing. Disturbed.

This castle only will withstand time. It is out of Time, inhabited by eternal ghosts, a Basilisk without age, by me and my other soul who is neither alive nor dead. Being a graduate frightens me, Harry. I don't want to leave and we are already in May.

And me, I would just like everyone to call you Tom ...

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On May 9, 1945, the Daily Prophet informed them the Second Muggle War had ended in Europe. Germany had capitulated, its chief had committed suicide.

When he was at the orphanage during the summer, Tom was watching Muggle news every day. However, as soon as he was back at Hogwarts, it was as if war no longer existed. When you live in a place which does not exist for any muggle or wizard map, you easily feel cut off from the rest of the world. He had never heard of concentration and extermination camps, and Harry had never been able to bring himself to talk about them.
Even if Harry did not come from that Time, or perhaps because he did not come that Time, thinking about war made him want to puke. From the beginning he knew what was going on and he had done nothing. He could have warned Dumbledore or the Minister, he could have begged them to go and see what was happening in Germany. He could have gone there himself. An Apparition round trip, some spells and some Unforgivables, and so many people would have been saved!

But it would have altered the course of History. All of that had already existed, mass murder was part of History, he could not do anything about it, it was not as if he were really in the past, was it? He did not know. Anyway, if he had gone back in time in order to kill Hitler, he would not have reincarnated into Tom.

All in all, he was ashamedly relieved to learn Nazi Germany had capitulated at last, for it was an issue which until then prevented him from taking full advantage of the few months of calm remaining before the next Horcrux.

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June blazed past, between exams, parties rhythmizing them and last trips to Hogsmeade. Tom's last day at Hogwarts came too fast. As in a dream, the boy found himself emptying his dorm part as he had emptied his room at the orphanage at the end of the previous summer. He remembered imagining he would feel an enormous wrench, almost as if he would be creating a new Horcrux, but his heart was hard as a clenched fist.

It was not possible, it was not happening.

Tom, Harry whispered, closing their half-packed trunk.

Yes?

We have to see the Headmaster.

To Be Continued ...

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

If you wanna follow my art-tumblr, you can check: http://maiathoustra.tumblr.com/
I've drawn a lot of Harry Potter related stuff in my short life :)

Don't forget you can leave a comment if you want to, be it for expressing your impressions, sharing your theories or just pinpointing errors :)

See you next week!
Borgin & Burkes (1945-1946 / 18-19 years old)

Chapter Summary

Harry goes to Dippet and asks for something the Headmaster can't give him. Free and penniless, Tom begins to work for Borgin and Burke. He eventually meets Hepzibah Smith, who owns two artifacts he is desperate to get.

Chapter Notes

/\ WARNING /\n
This chapter's last scene is PAINFUL and CAN BOTHER some of you. It involves non-con sex. I've kept it short and hopefully not too crude but be aware it is unpleasant to read. I apologize to readers who would feel upset or disturbed by it. It is an important event which helps (according to me) building Tom and Tom's characters.

About the reference to Back to the Future II: Bill Tannen becomes rich by wagering on horse races, thanks to an Almanach from the future.
About the reference to a Led Zeppelin's song: well, just my favorite band.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Borgin & Burkes (1945-1946 / 18-19 years old)

Chapter 11: You've got your whole life ahead of you

Harry was walking briskly, attracting the intrigued and slightly fearful glances of the few students who were still hanging around the hallways.

What was Tom Riddle doing in that part of the castle the day before he left school? Should not he be quietly packing in his dorm or partying one last time with his gang in Slughorn's office?

No one, however, dared to ask him where he was going. Even though he was more sociable than before, he still emitted this dangerous aura saying 'Do not disturb'. And how could one even call him, when he refused to hear his own name, when the pseudonym he had invented for himself was as ugly as it was grotesque?

Who could name such a charming young man 'Voldemort'?

In front of the stone griffon, Harry suddenly remembered he did not know the current password. Like the majority of the students, Tom Riddle rarely came into the Headmaster's office. The last time he'd been in front of the gargoyle was at the end of his fifth year, the day he had denounced Hagrid. Harry had not forgiven himself for this yet, and when he was in the Park, the gamekeeper's hut
always caught his eyes.

"Draco Dormiens Nunquam Titillandus," he tried.

To his astonishment, the guard turned on itself, revealing the spiral staircase, waiting for them to set itself in motion.

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This man is so careless, it is almost provocative, Tom thought as he knocked at the door of Dippet's office.

What should he be afraid of? Harry asked.

Any sensible Headmaster would change his password once or twice a year, it's just common sense, Tom replied. His office must be full of old and precious artifacts, it would be stupid to allow any student to access it. Why are we there, by the way?

You will see.

“Come in!” Professor Dippet said.

His throat clenched by a strange impatience, Tom slowly opened the door. Harry, who was always so reluctant to do anything that was out of the ordinary, had dragged them to Dippet's when they had not even finished packing their trunk, when they were taking the train to London the next day.

Why were they there? Was it one of those events Harry knew about? But Harry was usually not very inclined to face their Destiny, he'd rather avoid it. So nothing terrible was going to happen. No death, no blood, no inestimable objects mysteriously stolen, Tom thought with regret. No Horcrux. Creating a new Horcrux would have been a fine way of putting an end to his schooling, an act which would have marked the advent of a Dark Wizard more powerful than Grindelwald.

I wonder why my first incarnation went to see Dippet the day before his departure, if it were not to borrow some of his relics. Well, I'll soon find out, for Harry knows me better than I do. He might be the true protagonist of my life and I, a mere spectator. After all, he is the one who leads my story and tells it to me. He even knows its outcome. But how can I have an end, if I am immortal?

"Mister Riddle, what a pleasure!" Professor Dippet beamed, motioning for him to sit down. “What can I do for you?”

He waved his wand and the quills, inkwells and scrolls of parchments previously scattered on his desk immediately organized themselves by size and color. Despite his seven years at Hogwarts, Tom, pretty like Harry, was still amazed at the plainness with which wizards by birth used their magical powers. They did not even look at their wands and formulas came out of their mouths without them really thinking about them. Magic was not outside their bodies but inside, like a familiar murmur audible by them alone.

"I...” Tom hesitated, thinking: A helping hand, maybe?

"Professor Merrythought will be retiring, so I would like to apply for the position of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, sir," Harry said in a sure voice, while his other soul mentally expressed his astonishment.

Them, Defense teacher? Harry, perhaps, but him, Tom, would rather teach Dark Arts, period.
"Oh," Dippet said softly. "I'm afraid you're a little too young to ..."

“We have not the results yet but I swear I'll have my diploma!” Tom exclaimed, suddenly very agitated.

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So that was Harry's plan! If they were hired as a teacher, they would not have to leave Hogwarts the next day. They could settle there permanently. In a few seconds, Tom imagined a very pleasant life in the castle.

Classes would keep him busy only a few hours a day. He would have access, in his spare time, to all the resources available – and the Restricted Section was a place full of interesting books.

The pupils would most likely be as uneducated and intelligent as his own schoolmates were, but he did not doubt his ability to open their eyes on the profound meaning of life. Yes, he would make a perfect teacher: charismatic, hypnotizing, flirting with the limits of Light Magic ...

He began to fantasize about the distant day when a dark-haired boy with green eyes and glasses would enter Hogwarts and fall under the spell of his mysterious Defense Professor. In the case he would have himself raised this second version of Harry, he fantasized about the day he would have accompanied the child to King's Cross and rode the Hogwarts Express with him. But no, in reality, if he adopted little Harry, the kid would probably be brought up within the castle!

Had the first Tom Riddle taught at Hogwarts? This was not consistent with the status of nasty Dark Wizard surrounded by followers and Horcruxes. No, he would have known it, if Voldemort had been a Defense Professor. Harry had applied in order to be rejected.

Their stay at Hogwarts would end the following morning.

*He knew Dippet would not accept my application but he respected this element of my story. Why the hell does he suddenly try to reproduce Tom Riddle the First's life? What are you trying to do, Harry, apart from giving false hope to me?*

Oh, how he wanted to stay forever in the school! He would have abandoned his megalomaniac projects if he could have walked the corridors eternally. He would have found another way, through extensive studies, to extract Harry from their body without resorting to illegal techniques. In another life.

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"I have no doubt, Mr Riddle," Dippet smiled after a pause. "I can assure you all the members of the jury were positively surprised by your mastery of magic. However, the tradition is that there is an age gap of at least five years between the seventh years and the professors – maturity and ethics issues. After the regrettable incident of June 1943, we would not want a new scandal to break out in our school."

"I'll just have to come back," Tom suggested. "I'll wait five years, and I'll come back."

The prospect of having to wait five years to get back to his castle did not frighten him. What did five years mean, when you were immortal?

"If I'm still Headmaster at that time, you'll be welcome at Hogwarts for sure!" Professor Dippet chirped, looking relieved.
“Thank you, sir. I apologize for having bothered you – I acted on a whim, I must say. I wish you a good evening.”

"Come on, Mr Riddle, please ... I was very surprised when I learnt you did not go to the appointments Professor Slughorn had organized for you. Why a wizard as brilliant as you was not interested in ... Well, here I am reassured, you wanted to be a teacher!"

The Headmaster clapped his hands with rapture and a few sparks shone for a moment in the air.

“That's it. I don't wish to make a Ministry career. Good night, sir. I apologize again.”

"See you soon, Mr Riddle, and good luck," Dippet greeted him, before returning to his papers, obviously satisfied.

*Why did he seem so relieved?*

*Dumbledore had probably warned him against you,* Harry informed him.

*What does Dumbledore want from me?* Tom wondered for the umpteenth time.

*There are other Dark Wizards far more powerful and threatening than I am right now, and he does nothing against them. I can't believe he'll one day challenge Grindelwald to a duel.*

*And yet it will happen soon enough. Before the end of the year, Nurmengard will have one more prisoner.*

Tom suddenly remembered an enigmatic announcement from Harry, at the very beginning of their fourth year, which found an explanation at last.

*You've said Nurmengard would be useful, the prison would welcome an important prisoner. That was what you were referring to. With your knowldege, you could play the ponies. We could get rich.*

*You are too much self-interested to be upstanding,* Harry grumbled, thinking of Biff Tannen's misdeeds in the *Back to the Future* saga.

*Who is Biff Tannen? And what's Back to the Future?* Tom asked, puzzled.

*xxxxxxxxxx*

The next morning Tom took the Hogwarts Express, like everyone else and like he always did at the end of the school year, but for the first time he felt no pain in returning to London. He did not have to think of the damp, naked old room waiting for him at the orphanage or to mentally prepare to take the lousy bus that would bring him there.

He was terribly free. He could, after all, do whatever he wanted in his life without anybody, except his conscience, demand accountability. He did not linger on platform 9 ¾, wished a fair journey to the idiots who squirmed around him and plunged, intoxicated, into a world of freedom and independence.

He was, however, a relatively reasonable person – at least, Harry was – and he chose to postpone his desire for adventure in order to find at first a shelter for the night. Harry had told him he had spent, one summer, some time at the Leaky Cauldron, so Tom naturally went to this inn.

“Hello, sir ... Oh, you're a Hogwarts student, right?” Tom the barman stared at him.
Did he remember the solitary boy who had rudely rebuffed him several years before, when he had merely wanted to help him? Was he thinking that Tom's delicate face was unusually familiar? He was used to receive all sorts of customers, so why was he fixing the boy's eyes so insistently?

"I've just finished school," the former Slytherin told him. "I would like to rent one of your rooms for ... say, a week?"

"Of course, sir. I need a Gringotts form."

"I can't give you that."

"It's procedure, you ..."

Tom was already in the yard giving access to Diagon Alley, when Harry shouted "Thank you!" over his shoulder. He thought for a moment of reprimanding his friend for his lack of good manners, and then remembered Tom was no longer a child. He was now older than him.

In any case, Tom would not have paid attention to his remonstrances, since he was too excited by the prospect of setting foot at Gringotts for the first time. Harry had always refused to go there, lest Tom find out there was no vault in the name of Harry Potter.

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Tom still did not understand why Harry had not told him he was from the future. If he had revealed this detail to him earlier, it would have saved them so many disputes and misunderstandings ... But it did not explain everything either and other questions had germinated in Tom's mind after the revelations in the Chamber of Secrets.

So Voldemort had killed Harry's parents and many of his relatives. Was it not strange, however, that Harry had met him so many times? Was not it too much of a coincidence that he was present when Voldemort had nearly obtained the philosopher's stone, when his Diary-Horcrux had opened the Chamber of Secrets, when he had returned to life in the graveyard, when he had sacked the Ministry of Magic, when his faithful and traitor Death Eater had killed Dumbledore?

This story lacked something. All the elements were there – the Veritaserum did not allow a lie – but it lacked a logical link to make them coherent. Tom might not have asked the right questions. But knowing the answers was not his priority: he was young and very free.

After opening an account in Gringotts and depositing the few galleons he had in his pocket, Tom asked to fill out the automatic debit form that would allow him to rent his room at the Leaky Cauldron. His Goblin refused, saying his vault was too empty for that.

"Wizards do not understand that a well-filled vault is needed to buy a Goblin's trust," he said.

"Then I'll have a loan. Put a hundred galleons in my vault, give me this form and I will refund you."

The banker smirked at him mockingly.

"Wizards do not understand that a well-filled vault is needed to borrow gold from a Goblin."

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*These creatures are incredibly suspicious*, Tom left the bank, without the little gold he owned. *How could your vault be filled to the brim in your lifetime?*
My parents had left me a lot of money, Harry groaned gloomily.

It's a pity you aren't born yet, we could have lived like princes, if we had had access to your vault.

But I am not born yet and the only bank key we have doesn't protect much money.

Luckily you are here to remind us we are free, powerful and damn poor.

We have to find a job before tonight, Tom.

Merlin knew Harry did not want to work at Borgin & Burkes. The place inspired him the deepest revulsion and it was clearly not an establishment that would bring Tom back on the straight path of butterflies and rainbows. But Harry was hungry and they needed dosh.

Why would they make things difficult for themselves, looking for a honest work, while his knowledge of the first Voldemort gave them a job on a silver platter? Yet Harry did not give in to laziness and suggested to Tom to go around the shops of Diagon Alley, in the hope that one of them would agree to hire them.

In the late afternoon, in addition to being hungry, Harry was now totally discouraged.

If Fred and George's shop already existed, we would have a roof and a work placement, he thought, before realizing the absurdity of this thought.

The Weasley twins, accepting Voldemort as a trainee? Merlin's beard, one of their products was called 'U-No-Poo'!

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Perhaps because of the first raindrops or because of his stomach gurgling like the sky, Harry was suddenly overwhelmed by a wave of helplessness. Fred was dead. It was so long ago, in another life, but it had not happened in this one yet. Fred would born then die. Moreover, he was no exception. Finitude was the fate of all living beings, perhaps their only common ground.

Even if Harry had never wanted to be immortal, now he understood why the elixir of long life fascinated so many wizards. Death came at once, mocking man's presumptuous belief that he had a goal and a destiny to accomplish. A magic spell and anyone turns into a heap of rotting flesh.

It was not a reason to rush the end of the men by killing them, of course … but ... Moaning Myrtle and the Riddles would have died sooner or later. He had done what he could do. And, after all, why would he feel guilty of killing people who were already dead in his first life?

Well, he also stifled his guilt under a strong sense of unreality. All this could not exist. He had not killed the Gryffindor girl and the three Muggles, not really. He had mimed the act, like an actor who commits the same murder every time the video tape is rewound. Even Hepzibah Smith was already dead, even though they had not met her yet. How could one die several times?

However, he quickly realized his arguments were made of sand. When the moment would come, would he manage to kill the people he had cherished in his first life, on the pretext they had already died once? Would he be too alienated to feel sorry or, on the contrary, would he suffer so much that the little soul he would have left would fall into dust?

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Do you know what my predecessor did after Hogwarts? To become a credible Dark Wizard, he
needed gold, and he could not be crazy enough to break into Gringotts. Oh my, my stomach is empty.

But you’re never hungry or sleepy, Harry observed with a smile, the image of three unconscious teenagers clinging to a sick dragon's scales having dispelled his discomfort.

Sometimes he wondered if all the illegal things he had done in his old life were not more serious, all in all, than what Tom Riddle had done until then.

But you are hungry and sleepy. Eat this apple, I've kept it just in case. And we need to find a shelter for tonight, we'll look for a home and a job tomorrow.

Tom stood up and watched the shopping street, expecting to see a bridge beneath which he could set up an encampment. However, even though he was a penniless orphan, he was not the main character of a Dickens novel. So he made up his mind and sat under a staircase. Freedom did not suit him.

Harry could not stand it. He angrily crunched his apple, threw the stump to the ground, forced Tom to stand up and boldly entered Knockturn Alley.

He had never worked, let alone had a job interview. If he had been in his former body, he could have used his famous scar to get any position. Tough luck, in his second life, he was Tom Riddle, anonymous kid, not officially graduated yet and whose name impressed only Hogwarts students. And they were no longer at Hogwarts.

This is where the young Lord Voldemort worked, Harry said, pushing the door of Borgin & Burkes.

Seeing his beautiful face, the two antique dealers partners hired him without asking to check his Curriculum Vitae. Such a cute bloke was always helpful.

The following months were hard but oddly satisfying. It was not a dream job, but it was not what Harry had expected. In the 1940s, Borgin & Burkes was a mere dubious store. It did not enjoy yet the bad reputation it would have in Harry's time. It would meet with success when trading with the Death Eaters, a group that would be formed years later.

Or never, Harry hoped.

In short, being employed at Borgin & Burkes was as thrilling as working in any shop was: cleaning, greeting customers, managing stocks and watching people go by the street. But Harry and Tom were not so bored for they had, at the end of each day, this new and exhilarating feeling of having done something useful and of deserving their pay. Both loved the autonomy their first job gave them.

Armed with his Borgin & Burkes contract, Tom had been able to obtain a loan of ten galleons, with which he had offered himself a unique night at the Leaky Cauldron. He had left the inn the next day, scandalized by the prices.

With a heavy heart, Harry had agreed to rent one of Knockturn Alley's dilapidated rooms. For a handful of Sickles a week, Tom and he had gotten their first home, a few steps from the store.

A routine set up quickly between them and it felt like a couple's. Of course, they had always lived together, whether at the orphanage or at Hogwarts. What was new, however, was the lack of roommates. Their neighbors were discreet and rude and they were fine with that, for they were too busy enjoying their freedom and their youth.
One morning in August, when Tom was officially graduated and beginning to enjoy his quiet life, a newspaper article reminded him of the existence of Hogwarts.

A portrait of Grindelwald stretched out on the front page of the Black Knights, the only daily newspaper available in his Bed & Breakfast.

"Grindelwald unfairly beaten by Dumbledore," Tom read in a dubious tone. "Albus Dumbledore, teacher at Hogwarts, School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, attacks the valiant Grindelwald on the night of August 16th. The duel rages for long hours but no chance was left to the one who had set himself the task of restoring Wizards’ and Pure-Bloods' honor."

*Unfairly, my ass,* Harry grunted.

*The bosses should not be delighted with the news,* Tom commented. *Actually, you were wrong.*

*I don't dispute this point,* Tom said, leaving the newspaper without opening it, for Harry would tell him the story with more objectivity than an obscure Black Knights' editor. *On the other hand, you've said I wouldn't learn his defeat in a newspaper article. You've said it would be grand.*

*I made a mistake. I was convinced Dumbledore would beat him earlier in the year, when you were still at Hogwarts,* Harry conceded. *Happy?*

Harry had always thought Dumbledore’s and Grindelwald's duel had taken place before Tom Riddle had taken his NEWTS. If that had been the case, Dumbledore could have used his victory against the Dark Wizard to put the future Voldemort on guard. He could have told him, without a word, only by giving him a significant look: *Watch out, Tom Riddle. If I have to beat a Dark Wizard again, it might be you.*

But in this world, Harry realized, Tom would not fear Dumbledore as he feared him in Harry’s time, because he already knew the great wizard would die from the hand of Severus Snape, a Death Eater. So who would stop Voldemort from attacking Hogwarts? If he was not afraid of Dumbledore, who could stop him?

xXx

Having proof Harry's premonitions were not always accurate put Tom in a very good mood. He went to work with a light step. Borgin and Burke were not easy-going wizards, but on that day he would obey them without balking. If they asked, he would Apparate on Easter Island and bring back three statues, without even miniaturizing them.

“Bad news, huh?” Burke grumbled, pointing at a copy of the Black Knights lying on the counter. “I don't want you in my paws today, m’boy. So you go home, you put on your best clothes and then you come back to see me. I've got a mission for you.”

Ordinarily, Tom would have, at least mentally, complained about the way Burke spoke to him. But he was in very good spirits, and returned to his room whistling in his head.

Unsurprisingly, he noticed their wardrobe was desperately empty, but it did not dampen his spirits. He put on one of his old Slytherin robes. The last time he had worn it was only a month and a half ago, but it did not feel comfortable anymore. While observing himself in the mirror, he felt like he was disguised and threw his House necktie on the bed, furious.
You’re beautiful, Harry reassured him.

I’m growing old, Tom sighed, touching the slightly rough skin of his cheeks. I’m no longer a teenager. And don’t tell me that I’ve got my whole life ahead of me.

You’ve got your whole life ahead of you, Harry joked, ruffling his other’s hair before standing up. But what kind of life ...

xXx

Back at the store, Tom learned he had to go to a rich Pure Blood’s who claimed to be descended from Helga Hufflepuff. He had to buy one of her treasures for the smallest possible amount of Galleons.

“Listen to her, show her your delicate body from all angles if necessary but come back with something of value. I trust you to evaluate the fine price, you know the company policy.”

Harry groaned at the thought of meeting Hepzibah Smith. Burke seemed to interpret his foul throat sound as an invitation to complain.

“Yeah, times will be hard now that Grindelwald is no longer in the picture. The people of the Ministry will start raiding his sympathizers’ houses. I'd like to get what I can before small gems slip through my fingers. Ah, how miserable is the life of a dishonest antiquarian!”

Harry had not forgotten the infamous goblin armor Caracteracus Burke had so much lusted after. However, he intensely remembered two other treasures belonging to Hepzibah Smith: Hufflepuff's Cup and Slytherin's Locket. The Gryffindor boy calmed his nerves by saying the rich Pure-Blood had not been poisoned during Riddle's first visit. It was too early to give up all hope.

He was aware his optimism would kill him.

Tom took a handful of Floo powder and went into Borgin & Burkes chimney without a glance at his boss.

"Were are you going like that, smartarse? I haven't given you her name,” Burke sneered.

“Hepzibah Smith's!” Tom exclaimed, throwing Floo powder into the fireplace.

Just before the flames went green, he caught the bewildered look of his boss. Then he was sucked in by an intergalactic vaccum cleaner.

xXx

After fleetingly going through a thousand unknown chimneys, Tom suddenly came into a room without light. He stumbled but did not succeed in falling to the ground, for the floor area was equivalent to a stamp's. Face crushed against the wall, he fumbled around to meet only cold walls.

Who fucking puts a fireplace in a tiny, naked, dark room? Did he have the wrong address?

He grabbed his wand and tried to Apparate away but it did not work. Out of spite, he casted a *Lumos* which did not reveal much more than what his blind hands had been able to teach him. In their cell there was no door. And, of course, he had no Floo powder to turn back.

You said her name was Hepzibah Smith, right?
I haven't said it, I've thought it and you've decided on your own to pronounce her name, Harry corrected his friend. We could not have made a mis-

"Who is Mister, sir?" a stifled voice squeaked behind the wall.

"I'm Tom Riddle," Tom introduced himself immediately, without letting his relief show through.

He would not die in a cubicle without exit or ventilation, where there was not even enough room to masturbate. Wherever he had landed, a charitable soul would give him a hand.

“I work for Borgin & Burkes. I was supposed to meet Mrs. Hepzibah Smith but ...”

The creature behind the wall scurried in quick steps.

He left! Tom exclaimed, listening to the weakening sound. He left without listening to me!

Cut out the play-acting, Harry said with amusement, now he knew they were safe. And he is no 'he' but 'she'.

What do you know about House Elves' secondary sex characterics? How can you tell the difference between a male and a female voice?

I can't, but ... Harry hesitated. I know her. Her name is Hokey. She's going to get us out of here.

You know her, Tom repeated suspiciously.

I-

"Mister, excuse Hokey," the voice behind the wall squeaked. “Mistress awaits Mister in the little drawing-room, Mister follows Hokey, Sir.”

xXx

The Elf slapped her fingers and the wall separating her from Tom disappeared. The latter narrowed his eyes, expecting to be blinded by the sudden light, after his quarantine in the dark, but he was not. The corridor where he and Hokey stood was not really dark but it still was dimly lit. The walls, the ceiling and the floor were entirely covered with a thick, red velvet carpet, which sweated opulence and bad taste. Many portraits glared at him as he followed Hokey to the small drawing-room.

The room looked a lot like a circular version of the corridor, furniture, sofas and trinkets in addition. A huge colored meringue stood in the middle and Tom took a few seconds to understand it was a person indeed.

Hepzibah Smith was like in Harry's memory: an old, wealthy witch with an insolently made-up face, wearing a red wig, an excessively puffed-out dress, and shiny shoes making her feet look like badly stuffed sausages. She stank of vanity, but the Gryffindor boy could not help but feel sympathetic. This person was about to die after drinking poisoned tea.

"Good morning," Tom said, as soon as he recovered from his surprise. “My name is Tom Riddle. I work for Borgin & Burkes. Can I ...?”

He came nearer, bowed, and kissed his host's hand, wondering if he had lost his mind. He was not used to give so much consideration to someone who was not Harry. And he did not like to initiate physical contact with someone other than himself.

But a mysterious force had whispered to him to flatter the old witch, the same force that had told him
more than two years ago that Slughorn had information about Horcruxes.

He was not wasting his time and he had not stained his lips for nothing. He could get something out of his encounter with Hepzibah Smith, something which had nothing to do with his work at Borgin & Burkes. But what? If only the voice was louder!

"Oh, young man, you have much more manners than this Mr Burke, I'll give you that," Hepzibah sang out, waving her hand. "Sit down, I'm listening."

She simply felt back and Hokey snapped her fingers just in time, sending an armchair under her voluminous bum. Tom sat on a stool and quietly observed the room, looking for an artifact that might interest the shop.

xXx

Nothing exhibited in the room had value. The mirrors were not Venetian, the porcelains were not Chinese. The wood of the furniture was not precious and the displayed books were too new to be original editions. The plant that was dying beside him was not exceptional. The witch's clothes were beautiful but their fabrics were very common. Tom had noticed, by kissing her hand, that her fingers were keeping the marks of rings she did not wear.

Old Hepzibah Smith, though rich, seemed suspicious. She probably jealously guarded her precious objects and, given her attitude, she was not unaware that Tom's bosses had taken an active interest in them.

Gaining her trust would be a long-term job. Tom Riddle liked challenges.

"I've just graduated from Hogwarts," he said quietly, "and Mr Borgin and Mr Burke were kind enough to give me my first job."

The witch watched him with greedy, fresh eyes, looking at his school robes.

"Charming wizards," she said. "A bit insistent, though."

Tom smiled uncertainly.

"To tell you the truth, I don't even know why they sent me here. I'm sorry I Flooed without warning. Maybe I should–"

"My, my, don't be foolish. Now that you're here, please take a biscuit. Hokey, Hokey?"

The Elf rushed towards them, a tray on her head and Tom graciously helped himself. Without hesitating a second, he happily bit the biscuit.

*I didn't know you could blindly trust stranger's food,* Harry pointed out. He had been surprisingly discreet since they had entered the small drawing-room.

*I hope that you, the one who knows everything about my future, would warn me if we were going to die eating a biscuit,* Tom replied. "Delicious," he said, taking care to lick his finger.

*Uh, Tom,* Harry squeaked, gobsmacked, for their sex was awakening.

*Harry, don't tell me you like it when I suck my finger. You're such a plebeian.*

*Stop that!* Harry got angry but he had no credibility, for perverted thoughts were jostling in his mind.
He was seventeen, and Tom was barely more. Although they both had faced difficult times, although their souls were already pretty bashed up for their ages, they were young, unconscious and in a playful mood.

Throughout his extraordinarily boring conversation with Hepzibah Smith, Tom did all he could to make Harry crazy. While his host was paraphrasing the *Dark Knights*, he was picturing Harry lying on the grand piano that sat behind the witch. While drinking high-end tea a moment later, he was mentally rubbing his other self's virtual penis. Their physical cock jingled cheerfully in their underwear. When Hepzibah was showing him her youth pictures, he was pretending to be interested but he was actually – or in imagination – in a completely different place.

Botton line: when he came close to Hepzibah to kiss her hand before leaving, his cheeks were red and his hand was shaking slightly. The proud witch sticked out her chest, so pleased to be turning a young man's head.

xXx

“What? You got nothing for us?” Burke shouted, when Tom reappeared in the shop's fireplace two hours after his departure.

"Hepzibah is not an easy customer," Tom said. “She invited me to come back the day after tomorrow. I can assure you, Mr Burke, that I will not return empty-handed.”

The boss vaguely waved his hand to say: 'Kay, I'll let you do that, kiddo!''

Tom kept his word. Two days later he returned with a cursed coffer, neither wholly lawful nor wholly unlawful ... but of the kind it was not good to have on your bedside table if the authorities knocked at your door. Burke seemed very satisfied with his employee and decided to give him a promotion.

“From now on, young man, you'll spend less time in the shop. Instead, you'll go to some of our customers' and relieve them of some gems. Your wages will depend on your talents. The bigger you get, the better. I am clear?”

This new job was pretty appealing to Tom. He was never bored, for when one of his clients began to get on his nerves, he always had a Harry to tease.

The Boy-who-lived stayed quiet most of the time. However, when they were at Hepzibah Smith's, he was so at bay that Tom hesitated between annoyance and amusement. Yet he did not ask him what would happen to the unbearable witch. He did not care about her – he assumed Voldemort was going to kill her but he did not understand why. The witch's death would never be able to break his soul, no Horcrux would be created by such an act.

Why would Voldemort have murdered this woman if it were not to separate his soul in two for the third time? The answer was obvious: she most likely possessed something he wanted. Thus Tom weekly went through Hepzibah's airs and graces, distracting himself with terribly audacious homosexual pornographic scenarios.

xxx xxx xxx

One day, Hepzibah invited him to take a look at a Goblin armor she kept in an adjoining room. As soon as he told Burke about it, the antique dealer ordered him to snatch it from the witch's hands.

“Such a collector's item ... locked up at this old hag's ... It would look much better in my shop and
even better at another of my clients’ house! Give her five hundred galleons for it. I will easily sell it for the double ...”

"She did not seem very disposed to part with it," Tom said.

“Don't tell me she had got you hypnotized, boy?” Burke laughed. “Here, take this purse and go.”

“I'll be back in three days. We always meet on Thursday at four o’clock.”

"Do as you like, but come back with the armor."

xXx

Tom had no desire to bring the Goblin armor back to his bosses ... he could not spit on so much money. Therefore he deposited the five hundred galleons at Gringotts and his banker smiled at him for the first time in more than a year. This sum equated to he did not know how many months, years of salary. It was hard to say for the prices were very unstable since the end of the war. Harry was right: times were changing and it was time for them to change too.

While the previous day he had no intention of leaving his job, he now had the intuition it no longer suited them. The orphanage was a thing of the past. Hogwarts was also a thing of the past. Borgin & Burkes was about to be a thing of the past.

But when he thought about it, all his life had already been lived by the first Voldemort, so it was entirely a thing of the past. How terrifying it is to know your future is behind you!

The only new element, the one which pushed him to pursue a life whose ins and outs had been determined long before his birth, was Harry Potter. Even if his predecessor had accomplished everything Tom still had to do, he had not had the chance to have a second conscience. This was his privilege alone, proof he was not a copy but also an original. Oh, he would do anything for Harry, for he owed him his life. Thanks to Harry, he was unique.

As always, his benefactor was not much moved by his passionate declarations. Harry was obsessed by vulgar material issues, like the deposit of money that did not belong to them on their bank account.

xXx

You could have worked a few more years and you would have earned those five hundred galleons, Harry sighed, grabbing the toothpaste and the toothbrush on the edge of the sink.

Tom cleaned the foggy mirror with his hand.

Harry Goody-goody, you can't believe Burke won this cash legally? These galleons would be better spent by us than by him. And you can talk! Who made Polyjuice in Myrtle Warren's bathroom when he was twelve?

Okay, you won, I'm not talking about this money anymore, Harry capitulated, though he was convinced he had made Polyjuice for a good cause. It was not legal but it was legit.

Draco Malfoy was innocent, Tom reminded him.

How could I have known? He was the perfect culprit!

He was only twelve years old.
Sure, but he was a prick, Harry replied. If there's someone in my old life I don't regret having left behind ... 

He suddenly realized there was obviously someone else, someone worse than Malfoy ... How strange! The person he missed the least in his first life was also the person he loved the most in his second life. Given that this thought was disturbing, Harry changed the subject:

Why would Tom want to kill Hepzibah? he asked himself. I've always thought she had made an inappropriate gesture towards Voldemort but she's just an arrogant old witch. She does not deserve to die.

The first Voldemort murdered her, but you can't tell if I'll do, please don't blame me for something I've not done yet, Tom retorted. Do you think some people deserve to die? That some lives are worth less than other ones?

Um, Harry thought seriously. I believe all lives are sacred. At least, all innocent lives.

Tom smiled widely. Even after all this time in his dark company, his Harry remained so naive, so ...

Don't make fun of me, you evil prat, Harry grumbled, spitting in the sink.

Mixed with the foam, there was a little blood. He must have rub his teeth too hard. He opened the tap and watched the water take with it any trace of toothpaste and hemoglobin. If he did not feel like he had swallowed plaster, he might have doubted he had really brushed his teeth, for the sink was so immaculate.

Things went on without stopping and Hepzibah would sooner or later die.

Tom did not comment on his thoughts and closed the tap.

xXx

Do you think there really are innocent people? he asked, putting on his pajamas. I am convinced everyone is a potential devil, that our shadows are taller than our souls.

Temporal paradox, Harry grinned, slipping under the duvet.

Excuse me?

Oh, never mind ... you just quoted a song which was going through my head earlier.

Which is?

Stairway to Heaven, Led Zeppelin's best-known song. It was always on the radio, but Aunt Petunia never left it play. She said it would corrupt poor Dudley, a music from Hell.

The lead zeppelin ... I don't know them, Tom said disappointedly.

That'd be unsettling, the band'd be formed in the late 1960s.

When I find a body for you, I'll think about how to use your divinatory talents, the old Slytherin half joked. Don't worry, I do not intend to kill Hepzibah. However, I would like to steal some objects from her.

You don't even know which one, Harry laughed, cynical, trying to turn his Lumos off.
“Nox!” he repeated for the third time when Tom had pity on him and murmured the spell.

The light went out straight away.

_I'm almost a Squib_, Harry lamented.

Tom did not whisper to him a word of comfort, for he was thinking about his client's treasures.

_You know what she hides from me ... Oh, what kind of things does Hepzibah possess? Most likely terrible, phenomenal artefacts, otherwise Voldemort wouldn't have killed her ... But for which Holy Grail would he give up his work and his quiet life?

_How do you know Voldemort resigned after stealing and murdering Hepzibah?

_I know it, that's all_, Tom said, surprising himself. _I know it because Voldemort is me._

'You're not him!' Harry wanted to protest, but he could not think it strong enough and the syllables blended, forming a mild grimm. He did not either believe it anymore.

Tom fell asleep, thinking of the safes Hepzibah had not yet opened in front of him. He would have liked the demon in his ear to whisper louder, so Tom knew what to look for! But the memories Harry had of the first Voldemort were locked in a place so remote from their minds that even Tom, wonderful Legilimens, could not get to them.

**Xxx xxx xxx**

Three days later, Tom Riddle made his last official visit to Hepzibah Smith. He rang the doorbell and waited a few seconds for Hokey to come and open to him. He had never used Hepzibah's fireplace again. Actually, the witch had confessed to him that the lightless room was a test Tom had brilliantly passed.

"If I don't trust the visitor Hokey describes to me, I leave them in the room until they finds a way out."

Tom did not really see how you could get out of the closet without breaking the walls, thing the House Elf would not allow, but he politely had asked:

"When was the last time someone got stuck in this ... room?"

"Last week, Tom. A wizard, presumably a thief who intended to steal some of my jewels. He has stayed there until one of his friends had the foolish idea to Floo in search of him."

"And what happened to them?"

"They are dead. Suffocated by each other. You've noticed this room is quite narrow. But you, Tom, you take the main door of course!” she had said, fluttering her eyelashes.

Tom entered the large living room after Hokey. Harry caught their reflection in a standing mirror and recognized the great young man of the Pensieve, the one from Hokey's memory. Atrocious impression of deja vu!

The black suit with the classic cut, the hair longer than in the days of Hogwarts and the sunken cheeks: for the second time in his life, Harry thought these changes suited Tom. He looked more attractive than ever.

_Thank you_, Tom smiled. _"I brought you flowers,"_ he said aloud, making roses appear.
Hepzibah simpered and babbled. Everything happened as usual, but Harry started every time she opened her mouth. The Cup and the Locket, Hokey would soon bring the Cup and the Locket ...

xXx

Tom could not suppress his excitement. The things Hepzibah possessed, those which would help him extract Harry from their body, those about which the murmuring devil spoke to him constantly … The day the witch was going to show them to him had come at least! Everything in Harry's attitude told him so. Finally! Patience was going to bear fruit ... After a year of futile conversations, he was going to see what Voldemort had robbed the old witch of.

“Mr Burke wishes me to inquire–”

“Oh, Mr. Burke, phooey!” Hepzibah said, waving a little hand. “I've something to show you that I've never shown Mr. Burke. Can you keep a secret, Tom? Will you promise me you won't tell Mr. Burke that I've got it? He'd never let me rest if he knew I'd shown it to you, and I'm not selling it, not to Burke, not to anyone! But you, Tom, you'll appreciate it for its history, not how many Galleons you can get for it …”

The events were the same as in Hokey's memory. Whenever Harry saw a scene he had already witnessed in memory, he felt a curious sense of unreality. As if sucked out of Tom's body, he powerlessly watched Tom flatter Hepzibah, Hepzibah giggle, the two leather cases carried at arm's length by poor Hokey ...

Now that he was thinking about it, he had felt the same sense of exteriority during the last Pensieve-moment, the discussion with Professor Slughorn about Horcruxes. What was the previous memory? If he was not mistaken, it was Morfin Gaunt's. And before? Oh, it was so many years back, it was a memory of Dumbledore himself ... his visit to little Tom Riddle at the orphanage. And the very first memory belonged to Bob Ogden. It showed, long before Tom's birth, the lamentable life of the Gaunts.

After Hokey's memory, had Dumbledore shown Harry many others, during their private lessons? No, there has been only one, Voldemort visiting Hogwarts many years later, on a snowy day. Why would Voldemort wait so long before he begs again for the position of Defense teacher?

Lost in his calculations and speculations, Harry nearly missed the moment when Tom grabbed Hufflepuff's Cup. Yet he came back in their body at that precise moment and saw, in the golden reflection, two small red sparkles which were no precious stones.

He laughed hysterically as he noticed the same thing he had already noticed in the Pensieve: Hepzibah's face mirrored Tom's greedy expression, except that what her tiny eyes were fixed upon Voldemort's handsome features.

xXx

“... And all sorts of powers it's supposed to possess, too, but I haven't tested them thoroughly, I just keep it nice and safe in here ...”

Powers, Tom thought enthusiastically. No doubt, it was this object he had been waiting for a year. Helga Hufflepuff was known to be loyal and impartial, a saint. A cup ... It could be a religious reference. Yes, a cup of wine, wine which is actually the blood of Christ, the God-man who died on a cross, the man-God who had risen from the dead. In the Tarot, the cup was life, water and mother, the principle at the origin of everything. And had not the Knights of the Round Table tirelessly looked for the Grail?
Oh, the cup was a symbol of immortality and abundance, but it was also a container, like a vagina welcoming a child. Hufflepuff's Cup, was not it a goddess who can carry a non-viable baby in her womb – or a soul?

Tom wanted to touch the engraved badger a second time, as if to immerse himself in its symbolism – positive aggressiveness, mystical healing power, perseverance and snake-eater – but Hepzibah took the Cup of his hands and put it back in its box.

The wizard hardly concealed his rancour. How was he going to get the Cup? The object was a way to the truth, to the reincarnation of Harry Potter. He felt it in his veins, he felt it in his soul. The object resonated in him like a heart outside his body, like a Horcrux.

He forgot the cup, however, when Hepzibah opened the second box. He could not help it, he grabbed Slytherin's Locket and held it in the light to watch it closely.

A Slytherin relic! How could his host have one? The locket, too, seemed to be beating at the end of its chain, asking to be worn against the warm skin of a chest, rather than kept in delicate boxes. A locket … here was an object Tom could relate to. It was a wedding ring, a sign of belonging to a god or to a man. It was also a protective talisman or a memorial. The one wearing it puts his heart on the table, displaying around his neck the fact that he has a master.

And yet, a locket was also a hiding place. Behind the sculpted S, there might be a lock of hair or a photograph … or the Locket's secret was perhaps that it was empty …

The two artefacts Hepzibah had shown him were amazingly contrasting and complementary. Both had no meaning except as receptacles. But while one was open and receptive, the other was closed like a fist and small as a stone.

"Burke bought it, apparently, from a ragged-looking woman who seemed to have stolen it, but had no idea of its true value –"

_Merope Gaunt_, Harry commented.

_I know_, Tom said, clasping the Locket's chain in his hands, his joints almost white. _This locket belonged to my mother._

The coincidence was extraordinary, almost ridiculous. But since his life had already been scripted, Tom accepted the unexpected development. He was a good audience. He only hoped the outcome would live up to his expectations.

"And again, all kinds of powers attributed to it, though I just keep it nice and safe ..." Hepzibah told him, her hand outstretched.

Tom gave her the relic back with bitterness. He felt naked, as if he had lost his whole skin while losing the Locket. Hepzibah asked him if he was okay and worriedly scrutinized his face, before offering him smelling salts.

XXX XXX XXX

'Hepzibah Smith died two days after that little scene,' an imaginary Dumbledore repeated in Harry's head. 'Hepzibah Smith died two days after that little scene.'

_I will not kill her, do you hear me?_ Tom sighed, ringing the bell the day after his last official visit.

_Why are we at Hepzibah's so early? She should die tomorrow_, Harry wondered, as if Tom had not
I don't intend to kill her, only to take the Cup and the Locket, Tom tried again. She will kindly give them to me. She would lick my toes if asked to.

I'm not so sure about it. You know, I feel great in your body, why looking f–

You wouldn't want to hug me, just once?

Harry attempted to move but Tom regained control of their body with disconcerting ease.

You can no longer compete, this body, this wand ... you've been so weak since your near-death at the beginning of seventh year. My body is rejecting you. You're an intruder, you can't stay. You've got to go.

But to where? Harry asked anxiously.

The cup ... Immortality and abundance ... The Locket ... secret and protection ... They will help us.

Don't kill Hepzibah!

I won't kill her, Tom promised, greeting Hokey. As I've told you, if she gives me the Cup and the Locket, I will not hurt her.

xXx

I'm going to kill her! Harry exclaimed.

No, you're not gonna kill her. Put yourself in a corner of my skull and ...

No way. There must be another solution.

Close your eyes, Tom ordered.

I can't, my eyes are yours.

Get away, then.

But I can't either, I'm you.

Well, be me.

NO! Harry screamed, struggling, but Tom was still stronger.

Leave me alone, the former Slytherin boy said, showing him his mind's door.

Harry was curled up in a ball in spite of himself. Powerless, he shut his mental eyes, cut himself off from reality but he could not ignore Tom's disgust when Hepzibah closed her arms on their young and warm body.

xXx

I'm begging you, come back, Tom finally asked, after several minutes trying to make his cock hard. Think of me, think of us, Harry. I need an erection. We must have this cup and this locket. We'll explore their powers and we'll finally meet. It's a small sacrifice.
Harry was on the brink of puking but he came back, for he would never abandon his soul. While he was, with difficulty, imagining a love scene between him and Tom, he had nevertheless terrible thoughts he did not manage to get out of his head.

_It's not so bad. It's not my body, I'm not the one who will be soiled. Voldemort deserves sexual touching._

If Tom heard him, he did not let him know and Harry felt even more guilty. He let go of his evil thoughts and, without looking at Hepzibah's magically big breasts or at her red mouth, he invoked passionate images. He virtually licked Tom's entire body, with love and distress, and their physical penis began to harden.

“Oh, Tom, little rascal,” Hepzibah chuckled. “I wasn't expecting to produce such an effect ...”

The wizard awkwardly plunged into her loose, wet vagina which could never compete against his imaginary friend's narrow and dry anus. It was like drowning. He was losing his virginity, even if he had vowed he would remain physically virgin. But it was a necessary step and he would not feel sorry for himself. He had sold his body; he had his pride left. He was Voldemort.

After long minutes of wetness, Tom ejaculated, without thinking of anything but Hufflepuff's and Slytherin's relics and of what Harry was mentally doing to him.

_xXx_

Hepzibah did not keep her word. Soon after their sexual intercourse, she took him to her vault, but contrary to what she had suggested when she had invited him to her room, she did not give him the locket and the cup.

"Tom, come on, our intimate relationship was a mere sweet, a favor," she scolded him. “All these gifts, all these visits ... do you think I hadn't noticed how you looked at me? You aren't one of those boys who sell their bodies for a few galleons or for old objects. Stay tonight, we will talk about these relics tomorrow morning. An old woman like me, seducing a handsome young man like you!"

_I'm going to kill her!_ Harry shouted, trying to catch his wand, but the lack of result would have been the same if he had been a penguin.

Before dark, Tom had licked Hepzibah's clit twice. He had massaged her feet. He had kissed her neck, he had sucked her breasts. He had not managed to kiss her again but he spent the night cuddled up with gross curves.

The next morning the old witch seemed to have forgotten all about her promise.

"Oh my dear Tom, are you still talking about these knick-knacks? Come and take a bath with me," she chuckled, dropping her nightie.

_xxx xxx xxx_

That night, Hufflepuff's Cup and Slytherin's Locket in his pocket, Tom went to Gringotts. He collected his five hundred Galleons and, by the way, all the rest of his account, much to the dismay of his Goblin. While clearing out his room at his Bed & Breakfast, he vaguely wondered if Hepzibah Smith was dead. He hoped so. Not for himself, however, but for his other soul. Tom would survive physical taint, but Harry was in shock.

They did not eat and waited for the moon to rise high in the sky before getting down the stairs. They left their former room's key behind the counter and vanished in the night.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who follow this story, I'm really touched by your reviews! See you next week!
Chapter Summary

Tom gets himself a tattoo and go touring. He makes a hell of experiments on Hufflepuff's Cup and Slytherin's Locket. He finally meets some kind of success with the relics!! But he still isn't satisfied ...

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Smut in this chapter! Very long chapter!
When writing this I was partly inspired by a fanfic by Cheryl Dyson, In Pieces, where Draco is a ghost and his relationship with Harry is angsty and touching. I didn't copy anything but I borrowed from her the idea of a despair caused by almost-physicality.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Initiatory trip (1946-1953 / 19-26 years old)

Chapter 12: Genie of the Lamp

Tom would have rather kept his eyes on the dermograph dangerously approaching his freshly shaved skin, but the tattooer motioned for him to remain quiet.

"Don't move, kid. You know, even if you don't see them, you're going to feel them, the needles."

Admittedly, Tom thought as he tried to calm down. But still .

You're so squeamish something, Harry teased him.

How can you be so stoic? Tom replied, his hand clasped on Gaunt's ring.

You can tear your soul in a heartbit but you're scared of a few need–

Harry's reply got lost in a mental groan, for, without warning, the tattooer had stuck his needles in their chest and had begun to trace his lines.

The tattoo machine did not deviate from its trajectory once, even when Tom involuntary shuddered, even when his poor pectorals contracted in a reflex of rejection. The tattooer continued to work, paying little attention to the faces of his young client, wiping out blood's and ink's trails as he would have cleaned brushes. His job was an artistic profession, he often repeated to his friends. The fact his medium was alive and sentient did not matter.

Sometimes, when he felt the skin was really dry, to the point his gloves did not slide well, he rubbed some Vaseline on the irritated area. Tom breathed a sigh of relief, the lubricant's coolness being a
blessing – of short duration though. For the tattooer inevitably revived his infernal machine which buzzed, buzzed, buzzed, depositing tiny drops of ink under the studded skin.

The wizard boy was focused on the tattoo artist's current move, then on the next one, then on the one after. The man's gloved fingers pulled as far as possible the thin, shaven skin and, with his dermograph, he traced indelible lines that looked like scarifications. One wipe and lymphs, bloody exudates and excess of ink disappeared. From time to time he changed his position, pressing rudely his thick arm on Tom's naked belly, asked him not to breathe too hard, and resumed his task.

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Tom felt like he was scratched and scratched relentlessly by an abnormally methodical animal. Whenever the tattoo artist lifted the dermograph – to plunge its needles into the small black ink cups placed on the table – the pain decreased and became more and more bearable, almost as a ghost of suffering … till the artist restarted his machine and stuck it into his heart.

Throughout the ritual, the two men spoke little. If words had been uttered, they might have seemed superfluous. The tattooer had shaved Tom's chest, lubricated it, cleaned it and was literally leaving his mark on it. While they were strangers, they shared a near obscene intimacy. Something was happening, something beyond what language could transcribe. The pain brought Tom, a virgin surface fed on darkness, into a trance connecting his body to the dermograph and to the tattoo artist.

Humans and other animals aren't as permeable as they believe they are, he thought, as the needles pierced his skin with precision. My flesh doesn't absorb water in the shower but it is now saturated by the ink of an unknown man. When much older I'll look at this tattoo, I'll remember someone has someday slipped something under my skin, someone who is not Harry. Isn't this violation of my integrity transforming me irremediably? Is this body, distraught by a new element, still the one I had yesterday, is it still the one old Hepzibah has clasped against herself?

Even if I don't have a body of my own and even if can't draw on your skin, I'm touching you from the inside, Harry murmured, irrational jealousy gripping his throat. If I want to, I can make our heart beat faster, I can twist our entrails or I can bite the inside of your cheeks. No one but yourself can affect you so deeply, not even this tattooer guy, not even fucking Hepzibah.

I know, Tom replied simply. You possess me and I am possessed.

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After a length of time a watch could not measure – what actually meant seven hours? – silence suddenly fell on the room. Accustomed to the dermograph's deafening purring, Tom's ears welcomed this absence of noise as a ill-boding sign. Their torso's scarred skin also seemed to find this respite suspicious for it began to twitch, as if to invite the needles to butcher it again.

But the tattooer put his machine on the table and took off his gloves.

Is it really over? Tom wondered.

You have to ask him out loud.

I have no more strength, so speak for me.

"Is it really over?" Harry hardly articulated, oddly out of breath for a man who had spent several hours trying to stay as steady as possible.

"A tattoo is never finished," the tattooer grumbled. "But this one is sufficiently finished to come to
“Can ... can I?” Harry stammered, straightening up, without looking down at his chest.

"Go and look in the mirror," the artist suggested, throwing around a few cleansing spells.

Tom being a cream puff, Harry took control of their body and led them towards the big mirror in the back of the room. He was sure Tom would not dare to look at the result first.

Please call me a coward within my own mind, I don't care, the former Slytherin immediately snapped. How is it?

How would I know if you don't want to open your eyes?

Tom half-opened his eyelids and glanced at his reflection.

"Wow," he whispered at the same time as Harry.

"I'll rub on some ointment and put a bandage on it. Treat it three times a day for two weeks. Crusts will form in five days. Don't scratch them, you'd spoil the magical ink's effect. If all goes well, the tattoo'd begin to undulate when the crusts'd have fallen. Otherwise, come back to me."

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Tom left England the day his tattoo moved for the first time.

During the long journey they undertook, Harry and him did not talk much about Hepzibah Smith. When the old witch's name or face crossed their mind, they dismissed them by mutual agreement. Anyway, they had so much to do and discover that they did not have time to think about their life in London.

Harry wondered several times, however, about what exactly had happened to Hepzibah Smith. It was the first sinister event of Tom Riddle's life he was not sure he had reproduced identically ... he was not even certain it had happened at all. The cup and the locket in their pocket, they had left the old woman's fate in Hokey's hands, without modifying the Elf's memory.

Had the Elf accidentally poisoned her mistress? If that was the case, was it possible that in the first version, Hokey had really mixed up sugar and poison, that Tom had really been innocent?

Harry did not know. It seemed unlikely – he could not believe all the horrors committed by the first Voldemort had only been unfortunate accidents – but at the same time he had, for the moment, no evidence to the contrary. It was Dumbledore who had told him Tom had killed Hepzibah in order to turn the locket into a Horcrux. It was also Dumbledore who had convinced him the three Riddles had not been assassinated by Morfin Gaunt but by Tom Riddle. As for Myrtle ... it was a fifty years old memory who had confessed the murder to him.

If he could not make up his mind on the first version of the facts, he could assert that in the second one, Tom had not directly killed Turnip, Myrtle Warren, the Riddles and Hepzibah Smith. He had created two Horcruxes, the Diary and the Ring, but the locket and the cup remained untouched.

Harry had more or less abandoned all hope of changing Fate when Myrtle had died. But he was beginning to believe in Tom again. The former Slytherin was not fundamentally bad yet. He could choose not to follow the path of evil, now he knew Voldemort would lead a miserable life full of hatred and emptiness, now he knew dark magic had driven his predecessor mad.
I should have talked to him about Voldemort from the beginning, Harry thought sometimes.

Better late than never, Tom had once retorted.

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Tom and Harry did not live like princes but they did pretty well. They had abandoned their birth name to use Voldemort's. Tom had done a great job defending this decision. When one has stolen five hundred galleons from his former employers and is perhaps involved in a case of poisoning, one should take a back seat.

Tom is my first name, Harry is yours, he had added. But Voldemort is our name, a composite and timeless identity, because for you it has already existed, but for me it is still only a germ. For the moment, my predecessor has as much presence as a ghost. He is both a threat and a curse for he is, whether you want to tell me or not, what bonds us. And you have for me as much existence as him, that is to say, so much and so little ...

But I'm a beautiful ghost, Harry had said to lighten the mood.

A dream, no matter how beautiful, is still a dream, Tom had sighed.

They did not spend a lot of money, and instead of renting a room, they often camped. Harry found it incongruous that their tent, which was the exact replica of the one he had shared with Hermione and Ron during the Horcrux's hunting bloody year, housed two of the much-desired artefacts. But in this second surreal life, wild camping did not rhyme with meals of moldy roots, he was not fleeing from Voldemort but he slept with him and the Horcruxes were not Horcruxes. Yet.

The only time they have spent a lot was for their tattoo. With time, the pattern had fit in their chest and Harry no longer noticed its discreet undulations. However, with a bitter amusement, he sometimes thought of the day he nicknamed 'The day Tom Riddle had acted on a whim.'

Before I leave England, I'd like to get a tattoo, the former Slytherin had said, while they were having lunch in a Muggle London pub, the day after their night departure from their Knockturn Alley's room.

You?

Who else?

Okay, it's not like we were two, Harry had half joked.

What you mean is you can't picture 'Voldemort' with a tattoo, do you? Tom had thought, after a second.

Yes and no, Harry had admitted, thinking of the Death Eaters' Dark Marks.

Was Voldemort himself covered with dark ink? It was a disturbing thought. Harry suddenly had an absurd image of the Dark Lord dropping his heavy black robes to reveal pin-up, swallows and popular proverbs tattoos.

Show that again? Tom had exclaimed.

It's out of the question to get a tat saying 'If you can't find your better half, try finding your better two quarters' or 'The future is not what it once used to be'.
You make no sense at all, Tom had protested. I'm talking about the snake and the skull ... Dammit, how can you know before me and better than me what tattoo I wanna get?

Are you talking about that? Harry had grimaced, invoking an imaginary Dark Mark in their collective mind.

Tom had contemplated the pattern for a few moments before swinging their plate in the bin, without listening to his hungry friend's complaints. He had gone in search of a wizard tattoo shop and had ended up under a stranger's needles less than an hour later.

Harry was not thrilled about wearing a symbol synonymous with murder in his days. He had felt like throwing up the little substance he had in his stomach. So, as usual, he had tried to dissuade Tom from doing what he was planning to do. And, as usual, Tom had achieved his designs with flying colours.

Now, Harry could not bring himself to regret this tattoo of ill omen. He barely admitted it to himself, but when he touched the slightly swollen skin of his chest, he felt a mixture of guilt and excitement, as if wearing such a mark had definitely made him join the dark side of the force. There was no going back now, but he was not afraid of that. What scared him was the moment of uncertainty before any radical decision. But they had done it, they had scarred their torso for life.

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In front of the mirror, during all the rest of his existence, Harry would never be able to escape the eyes of the snake haunting a human skull's empty orbits, for the reptile lived in his flesh. He would never like this condemned and defiled skin, but he would accept it, for he had understood that for his Tom Riddle, the serpent in the skull's symbol was not a curse, not yet.

When he had nothing better to do, Tom explained to him the symbol's different meanings from every conceivable angle. He could not tolerate Harry being so wrong about it.

He had been dreaming of it since he was a kid. He had always had it in a corner of his mind, like an obsessive and elusive design appearing in nightmares one would like to draw in order to exorcise it. All this was Harry's fault, because he most likely had thought several times about the Dark Mark during their childhood, imposing fugitive images of skull and snake on a poor orphan without a mental defense.

What you call the Dark Mark reminds me of the Basilisk, my eternal friend at Hogwarts, coming out of Slytherin's mouth, mortal like all men. But isn't this snake miming a dead person's tongue also an obvious reference to Parseltongue? Anyway, it incarnates the Same's and the Other's duality. For when it sloughs, does it only shed its old skin or is it turning into a new being? Is it a symbol of immortality or of eternal youth? Unlike the Ouroboros, it doesn't bite its tail, it isn't the guardian of a cyclic eternity. It rather is a momentum toward an end. You have resurrected, but if we both died, I wouldn't want us to start this life again and again. This is certainly why it lives in a skull, just as our two immortal souls survive in a carcass-body, a basic human body that will slowly rot till it becomes dust again. Yet the mortal skull and the immortal snake aren't antagonistic. Both are no longer in Time, the first because it has already left it, the second because he isn't subject to it, analyzed Tom one day.

But the serpent is the Tantalizer and the Sinner in Genesis. He is associated with Evil, Harry pointed out, suddenly remembering the Sunday morning masses to which Anne brought all the boarders.

He only is the guardian of the Tree of Knowledge. He is lucid. Its sin is to keep its eyes wide open, its sin is to have no eyelids.
What terrible secret does it keep that Eve wants to know so much? Harry asked in spite of himself.

Oh, probably the same kind of secrets you hide from me, the kind that can destroy innocence, virginity and the eternal youth of the first couple.

But what poison does the apple contain?

It's so easy to understand! Tom said, in a tone both annoyed and superior. For Adam and Eve, poison is not death but mortality. This is what the serpent teaches them: that they are only men.

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Two years after leaving the capital of England, Tom and Harry had visited most of European countries and, with patience and perseverance, they had gathered enough information about Hufflepuff's Cup and Slytherin's Locket to start experimenting.

Hepzibah Smith had not exaggerated. Writers, historians or adventurers attributed a thousand and one powers to the legendary artefacts. While British authors sometimes reminded in a foot note that they were fairy tale items that had never been proven real, foreign researchers referred to the cup and the locket as to undeniable realities.

With Gryffindor's sword and Ravenclaw's diadem, they formed a powerful quartet able of awakening a power that had been asleep for centuries. Exactly as the Deathly Hallows' collation would summon the reaper.

The parallel between the Deathly Hallows and the Hogwarts Founders' relics was common in works devoted to legendary objects, but Tom experienced only vague interest in the Resurrection Stone, the Invisibility Cloak, and the Elder Wand. Indeed, Harry had explained to him that none of the three items was able to bring back a dead man.

I guess you can't explain why you know that.

I have my sources.

In your first life, were you a stronger wizard than Voldemort?

Why do you think that?

You know so many things he seems to ignore ... so many things I ignore ...

He was not interested in love or in the Deathly Hallows, Harry said. Otherwise, he certainly would have known more than I did. All I know about the Halows, I got it from one of my friends' father. I was not special.

Tom, in any case, believed dwelling on the Deathly Hallows was a waste of time. As the first Voldemort had never looked for them, he would have to display great and perhaps useless efforts to find them. Whereas the path leading him towards the Diadem and the Sword was much easier and safer.

Indeed, Harry, who was decidedly far too knowledgeable to be an ordinary teenager, thought that Lord Voldemort, First of His Name, had already laid hands on the cup, the locket and the diadem. Which meant Tom would have no trouble finding the diadem, and that he would only need a bit of goodwill to get the sword.

Only a true Gryffindor can make it appear, Harry repeated for the umpteenth time.
Aren't you a true Gryffindor? Didn't you kill my precious Basilisk with it?

I'm sorry, but it also tried to kill me. Shouldn't you ask for forgiveness for that matter? Harry said in a teasing tone.

No, Tom replied dryly, it was not me, or rather, it was not me yet. But you, in the future, in the present or in the past, you are a Gryffindor. When we go back to Hogwarts, you'll get the Sword out of the Sorting Hat.

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However, being not even twenty-two, Tom Riddle was still too young to apply again to Hogwarts. He took advantage of the time he had and explored all the possibilities the two artifacts he already had, the cup and the locket, offered. In reality, each one of the relics possessed enough properties to turn the head of anyone seeking wealth or glory.

Hufflepuff's Cup was rightly nicknamed the Cup of Abundance. Once filled, it never drained. Whether wine, gold, or precious stones was poured into it, it overflowed with its contents for ever, waiting only to slake its owner's thirst.

Literature did mention a few exceptions which interested Tom a lot, for he was sure they could make Harry appear. He checked each hypothesis and was surprised by the veracity of the rumors going around the miraculous receptacle. Some historians did their job really well.

If blood flowed into the cup, the latter absorbed it but remained empty, like an insatiable mouth demanding more and more. One evening, Tom watched it, amazed, drinking liters of blood. He only stopped when Harry threatened him to vomit in the magical cup, to check another of its properties.

Much more interesting was the cup's ability to keep alive organic matter. If a living being – or a piece of a living being – was placed into it, it would not die nor rot. In the nourishing receptacle, it was protected from any threat of death. And even more, it could develop.

Tom experimented in many ways, hoping to find a way to put Harry's soul inside the cup and, why not, to grow a body in there.

From a grape seed, he made a whole tree grow in the cup in a few days. He kept a rose alive for three weeks, its petals' color never changing. He confined an ephemeral insect for two days without it dying. He left an egg there until it became a little robin.

He imprisoned a dying mouse in it, but although it did not die, it was not cured either. When Tom pulled it out of the cup, it gave up the ghost. The wizard dropped the rodent's corpse into the cup but the mouse did not resurrect. He placed a piece of meat in the cup. The flesh remained red and did not melt, but it did not turn into a small lamb either.

Oh, the cup did wonders, but it did not bring back the dead and it did not cure grazed beings.

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Works about Slytherin's locket were rarer and Tom began to experiment without knowing what to expect.

The inside was empty and showed no image, which was rather strange for a locket. Tom therefore proceeded, cautiously, to place different kinds of things into it, expecting each time he closed the piece of jewellery to provoke a supernatural catastrophe.
The first experiment he did was to plainly place a piece of blank parchment inside. Nothing happened. He wrote a note on the parchment and placed it again in the locket. Still nothing.

*What to do next?* he thought calmly.

*Can I?*

*Please. If you have any idea, Harry, my body is yours.*

Harry threw away the first piece of parchment, tore another one where he wrote awkwardly 'My name is Tom Riddle'.

As soon as he closed the locket on the name, he felt a torrent of magic passing in his fingers. He tried to reopen it but the receptacle had been sealed. Neither physical strength nor the most powerful spells Tom knew changed anything about it. After two unsuccessful hours, they put the locket around their neck and went down to eat at the tavern of the inn where they were staying, for Harry was hungry.

*Do you think having hidden my name inside the locket had an effect?* Tom asked, playing with their food.

*It seems so,* Harry replied when the waitress who had openly been hitting on Tom since his arrival failed to call them. She accused her younger brother of casting a hex at her.

*My name became a secret,* Tom marveled, caressing the locket under their robes.

*How to lift the taboo? We must be able to open the locket again,* Harry said, much less enthusiastic than his friend.

*We must make it understand it no longer has to keep the secret, so it no longer remains closed.*

The two boys stayed thoughtful throughout the meal. Even if he was hungry, Harry ate little.

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*Maybe we just have to tell it the secret out loud,* Harry finally suggested. *That way, it's no longer a secret.*

Tom raised the locket in front of his mouth and muttered “Tom Riddle”.

The locket opened and the piece of parchment bearing the former Slytherin's name fell into their soup.

“Tom!” the waitress immediately called. “Before I can not call you, brother little cast the spell. How do you do?”

Other experiments followed and Tom managed, with Harry's help, to build up a table summarizing Slytherin's locket's different properties.

It kept secret what was entrusted to it in Parseltongue or on a piece of parchment, as long as it considered it a secret worthy of it: a name, a dark idea, a misdeed. It was also strangely touchy for an [object](https://example.com) and remained burning hot for hours after Harry had dared to tell it 'I love treacle tart'.

It protected the one whose piece or picture was hidden inside. Tom had slipped inside a bird’s feather and the bird had avoided all his spells with an abnormal agility. He had put some bloody crane’s-bill's pollen in it and had felt worse than a Squib when he had failed to crush the flower.
Worn empty around his neck, the locket gave assurance and determination, as if it were a second heart, heavy and dangling outside his ribcage, Salazar Slytherin's heart itself.

Tom kept it empty. The only thing he really wanted to lock up was a lock of Harry Potter's hair to give him the Founder's blessing. But Harry did not have a body. He was not born yet; he was already dead.

After a year of experiments on the cup and the locket, Tom began experimenting on Harry Potter.

"Harry," Tom murmured, raising a shaky hand towards Harry Potter.

Harry nodded without extending his hand, without opening his mouth. He was just standing, slowly fluttering.

"Why don't you say anything? I've dreamed of this moment ...“

Tom did not let anger win him over. He came closer to the wizard's shape in front of him. His first meeting with Harry could not start with a fight.

There were so many more interesting things to do, like hugging for real, kissing or interlocking digits. But Tom did not dare to touch his friend's dangling arm immediately. While he knew his face by heart, while he was living with his soul from birth, the body unfolded before him suddenly looked intimidating, like a stranger's. He did not know what to do with it. Harry Potter was so big ...

It was like sleeping with someone in the dark for years and one day turning on the light and suddenly realizing the other one exists outside of you. Seeing them and realizing they were another person. Tom suddenly felt ashamed of having done all he had done in Harry's presence without a second thought. How could he go to the bathroom in front of someone? How, as a baby, had he been able to piss and shit himself, while Harry witnessed that?

Harry smiled at him and Tom forced himself to look at him, though he was afraid his insistent gaze would make him disappear.

Harry Potter was exactly like he had pictured him – which was a relief, as Harry could have provided Tom with idealized images of himself – albeit strangely young. He was only seventeen, while Tom was almost twenty-four. His angular features still bore the traces of adolescence and his gaze was not haunted like Tom's. The Harry Potter standing before him had never created Horcruxes. And he was a virgin.

His hair was less dark than in Tom's fantasies and his eyes less brilliant but equally green. His face was less symmetrical, his mouth thinner, his eyebrows thicker. His expression was less mutinous: it looked too serious for a boy who had eternal youth … but Voldemort had already killed many of his loved ones.

Despite these few details, he was what most resembled the man Tom loved. It was Harry Potter's body before he reincarnated into Tom Riddle. He was outside Tom's skull. So Tom overcame his apprehension and squeezed the ghostly figure in his arms.

Harry Potter disappeared without a cloud of smoke. He left the Hufflepuff's cup as empty as the wizard boy's heart. Dumstruck, Tom looked at his hands, looking for a shadow that no longer was there.

"No," he said, falling to the ground.
He felt like kicking the stupid cup whose badger looked like it was taunting him.

*It didn't work,* Harry commented dully, comfy in their head.

*You were there, outside of me, under my nose ...*

*It was only a memory,* the Gryffindor argued clumsily.

*A memory of you isn't only a memory,* Tom got angry. *I'll take every thing the cup and the locket will offer me, even if they are only illusions. An illusion is more than what I've got.*

*You're saying I'm nothing?* Harry unwittingly got mad too. *Yet I exist, I exist much more than this poor memory incubated in a magical cup!*

*It wasn't you, but it was beautiful!* Tom grunted as he ran his finger around the cup, trying to unravel its mysteries. *Why this memory didn't come to life, why wasn't it solid?*

*A memory is just a picture. It can not turn into a body,* Harry said.

*But you, if you are not even a picture, what form of existence are you?* Tom snickered hysterically. *You're just words! I'm crazy about a thought!*

**Xxx xxx xxx**

On a full moon night, after so many failures and dark readings that his face had become waxy, Tom succeeded in producing something else than a vapour in the shape of Harry Potter.

Combining the cup's and the locket's powers had never had any effect. But since Harry had revealed to him that Gaunt's ring's stone was one of the Deathly Hallows, Tom had been working harder than ever.

And that night, in an unnamed clearing, he felt like he was on the right track. This ritual might actually be the one. He had locked Gaunt's ring into Slytherin's locket, with a note saying 'I'm Harry Potter'.

He had fed Hufflepuff's cup with his own blood and filled it with pieces of himself: nails clipped short, hairs taken of at the root, dead skin torn from his chapped lips. These carnal offerings all had an extraordinary power of regeneration. They formed in the cup an organic cluster which seemed to beat like a heart.

All they needed was to plunge Slytherin's locket into it.

The ring, in the locket, in the cup: such a mise en abyme could only work.

Tom removed the locket from his neck and shivered nervously in spite of himself. The night was too quiet around him, for he had protected the clearing with all the wards Harry and he knew. In such deadly silence, how could Harry come back to life?

*What are you waiting for?* Harry rushed him. He was struggling to contain his excitement.

Like Tom, he sensed something was going to happen that night. They had already tried all possible variations of the ritual. It was their last chance. It was going to happen. On that night of full moon, he was going to get his old body back.

Tom squeezed Slytherin's locket in his hand a last time and thought it was throbbing, but he was not quite sure if the beats truly came from the locket. The movement might come from his own blood in
his swollen veins.

He finally dropped the locket into the cup filled with human samples. How unfortunate Harry had refused to add one of their bones! Tom was convinced a rib or a vertebra would have been a bonus in their experience.

He forgot everything about his rancor when Harry rose in front of him.

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He was in the flesh. His outlines were not fuzzy as a memory’s, its skin was not translucent as a phantom’s. His keen gaze looked like a newborn’s, amazed to find himself outside the womb. His first reflex was to scratch the back of his head, with an embarrassed smile. He was wearing his glasses and a funny scar shone on his forehead. He was naked, pink and very hairy.

When he realized he was not wearing any clothes, he immediately hid his pubis. His cheeks turned red and he frowned, for Tom was giggling softly.

Harry Potter looked so alive! One just had to not look at his lower legs, buried in Hufflepuff’s cup, to convince oneself the dark-haired teen was an ordinary human being. His pale body contrasted with the dark and empty clearing and one could not see through it.

"My efforts have paid off!" Tom said and finally burst out laughing like a devil, producing a sinister echo in the clearing.

Harry rolled his eyes, without removing his hands of his cock. Tom stopped laughing and looked at him eagerly. Every gesture, every flutter of lashes, Tom recorded everything as if Harry was going to fly away.

It's not like my legs were stuck in a cup, Harry joked with a grimace.

“You can talk! I managed to create a naked and talking Harry Potter!”

Tom started laughing again, in a near dubious way. He turned around Harry, without daring to touch him eagerly. Every gesture, every flutter of lashes, Tom recorded everything as if Harry was going to fly away.

Are you thinking in my head or am I just hearing your thoughts? Has your soul really come out of my body?

I dunno. Is this really an urgent matter? Harry sighed, opening his arms.

Tom hesitated for a moment, during which Harry, too, wondered if all this was truly wise.

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Seeing Tom Riddle from the outside, it was not like looking in a mirror. While the former Slytherin’s reflection in water or in ice had become as familiar as his first body’s, Harry realized Tom Riddle and him had never been the same person.
Tom was a being separated from him. It was a fantasy of Destiny which had united them in a single body.

Harry looked at Tom as if he had just met him, as if he had not spent more than twenty years in his company.

Tom was no longer the lonely little boy of the orphanage. He was no longer the proud teenager of Hogwarts. He had grown up and his face had lost its grace, after several years of travel and frustration, facing desperately fruitless experiences.

Underneath his drawn look, Harry could hardly guess the young wizard who had worked at Borgin & Burkes and seduced old Hepzibah Smith. Tom looked so elderly. He was not twenty-five, but his expression was veiled by cursed lassitude and powerlessness.

He was not yet the Voldemort who would go to Dumbledore and apply again for the position of Defense Professor, but he was no longer Tom Riddle. The man in front of Harry looked like he balanced between two identities. But his expression was sincere: he was incredibly happy to meet the one who had haunted him since his birth.

To give this near-body to Harry, he had sacrificed his sweat, his energy and his time, and now that he had finally succeeded, he seemed ready to die, as if his life had no purpose anymore. His blood-stained eyes with heavy violet rings seemed to ask 'What's next?'

For the first time in many months, Harry wondered when he should kill his other conscience. But now Tom had managed to temporarily separate their two souls, the prospect of murder was frightening. It was no more, it had never been a suicide but a murder.

The Chosen One brushed off his doubts, ignoring if Tom could hear them. This was not a time for questioning but for reunion or for meeting. So he opened his dangling arms.

Tom slipped gently into his embrace, his eyes wide open, refusing to admit the only person he loved was finally there, around him, but he was hardly more than a subterfuge.

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The advantage of starting with almost nothing was you could be content with very little. After twenty-four years of cohabitation with an imaginary friend who was only a language, Tom was very happy to spend a whole night admiring, cuddling and chatting with this near-Harry. He was no longer alone with his reflection, he was with someone else.

The near-Harry was an image endowed with a certain materiality. He could touch and be touched but Tom was always very careful not to make a sudden move which would have crossed his friend's body. In reality, the near-Harry was like an oddly solid ghost, but he did not have a specter's mobility and he was mute.

This last detail did not bother Tom, for he liked their chatty silence a lot better than taverns' hubbub. Their telepathic bond made their relationship much more intimate than lovers' kissing wildly in the rain and on public benches. They did not need that.

They had more than all the lovers in the world could hope for and, unfortunately, much less. Their passion had the power of a dream, but it was none the less a dream.
I'm a bit like the genie of the Lamp, Harry mumbled, making a vague gesture toward his lack of feet.

He still had difficulty getting to the idea he had no feet. The fear of losing balance was gnawing at his near-stomach. Not being able to take a step forward also frustrated him madly. He looked like a perennial plant. But anyway, he had a near-body.

Except you don't live in an oil lamp but in a cup, a locket and a ring, Tom thought fit to specify.

And I am not blue and I don't grant wishes.

Why would you want to be blue? Tom frowned then added, I think you could grant some of my wishes.

Come closer, then, I can't leave my quarters, Harry joked, unable to hide his apprehension.

Tom got nearer to the cup and was careful not to knock it down with an accidental kick. He looked up at his other self and noticed with anger that Harry looked hesitant. He was hesitating over whether to kiss him.

It was not as if he had not jerked Tom off countless times, as if he had not put his finger in his arse, as if he had not mentally hurt his anus in many of their fantasies! They had already gone so far, physically and mentally... and now that they could almost do things like normal and separate human beings, he ...

Cut the crap! Harry said exasperatedly. I've only kissed two girls in my previous life, I'm just a bit anxi–

He suddenly broke off and panicked, as if Tom did not know everything about his love life:

Ginny and Cho, it was a long time ago!

I'm not as reluctant as you are, and yet I've never kissed anyone, Tom replied.

Hepzibah Smith's red lips unfortunately crossed their mind, but neither of them could tell which one had thought of them. As if to prove the old witch had not defiled him, as if to prove his body belonged to Harry Potter solely, Tom pressed his mouth resolutely against Harry's near-lips. The Gryffindor boy moaned shamefully.

At last, they thought. At last, we have two mouths.

xXx

It was not like their usual kisses, but it was necessary to say they had never kissed except in imagination. And could animating in turn Tom Riddle's body's two unique lips be called kissing?

While they had long believed their cohabitation gave them a privileged relationship, they simultaneously realized that even the most daring fantasies were nothing like a plain abominably chaste oral contact.

Not being able of predicting the other one's next move was so strange! It was strange and very arousing to be two separate entities but to still hear the other one's thoughts.

Harry groaned boldly and Tom took advantage of it. He stuck his tongue in his lover's mouth.

His kisses with Ginny came back to Harry in spite of himself. What should he do? What did she love? Should he turn his tongue clockwise?
Tom almost sank his teeth into Harry's lips, when the redhead chick's pictures popped into his mind. How did Harry dare? But Tom was more selfish than jealous, and he chose to continue achieving his dream rather than spoiling everything.

Nothing could stop his tongue, his lips, and his hands, nothing, not even Harry's stupid thoughts, not even his protests. If Harry did not like it, he had to grin and bear it, to suffer in silence, for Tom would continue, for Tom had waited so long for this moment he inten ted to get the best out of it. Oh, he was not sharing a kiss with Harry, he was violating his mouth, he was possessing the one who had possessed him all his life.

He did not give a shit, in fact, about who Harry had seen in his first life. Ginny Weasley was not even born, Tom would only have to wait until the 1980s to kill her and turn her blood into black pudding.

Hearing the thoughts of his other self, instead of backing up, Harry opened his mouth wide, obscenely offering himself to Tom. He spread his lips as he would have spread his legs and showed his anus; he received Tom's wet tongue deep in his dry throat with a shameless avidity.

He did not really care, for now, that the guy he was kissing would become the Dark Lord, for a foggy wave of desire was rising in him and threatening to submerge him. And it was so good, to feel such an urgency, to feel his own cock hardening like a real penis engorged with blood.

He had not felt with his own senses for so long! He had not had his arousal only for himself for so long!

Tom could plan the most atrocious murders, he might be Voldemort, at that very moment, he only was a mess of flesh pressed up against Harry Potter. And he was terribly, humanly, hard.

Oh, their first kiss was as furious as it was strangely dry, for Harry's near-body could not secrete any fluid. Luckily Tom's mouth produced saliva for two. His chin and the grass at his feet were covered with spit, as if the future Lord Voldemort were drooling in a vacuum, as if Harry's nearly carnal shape was only a hallucination, a very sweet mirage.

For a second, Tom wondered if he had really gone mad and was really kissing air. If this were the case, he would kill without hesitation whoever would dare to make him recover his wits.

**XxX xXx xXx**

Months and years went fast. Tom Riddle no longer traveled to find information on the cup and locket but only to discover the world and kill time.

Indeed, he had found out the ritual making Harry appear was as exhausting as it was punctual: it only worked perfectly well on full moon nights, the maternal star lost in the celestial ocean being then favorable to resurrection.

These monthly meetings were awaited like the Messiah. They were miraculous but only lasted three consecutive days and, when the moon entered its waning gibbous phase, it left behind it two devastated beings. Tom and Harry fell back in their old common carcass, in which they now felt cramped. One day considered a blessing, their cohabitation had turned into a long wait for the blissful nights when the moon was round.

The week following the full moon, they were not much eloquent. Each of them, on their own, dwell on the intense moments they had just lived. Every gesture, every laugh, every kiss, they went through them again in their own corner, as if the one with whom all this had happened was not the
one who was in their head during the rest of the month.

The next two weeks, everyday life caught up with their melancholy and they gradually resumed their mental discussions, which almost all revolved around what they were going to do when the moon would illuminate their nights again. They took random Portkeys and met strange characters in the semi-darkness of the taverns.

The nearer the full moon was, the more febrile they were and the more they get back to the way there were before. They were nervous, stifling in their shared body.

But their time was short. The last day's dawn never failed to come. The agonising first rays of the sun made Harry Potter's near-body disappear. And the cycle started again: nostalgia, waiting, feverish impatience, ecstasy, and so on.

XXX xxx xxx

They waited for several lunar cycles before daring to touch their respective sexes.

During the first months, they had simply enjoyed their respective presences, devouring each other with their eyes without exchanging anything but monstrous kisses. Teeth banging silently against near-teeth, tongue filling a near-mouth, lips and near-lips welded together to the point of confusion.

Sometimes Tom had the impression the one with a near-existence was not Harry but him. How could he be sure he was not the ghost, when his hand often got through his other self's body? While there was no doubt Harry had had a life before his reincarnation, Tom Riddle's whole life was only a repetition of the first Voldemort's.

What if Voldemort was just a myth derived from Harry's imagination? What if all his life's sinister events had been intentionally provoked by Harry, a sick mind who wanted to give a flesh to the Dark Lord, a character he had invented? And what if it was him, Tom, who was the imaginary friend? What if his body was Harry Potter's body?

All his fears were not rational, but he could not help but wonder, for the time when he had a blind trust in Harry was over. Even if Tom had long believed in him, Harry was not him. It was tiny, but there was a chance Harry was a traitor.

After seven months, Tom finally buried his doubts. If Harry was playing with him... in the end, why would it matter? Tom would not relegate his imaginary friend to the back of his mind and forget about him. If Harry had not told him everything about their Destiny, Tom just had to stop the rituals and get seriously into Legilimency.

But the real reason he put aside his fears was he was burning with the desire to penetrate and be penetrated by this brazenly other body.

On August 1952's second full moon night, Tom Riddle and the near-Harry Potter lost their anal virginity. Tom Riddle was twenty-five. Harry was seventeen or forty-two. Tom's dick had not touched any body since Hepzibah Smith. Harry's cock had never known anything but his right hand.

While their Hogwarts wanking had been pure moments of letting go, while in their fantasies, their lovemaking was fantastic and indecent, their physical first time was exquisitely awkward.

Both of them did not know what to do, now they had left the unlimited field of imagination or the reassuring routine of masturbation. Sleeping with someone was far more frightening than jerking off or inventing erotic scenarios. And they were two men. And they had a huge age gap, whether Harry was seventeen or forty-two.
“Is this really what your cock looked like?” Tom whispered, contemplating Harry’s half-hard near-sex.

*Uh ... yeah, I think so*, Harry restrained himself from hiding his pubis.

It was silly to feel embarrassed. Merlin knew that after seven full moons, Tom had got used to seeing him naked.

*It's not like in your ...*

*It's not hard yet, that's why it looks so small!* Harry snapped. He had the pride of a seventeen years old boy.

Tom sneered and the Gryffindor wanted to step back, but his near-body was held captive by the cup. Tom laughed again, amused by his other self’s anxiety and knelt before him.

*Tom?*

Tom did not think, or maybe he was using Occlumency. In any case, Harry could not figure out what he was going to do. Of course, he knew what it meant to kneel before a hard dick. In their fantasies, they had sucked each other many times. But to experience it for real, to imagine the future Dark Lord’s mouth would soon close on his cock ...

Tom smiled. As for him, he heard distinctly what Harry was thinking about, and he liked that, he liked that very much. How arousing, how flattering, to know the penis twitching a few inches from his mouth was erect for him and for him alone!

Tom looked Harry straight in the eye, listened to his perverse thoughts for a few more seconds before opening his mouth and swallowing the near-cock. The organ was neither hot nor cold. It was not lukewarm either: it was as if he did not emit any warmth and Tom felt unwittingly like he was sucking on a piece of wood. He slowly licked the glans and the picture of a varnished cup and ball crossed his mind.

Harry did not like his penis being compared with a cup and ball. He grabbed Tom’s shoulders to remind his lover he was not made of wood. He wanted so much to deeply stick his dick into Tom’s throat but he did not dare, for Tom glared at him just as the thought began to form in his mind.

Tom continued to lick the swollen glans with a diligence he had never shown in imagination. And it was good, but it was so delicate, so frustrating!

**Tom continued to work without accelerating. In imagination, he loved their unrestrained fantasies, where hands, mouths, cocks, sperm were everywhere. But in real life he appreciated to build the tension little by little, till Harry’s arousal would be so violent it would be painful.**

He did not admit he was afraid to take the whole near-penis in his mouth. Indeed, he was either an expert, because of his imaginary training, or a novice, precisely because of his real inexperience. Yet when Harry’s supplications began to give him a headache, his licks became more assured and he started to frankly suck on the stiff penis, sometimes letting his teeth grazing the swollen veins.

Harry watched Tom fervently, as if the secret of the universe resided in the way his lips hugged his penis. Just seeing his cock – how could he have piss for twenty-five years without his good old
weiner? – plunging and plunging again into the future Voldemort's mouth made his muscles contract involuntarily.

It was a hypnotizing vision. Without thinking, he gave a pelvic thrust. Contrary to what he feared, his cock did not get through Tom's skull but quietly sank into his throat. Tom's uvula was pressed against his glans.

He thought of the rainy day Ginny had awkwardly proposed to give him a blowjob. A flash of anger tore his good old scar at once and he knew he had made a mistake.

Tom no longer wanted to make the tension rise. The only thing he wanted to do was to suck this near-dick with so much intensity Harry would not be able to think. His unrestrained movements almost pulled off Harry's near-penis but he did not give a damn. On the contrary, the desire to bite the vulnerable organ and feel the blood spurting in his mouth and running down his chin made him even more hard.

Whenever the glans slid off his lips, momentarily released from his oral cavity, Tom re-entered the fray with more arousal and fury. His own cock, stuck in his pants, hurt him, but he did not devote a second to it. He loved giving heads, but he loved having a hard-on and not touching himself even more.

He wanted to be a sadist, he was a masochist.

His only aim was to make Harry come. He was going to make him experience so many emotions at the same time that the poor guy would no longer be able to distinguish pleasure from pain. Harry would lose control of himself while feeling extremely bad; he would literally liquefy and return to the state of disembodied conscience.

Tom Riddle aka Voldemort was going to show him he was not tolerating any betrayal. Harry's soul and near-body were solely his.

I'm going to disintegrate him, he thought with mad delight, when he touched his other self's hard testicles, when the cock in his mouth exploded.

From Harry Potter's near-body's near-glans nothing came out, neither blood nor sperm. Tom moved aside, feeling like he had not accomplished anything. In his mouth there was no sour taste but only saliva.

xXx

Harry did not go up in smoke. His near-body remained as solid as ever.

He stared at Tom, who was wiping his mouth on his sleeve, and a glance at his robes taught him what he needed to know. He took a deep breath.

He was going to suck Lord Voldemort off and he was going to like it. It was not going to happen in a reverie, but for real.

Harry knew that if he thought about it for a moment more, he would find himself suicidal. Yet the mark he was about to overstep, he probably had already stepped over it years ago, when he had touched Tom Riddle's cock for the first time.

Lie down, he ordered.

Tom did so. He raised his head slightly, but Harry told him not to move. The wizard lying in the
Harry was going to suck him. It was not surprising. It did not arouse him so much and Tom understood he really had a preference for sucking over being sucked; for penetrating over being penetrated. He, Voldemort, would rather give than receive.

His eyes closed and his mind empty, Tom waited for Harry's ghostly, warmless mouth to close on his softened cock. He gasped when a finger brushed against the skin separating his testicles and his anus.

Harry had fingered him many times before, but always with Tom Riddle's fingers.

On that August 1952's night, foreign, thicker fingers penetrated Tom. His anus tightened by reflex.

*You don't want me?* Harry teased him. *Even if you gave me a blowjob just now? Even if I've already put bigger things than fingers into your arse?*

*It burns,* Tom whined.

Harry withdrew his fingers. He would have liked to spit on them but he had no saliva. So he put his forefinger and middle finger on Tom's lips. The former Slytherin's mouth opened immediately, eagerly welcoming the near-phalanges which had just titillated his anus.

The future Voldemort shamelessly licked the fragrant fingers. His mind was full of images of the tear to come. He ached to be torn up by a real cock. His own fingers and the objects Harry had sometimes inserted into his arse had not been suiting him for a long time.

His craving for domination was nothing compared to his incoherent need to belong to someone, to be for someone, *to exist.* If Harry sodomized him, then, for a moment, they would no longer be two soulmates belonging to different Times but two human beings who did not know how to show their love except by throwing one into the other.

Like all lovers, their disjointed bodies would join, and they would feel like, as long as arousal would last, they were the same one.

**xXx**

Harry contemplated the Dark Lord's young and beautiful body, while discreetly listening to his thoughts. He took his fingers out of the wet mouth of the man who murdered his parents and put them into his anus. Tom unconsciously raised his bum and Harry shuddered with a perverse pleasure.

Lord Voldemort, so pitiful ... And him, Harry Potter, barely more respectable!

The Chosen One fingered Tom deep. It was both familiar and new, for Harry did not felt penetrated for the first time while doing so. He felt oddly alone. He almost spread his arse to stuff a few fingers into it.

"You miss being in my body, Harry?" Tom succeeded inarticulating aloud, in a provocative tone that was reminiscent of Malfoy's.

His voice was still echoing in the wards around them when Harry positioned his penis, hard again – a near-body advantage! – against his anus. And pushed.

Tom fell apart. Harry was not the one who was not made of flesh but him, Tom Riddle. He was the intruder, the wandering soul. Why, otherwise, when his anus had been penetrated by a cock able to
go up his entire alimentary canal and emerged through his mouth, would he have not be in pain but felt a dizzying sensation of bursting?

Such a liberation in this unbearable bodily burning!

His whole soul resonated with the universe, as if it were no longer a finite material entity but a cosmos all by itself. He was planets, he was a black hole. He was dead stars, he was comets. And an asteroid was passing through him, overturning all the stars on its way and leaving behind it a luminous tail called meteor.

None of his senses worked as it should, but he did not worry, for he had received other, more impressive gifts.

His open, blind eyes did not allow him to see Harry and the dark sky above him, but all the energy's and magic's flows surrounding them. Green, blue, red, and yellow trails collided with sparks that grew and explode, like silent fireworks.

Unsurprisingly, he noticed in his anus area a bright white ball of energy, attracting towards it all the will-o'-the-wisp around. His arse was as thirsty for magic as for cocks but Tom was completely cut off from his body.

He spread his nostrils but no perfume of grass, sweat and night under the stars came. Instead, he felt suddenly euphoric, as if he would have drunk a cocktail of Amortentia and Felix Felicis. Head back, he inhaled the smell of supreme beatitude.

He exposed his tongue and licked Harry's near-face he could not see. His taste buds did not tell him about the roughness, taste and warmth of the cheek, but his physical corporality slowly melt.

His toes turned into roots, his fingers into lianas, his hard penis into rock. His hair became a tuft of grass and all his body hair sparkling lichen. His spreaded legs were sandbanks and his faceless skull became an empty shell waiting for a hermit crab.

He had become deaf and he could not even hear Harry's thoughts. In this extraordinary and strangely restful silence, he heard the voice of the devil living into his ear. He had noticed his humming years ago but he had never realized he had a woman's voice.

*What are you saying? he asked.*

... *as the seventh month dies ...* the voice of the devil said, before shutting up.

Tom did not wonder what it meant. He was so peaceful, beyond anxiety. Being penetrated by Harry's near-phallus had extinguished Tom's sensual pleasures craving, his being craving and his non-existence craving.

He had reached Nirvana without looking for it and without realizing it, absolutely gratuitously and contingently, and it really was like blowing out a candle.

*But the near-Harry kissed him and Tom got out of his trance.*

**XXX xxx xxx**

As time went on, they trusted each other even more, and soon, during each full moon night, they slept together without restraint or poetry. What had been at the very beginning a rare gift of the Gods became a habit, then a frustration.
The ritual made Harry feel uneasy, and on certain nights he could not get hard, for the bottom of his body was stuck in nails, armpit hair and sometimes teeth.

Hufflepuff's and Slytherin's relics also had their own limits while Tom wanted more and more. Obviously, being able to touch Harry was good, for sure ... but it was not enough.

If he laid hands on the Founders' two last relics, he would no longer have to settle for a sweet and cruel illusion. He would be able to create an autonomous body, a body that could walk and talk aloud.

After much thought, Tom was now sure the gathering of the four relics did not confer immortality, contrary to what most of the texts asserted. No, according to him, the four Founders' power was far less eye-catching than eternal life but equally attractive: the power to transgress the five exceptions to Gamp's law of Elemental Transfiguration.

If the Hogwarts Founders were as gifted as legends said, they most likely had found a way to make love, food, money, health and life appear from nowhere. *Life.*

Tom only had to find Gryffindor's sword and Ravenclaw's diadem and he would be able to invoke the Founders' power. He knew the Sorting Hat kept Gryffindor's sword safe at Hogwarts, but he was not ready to come back to England yet.

He did not know where Ravenclaw's lost diadem was, but that problem was solved in a few seconds. *Albania,* Harry said, without hiding his resignation.

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**To Be Continued ...**

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**Chapter End Notes**

Please review if you want to support the author (me) :D

See you in a week!
End of the trip (1953-1955 / 26-28 years old)

Chapter Summary

Tom is in Albania, looking for the Diadem. Harry feels weak/like he is dying again. They eventually come back to England and meet with people from a long time ago. And the Founders' Relics are to be reunited ...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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End of the trip (1953-1955 / 26-28 years old)
Chapter 13: Like hope or worse, like love

Tom Riddle left for Albania. The mostly mountainous and sylvan region was not very welcoming. Natives were rather suspicious of the young Englishman with the funny face. It suited Tom, he was not there for a tour.

Harry had thought it would only take them a few days to find the Lost Diadem of Ravenclaw and they could start new experiences right away. After all, it was not like they did not know where to look. He remembered very well his discussion with the Grey Lady on his first life's last day. Rowena Ravenclaw had hidden her mother's diadem in a hollow tree of the Albanian forest.

Harry was aghast at discovering there was more than one forest in Albania.

For two months, Tom followed the same routine. He stopped for a few days in a village and explored its surrounding forest. When he thought he was done with it, he left. Most of the time, he traveled by train. He Flooed when luckily the inn where he was staying was connected to the network.

Several times, he just felt like fucking Apparating in front of the bloody hollow tree but to do so, he would have had to be able to visualize it. Unfortunately, though he had great powers and an uncommon destiny, he was still unable to imagine a place where neither he nor Harry had ever been.

The search was slow, or rather stagnant, for lack of a more elaborate plan than 'looking in tree trunks in case Rowena Ravenclaw was foolish enough to hide the diadem without warding it'.

The absurd insane quest was fortunately suspended by two saving full moons. Those three monthly nights were for Tom and Harry like weekends for a Hogwarts student. But they needed more. So they were back on the road.

They would have called it quits a long time ago had they not known the first Voldemort had managed to find the diadem. And everything the first Voldemort had done, the second Tom Riddle could do too, since they were destined to accomplish the same things, since they were the same
person. It was a matter of time. How fortunate, time, that was something Tom did not lack.

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What if the diadem is not hidden in a forest? What if you lost your memory? Tom wondered with ire, glaring furiously at the trees around him.

All forests looked alike, they were only trees, trees as far as the eye could see. And some cracking noises and, at times, some discreet whistlings in the shadow, too discreet to be understood.

If Tom did not scrupulously trace their route on a map of Albania, he could have sworn he had already visited this forest the previous week.

I remember very well what the Grey Lady told me, Harry repeated for what seemed to be the thousandth time in two months.

Tom's complaints reminded him of Ron during the Horcrux hunt and, frankly, that was no good memory. Not knowing where to go, randomly searching places and sleeping in an old tent ... even the purpose of their quest was the same. Except the diadem was not a Horcrux. Not yet.

Why would she have told this to you? No, more importantly: how did you learn Voldemort had got the diadem? If I were him, I would never have boasted about it. I would have kept this information secret.

I know a lot about Voldemort, Harry said cautiously.

Yes, I had noticed that. You knew something was going to happen with Hepzibah Smith.

Harry did not belie. He had never imagined Voldemort had slept with her, of course, but Dumbledore had told him Voldemort had killed the old witch, after he had relieved her of Hufflepuff's Cup and Slytherin's Locket.

Are you sure there was nothing between the first Voldemort and you? Tom asked, narrowing his eyes.

Me and Voldemort? Harry exclaimed with horror, the Dark Lord's ignoble face in his mind.

He saw again his eyes without lids, the slits which acted as his nostrils. He could see his red iris again and his mouth without lips. He saw again his blue bald head shining like a fish-egg and he winced. Then he realized Tom could take offense. After all, he was Voldemort.

As expected, Tom took offense.

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After three days going deeper into an immense forest where, as soon as the sun began to decline in the sky, men-eater beasts likely prowled around their encampment, Tom met his first Albanian serpent.

Wrapped around a branch, one of its coils dangling like a large viscous vine, the reptile with round pupils stared at him. It did not look fierce, with its rounded muzzle, its small head and smooth scales. But Tom had never dealt with foreign snakes and he was not sure it was as friendly as the Basilisk.

~ Hello,~ he hissed politely, a hand on his wand.
The serpent looked at him from top to bottom, as if to estimate the time it would take to digest a 5,75 ft beast.

~You know our language,~ it said, and its tone was not hostile.

As Tom explained to the snake he was looking for a thin, shiny object hidden in a tree several centuries earlier, Harry examined the snake more closely. It was not Nagini. That was fine because Harry had no desire to see the animal that had planted its poisoned fangs in Severus Snape's throat.

When Tom stopped speaking, against all odds, the Aesculapian snake ordered him to follow it.

xXx

After only three minutes of walking – slithering for the snake –, they arrived in front of a gigantic tree whose trunk could not be more intact.

Tom cast several detection spells before bursting with anger.

~ There is nothing here. You lied to me! ~ he snapped harshly.

Harry became aware for the first time of how threatening Parselmouth could sound. Even if he understood their meaning, the squeals coming out of Tom's mouth had a sinister echo in his head and in his ears.

~ Look at the top of the tree,~ retorted the snake, not at all impressed by the proud biped.

Harry raised his head and, among the leaves, he noticed a bird's nest which he found very large compared to those he had seen in England or elsewhere.

~ Up there nestles a snake eater. Make its blood flow and what is shining is yours,~ explained the Albanian reptile.

Harry hesitated, but Tom whistled at once, all trace of anger disappeared from his voice:

~ Serpentine word. You'll have the head tomorrow. ~

Yurk, there must be another way to get the diadem without beheading a bird! Harry exclaimed.

You thrust a sword through my Basilisk's mouth. You killed my father and my grandparents, Tom said.

Harry could not reply to that.

~ After the moon and the sun, I will come again,~ the Aesculapian snake disappeared under the shrubs.

Its brown scales glistened a few seconds before extinguishing. Tom found himself alone.

He cast a Disillusionment Charm, a Warming Spell and some wards around him so he would not be disturbed during the night. He crouched down three meters from the tree, his eyes riveted on its top and he began to wait.

He waited all night, but the bird did not return. When the sun rose, Tom agreed to close his eyes for fifteen minutes. He was not sleepy but Harry was exhausted. How annoying to have such a vilely human body! If he missed the bird, he would ...
Tom Riddle's body fell asleep before he had time to think about what he would do if he missed the bird.

xXx

A sunray right in the face did not fail to wake them, several hours later.

Harry was all sleepy and confused – had he actually had a dream involving Dumbledore's beard? – but Tom opened his eyes without pity. The former Slytherin was neither well-rested nor tired, and it had been like that for so many years he did not even remember what it was like to get up after a good night's sleep.

Yet he did not regret his condition, let alone when it allowed him to be clear-headed at any time of day and to discern, at the top of the tree he had been watching all night long, white and brown spots which were not leaves.

Tom had missed its return from the hunt, but he would not miss the bird.

He canceled the Silence Charm surrounding him, raised his wand to the short-toed snake eagle and said with as much determination as coldness:

"Avada Kedavra!"

The green lightning did not miss its target and the bird fell, but its large brown wings were caughten in the branches. Suspended like that, it looked like a shirt escaped from its clothesline and pitifully stopped in its flight by a tree.

Tom pointed his wand at the bird again to levitate it to the ground. As he dropped the dead body at his feet, Harry finally exclaimed, forgetting to think in his head:

"You killed it! You killed something in cool blood!"

Tom did not answer, for there was nothing to answer. Ravenclaw's diadem was well worth the death of a snake-eater.

I don't care if this bird is dead, Harry said. But you killed it in cold blood.

You killed my father and--

Half of my soul was in a damn Horcrux!

And where do you think mine is?

Harry, who was ready to engage in a dispute, stopped short, allowing Tom to resume his thinking.

It was the first time he'd cast the Death Curse, but it did not seem like the first time. He had felt nothing special.

Long before the Hogwarts' professors, Harry had explained to him that to cast an Unforgivable, you had to want it with all your soul.

But it had been so easy Tpm felt like he'd done that all his life.

The boy turned the bird over with a slight kick and found himself facing two large yellow eyes, like those of an owl. The short-toed eagle's breastplate, the color of birch bark, was abnormally spotted with blood.
Avada Kedavra doesn't usually bleed, Tom thought, before realizing something was sticking out of the bird's beak.

Without disgust – after all, he had inserted his penis into Hepzibah Smith's vagina – Tom leaned over, opened the raptor's beak, and gently waved the dead body up and down.

Half a snake escaped from the bird's beak and rolled on his shoes.

This crown is useless! Tom growled. Ravenclaw's relic is less interesting than Hufflepuff's! I can't believe it.

Maybe if you kept it longer on ...

It's useless.

Tom took off the diadem. He held himself back from reducing it to ashes. He did not know why, but since he had put his hand on the diadem, he kept thinking of fire, of a huge and devastating fire.

Harry spun the diadem on the tip of his fingers, thinking. Unlike the cup and the locket, Ravenclaw’s relic did not seem to present a thousand extraordinary faculties. They had been experimenting on the diadem for several weeks now and for the time being, it had not been very cooperative.

Tom wore it every night but he had never woken up with the conviction he had discovered a new argument revolutionizing the Chicken and the Egg paradox. Nor had he invented the mathematical formula of the resurrection of the dead.

It was scarcely as if dawn found him a bit more enlightened. On the contrary, his thoughts swarmed, moved about in all directions, and he was very anxious to write a book in order to get rid of all the philosophical reflections which assaulted him during the night.

When he took off the diadem, his head was always full of memories and of inexplicable visions, which were of no use to him: the seaside cave, an imposing manor, the house of Gaunt, a vault overflowing with gold and fire, fire everywhere ...

Harry had no time to be alarmed by the premonitory images the diadem gave them. Indeed, for the second time since his reincarnation in Tom Riddle, his health was drastically deteriorating.

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The symptoms were the same as when Tom was almost seventeen years, nine months, and a day. But instead of slowly getting worse, they rushed one after the other.

Harry's focus was diminishing day by day, his thoughts were losing all coherence. Flashes of light blinded him, and at times he felt like he was leaving Tom's body, he was flying away. He was struggling to stay. He did not want to die.

He felt a mixture of weariness and of anger every time a fragment of his conscience vanished. He tried to stretch out his fictitious arm to catch them in flight, but even that required too much effort. Then he spent most of his time curled up on himself, in silence.

Tom did not feel as helpless as at the beginning of his seventh year. He knew what to expect and he knew what he had to do. He was no longer a teenager distraught because his imaginary friend,
supposed to be immortal, was dying.

He was twenty-six. He had slept with a woman, he had slept with Harry. He had gotten a tattoo and he had cast a Death Curse without hesitation. He would do it again and not at a raptor. He would kill a human being if it held Harry back a little more in their body.

He knew who he was. He was not lost. He was Voldemort and he was going to create a Horcrux again.

On the 16th of August, 1953, the diadem, which he never left, informed him the day had come. Harry lay in the back of his head, inert, a kind of small fetal-like kernel, gently pounding like a serpent’s heart beats a few more times, while the rest of it is already dead.

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With the diadem in his hand and his trunk miniaturized at the bottom of his pocket, Tom came out of the forest. The sun blinded him and he instinctively raised his hand to protect his eyes. How many years had he been wandering around the world? Well, how many weeks had he spent in the forest, in the company of Albanian snakes, trying to unravel the diadem’s mystery?

Being an immortal being without professional obligation, he had not cared about the calendar. After finding the diadem, he had lived from day to day, feeding his body with seeds and animal bodies his reptile friends sometimes brought him. He fell asleep in clearings adorned with wards taught by Harry and this frugal life suited him very well.

Yet, exposed directly to sunlight, he realized he had lived away from men longer than he thought. He saw his dirty nails, his callused hands, his torn and muddy robes. His shadow danced on the golden field like a scarecrow’s.

He touched his face and discovered, without surprise, a thick beard. Once a fussy child, Tom did not remember the last time he had washed himself with anything but water and spells.

He did not, however, linger over his neglected appearance. He had to kill someone, anyone, to free Harry from his illness. The diadem had told him so and he sensed it was true.

He saw a figure in the distance and he smiled. That man would do the trick.

“Kush je ti?” called the Albanian peasant.

Tom resolutely came over to him, the diadem in one hand, his wand in the other one. He was going to kill his first man. He was not sorry. He was Voldemort and Voldemort was not one to be sorry.

When he met the Muggle's eyes, his heart remained rudely calm. He had expected to feel excited, like the day he had opened the Chamber and Myrtle Warren had died on his orders. Or maybe fear, like the day Harry had pointed his wand at Thomas Riddle. He must have become an adult meanwhile.

He was ten years older than his soulmate. He had flown across the world and seen many things. He was no longer the feverish kid whose only dreams were to be admired, feared, and to be able to touch the man he loved. Since the day Harry had told him who he was going to become, he had gradually ceased to be Tom Riddle. Now he knew he had a Destiny, he would accomplish it.

Ravenclaw’s diadem had to become a Horcrux. It was obvious, even though he did not know how to explain it. In any case, it was the only way to postpone the deadline.
He could not back down for the next day, the 17th of August, 1953, Tom Riddle would be eight years, ten months and sixteen days older than Harry Potter.

The next time Harry would get sick, it would probably be in four years, five months, and eight days. And the next time, it would take half as much time. And the next time even less, until Tom would be forced to create Horcruxes every day, every hour, every minute, and then finally his soul would be so mutilated and the blood on his hands so indelible, he would simply return to dust.

Tom left his speculations because the peasant was shaking his scythe as if to make him flee.

Harry? Come back there. I will kill this man.

What? No! What the fuck are you doing? Harry cried, returning to their mind.

In the blink of an eye, he understood what was happening. He saw the Albanian peasant, he felt the warm diadem in his hand and he tried to scream, but their lips were already formulating the Unforgivable.

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Why did killing a man save me? Harry anxiously wondered. The last time I got sick, Tom simply picked up the fragment of my soul which was in the Diary.

He made a few steps in the field, without looking at the Albanian peasant's corpse, whose eyes were staring at a scorching sun without blinking.

His control over Tom's body had diminished further and he did not even try to use their wand, for he knew full well it would poorly obey him. But he felt whole again.

He no longer felt like he was falling from the inside, crumbling. His thoughts obediently remained in their head, when during his illness they seemed to flow through their ears and go he did not know where.

Neither the diary nor the ring contains fragments of your soul. Your soul is entirely in my body. To save you, we had to create a new Horcrux, Tom explained calmly.

But why is a Horcrux ... And how did you know ...? All this makes no sense. This story makes no sense!

Tom regained possession of his body without replying. He levitated the corpse and proceeded to the protective forest. As soon as he left the exposed fields and plunged again under the trees, he felt more serene. The shadows and the damp smells diverted his attention from his terribly pale hands.

Ravenclaw's Diadem is much more useful than I thought, he lowered his wand.

The corpse fell to the ground and his head bounced. A little bit of dirt stuck to his lips.

The diadem ...? Harry repeated, not daring to look at the body. — He's dead—this guy's been dead for a long time—the first Voldemort killed him well before I was born—it's not Tom's fault, not my Tom's fault—

The diadem knew, Tom ignored his other self's bad faith. It knew we had to create a Horcrux in order to heal you. It told me so and I did it.

But why?
I don't know. Maybe when I lose my soul, yours, like a parasite, takes advantage of it to spread out a bit more in my body, Tom smiled and felt his absence of lips stretch out on his teeth.

He sat down on a stump and watched the serpents converge towards them. The reptiles had not waited long before coming to him or, rather, to the corpse. Seeing them covering the man on the ground, Tom suddenly felt like he was back to the Cave and was nine years old again. Or was he ten?

But this time, the serpents scarcely whistled a thank you to him. They had not come to hug him but to shred the flesh of a dead man.

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Harry forced himself not to look away. The Albanian peasant had died to save his life, although he would never know that. The least he could do was to watch him become food for beings who were still alive.

It was a horrible sight. But Harry had not offered to bury the Albanian peasant. It would have been hypocritical. Deep down, he did not regret that Tom had killed the stranger to save him. Deep down, he was happy to have a new proof of Tom's love. This simple thought bothered him so much, he felt so guilty, that he forced himself to look at the Muggle's face, even when there was nothing left of it.

It's amazing that you, who know everything about my life, know almost nothing about Horcruxes, Tom was trying not to see what he was seeing.

Snakes were his friends and the peasant could not feel anything anymore, but all this was disgusting. Tom was watching, though, for Harry was watching.

Because you know more about Horcruxes than me? Harry said distractedly. Everything you know, you learned it from me, or we discovered it together.

The diadem opened my eyes to many things. Creating a Horcrux lets you get back into my body, it lets us postpone the deadline, because it's a sacrifice. I sacrifice a piece of my humanity, I sacrifice a piece of my soul, so your soul can continue to live, artificially, in a body which isn't yours.

What do you think'd have happened if you hadn't followed the diadem's advice?

The words 'If you had not killed this poor Muggle' echoed a few moments in their mind.

Tom thought. When he had understood what he had to do, he had not hesitated. He would never let Harry die.

But one day he might have to let him go. He did not know whether their cohabitation was due to Fate or Chance. It seemed Harry could be snatched from him at any moment.

Tom watched his shadow stretching out in front of him, and it looked lighter than before, as if it were only half a shadow.

Turning the diadem into a Horcrux had taken his presence from him. He looked at his face in a puddle and it was blurred like an unfinished portrait or like an early decomp dead man's.

Three pieces of his soul now resided in Horcruxes. Had he already reached the limit of humanity? How would he handle it, when Harry would fall sick again?

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If I hadn’t killed this guy, you’d probably be back to where you come from. But it won’t happen as long as I’m alive, he eventually said. You will not die as long as I am here to resurrect you.

You don’t regret it, Harry commented, with more distress than anger.

You don’t regret it either, Harry. You’re watching him get shredded without feeling anything else but a knot in our stomach. You knew this man was going to die, for you know everything about Voldemort’s life. You knew the diadem would one day become a Horcrux. But you’ve done nothing to stop me from fulfilling my destiny.

It’s not your destiny! Harry winced. But I knew, yes, I knew ...

Why had he done nothing? He had gone in search of the diadem in the hope of more carnal meetings with Tom. The diadem had to complete the two Founders’ relics in their possession. And as neither the cup nor the locket had been transformed into Horcrux, he had hoped the diadem would also escape the curse. But each time he was thinking he had a grip on Tom’s life, the sinister events came back and taunted him.

You are far too human and sensitive. You’re way too young, Tom said.

I can’t help it, Harry defended himself. He blinked when a snake literally swallowed the peasant’s left shoe.

This was not a criticism.

Why is my presence decreasing at certain times? How can a soul get sick?

I don’t know, Tom got up. There was not much left of the corpse. But I know that in four years the cup will also become a Horcrux. And in six years, it’ll be the locket’s turn. And when I’d have created every single one of Voldemort’s Horcruxes and when your soul will fall sick every day, maybe one of us will die at last!

But if you create Horcruxes to save my life, why did Voldemort create them? I didn’t live with the first Voldemort, he had no reason to divide his soul! Harry wailed in despair, thinking of the number of murders they still had to commit.

~ Voldemort, it’s me!~ Tom hissed in Parselmouth, and the digesting serpents at his feet gave him a bad look.

He resumed mentally: Everything Voldemort had the power to do, he did it, for no reason. You look for coherence in his life ... Have you ever wondered whether you were just inventing our relationship, in order to explain his acts? Have you ever wondered whether you had gone mad?

“You exist!” Harry said aloud. “Tom Riddle, you exist!”

The words echoed in the forest without finding any answer, not even from the serpents, for they did not speak English.

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After turning the diadem into a Horcrux, Tom felt the need to return to England. How much time had he been traveling? How much time had he spent in Albania?

Initially he had fled his homeland only to escape possible judicial proceedings and to keep himself busy till he could apply again to the post of DADA teacher.
Then he had done experiments on the cup and on the locket. Then he had made the most of his monthly meetings with Harry. Then he had gone in search of the diadem. Then he had killed the peasant. All this had taken him seven years.

It was more than time to return home.

He had three relics. Combined with Gaunt's ring and with organic offerings, the cup and the locket were able to conjure Harry on moonlit nights. The diadem seemed to have no other properties than to award its owner greater intelligence. Well-controlled, this power could prove very useful.

All they needed now was Gryffindor's sword. Which meant he was bound to see Hogwarts soon enough.

As they crossed Europe from east to west, going from fireplace to fireplace, the excitement slowly rose inside Tom. Every time he came out of a hearth, he expected to see the Leaky Cauldron, the Three Broomsticks or the Hog's Head.

How could he have spent so many years away from England? How could he have spent so many years away from Hogwarts?

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Harry was far from sharing his friend's excitement. When Tom had told him they were returning to England, he had felt nothing but a little resignation.

During their seven-years-long initiatory trip, each day had been new. He had discovered, together with Tom, the Founders' relics' powers. He had felt like they were finally two normal young wizards, on a sabbatical year after school.

He had selfishly enjoyed those years of travel and those moonlit nights which had gave them more than they had ever had. He had touched Tom and had been touched by him as if the ritual were for single use. And he had been happy, because Tom Riddle was very generous to those he loved. It was a pity he had never loved anyone in his first life.

In short, for seven years, Harry had felt free. He knew almost nothing about the first Voldemort's initiatory trip. He might have also discovered the powers of the Founders' relics. He might have acted exactly as they had, and he might have killed a short-toed snake eagle so an Aesculapian snake took him to the diadem.

It was unlikely, but even if it was the truth, it did not matter as long as Harry did not know. It was of little importance to him to be really free. What he had savored during this journey was the impression of being free.

But Tom willingly put an end to their sweet youth and independence. He was bringing them back to England. Destiny was catching up with them and soon they would have to meet Dumbledore again.

Harry remembered the last memory Dumbledore had showed him. He remembered it so well he could not believe so many years had passed.

His transformed face so similar to his Tom's, Voldemort enters the Headmaster's office. On the other side of his desk, Dumbledore offers him a glass of wine. The discussion is polite, but it ends abruptly. Voldemort leaves, his robes swirling in his back.

Of the six memories Dumbledore had shown him, it was the one that had bothered Harry the most. There was nothing really frightening about this scene. That might be why it had always made Harry
want to play the dangerous 'What if' game.

What if Dumbledore had hired Voldemort? What if Tom Riddle really had a teaching streak? And what if Snape had not become a Death Eater, and what if he had not been at the Hog’s Head the day of Trelawney’s job interview? What if Tom had never heard of the prophecy? What if he had not become the Dark Lord?

Then his parents, Sirius, Remus and so many others would still be alive. And Harry would never have got a scar.

Harry was afraid to meet Dumbledore. After twenty-six years, he had well understood Destiny would come true with or without his help. Even so he could not help but have a foolish hope, a crazy hope that in this second life, Dumbledore would give a job to Tom.

_Dumbledore will refuse my application?_ Tom said, between affirmation and interrogation. He was throwing floo powder in an inn’s fireplace.

_Yes he will, if you must know. But you already knew, didn’t you?_  

_Of course, just as you know that what interests me isn't the job but the sword._

Tom got into the fireplace. A single trip and they would be in London at last.

_I wish it was the opposite, _Harry thought for himself. _I wish Tom would really want to teach, then Dumbledore would give him a second chance._

_“The Leaky Cauldron!”_ Tom cried, and the green flames engulfed him.

**Xxx xxx xxx**

In London, Tom was tempted into Apparating directly to Hogsmeade, so he could apply for the post of DADA teacher before nightfall – so he could take the sword by the way – but Harry advised him not to do so.

_We can't show up at Hogwarts without warning anyone, after ten years of absence! We must ... I dunno, we should find out about what happened here during our time away._

_You could have been more assiduous during your History’s classes, _Tom half joked. _What exceptional event could have happened?_  

_I don’t know, _Harry admitted, _but I know Voldemort didn’t meet Dumbledore til 1955. Which leaves us two years._

_And it is important to respect the chronology, even if the sword is within reach? _Tom asked dubiously.

_I don't know, _Harry repeated with annoyance. _I don't know everything._

Tom nevertheless decided to wait two years before going to Hogwarts because he trusted Harry and his predecessor. He was itching to push the castle’s doors but at the same time he felt he had something to do in London, something which could keep him busy till 1955.

He began to read the press compulsively and discovered things had actually changed a lot since he had fled England.

A pack of idealistic wizards was widely talked about. They wore masks, organized select meetings,
and sometimes made trouble during public events. Their opinions did not win unanimous support but most old Pure-Blood families did not hide their admiration for them. The Black Knights called them a revolutionary group, and even the Prophet said they carried a message.

After reading everything he had found about the small group, Tom sent owls to his former dormmates. While he was experimenting on the Founders' relics and spending time with his imaginary friend, it seemed that the other Slytherins were also trying to realize their schoolboy dreams.

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“How do you call yourselves?” Tom asked with a smile.

Callum Nott, Byron Mulciber and Nath Rosier exchanged uncertain glances.

If Tom had not read the date on the newspaper that morning, he could have sworn he was back in 1945. The wizards in front of him looked just like the students he had left at King's Cross, seven years earlier. But himself ... Oh, his face had changed, since the end of his seventh year!

"We don't have a name yet," Byron said. “We considered 'the Knights of Walpurgis'. You know, like—“

"Yes, I know," Tom politely cut him short, for he had attended a 'Walpurgis night' in Scandinavia.

The reference was beautiful but the name was ugly. 'The Knights of Walpurgis' sounded like the Dark Knights, a proof his former dormmates were not more original now than when they were in school.

“What happened to Albert Avery?” Tom asked, putting down his tea cup without touching it, for he was never thirsty and Harry was not fond of tea.

Callum, Byron, and Nath all sneered and straightened up, as if Albert's mention gave them self-confidence.

"He got away from our group. We are too extreme for him, his words, not mine," Byron smirked.

Tom smiled knowingly, but he laughed badly deep down. His former classmates had not change a bit. They spoke loud and clear. They had ideas, the press dedicated a few articles to them and they believed it was that, being someone.

None of them, however, had done what he had done, none of them would ever do what he would do in the future! They were mediocre and their fight was a real waste of time.

But Tom knew perfectly well the first Voldemort had surrounded himself with the former Slytherins. They were easily acquired followers. He just had to play along with their projects to get, as when he was at Hogwarts, a gang ready to sacrifice themselves for him, in case things went wrong.

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"And you, To--" Nath began, before remembering Tom Riddle did not like to be called by his first name.

Tom looked up at him and waited.

"V-Voldemort, what have you been doing all this time?" Callum asked suddenly.
Nath gave him a grateful look.

"A lot," Tom said evasively.

He had no desire to tell them about his journey. But they had to fear him, they had to know he had pushed back the limits of magic further than anyone else.

He grabbed his cup and drank it. The tea was lukewarm and Harry grimaced mentally. The three former Slytherins stared at him, waiting.

"My journey was long. I could tell you a part of it if you grant my request," he whispered, asking Harry: What's their name?

Errr, Nath, Callum and–

No, the name of their group, of Voldemort's group! Tom exclaimed impatiently.

"Which is?" Byron inquired.

Why ally with them? Harry protested.

Because they are Voldemort's future followers and I am Voldemort.

"Keep my name secret," Tom said, without showing anything of his internal dispute. “And keep yours secret.”

You're not Voldemort.

Stop insulting your own intelligence, you know I'm Voldemort. If you don't tell me their name …

“Which name?” Callum looked lost. ‘The Knights of …“

... I'll kill one of them. You know I can do it.

Death Eaters! Harry shouted. They call themselves the Death Eaters!

“ … Walpurgis?”

"No," Tom said softly. “Not the Knights of Walpurgis. Now you are the Death Eaters.”

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The next two years felt like a second. Tom regularly met with the Death Eaters. He did not participate in their actions and had no interest in their fight. These weekly appointments were nevertheless necessary to assure him the role of leader. The more Death Eaters there were, the more he was admired, he who did not give a toss about Pure-Bloods' supremacy.

He spent most of his time reflecting on what the diadem was trying to tell him, through these obsessive images of fire, fire everywhere. And, on moonlit nights, when he slept with Harry and reached his cosmic illumination, he was trying to hear the female voice of the demon living in his ear.

But, until then, the only thing he had understood was that there was something about a seventh month that would die at some point.

That was not exactly a news flash, Harry wholeheartedly hated the Death Eaters. But even he admitted they were not dangerous, not yet. They were content with blocking the floo network from
time to time, penetrating illegally into the Ministry of Magic, and even if they had threatened to do so, they had never made the Knight Bus explode.

None of them got a tattoo on their right arm. Their masks did not represent skulls yet. They were violent activists but they were not terrorists yet. And they were well liked. Despite their name, they were not Death Eaters yet.

And Tom ... Tom did not care about restoring Pure-Bloods' ancestral status or eradicating Muggle-Borns. Tom presided over his former classmates' group as he had done in the days of Hogwarts.

His mysterious aura and his handling of rhetoric guaranteed him an attentive audience. His face's strange ugliness was soon forgotten by his circle of friends. Indeed, Harry sometimes perceived Andrea Nott's admiring glances. Nott's sister was not impervious to their disfigured features.

*Have you just called me disfigured?*

*Oh, it was a bit ironic,* Harry stammered. *Malfroy called me 'Scarhear' throughout my schooling.*

*You think a lot about this Malfoy boy,* Tom said dryly. *Speaking of the Malfoys, wouldn't it be Abraxas over there?*

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Harry looked up and saw the platinum blond hair of a Malfoy. It was indeed Abraxas, one year older than them. He was looking at the brooms with Walburga Black, who held Orion by the arm.

*Odd coincidence, isn't it?*

*Diagon Alley is small, unfortunately,* Harry grumbled.

He had not seen Walburga Black for eight years, and he had not missed her. Something about her reminded him of Pansy Parkinson or of Millicent Bulstrode ... or maybe of Daphne Greengrass.

When the witch spotted Tom, she squeaked, with a small gesture of her hand:

“*Oh, Tom!*”

Tom briefly greeted Abraxas and Orion, before turning to Walburga. The former Slytherin girl's face had lost its teenage grace but neither did it look like the portrait Harry had known.

“Walburga, you must remember I don't really like my name, um?” Tom leant towards her.

*Don't be jealous,* he whispered mentally.

*I am not,* Harry replied, and it was true.

He was incapable of jealousy because ... it was not as if Tom belonged to him. It was not like they were dating or married. Tom was not his, he *was him.*

Walburga looked like she wanted to let go of her husband's arm to caress Tom's deformed face.

“I'm sorry, it was an automatism ... Voldemort,” she whispered, without moving. “I recognized you, of course. Andrea told me about your new ... your new ...”

Orion looked embarrassed. He nodded at Tom and Abraxas and pulled Walburga by the arm before she could finish her sentence. In front of the broom shop only Tom and Abraxas were left. The latter
looked terribly like Lucius.

"What do you think of my little group, Abraxas? You must have heard of us lately, haven't you?"

Oh, Tom, you moron ... Why do you feel compelled to recruit everybody? Harry wondered, almost for himself.

The more wizards ready to die for me, the more wizards ready to die for you.

I don't want anyone to die for me, Harry grumbleds, but Tom did not answer him, for he was in the middle of a discussion with Abraxas Malfoy.

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On a particularly cold February morning – it had been snowing all night and it would be snowing all day – Tom woke up knowing the time to see Hogwarts again had finally come. Harry did not protest. He remembered there had been snow on Voldemort's cloak, in Dumbledore's memory. And he did not want to admit it, but he missed the castle. Since they weekly met with the Death Eaters, the prospect of their meeting with the Headmaster frightened him much less.

Tom sent an owl to Dumbledore first thing, hoping to meet him at the end of the morning, but the Headmaster told him to come by half past six, at the same time as their Death Eater meeting.

That old wizard did it on purpose! Tom raged. He knew meetings were on Thursday evenings.

How could he have?

This man knows everything, Harry. You told me he was the most powerful of all and even Voldemort, the Dark Lord, feared him. He's never liked me but I, I've always hated him.

Harry remained silent. Before, when he was thirteen, fourteen, he had absolute faith in Dumbledore. But now ... there had been all these lies, all these secrets, all these plans to make him, the Boy-who-lived, a human sacrifice. Even in limbo, Harry had not been able to sympathize with the dead man's bitterness and regrets. Even in limbo, Dumbledore had seemed contemptible, letting the poor scorched thing agonizing under the bench, without trying to help it.

When Callum Nott, Byron Mulciber, Nath Rosier and Antonin Dolohov, the new recruit, learned Tom would be absent that night, they insisted on going with him to Hogsmeade.

"It's been a long time since I'd set foot in the Hog's Head," Dolohov took off his cloak. "This is an opportunity you provide us, Voldemort."

Tom did not react and sipped his glass of water in silence.

The Death Eaters chatted calmly and then lively, for alcohol was slowly loosening their tongues. From time to time they glanced at him curiously. Everyone obviously wondered why a wizard as powerful as him suddenly expressed the unexpected wish to teach.

Following him in Hogsmeade, they had hoped to learn more about his motivations, but Tom refused to drink with them and did not say a word.

At six o'clock precisely he gave them a nod and went outside in the cold and the snow.

XX
“Good evening, Tom,” Dumbledore said in a peaceful tone. “Won't you sit down?”

"Thank you,” Tom took the seat Dumbledore had indicated. “I heard that you had become Headmaster. A worthy choice.”

You boot-licker, Harry grumbled.

*The art of small talk or, rather, of banalities,* Tom replied in a pedantic tone.

The rest of the discussion went exactly as in Harry's memories.

Dumbledore and Tom shared a glass of wine. Dumbledore refused to call his guest by his pseudonym – which upsetted Tom – and babbled for a moment on the beauty of the post of Headmaster.

Like every time he relived a scene he had seen in the Pensieve, Harry had a curious and annoying impression of unreality. He was following events from afar, it was almost as if he were not in Tom's body, but somewhere above him. Tom spoke with their mouth, the words came out of their common throat, but everything went like in a dream or a movie.

"I have returned," Tom finally said, "later, perhaps, than Professor Dippet expected ... but I have returned nevertheless, to request again what he once told me I was too young to have. I have come to you to ask that you permit me to return to this castle, to teach. I think you must know that I have seen and done much since I left this place. I could show and tell your students things they can gain from no other wizard."

*Pretty spiel,* Harry commented in spite of himself.

*He won't hire me anyway,* Tom replied, almost bitterly.

"Yes, I certainly do know that you have seen and done much since leaving us," Dumbledore said in a low voice. “Rumors of your doings ...”

*The Death Eaters hadn't held their tongues, those morons. Yet I told them!*

“... have reached your old school, Tom. I should be sorry to believe half of them.”

Tom made an inventory of all the good for nothing people surrounding him and stopped on Walburga Black. It was inevitably her. She must have spread fanciful gossip at all the parties she had been, to make it look like she had an intimate relationship with him, Voldemort.

“Greatness inspires envy, envy engenders spite, spite spaws lies,” Tom eventually declared. “You must know this, Dumbledore.”

“You call it 'greatness' what you have been doing, do you?”

"Certainly." Tom affirmed, thinking of Hufflepuff’s and Slytherin’s relics, of the ritual he had invented to temporarily extract his soulmate from his body. “I have experimented; I have pushed the boundaries of magic further, perhaps, than they have ever been pushed —"

"Of some kinds of magic," Dumbledore corrected him. “Of some. Of others, you remain ... forgive me ... woefully ignorant."

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Harry did not remember being shocked by this statement in the Pensieve, but when he heard
Dumbledore speaking to Tom like that, a deep sense of injustice rose in his soul. How did Dumbledore dare ...? Had he any idea of what it was like to live in their body? Did he know anything about the complexity of their bond?

The anger that constantly twisted his bowels in fifth year, that teenage fury he had been curbing since he had decided, twenty-eight years earlier, to take care of little Tom Riddle as if he were his brother or his son, this anger threatened to overwhelm him.

Without even knowing it, he had tightened his hand on Tom's familiar wand and scanned the room in search of an object, preferably very fragile and very precious, to explode in the second.

His gaze was torrid, his face tense and malevolent, more menacing than an outburst of rage. He did not need a mirror to know what he looked like, because he was perfectly aware of Voldemort's expression in the Pensieve, when Dumbledore had made the same comment.

With an imperceptible movement of the head, Tom sent Harry back to the depths of their mind.

"The old argument," he said in a whisper. "But nothing I have seen in the world has supported your famous pronouncements that love is more powerful than my kind of magic, Dumbledore."

All anger suddenly left Harry's veins. For him who knew Tom, the words he had uttered were limpid and melancholic. Tom was saying that even if they desperately loved each other, with every fiber of their being, it was not enough. They could not be satisfied with mental conversations and common but solitary masturbations, for thoughts were only words, and hands were neither mouths nor arses.

Their love was mad and powerful, but not enough to bring back the dead or to conjure souls. Only magic, relics or Horcruxes could help them. And to say that Dumbledore, and to say that him, Harry, have believed that at that time Tom had been confessing he knew nothing about love!

How Dumbledore had misjudged Tom, how he had misled the Boy-you-lived ...

Harry calmed down and took an interest in the discussion again.

"And what will become of those whom you command? What will happen to those who call themselves – or so rumor has it – the Death Eaters?"

*This foolish old man is omniscient, it's almost as if he also came from the future,* Tom grumbled.

*That would be ... It's not ...* Harry muttered, caught off guard.

*I was joking,* Tom said, humorless.

"My friends," he said aloud after a pause, "will carry on without me, I am sure."

*I'm not so sure about that,* Harry commented.

*Neither am I,* Tom replied absent-mindedly, listening to Dumbledore.

"Then if I were to go to the Hog's Head tonight, I would not find a group of them – Nott, Rosier, Mulciber, Dolohov – awaiting for your return? Devoted friends, indeed, to travel this far with you on a snowy night, merely to wish you good luck as you attempted to secure a teaching post."

*Oi, how can he know everything?* Tom sighed.

*The Hog's Head's owner, Aberforth Dumbledore, is his brother.*
Alright. And you, how can you know everything? You were close to Dumbledore, in your first life, Tom thought accusingly.

I thought so, but he's taken a lot of secrets to his grave, Harry replied.

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Dumbledore straightened up in his armchair, clasping his fingertips in a very typical gesture.

“... let us speak openly. Why have you come here tonight, surrounded by henchmen, to request a job we both know you do not want?”

"A job I do not want?” Tom was astonished. “On the contrary, Dumbledore, I want it very much.”

It was not a lie, Harry noticed. Tom would have liked to teach, but he had got used to the fact he could not escape his Destiny … thus he did not even try to convince Dumbledore. If he had come without knowing Dumbledore would rebuff him, he might have shown more ardor, and Dumbledore, charmed, might have hired him ...

You're deluding yourself, Tom whispered.

"Oh, you want to come back to Hogwarts, but you do not want to teach any more than you wanted to when you were eighteen. What is it you're after, Tom? Why not try an open request for once?” Dumbledore asked.

Tom sneered. As if Dumbledore would give him Gryffindor's sword if he asked for it!

Not the sword but the Sorting Hat! Harry suddenly chirped. Request to talk to the Hat again!

"If you do not want to give me a job –," Tom began.

"Of course I don't," Dumbledore interrupted him. "And I don't think for a moment you expected me to. Nevertheless, you came here, you asked, you must have a purpose.”

Tom stood up, his features thick with fury. Harry, in him, was battling against his cowardice.

Ask him, shit!

"This is your final word?"

"It is," Dumbledore said, standing in turn.

“Then, we have noth–Let me try on the Sorting Hat,” Tom said, upset and surprised at the same time.

Harry had managed to take control of their mouth. For the first time since the beginning of their conversation, Dumbledore looked stupefied.

“The Sorting Hat?” he repeated.

“I have ... something to ask him,” Harry improvised.

Dumbledore peered into his eyes for several seconds before resolving to go and take the Hat on its shelf. He handed the artefact to Tom, still confused.
"Could we have some ... privacy?" Harry stammered.

If he found the use of the first person plural strange, Dumbledore did not let it show.

"I've actually got to send a letter to Minerva Mcgonagall, but of course you don't know her. She started school in 1947. And, if I remember correctly, you had already left your job at Borgin and Burkes at that moment."

Tom did not really listen to the Headmaster's babbling. Now the Hat was in his hands, he could not wait to see Dumbledore go away.

"I'll leave you with the Sorting Hat," Dumbledore said finally, opening the door of his office, but without taking his eyes off him. "There's no point in reminding you that if anything disappears from this office ..."

"Professor," Harry cutted him short. "I just want to discuss my ... sorting with the Hat, nothing more."

Dumbledore took another confused peek at him, before closing the door behind him and leaving for the Owlery. Had Tom Riddle really called him 'Professor'? It was impossible, but there had been this gleam in his eyes, like hope or worse, like love ...

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As soon as he was alone, Tom put on the Sorting Hat. The hat did not fall on his eyes, proof, if one was still needed, that he was no longer eleven. It did not mean he no longer was psyched out by it, quite the contrary.

Already the first of September? There is no way, the Hat said in their head.

I hate to bother you, but– Harry apologized.

Have we met before? the Hat asked. Your mind is both familiar and unknown to me ...

We have, of course, Tom chimed in impatiently. I was sorted in–

Oh, I remember you. I was talking to the one with whom you share your head.

Unlike the day of their Sorting, Harry did not try to make himself very small.

Yes, we are two in there, he said with clumsiness and bravery. But we haven't met yet, you and I.

The Sorting Hat remained pensive for a moment before saying: Time means nothing to me, for I am only a hat. I do not know death, let alone life. But I know my job, and both of you were made for Slytherin ... or for Gryffindor. Why come back to me, while for one, Hogwarts is already behind him and for the other, Hogwarts has not started yet?

We came back because of Gryffindor.

We need his sword, Tom explained laconically.

Oh, he does have some nerve! the Hat was full of enthusiasm. You wouldn't have done as bad in Gryffindor as you think. You could have enjoyed your youth, cultivate your courage and learn to express what you keep hidden in a corner of your head.

The sword? Harry asked sheepishly.
Why would you want the sword? the Hat inquired.

We need it to–

Oh, you, I know your heart. You are a Gryffindor and I have already loaned the sword to you in the past or in the future, the Hat replied. Then he turned to Tom: But to you, a Slytherin, why should I give the sword?

Severus Snape was a Slytherin, yet he owned the sword for a while, Tom retorted.

Severus Snape? This name ... How? A Slytherin? the Hat muttered for himself. Both of you form a funny pair. But so be it, your heart tells me your intentions are not evil and I would like to return to my shelf. A Slytherin, Severus Snape?

Without listening to its ravings any longer, Tom took off the Hat. He put, or rather Harry put his hand in it, and their fingers met the cold grip of Gryffindor's sword. Harry pulled it out of the Hat so Tom could see it.

Its blade of pure silver, Godric Gryffindor's name engraved on it, its hilt adorned with rubies, it was really her.

Tom had gathered the four Founders' relics. The irony was that the relic he had most easily obtained was precisely the one the first Voldemort had failed to get.

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For a moment, they had truly thought it was going to work. Harry had brought them to the Room of Requirement, a place where no one could disturb them. At least that was what he had told Tom. He knew that for some unknown reason they would leave Ravenclaw's diadem there.

Is was all clear to him now.

Once the door was closed behind him, Tom had hastily taken out the three other Founders' relics of his trunk. Then he had attired himself in the artefacts, like a child on a carnival day. Except that his lips had not cracked the shadow of a smile.

The sword in his right hand, the cup in his left hand, the locket around his neck and the diadem on his head, he could have looked like a fool, but a broken lantern's pane had rather reflected the image of a messianic or chivalrous figure. He looked straight out of a stained-glass window. However, he had not had time to admire himself, for a magic flow had started to run in his flesh, distracting him from any aesthetic consideration.

He had sensed that the four artefacts were trying to connect with each other. Flows of energy had gone through him, randomly at first and then more and more precisely, until he could imagine the trails widening inside his body, like the tunnels of an ant nest. The magic started from his fingertips and went to his chest, climbed up his neck and rushed to his skull and it was there that it became a big mess.

As if blocked by a hydraulic dam, magic had accumulated in his head without succeeding in passing through the diadem. It had continued to flock to the top, furious and destructive, just wishing to reach the diadem, which refused to resonate with the other relics. But magic had never stopped rushing in their neck and if they did nothing, they could die overwhelmed by it ...

Harry tore off the diadem from their head. The tension in their body disappeared and he inhaled deeply. He was thirsty. He was exhausted.
Tom wanted to scream his frustration, but his lips trembled, traumatized by what had just happened, or rather, by what had not happened. Then he threw the damned diadem across the room. Harry did not have to look where it had ended up to know he would be able to find it, years later, next to a wardrobe with blistered doors and the chipped bust of an ugly old warlock.

*Let's go,* Harry said.

*When I killed this peasant in Albania,* Tom thought calmly, *my impure and murderous soul came into the diadem. At that moment, it ceased to be a relic and became a Horcrux. The power of the four Founders ... we'll never know what it was.*

*Let's go, Tom. We still have to test the sword's properties.*

Tom slipped Gryffindor's sword into his trunk and left the Room of Requirement.

He had planned to leave Hogwarts without looking back, but when he reached the main gates he turned around in spite of himself. For a few seconds he let his gaze wander over the castle with snow-capped towers and windows drilling yellow rectangles in the dark, over the muddy park with bare and twisted trees, over the frozen lake.

Then he let anger invade his mind and body, inhabit him like a demon, possess him entirely. Harry's protests were of no use, he did not even hear them. His soul was so diminished now he no longer called himself a living being, let alone a human being, and the litany of his thoughts had an icy echo, even in his own mind.

*Cursed be Hogwarts,* cursed *be Dumbledore! Cursed be the teaching position!* I *never should have come back ... Cursed be the Defense Against the Dark Arts! If I, Lord Voldemort, could not get what I wanted from the bottom of what remains of my heart and soul, no one should! No one but me will bring together the four Founders' relics! No one will keep the post of Defense teacher!*

*“Cursed be Hogwarts!”* he yelled, slamming behind him the castle gates.

His cry still reverberated in the cold February atmosphere after he had Apparated away.

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*To Be Continued ...*

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Chapter End Notes

Every comment is welcome!
Hey guys, hope you'll enjoy this chapter. I tried to be respectful and objective about every mythes and beliefs this chapter deals with. You'll see I'm a bit of an India obsessive person (I'll be travelling there in November!!). There are some notes at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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**Dreamtime (1955-1962 / 28-36 years)**

**Chapter 14: Dirt under his white nails**

Callum Nott, Byron Mulciber, Nath Rosier and Antonin Dolohov waited for Voldemort all night, but Tom never returned to the Hog's Head.

They tried to contact him for several days, unsuccessfully. The owls came back to them, sealed letters fastened around their legs, and a disapproval look in their large bright eyes.

After a week, the Death Eaters decided to go and knock at the door of the room Tom had once told them he rented. A witch and a wizard opened to them. As soon as they saw their visitors' masks, they squealed together.

"You're the Death Eaters, right?" the witch asked.

"We are," Antonin Dolohov said before slamming the door in her face, almost crushing her fingers.

His comrades and he left from whence they came, in a whirlwind of black capes, Dementors' pantomimists.

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In the absence of their leader, the Death Eaters continued to meet every week and soon they stopped talking and thinking about Voldemort.

Tom Riddle had done a lot of good to their organization. He had given it a name. He had given it methods which, although flirting with illegality, could not lead them in front of the Wizenmagot. But he had also given it enough autonomy to survive without its head.

The young recruits, those who believed Voldemort had founded their group, were disoriented for some time. They did not, however, dare to ask questions to the older ones, and followed orders without protesting.

And the elders, those who had once belonged to the Slug's Club, were not surprised by Voldemort's
impromptu departure. After all, Tom Riddle had always been a funny wizard.

Nott, Mulciber, and Rosier remembered the taciturn boy with whom they had shared a dormitory, that kid they had often seen speaking to himself in front of the mirror. Without much effort, they also could see again the megalomaniac teenager who had suddenly imposed himself as president of Slughorn's parties, in which he had until then always refused to take part. And it only took them a moment's reflection to conjure the face of the Headboy who, at the end of his seventh year, had left Platform 9 ¾ without saying good-bye to them, without telling them he was going to work for Borgin and Burkes.

But Voldemort might not have known at that time he would be hired by the antique dealers the next day. And he probably had not expected to leave England for seven years either.

Voldemort was a great wizard. His new face was the indisputable proof he had not spent all those years sunbathing on Mediterranean beaches. His altered features and blood-stained eyes spoke for him and no one doubted he had madly experimented during his exile.

He was brilliant, no doubt, but his intentions ... they were impossible to guess. John Lestrange had a theory about him. Like a powerless tragic character who seeks to give meaning to his own actions, dictated by an omnipotent Author, Tom Riddle, teenager or adult, wandered in his own life. Once again, he had disappeared without leaving a trace or warning anyone, without even planning it.

Besides, why had he taken command of the Death Eaters when he had returned to London two years earlier, the elders had no idea. Voldemort had never manifested more than a polite interest in their cause. He had met face to face with each of his new supporters, he had demanded detailed accounts of each of their actions, but he had never actively taken part in them.

Voldemort was a great wizard, but he did not seem to have a goal, at least, a goal that made sense ...

Yet if there was still anything charming about his blurred face – and Walburga Black and Andrea Nott were nursing guilty fantasies about him – it certainly was this lost look behind his cold and intimidating assurance, like a ghost in his eyes.

What was attractive about his muddled face and his albino eyes was the impression that even a wizard as powerful as him did not know what to do with his life.

But Voldemort had left them for an indefinite time, without warning anyone, as usual. When he would come back, if he came back, the Death Eaters would show that they too were capable of great things. They admired Voldemort and that was why they would not perish during his absence.

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In his first life, Harry had always thought Voldemort was an immortal wizard who would always be there somewhere, lurking in his shadow and in his scar, an ageless wizard.

However, while breakfasting at a cafe in Shravanabelagola, Karnataka State, India (1), leafing through the local wizard newspaper without understanding a word of it, Harry wondered, without apparent reason, about Voldemort's age.

He calculated that at the beginning of the first war, in 1970, Voldemort was forty-three. And that on the night of Halloween of 1981, night he had killed his parents, he was fifty-four. After his destruction that night, after the unexpected rebound of the Death Curse, had he continued to grow old, when he was less than a spirit and a phantom and he survived only through the Horcruxes? And when he had resurrected in the cauldron of Little Hangleton's graveyard in 1995, how old was he?
Did he still have an age?

Holy cow, I couldn't read a word of Hindi for the life of me, Harry thought suddenly, in an awkward attempt to hide his previous thoughts.

Of course, such a lamentable ploy could not deceive Voldemort.

The war will not start until 1970, Tom commented, as if Harry had not tried to hide this fact from him. Why did my predecessor wait all this time before disturbing the existing order? He who had the same ideals as the Death Eaters, why did he not launch the assault as soon as he could? What did he do during the fifteen years that followed his conversation with Dumbledore?

I ... I don't know, Harry admitted, and that irritated him more than it should have.

Their first disappearance had not worried him. Seven years of initiatory trip, it was long, alright, but it was acceptable. The very young Voldemort wanted to see something of the aera and create some Horcruxes in passing? It was quite understandable. But this new absence of fifteen years, Harry could not figure it out so easily.

Fifteen years. Harry could not believe they would disappear for so long and yet ... it did not scare him. It was a platitude, but the older he grew, the shorter days looked. Besides, when he thought of their journey through Europe – more than two years ago, already! – he felt like their travel had lasted the time of a dream.

And when he said to himself they had left England on a whim again, he did not even feel an ounce of guilt. An hour after crossing Hogwarts gates, Gryffindor's sword tight against their chest, they had already emptied their room and grabbed a clandestine Portkey for New Delhi. Not a hint of anguish or repentance at the idea of spending again so many years on the go, then.

But Harry could not help wondering why the war should wait fifteen years before starting. It was difficult to understand. According to Dumbledore, Voldemort had spent all these years recruiting followers. But fifteen years, it was a pretty long time to just gather troops ...

Especially as, as Tom had suggested, Voldemort already had Death Eaters at his command before his second disappearance. They were perhaps not numerous enough to overthrow the Ministry of Magic alone, but two or three years more would have been enough to complete the ranks. Not fifteen years ...

Let's stop thinking about that. Let's see what the sword of the illustrious Gryffindor can do for us now that my body and you are not hungry anymore, Tom whispered, dropping the newspaper with incomprehensible characters. And by the way, in Karnataka, the official language is Kannada, not Hindi.

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Harry rolled his eyes but he was too excited by the prospect of finally conducting their first experience on Gryffindor's sword to waste time debating the resemblance between Hindi and Kannada. He fumbled in their pockets in search of a Galleon, remembered wizard India still had her own currency before the war and threw a few colored coins on the table instead. He immediately went away, without waiting for the waiter.

Amused, Tom gave up his body to him and let himself be carried around through the streets of the small town of southern India, stuck between the two hills Vindhyagiri and Chandragiri. The walking was short, for Shravanabelagola was more a village than a city, and they arrived very quickly in front
of the six hundred and sixty steps and some leading to Vindhyagiri's summit.

Tom took off his sandals. He handed them to the man in charge of keeping the shoes of those who climbed the sacred hill. The latter placed them in a small box behind him. Tom gave him a five-rupee note, got his thanks in Kannada, and began to climb the stairs.

After his seven years of initiation, Tom had understood that English wizards' way of life was far from universal and that pointed hats, pumpkin juice and owls were typical in Great Britain only. But he had had to go to India to truly become aware of the magical world's incredible diversity.

In Shravanabelagola, a Jainist city (2), wizards and Muggles cohabitated discreetly. It was rare but not unheard of. It was the case in some German villages Tom had visited. However, in Shravanabelagola, wizards were monks and that was something Tom had never seen in Europe, something he would never have thought possible.

As far as he remembered, every Sunday at mass, they were told that wizards, magicians and all infernal creatures swore fidelity only to the Devil.

But in India, Jain monks openly used magic to rescue a jiva – that is to say, a form of life – (3) whether it was a small blue fly or a chinkara gazelle. And Muggles did not burn these wizarding monks, they offered them meals.

*India is crazy. Or maybe it's the rest of the world that's crazy,* Tom often thought and Harry could only agree.

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As soon as they reached the temple where they were graciously accommodated, Harry rushed to the dormitory of which they were the only occupant. Tom stayed in the background and watched as his soulmate pulled Gryffindor's sword out of their trunk.

If there was one thing Harry controlled better than he, it was the sword. Light and vibrant in Harry's hand, it was heavy and stiff as soon as Tom was in control.

Harry made some uncertain moves with the sword, splitting air as if he were Godric Gryffindor himself. He put it on the bed and pulled out a small flask from their trunk. It contained water from the Ganges, a river which, according to the poem, was none other than Vishnu the protector. In addition to being a god, the Ganges was also the place where Hindus came to burn and die and where their ashes were thrown.

The Ganges was the most sacred of the Indian rivers, despite its pollution. Its waters were the belly of all life but also the arms that welcomed the deceased. They were both Mother and Death. They guided souls to their new bodies again and again, for the reincarnation cycle only stopped when the jiva reached liberation. Only then would the soul get itself out of matter and leave behind it a small pile of dust, quickly carried away by the river.

Tom Riddle was far away from liberation. If he were to die, he would reincarnate for sure. But it was too soon to die, he still had much to do.

*Pour the water on the sword,* he ordered, suddenly very impatient.

*I know!* Harry snapped back.

He cautiously opened the flask and poured the Ganges' holy water, the Ganga jal, onto the sword's blade. They had seen right: the silver blade absorbed the liquid like a thirsty man.
Tom was jubilant. His plan was going to work. They had not gone to India for peanuts. Gathering the four Founders' relics had not worked, but it was not such a big deal. The sword would complete their ritual's protocol perfectly.

All day long, Harry harassed Tom to find out what the plan was. In vain.

*When the night falls and the full moon rises, you'll discover the ins and outs,* Tom said, almost teasingly.

The day felt endless among the Jain ascetics, but after a frugal meal the sun finally set on Vindhyagiri hill.

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In the cool and desert temple's courtyard, as a starless sky lay over his head, Tom began the familiar ritual. He shed his blood in Hufflepuff's Cup. He put organic offerings into it. He locked up Gaunt's ring and his nasty secret 'I'm Harry Potter' into Slytherin's Locket. He took off the Locket from his neck and held it on top of the Cup. Usually, he let go of it without waiting, too eager to meet the near-Harry again, but this time would not be usual.

The jewel turned on itself, attracted by the ground, like if it was dying to meet Hufflepuff's Cup. Harry mentally held his breath.

*What are you waiting for?* he asked eventually, uncomfortably.

He clumsily took control of their right arm but Tom kept his fist tightly clasped around the golden chain. In his left hand, another artefact shone supernaturally in the dark night.

When Tom finally let go of the Locket, which fell into the Cup like a stone, he raised the sword and stabbed himself through the heart.

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Harry woke up at once in his near-body, panicked.

*Shit, shit, shit!* he repeated.

He forced himself to look towards the ground, expecting the worst. Tom lay on the floor but the sword was not stuck in his heart.

Had he been hallucinating? No, he could not have, he had felt the sword touch them deep inside … at their core ... Tom had just committed suicide. Why? And how could Harry still be *there* when Tom was dead?

*His body may be dead, but his Horcruxes remain! Where are you, Tom? Tom! Tom, answer me! You can't be dead, you twat!* Harry screamed, but his mental cry could not pass through his lips and no one answered him, not even the round, cold moon.

His legs stuck in the Cup, he leaned as much as he could on his friend's body, looking for any life sign. Tom wore a strangely peaceful expression in death, but Harry did not linger on his face. He had just noticed the sword with a pristine blade, which was resting askew on the corpse. Its cross-shaped hilt crushed Tom's lips a bit.

*Tom!* Harry screamed mentally, digging his near-nails into his near-cheeks, unable to think, unable to analyze the situation.
However, he did not have time to whine or get angry. Something suddenly began to emerge from the dead’s parted lips, a sort of vapor whose shape curiously looked like ...

*Tom!* Harry silently exclaimed and he cursed his near-vocal cords which could not vibrate.

It did not matter, however, for Tom had heard him.

*I worked,* said the smoke that looked just like Tom Riddle. *I'm here.*

He was more vaporous than a ghost and his contours were less defined. He was certainly not alive, but he was *there,* in front of Harry, and that was all that mattered. Terribly relieved to see his friend after believing him dead, Harry instinctively stretched out his arms. He did not have much hope of catching the misty shadow, so he could not believe it when his near-fingers closed up on a solid body.

*I worked,* Voldemort repeated, his nose buried in Harry's neck. *I can't give life to you but here I am, as spectral as you are.*

Harry did not answer. He kissed him gently, trying not to think that by his fault, *for* him, Tom was gradually giving up his status of flesh and blood being.

*Hush, Harry. I'll join you in death if necessary,* Tom murmured, and this promise sounded more sinister than romantic.

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*You could have died!* Harry yelled when at dawn Tom and him successfully returned to their common body.

*And you look more and more like your friend Hermione,* Tom said lightly, dusting his robes.

He picked up their scattered things on the court floor.

*You killed yourself? You committed hara-kiri!*  

*The formal term is seppuku. And samurai did not stab their hearts, they disembowelled themselves, laterally. Sometimes they cut open themselves from top to bottom, to show their resolution. It hurts a lot more, did you know that?*

*Thank you for the details, but that's not the point, you dickhead. How could it work? What exactly happened?* Harry dragged himself to their dormitory, anger slowly disappearing, for he was too sleepy to stay upset.

He climbed with delight into their uncomfortable bed, so tired he did not notice Tom had not replied.  
But the ruthless Dark Lord got them up less than five minutes later. He packed his trunk, cleaned the dormitory with a flick of his wand, and resolutely proceeded to the temple's living room.

*May I know what the fuck you're doing and why we're not having a snooze?*  
*I'll go and thank the monks for their welcome. We're leaving. You'll sleep soon.*  
*I thought your hara-kiri or seppuku, call it whatever you want, would only work in a temple? And tonight and tomorrow night, are still moonlit ...*  
*We've overstayd their welcome, Tom lectured him. We'll find another temple on the road, it's not like we were in India.*
After taking their leave of the Jain monks, Tom and Harry unearthed a verdant space where they could sleep – they were exhausted. When they woke up, Tom finally consented to discuss what had happened during the night.

By absorbing the sacred water of the Ganges, which brought souls to their new bodies, it looks like Gryffindor's sword had obtained the property of dividing the soul from its carnal envelope.

Anyway, when Tom had stuck it in his chest, it had not pierced his heart. It had given him the delicacy of a god for a full moon night, because a soul without a body occupies no physical space.

Oh, how Tom had felt light that night, hovering alongside an equally astral Harry! He had not had to fear that one of his moves, too abrupt, would pass through his friend's near-body. They had touched, embraced, cuddled against each other. Each time, their hands and lips of smoke had met with deliciously solid areas.

For the first time in their lives, they had been part of the same dimension.

The Soul Realm was neither the living's nor the dead's. It was a disturbing in-between, a universe superimposed on the mortals' one, somewhat like the portraits', whose inhabitants haunted walls and paintings.

At one point, Tom had forced himself to look at his physical body lying on the cold gravel, Gryffindor's sword across his chest. But the yard surrounded by rocks, the temple adorned with Neminatha and Shantinatha statues (4), and even the immense statue of Bahubali (5), which could be seen from the town, had all seemed to him of no interest. He just had had to blink with his tearless eyes and the outside world had vanished.

Observing the world beneath was like trying to see through a very thick window or through liters of swirling water. It hurt the eyes and it was not necessarily very rewarding, contrary to the mysteries of the soul world. Mysteries, indeed!

For in the invisible Soul Realm everything was elusive and tender. Nothing was aggressive like the sharp angles and the saturated colors below. Things only appeared to those who wished to see them. They stood, if not in the background, at least like they were close to the limits of the visual field. There was no longer any contour and delimitation: the souls' universe was in fact an immense and unique organism.

Fascinated, Tom had spent a long time watching the flows of energy that made the universe vibrate around him and that perforated him sometimes without hurting him. But what his blind gaze had been most attracted to was the bubbling mass of magic lurking above Hufflepuff's Cup. This nervous concentrate was Harry's soul.

Tom and Harry hit the road, more determined than ever. When night fell on the little temple where they had stopped, they repeated their encounter from the day before, as passionate as new lovers.

Unfortunately for them, the moon was doomed to decline.

After three blessed nights, began the familiar but still unbearable waiting's torture.

It had been years since they had mastered the full moon nights' ritual. The combination of ring, locket and cup no longer had any secrets for them and the moist and intolerable excitement of the beginning
had gradually given way to a quiet patience.

But the discovery of Gryffindor's sword's properties instantly revived their desire of the flesh, rumbling like a hungry monster, hunched up on itself, watching for the moment when its prey will finally have its back turned. A monster would claw their stomach, motionless and tense, until the moon would again consent to make itself full.

Twenty-seven days later, they were in the temple of Sûrya, in the village of Konârak, when the maternal star gave them once again its blessing.

And they touched each other, embraced each other, and threw within one another, until they melted with the soul of the world. It was not like they had never been able to do all this before. Merlin knew they had explored their respective bodies a scary number of times.

However, Gryffindor's sword offered them a drastically different way of interacting and, like children, they joyfully tested all the new options available.

Souls love each other in a very strangely way. It had nothing to do with sex. No, to kiss, for spirits, was rather like inextricably entangling one around the other, like plants whose roots and branches are impossible to separate.

Nor was it intentional. Their souls met like the pollen scattered by the wind stops on the pistil of a female flower: they made love at random, and this had an impact on the whole Soul Realm.

For they felt it, that their actions did not concern only them. The buzz coming from their near-sexes was spreading around, without losing its power, and any soul in the whole universe knew what they were doing.

They did not feel embarrassed, however, and watched with satisfaction the flows and effluvia of magic emanating from their shape, making the path of a passing soul wave and resonating a thousand leagues away.

They were connected to the rest of this dreamlike and astral world as stars constitute constellations. When one of them moves or dies, all the other ones are affected. And that's how it was, there was no reason to be modest.

From time to time, a particularly ferocious soul shook their love time and they were raped from end to end. One of these turbulent souls knock them over so roughly they could have sworn it was Moby Dick's, violent and white in the dark world of souls.

Being sometimes invaded by a foreign breath did not bother them. A soul has nothing to protect or hide. Exposed and vulnerable like a newborn baby, it is as elusive as a mirage, a shadow, a dream.

It was intoxicating, and Tom could not figure out if he was coming because of Harry's cock in his smokey anus or because of the omnipotence of his astral body.

What he knew, however, was that when daylight would come back, the dead would return to earth and Harry and he would inexorably go back to their body.

XXxxXxxXx XxxxXxxXx

Time passed, punctuated by the moon and a heart surviving every month to the thrusts of a goblin sword. During their initiatory trip, Harry and Tom had restricted themselves to Europe. During this second travel, they chose to abandon the old continent to visit the rest of the world, in search of sacred liquids that would strengthen Gryffindor's relic.
They spent a long time in India studying Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism, despairing of understanding the bond between a soul and its body. If they died, would they reincarnate, like the Jains and the Hindus, or would they be reborn like the Buddhists? Could they still die, or were they condemned to occupy one body after the other, without ever being able to burn their karma and reach the \textit{moksha}, the liberation?

They lived in India as ascetics, except three nights a month, where they were only gaping holes, hungry for penetration and esoteric experience.

After a Brahman had affixed them the \textit{tilaka}, the red powder mark on the forehead – which is the third eye's chakra – they decided it was time for them to leave for the Maghreb.

In Egypt, they watched wizards practicing funeral rites and listened to arcane passages from the Book of the Dead. In vain did they squint their eyes, they could not see the bird-soul with human head, the \textit{Bâ}, flying over mummies to vivify them. On one moonlit night in the desert, however, they believed they had seen Heka himself, the old divinity personifying magic.

As soon as they had plunged the sword into the black silt brought by the flooding of the Nile, they left the country, because Hapi, the god who embodied the river, disconcerted them too much. Hapi was a hermaphrodite god, often represented as twins. Depending on the years, he was a symbol of life or death. Indeed, from his will depended the survival of the Egyptians and, when he was discontented, he dried up or inundated the crops. He thus received many offerings. The parallel between Hapi and Tom Riddle was so disturbing they quickly fled to America.

They celebrated the \textit{Día de los Muertos} with the Mexicans, surrounded by colorful skulls. On the first day, October 31, the spirits of the dead children, the \textit{angelitos}, visited Earth. The next day it was the turn of adult spirits to mingle with the living. Tom and Harry poured the traditional tequila onto the blade of Gryffindor's sword and set out to meet the Maya magicians.

Mayas taught them the art of calendars and of self-sacrifice. Bewildered by their hosts' tales, Tom and Harry passed a rope bristling with obsidian blades through their tongue. The blood filled their mouth and they soaked a paper with it, and they burned the paper, as the priest asked them. However, instead of offering the ashes to the gods, they sprinkled Gryffindor's sword with them.

When the priest was busy, they immediately cast a healing spell on their tongue. They still had trouble eating for several days.

\textit{xXx}

They then approached the Amerindian wizards, with whom they went into a trance and venerated the Great Spirit. Inspired, Harry slit, with the sword's edge, smoke from pipes and calumets, from wood fires and from incense-holders. He was certain he had slain some spirits in passing, for the blade felt quite odd afterwards.

Tom discovered that \textit{papooses} became adults only if they had succeeded in turning into their Animal Totems – which meant there were in North America an astounding number of unlisted Animagus.

Under the influence of white sage, Tom tried with all his might to transform into an animal, but he dumbly remained a human being with a blurred and tired face.

The shaman, who had watched him in silence, suddenly stared straight into his eyes and Harry was trapped.

\textit{He saw me, he knows I'm here!} he thought, glancing at the intimidating wizard, whose long black
hair was interweaved with feathers and fabrics.

"You as totem," the shaman said, pointing first at Tom's forehead, then at the tree trunk carved and painted with several animals. "You several. Before become animal, you become one."

The shaman offered Tom to exorcise him from his evil spirit and Tom pretended to consider the offer, in order to scare Harry.

The next morning they were both safe in Kenya. The Kikuyu told them that Ngai, the God who was the lifeblood and creator of everything, appeared from time to time on top of Mount Kenya, his earthly abode, moving with a thundering noise, and blasting his way with lightnings.

Tom and Harry soaked the sword in the icy waters of Mount Kenya, which the Kikuyu called Kirinyaga, 'white mountain', because some of the red volcano's summits were always snow-capped.

The sword never ceased to strengthen and each time it freed up more easily Tom's soul of its mortal coil, on the nights of full moon. It now stuck in his heart as if his physical body was just wind.

Harry could not say why they kept fortifying the sword, which was already doing a great job after absorbing the water from the Ganges, but he did not complain. He had been seized by a passion for traveling and for the innumerable religions and mythologies of the world.

Between a Tom Riddle thirsty for discovery and a Tom Riddle at the head of an extremist Pure-Blood group ... There was nothing to think about.

In short, Harry could have continue to dip his sword in all the holy waters of the world forever but in January 1958, Tom, thirty-one, abruptly came back to England.

After living one day at a time for three years, Harry had totally forgotten a new deadline was coming.

XXX XXX XXX

The symptoms were the same as the two previous times. Harry was trembling. He was weak, very weak, and lights blinded him intermittently, as if a deviant ophtalmologist enjoyed projecting a small light to see the fundus of his eye.

He had the anguishing and oppressive impression of being paralyzed and unable to make any voluntary movement. Tom could lend him his body all day long, Harry could not even blink or clench his fist. He was suffocating, he felt death coming for him, he even saw Hel, the Old Norse goddess of death, stretching out her arms.

Sometimes she was so bloodcurdling beautiful, sometimes she was breathtaking ugly. She was there, her face half rotten, she only waited for him, lying in her bed 'Sick-bed', with her knife 'Famine' and her dish 'Hunger' in the hands. Harry was about to cross 'Stumbling-block', the threshold of her subterranean realm, Niflhel.

But of course, Tom did not let Harry die. On January 23, 1958, after three mystical years, he stood before a door he would have rather never seen again.

However he knew what he had to do. He was not afraid. On the contrary, he was aroused at the idea of killing Hepzibah Smith at last. Her death unfortunately meant something else: the end of the rituals, the end of Harry's near-body. The end of Slytherin's Locket's powers.

He knew that, contrary to the ring which, despite his Horcrux status, could still be used because it also was a Deathly Hallow, the Locket would cease to work.
Don't think about that, he told himself. The sword will take over, the sword will never have to turn into a Horcrux. The sword alone is capable of a miracle.

What are you ... thinking about? Harry asked softly, opening his virtual eyes. No! What are we doing here?

You know perfectly well, Voldemort ringed the bell.

"Who is sir?" Hokey squealed, opening the door.

The Elf looked as old as the last time Tom had seen her. Her ears were almost obstructed by the clumps of hairs growing inside them and her eyes were glassy and bluish. Could she still see?

"You do not recognize me, Hokey?"

The Elf shook her head, trying to twist her hands to punish herself, but Harry, in a difficult gesture, prevented her from doing so.

"Stop that, Hokey," he mumbled.

"Who is sir?" the Elf asked again, beginning to wind her fingers again.

"I've come to see your mistress," Tom replied with a suggestive smile, and the Elf asked him to follow her.

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The living room was as round, cozy and emetic as Tom remembered. When he saw Hepzibah Smith, he sensed with trepidation an anger that did not belong to him. He did not hate the old witch – it was partly thanks to her that he could meet with Harry Potter monthly – but Harry ...

Oh, Harry was only negative energy, as if their whole body trembled with hatred and fury. The candlestick above them began to oscillate menacingly.

Tom clearly remembered the last time his loss of control over magic had caused objects to vibrate around him. It was at the Riddle Manor. A roaring and poisonous wave had rumbled in his heart and soul. Harry had been so angry he had killed the Riddles.

Tom realized he was not the one who would murder Hepzibah. For some unknown reason, Fate wanted Harry and he to commit one in two crimes, both equally guilty, both Lord Voldemort ...

"Who are ... T-Tom?" Hepzibah Smith asked with a frown.

In anger, Tom Riddle's already ugly face must have transformed into an abominable mask. It was surprising that Hepzibah could recognize him.

"What are you doing here? You disappeared and then ... you ... The cup and the locket! I hope you brought them back to me!" Hepzibah came nearer to him.

Harry wanted to laugh, but he could not. He was possessed by pictures of breasts with dark nipples, bright red lips and sensations. That was the worst part of it, Tom's penis remembered the loose moistness of Hepzibah Smith's vagina, even after more than ten years.

What has been in contact once will be forever! he thought, for even though Tom had only penetrated the witch once, his cock would never be virgin again.
It would always be contaminated, it would always be this dick, the one Tom sticks into Harry's arse, which have already gone into Hepzibah.

*This woman and I have shared the same cock!* Harry grunted, gnawed by uncontrollable jealousy. *Tom belongs to me and yet ... yet ...*

Tom tugged at the golden chain around his neck to show Slytherin's Locket to Hepzibah Smith, who held out her arm to seize it, like a child to whom a candy is displayed.

“You brought it! Give it to me now!” she cried, hopping heavily, oblivious of her fatal fate.

Tom did not stop Harry from casting the Unforgivable, but his soul tore apart, for killing Hepzibah was saying farewell to the Locket's properties.

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Just as with the murder of the Riddles, Harry had no trouble removing the evidence of his crime. He modified Hokey's memory and left Hepzibah Smith's house without any remorse. He thought for a moment of Bill's and Fleur's wedding. Ron, Hermione and he had landed up in a muggle cafe and had to erase the memory of the two Death Eaters who had found them thanks to the taboo put on Voldemort's name. Who was responsible for the spell? Hermione, it must have been Hermione.

He did not understand why Hepzibah had been killed so late – Dumbledore had been clear, she had been found dead two days after Tom Riddle's last visit, a decade earlier.

*Why do you always try to compare our life with the first Voldemort's?*

*Uh, wait, let me think ... Because you are Voldemort?* Harry replied, unusually sarcastic.

Tom sighed and stroked the now useless locket with his fingertips. The jewel had been sealed at last, containing a piece of his soul. He had expected it but it was still depressing, because it meant there would be no more ritual on full moon nights, at least no more like those they had known till then.

*Can't figure out why creating Horcruxes cure me ...* Harry sighed, stopping at a red light.

*It doesn't matter,* Tom Riddle watched the cars zooming before them, thoughtfully. *Do you regret killing Hepzibah Smith?* he asked finally, when the fire turned green.

To answer, Harry laughed out loud. The noise coming from his throat was lost in the Muggle streets uproar, but some passers-by peered at him furtively.

*No, I don't regret it, this woman ...*

Hepzibah made him curiously think of Bellatrix Lestrange. Not because of her appearance nor of her behavior, but the two witches, in their own way, had sought to claim ownership of Voldemort, whereas this one did not belong to anyone, not even to Harry. Both looked like ugly raptors, had the same grotesque female stuff ...

*But you, Harry suddenly thought accusingly, you, you regret it. Otherwise, the Horcrux could not have been created, if you hadn't wanted her to live ...*

Tom just smiled. Harry knew very well he did not care about Hepzibah Smith. What had caused him pain was the loss of the Locket's powers.

*I know, but it's always nice to hear it aloud,* Harry winced as he slipped into an alley.
You're spoiled, Tom retorted, before Apparating away.

XXX xxx xxx xxx x xxx xx

The two years that followed Hepzibah Smith's murder passed at a frightening speed. Fortunately, the loss of the Locket did not put an end to their monthly encounters. They had not watered Gryffindor's sword with so many mystical liquids for peanuts.

The ritual involving the ring, the locket and the cup no longer worked, but Gryffindor's relic alone was powerful enough to satisfy their infatuated souls' needs. To see each other, without necessarily touching one another, was already more than they had the rest of the month.

In a place as innocuous as a large Scottish park devoid of any temple or divinity, Gryffindor's sword was able to offer them a sweet night of contemplation, from which they came out delighted and frustrated.

Indeed, every time Tom put the goblin blade in his heart, his soul escaped from his mouth, but the novelty was that Harry was stuck in their physical body.

The tables turned, Tom had said the first time, before having an hysterical and silent fit of the giggles. I'm now the one who doesn't exist and you're the one with a body! I'm the specter and you're the man!

Distraught, Harry had passed his hand through the so fragile soul floating at a few inches from him, expecting to touch it as before, but his flesh fingers had only met with a lukewarm humidity, as steam over a bowl of pasta.

He felt incredibly heavy in that body where Tom was not, in that sticky, noisy organic mass of which he was the only resident. That night he had been ardently jealous of Tom's ghostly state. He would have liked the familiar and convenient ritual to be still practicable ... He would have liked to be a soul, like Tom, as before, light and free.

He had at last a body of his own, he was at last alone in his carcass. After thirty-three years of sharing the same body, they had at last succeeded, with disconcerting ease. But Harry did not want a body if Tom did not have one! Harry had never wanted to steal Tom's body, Voldemort's infamous body.

What did Fate want of him? Why had he reincarnated in Tom, if it was not to save him, or to be very much in love with him? Had the time for suicide come?

You're thinking too much, Tom murmured. I stick a sword in my heart every month and I am not dead. How can you believe you could kill me? Be patient, Harry. One day you will have your body and I will have mine, and we will be able to cuddle one against the other.

Harry smiled sadly with Tom's lipless mouth. He had not believed in that for a long time. Actually, had he ever believed it?

XXX xxx xxx

After killing Hepzibah Smith and checking that Gryffindor's sword was still operational, Tom and Harry once again fled England. They found themselves one fine morning, for no good reason, waiting for a Portkey for Singapore. There, they puked up with passion and then grabbed the little glass bottle that brought them to Sidney.

Once in Australia, they fell under the spell of tropical forests. As in the days of Albania, they lived as
hermits, from time to time joining the aborigines who always had their heart set on telling them about Dreamtime.

Oh, in two little years, they could not possibly understand what was really Dreamtime! But they tried.

Anangu called *Tjukurpa*, Dreamtime, (6) the old and mythical time when matter did not exist. Dreamtime preceded Earth, human beings, animals and plants. But at the same time, Dreamtime was still there, superimposed on the world, invisible and impalpable.

Tom and Harry quickly made the connection with the cosmic dimension in which Gryffindor's sword sent Tom's soul on full moon nights. Dreamtime was the name Australians gave to the Soul Realm.

“The spirits have dreamed of men and the men were born. The spirits have dreamed of wallabys and the wallabys have opened their eyes. The spirits have dreamed of trees and the trees have grown. Everything that took place in Dreamtime took place, one way or another, in the world of the surface,” an Anangu picker who spoke English told them.

“Where were the spirits, when the people of England invaded and colonized your lands?” Tom asked, out of curiosity and provocation.

In the last few years he had heard so many mythical stories, supposed to explain both the meaning and the absurdity of life ... His original wonder had mutated into a mocking skepticism. If there was a God, if there was an explanation for his life, he was willing to listen! Let him know at last why Harry Potter lived in him and why he had potentially life-threatening crises! Let him know at last why he had fallen in love with a being who did not exist and who most likely would exist even less soon!

"Where are the spirits," he continued, "now that people come en masse to your lands? Where are they, when people divert your rivers by building dams in the Snowy Mountains, when tunnels are being dug and power plants are being built all over the country?"

"The spirits are in the Dream, but they are also there," the picker replied wisely, pointing at the trees around them. “The Rainbow Serpent sleeps in the wells and rivers. He watches, and when the Day comes, he will come out of the Dream and begin to move, like the snake on your chest.”

Tom apologized for his rudeness and allowed his interlocutor to trace his tattoo with his fingertips.

He had grown accustomed to a bare-chested life, wearing only long cotton johns. Half-naked, he thus blended in with all the aborigines and, at the same time, he stood out: his tanned skin was covered with a Dark Mark.

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On April 12, 1960, Tom abandoned Australia and narrowly returned to England. Time was short.

For the fourth time, Harry was wasting away. The symptoms were the same as the three previous times, but they had waited until the last moment to display themselves. They all appeared suddenly. In the space of a few hours, Harry had begun to have a fever, to tremble, to wail, to cower, repeating he was going to die for good.

As a result, as soon as Tom had let go of his Portkey, he hastened to pass on London's muggle side in order to look for his future murder's ideal and anonymous victim.

Thirty seconds later, he had found him. He pushed a homeless man into a dead end and killed him
with Hufflepuff's Cup in his hand. He was not sure if Harry had protested, if he had played the part of the life drive. He, Tom, had felt nothing at all: no hatred, no pity, no anger, no death drive. And yet, the cup had turned into a Horcrux, he felt it beating against his palm.

He had come to a point where *Avada Kedavra* had become routine.

Harry immediately regained consciousness and, had he not been relieved to be alive, he would probably have started crying. He was scared. He was revolted by his condition, which was no better than a vampire's ... but Sanguini looked like he had some control over himself and Hermione had told him about the special bond between a vampire and their prey as well as alternatives to natural blood. And, at least, vampires were potentially *immortal*, while he, whether he kills or not, would soon die.

How long did he have to live? The deadlines were now more and more constraining, less and less forgettable. His next crisis would be in a year, the next one in a year and six months, and the next one in a year and three months ... And then he would not count in months anymore but in days. In 1962, he calculated. He was going to die and leave Tom behind him in 1962, in two years.

*I'll just have to create other Horcruxes*, Tom abandoned the homeless Muggle's corpse in the dead end.

Harry and he both knew it was not possible. Having thought a lot, the Gryffindor had come to the conclusion that the next Horcrux, Nagini, would only be created *after* Voldemort's return in Little Hangleton's graveyard.

They had reached their limit. They were not fooled. At thirty-three and five Horcruxes, Tom already looked like a dead man. His face was no longer only blurred. His nose had sunk in his face. His body had become twisted, and his flesh had melted. He was no longer a human being, hardly a parody, a subterfuge, a sort of scarecrow. And his soul ... Oh how unstable was his soul! It looked like it was frizzling, like a bulb with a bad contact, at any moment risking dying out or blowing up.

But Tom did not care, as long as Harry's soul did not disappear.

*I've made it, but soon, too soon, I'll fall sick again ...* Harry sighed. *We can't kill anymore. I don't want to kill any more! It's tiring.*

*We have one year left. I still have got enough soul to continue living.*

*But not enough to divide it once again. It's over, Tom. The next crisis will be the last one. And there is no point in bringing up unicorn blood or philosopher's stones.*

*I was not going to, Tom said. The diadem only told me about the Horcruxes, and nothing else.*

*So we agree, at least. What are we going to do for a year? Wait till I die?* Harry snickered.

Now he had made his mind, death did not frighten him. He'd one day been ready to die so Voldemort would die too. Thus was he now ready to die so Tom would be freed of his demon.

Tom did not know how to save Harry, but he knew how to kill time.

**Xxxxxxxxx xxx xxx xxx**

Tom gently pushed the rickety door of the House of Gaunt and closed it cautiously, for it was off its hinges.
The place was already in ruins when Morfin lived there. Fifteen years later, to call it a 'house' would have been improper. It was four moldy walls, a roof with rotten beams and a floor strewn with a greyish and indistinct shambles.

Neither Harry nor Tom could believe it had been more than fifteen years since their Uncle Morfin had dismembered a deer in front of them, sitting on a chair of which one leg was broken now. It seemed so recent ...

Nevertheless, time had went by in Little Hangleton, as evidenced by the dust everywhere. If one took a close look, one would find out it was a mixture of soil, mineral fragments, mould and dead insect shells. It squeaked under his shoes and it was uncomfortably soft. Harry had the absurd and regressive impression of walking on the rubbery floor of a children's playground.

*Are you sure of yourself?*

*The first Voldemort did it.*

*But you, why do you do it?* Harry asked. *What is the meaning of –*  

*Nothing means anything! Nothing makes sense! You still believe that your illness, your existence, my existence, have a meaning? Why shouldn't I mimic my predecessor?*  

*Because you're not –*  

*Damnit, I'm Voldemort!* Tom said proudly. *I'll prove it to you.*

Tom had worn Gaunt' ring for several years, in memory of that glorious day Harry had become a murderer and he, Tom, had become the last Riddle. The great sentimental attachment he had for the jewel had vanished, in the course of Horcruxes and soul mutilations.

Henceforth, he only cared about useful objects. Gryffindor's sword was useful to him. The ring, the locket, and the cup were of no use to him, for they had been defiled by Darkness.

Tom had set out to hide his Horcruxes in safe places. Even if they did not enable him to meet Harry on full moon nights, they were still precious to him. They contained parts of his soul, which was quite a big deal. They would keep them alive if Tom and Harry were to die or rot. Whether their physical body was intact or not, fragments of their souls would always be scattered here and there, eternal witnesses of a destroyed love. And they would not be dead or alive, they would be in Dreamtime.

Oh, it would be nice, but Tom had no desire to die. He was not really worried about his Horcruxes, he hid them in order to amuse himself. If he did not think about Harry's next crisis, maybe it would not happen. If he did something with his hands, his other self could not disappear.

Tom levitated a small paving stone from the ground, dug the earth underneath, put a thousand and one vicious Wards on it, for Harry had confessed Dumbledore, the horrible wizard, would dedicate himself to destroying his Horcruxes. The Gangrene Curse would be a sweet payback for turning down his application!

Tom put the stone on his second Horcrux and left the House of Gaunt. He did not feel anything in his heart.

*xXx*

The year passed quickly, quicklier than he would have liked.
He wasted hella time in plundering graveyards and carrying corpses to the seaside cave, deserted by his snaky friends a long time ago. He created many Inferius. Not really with the aim of protecting Slytherin's Locket but rather in order to try, in a final effort, to transfer Harry's dying soul into a magically animated body. Unfortunately, all his experiments had failed and he found himself with a lake full of nightmarish creatures. Harry watched him do that with disgust and pity. Oh, Tom Riddle was fighting something too powerful for him.

On top of that, on one November night, Gryffindor's sword disappeared. Either a Gryffindor with a much purer and more noble heart than their had pulled it out of the Sorting Hat, or the sword was bound to return to Hogwarts somehow. Its absence was not objectively a loss – the rituals had only been intense moments of frustration for several months now – but it contributed to the impression that their world was falling apart.

Tom was trying to catch all the fragments in mid-air but it was like trying to catch his own shadow or reflection. He often made the same nightmare: his limbs were coming off from his body, he was breaking up, he was losing pieces of flesh at every step. And at one point he was nothing more than an organic pulp with a few teeth left.

But he had faith in Harry, he had faith in him desperately.

Harry had abandoned all hope.

In the last days he matter-of-factly described to Tom the various Wards protecting Slytherin's Locket, as well as the abject use Voldemort would make of the House-Elf Kreacher. He told him the Lestranges would get Hufflepuff's Cup and the Malfoys would get the Diary.

He revealed to him that the Dark Lord would lose the first war and that there would be a second one, years later, of which Harry did not know the outcome, for he had died before its end.

He almost talked to him about the prophecy and he would certainly have done so, had he had the strength to. In any case, that's what he wanted to believe.

Deep down, he knew that what he lacked was not strength but courage. Even within a few hours of his death, he could not bring himself to tell Tom Riddle they were supposed to kill each other.

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On May 23, 1961, Tom and Harry woke up quite normally in the Godric's Hollow's inn where Harry had chosen to die.

I ... I'm still here, Harry stammered.

Yes, Tom breathed, ignoring his other self's obvious weakness. Yes! Oh, Merlin! No murder, no Horcrux and you're still there!

Harry would have liked to temper his other self's delight, but he was too thready, too dissipated for that.

He was no longer a conscience in its own right but more a kind of memory. Like a novel character Tom would have fallen for and he could not forget once the book was finished, Harry was hopping in Tom Riddle's mind. He existed, as all fictional characters exist, but he was no longer an autonomous mind. He was a repetitive echo, which could not invent anything. He was a portrait without face or color or frame.

"Why would it matter? You're still there!" Tom exclaimed aloud. “Whatever you are, I don't care, as
long as you are Harry Potter!"

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Every time a deadline came, Harry lost a little more of his presence. He faded from Tom's mind, and sometimes faded from his memory. Like a novel character of whom, as a child, Tom would have fell in love, Harry was gradually substituted by more recent memories, becoming a mere childhood memory.

From time to time, Tom realized with amazement there was someone else in his head. Then Harry did his best to tell him his story, and suddenly Tom remembered everything again, and he apologized, and he got angry.

It was exhausting for Harry and for Tom. Harry sometimes prayed that the fateful day finally comes. It was a slow agony, against which none of them could do anything.

Six months and nineteen days on December 11, 1961.

Three months and nine days on March 22, 1962.

One month and twenty days on May 11th.

Twenty-five days on June 5th.

Twelve days on June 17th.

Six days on June 23, then three days on June 26, then a day on June 27 ...

And there they were. Harry Potter's last day had come. Harry died.

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Yet Tom Riddle was sure it was not true. He remembered Harry Potter perfectly.

He could not hear his voice, but he felt him. Harry was everywhere around him and everywhere in him. He was the dust that clung to his hair, he was his translucent and bluish shadow. He was the wind against his bald head, the air getting into the cracks that had been nostrils at one time. He was there, the dirt under his white nails. He was the dryness in his eyes and the blood singing in his temples when Tom got up too fast.

He no longer spoke, he no longer thought, but he had not left. He was not alive, he was not dead. He existed in the same way a historical figure or a legend exists, for ever.

Dumbledore may have been right when he said love was a kind of magic that could defeat death. I love Harry, and this love prevents him from dying, for one can only love somebody who exists! By loving him, I am the guarantor of his existence, by loving him, I testify he cannot not be ... Even if for the rest of the world, Harry Potter is nobody, me and my distorted body, we wear the traces of his passage on Earth. Like a statue immortalizes a man, me, Voldemort, I make Harry Potter immortal. I know he is, and that is enough to make him be.

The rest of the year 1962, Tom Riddle mourned dutifully, as if he had gone on strike. Barely eating and sleeping, he thought of Harry from morning to night. Every time he indulged in thinking of something else, he mentally flagellated himself. It did not happen often, for from the bottom of his heart he wanted to be the eternal witness of Harry Potter's fugitive existence.
Unfortunately, a mutilated soul's memory is fragile and unstable. It may flicker at any time.

Thus, on one morning in January 1963, Tom Riddle woke up and he had forgotten who Harry Potter was. He remembered, however, that he was Voldemort, the Dark Lord, and that he had a war to prepare. On that day he returned to London and contacted the Death Eaters.

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**To Be Continued ...**

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(1) Shravanabelagola: City known for being a Jain religious center. At the top of Vindhyagiri hill Tom climbs, is the huge monolithic statue of Gomateshvara.

(2) Jainism: An Indian religion whose goal is to reach liberation, nirvana, that is to say, to quit the reincarnation circle. It advocates, among others things, ahimsa, the precept of 'cause no injury', which leads to strict vegetarianism.

(3) Jiva: Individual soul, every living being.

(4) Neminatha and Shantinatha: Two Tirthankara, Jain spiritual teachers of the righteous path.

(5) Bahubali: the true name of the monk represented by Vindhyagiri hill's giant statue. He is the son of Rishabhanatha, the first Tirthankara.

(6) Tjukurrpa: Dreamtime is the cosmogonic myth of most of Australian aborigines.

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Chapter End Notes

Here we are ... Is Harry dead ? Is Tom a big baddy villain ?
Next week: the first wizarding war.
Stay tuned and please leave a comment if you wanna make the author happy <3
Chapter Summary

Tom forgets Harry and becomes Voldemort, committing crimes and meeting Death Eaters. Yet he is a sad and depressing dude, for he knows he lost something and can’t remember what. Harry isn’t dead though. He is weak and powerless. Fate goes on ...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The first Wizarding War (1963-1980 / 37-53 years)
Chapter 15: The unknown and familiar voice

"V-Voldemort," John Lestrange stammered, opening the door to his visitor. “So you did come back.”

Voldemort smiled.

He had arrived that morning in London. Before looking for a room, he had sent owls to his former partners – Byron Mulciber, Nath Rosier, Callum Nott and John Lestrange – the few Death Eaters who had been part of his private circle seven years earlier. Or was it eight years ago? Too much time, anyway.

How could he have left his precious organization to its own devices for so long? He could not even remember why he had originally fled England after meeting Dumbledore, but the point was that, as John Lestrange had so cleverly pointed out, he had come back.

John had been the fastest to answer. He had written down his address to Tom with a kind of regret, without clearly inviting him. One did not have to be a great Legilimens to understand he was not excited about entertaining Voldemort or seeing him again.

Voldemort cared nothing for his former schoolmate’s reluctance, and half an hour after receiving his letter, he was ringing the bell.

"Indeed, John, here I am again," he said, his smile lingering on his lips. “Can I...?“

John Lestrange looked old – yet he was only one year older than Voldemort, so he was still young, thirty-eight. He shifted to the right, mumbling.

He led his guest into a vain living room, with lacquered furniture and glittering windows. The walls were, as in every family house, covered with haughty portraits. In the midst of them, however, striking by their bright colors and mediocre quality, were exposed ...
"Children's drawing," Voldemort commented, sitting down in a large armchair, as if he belonged there.

John laughed nervously but did not answer. He sat down in the sofa, facing his guest and called: "Zeeky?"

When his House Elf appeared, John ordered her to bring tea and biscuits. The silence re-established itself, thick and unpleasant, at least for John.

For one reason or another, he seemed uncomfortable. His hands rested awkwardly on his lap and he did not look at Voldemort straight in the eyes. In former times he had always shown great self-confidence, but he now resembled your average wizard addressing an unforeseen situation. His long hair, which framed his face like two black curtains in the time of Hogwarts, was now tied in his back with a proper velvet ribbon.

"If I remember correctly, your wife had just given birth when I had to leave England," Voldemort went on, examining the drawings hanging on the walls.

They were stupid, ugly and miserably ordinary, very similar to those who decorated the orphanage's living room. This kind of pictures, the youngest boarders produced them tirelessly. Only he, Tom Riddle, had had a little talent.

"Rodolphus, our elder."

"You have another child," Voldemort said. It was not a question.

"Rabastan. He's one year younger."

Zeeky came back with a tray, put it on the coffee table and began serving the two wizards.

All the House Elves Voldemort had met were rather fearful but Zeeky was so intimidated by him that she nearly spilled his cup over him twice.

When you looked closely, John also seemed a bit frightened, although he concealed his fear more skilfully than his Elf. Glancing at the children's drawings, Voldemort suddenly understood why he was no longer welcome at the Lestranges.

"How were the Death Eaters during my long absence?" he asked politely, sipping his tea.

John's face crumbled for a brief moment, but he quickly recovered his composure.

"Last time I heard – "

"And when was that?"

It turned out John Lestrange had cut ties with the Death Eaters shortly after Voldemort's departure. He gave a thousand reasons for this break up: he had become a father, his wife was expecting a second child, the organization's actions were becoming more and more violent, he simply had no more time or very touching, 'The Death Eaters without you, it was not the same any more'.

"But don't think I'm an enemy of the Death Eaters!" he thought fit to specify, his cup of tea trembling slightly in his hands. “Don't forget I am the one who told you about the Blood Theory in the Hogwarts Express. And Pure-blood supremacy is one of the first things I have taught my children. I support the Death Eaters, I like them.”
This statement did not impress Tom.

"If you support us as you say with so much vehemence," he said, putting his cup of tea on the tray, "don't be away tomorrow night."

He looked for a Galleon in his pockets and threw it into the hands of a disconcerted John. Was Voldemort paying him for tea or was he giving him alms?

"What...?"

"A Portkey, leaving at eight o'clock tomorrow. Do not be late, John, if you support us and if your children support us."

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During the weeks following his return in London, Voldemort began to take over the reins of the organization he had abandoned to its fate years earlier. Recovering his place as a leader among the former Slytherins took him more time than the first time: in those years, the Knights of Walpurgis did not even have a name, let alone a hierarchy. They had been ready to welcome a messianic leader.

But in 1963, many supporters knew Voldemort only through rumors – some, the most skeptical, claimed he was a legend, created from scratch by the first Death Eaters, in the same way the first Muggles had invented God.

After several months of work, however, the one who one day had been called Tom Riddle found among them his place of king. He had used unsavory techniques. He had cajoled, tortured and promised the earth to those sympathetic to the cause. He had convinced John Lestrange and Albert Avery to come back to him, not because he needed them, but because he wanted to teach the other Death Eaters a lesson. Nobody can leave the Dark Lord, nobody can escape his grip.

He had gathered the Death Eaters several times a week and gave furious and violent speeches, all of which about his thirst for power and revenge over an era that oppressed the Strong and celebrated the Weak.

All these abject and ungrateful Muggles, of whom they were obliged to hide, Muggles they had to protect, all these Mud-Bloods, Squibs, Half-Bloods, Blood Traitors, which contaminated their race and whose genes circulated in their veins, even in the purest of them: it was necessary to make a purge. We had to burn everything, sweep the ashes and start again!

Voldemort was convinced this was the great project of his life. The day he would have accomplished it, he would at last be appeased. For too often, without explanation, an oppressive feeling of loss submerged him and the things under his chest became so heavy he feared they would break his ribs and pierce his skin. Sometimes it woke him up in the night, he whose body was never rested nor tired. And he felt like a demonic hand was hugging his heart, and it was so deep he thought everything was going to explode.

He assumed that this visceral grinding was the expression of his desire for domination. After all, what could lack to an immortal being with immense powers, if not the realization of his old dreams?

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The Dark Lord knew no one doubted the legitimacy of his leader position on the day he ordered his most devoted Death Eaters to extend their left arm and no one dared protest or ask him what he was intending to do.
Voldemort, without blinking, poked his wand in their forearms' tender skin, one after the other, like a schoolboy sticking his name on his school supplies.


Voldemort stopped in front of John for a fraction of a second longer, before continuing, naming each time the one in which he was infusing his magic.

When he had affixed his magical signature to all of his followers, he let the moment stretch out, savoring their anxious looks. He could imagine what they felt, receiving in themselves a part of stranger magic. Yes, he could totally relate to their situation, as if he had already been crossed, pierced, violated by magical fluxes which were not his. But it was impossible, of course. He would never agree.

"Morsmordre!" he finally screamed, excited in spite of himself to cast the spell he had invented barely a week earlier but to which he was already oddly attached.

At the tip of his wand, sprung the symbol tattooed on his chest. Even if he had forgotten its exact meaning – it was quite natural for his memory to be a bit cloudy, after all these Horcruxes – he could easily guess it. The Mark could only evoke his link with Salazar Slytherin and his unique gift as a Parselmouth.

The immense skull haunted by the serpent remained suspended in the air for a few seconds before being attracted by the Death Eaters' naked forearms, saturated with Voldemort's magical signature.

Voldemort felt an outpouring of cruel sympathy for his docile followers who did not move or say a word, in spite of the unknown spell rushing towards them, ready to devour them.

All of them watched, worried and tense, as the Dark Mark jumped from forearm to forearm, leaving each time a black and brilliant trace behind it, like a grotesque ink pad.

When all forearms were marked, the evil symbol disappeared into the air. The Death Eaters peeked at their identical tattoos, not knowing what to think about them.

Voldemort came near one of his men – Yaxley –, grabbed his arm without delicacy and touched the Mark with the tip of his wand. He felt a ferocious joy, hearing all the Death Eaters whining in unison.

"From now on, as soon as your Mark burns, you will come to me, my friends. This is an honor, this is a pact!"

XXX xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx

The sixties were a turbulent period. People murmured in the shadows, saying things were going on. People did not really know what, but they were scared and they went out less often. They were suspicious of strangers. There were no facts, even less evidence. The air was simply overloaded with bad magic and soon they felt like someone was going to light the fire.

The Prophet remained faithful to its editorial policy: do not frighten people by speculating on granny's intuion, do not rely on cracking knees or on other warning signs, as long as the storm is not in ahoy, as long as they were not in the eye of the cyclone.

While newspapers edited articles of no interest, Death Eaters infiltrated the political spheres in silence, with an elegance which had nothing to do with the media fuss of their early days. They were everywhere, in plain view and sometimes their pictures appeared in the people section. But they
were also nowhere to be found for, on the surface, the previously popular Death Eater organization had dissolved.

Yet the old ladies and their rheumatism were right; terrible things were hatched in the darkness.

Voldemort never stopped rallying wizards to his cause, choosing the youngest, the most timid or the most enthusiastic.

He had taken an affection for little Rabastan and little Rodolphus Lestrange, as well as for Abraxas Malfoy's son, Lucius. The three boys were still children but they would grow up quickly. When the seventies come, tender and fanatical flesh would undoubtedly join the Dark Lord's ranks. The latter only regretted one thing, not having indoctrinated them from the cradle.

Thus he found himself at Walburga and Orion Black's, an unhappy couple who had miraculously produced two heirs.

xXx

"Regulus," Voldemort said softly, touching the boy's cheek.

Regulus, who was only one and half years, smiled openly. He tried to nibble at Voldemort's nails but his mortified father, with a discreet wave of the wand, sent him pronto to dreamland. The visitor turned to Sirius, one year older than his brother, but the child rejected him violently.

"No!" the baby, who was in his two-years-old crisis, tapped the hand of the stranger. "Don't want!"

Walburga and Orion did not imagine the anger that passed, for a brief moment, in their guest's eyes.

"If you want to see bigger children, Voldemort," Walburga said hastily, "you can always go to Cygnus and Druella – my cousin, but I'm sure you remember her. They have three daughters. They must be more reasonable than our toddlers. Their eldest is already at Hogwarts."

"Slytherin, of course," Orion added and his wife cast him an exasperated look.

As soon as Voldemort got outside 12 Grimmauld Place, his heart suddenly felt incredibly lighter. All the time he had stayed in the Black family's ancestral home, the organ had been heavy in his chest, a cloud full of water and unable to rain.

The wizard had had such difficulty breathing he had to slip away to the bathroom in order to make sure he had not been hit by a hex. He knew in truth he was merely having one of his absurd crises at a most inopportune moment, but he had preferred to check.

Back from the toilets, he had tried to calm his heart by breathing slowly, while Walburga had recited to him her complete genealogy, tracing family ties on an old tapestry. He had not heard a word his host had said and eventually he had let his eyes wander through the room.

Every time he had laid eyes on a particular object, he had felt a hot flash. What had got him into a state, what had filled his nostrils, was an unexpected sense of recognition.

He had never been in this house but he had had the crazy impression of having dreamed of it several times, even if the place was far from idyllic.

The hideous troll-leg umbrella-stand, the House Elves' heads on the walls and the present servant, Kreacher, who deserved his name, all had made him want to flee ... and at the same time to curl up on himself, as when he was a child and he felt lonely.
Something, in 12 Grimmauld Place, had awakened in him emotions he did not know he had. He repressed them without regret. He was no longer Tom Riddle. His heart did not have to beat wildly in houses he only knew in dreams.

XXX XXX XXX

Time passed, but not the melancholy of unknown origin that engulfed Voldemort from time to time. Sometimes when he came home in the evening to one of his big, cold, illegally-obtained manors, and he lay down in the Master Room's big, cold bed, his big, cold body, deserted by sleep, was gripped by funny palpitations.

Why did he feel so lonely in the nighttime, in the daytime, with or without his Death Eaters, when solitude had never bothered him during his childhood or during his long solo journeys? Why did this feeling of loss keep sticking to his skin when he was immortal, powerful and respected, and when he did what he had always been destined to do?

His blazing future was waiting for him: the war in 1970, the years of terror, Lord Voldemort's zenith ... nothing would stop him, for he was not mortal. He would be God, he would be king. When he would finally be the Supreme Being, he would have taken his revenge. His heart would stop racing for no reason.

But why did the immortality conferred by the Horcruxes sometimes seem to him of no interest? Why did he, in the midst of a speech or a meal, feel that everything he did and his whole life had no sense at all? Why, when he was convinced he had never had a heart, did he feel like he had once had one, but that it had been snatched from him?

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Harry Potter was not dead but of that, Voldemort was not aware. And even if he was, he most likely would not know what to do with this knowledge, since he had no memory of the one he had shared his body with for thirty-five years.

Why? Harry wondered when he was fit to wonder.

But most of the time, he was just there, too evanescent, too diffuse to ask himself questions. Bent over himself as the youngest embryo, as a single-celled organism, he watched from a distance horrible scenes over which he had no control. And everything had the vaporous and tenderly floating texture of a dream. Scenes and images succeeded one another in a kind of incoherent dance, and even though the dreamer's eyes twitched beneath his eyelids, the sleeper remained buried in his rapid eye movement sleep.

In the years before the war, Harry helplessly saw Tom Riddle surrounding himself with a bunch of Death Eaters wearing the Dark Mark, a symbol of allegiance and belonging. He saw, dazed, strangers' faces writhing with fear as Voldemort met their eyes and some faces disappeared little by little, replaced by funeral masks. He heard, coming from another world but also coming from Tom's mouth, spells that would have made him shudder or puke if he had been anything but a passive and drowsy spectator.

Harry sometimes sank into unconsciousness for what seemed like very long months, perhaps years. One day, Andromeda Black, Druella and Cygnus' younger daughter, had just emerged from childhood. The next day she was a young witch who wore make-up and could stand up to her family. One day Rodolphus and Rabastan were eight and nine. The next day, the two Slytherins spoke of joining their father in the ranks of the Death Eaters.
And Harry was filled with terror and, when he was lucid enough, he sought to communicate with the other part of his soul, but everything went on as if they were no longer the same person. Harry saw through his eyes as it had often happened to him in his first life. He had no control over these visions and he endured them, shouting and writhing in despair, without anyone, not even Voldemort, noticing him.

The Savior saw one evening Bellatrix Black, a teenager, trying to seduce Voldemort. Her flutters of lashes get to him with the same clarity as Voldemort's fury on the day he had learned that Gregorovitch did not own the Elder Wand. Except that, this time, what was burning was not Harry's scar but his heart.

XXX xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx

Years passed and 1970 finally came.

Voldemort had with him all the most vicious creatures in the wizarding world. Travers, appreciable for his coldness and quietness, had approached the Giants and managed to gain the confidence of some of them. Macnair had discovered in Russia a tribe of Trolls smarter than average but not enough to be aware that Voldemort was only taking advantage of their strength and brutality. And John Lestrange, who was well-connected, had convinced some of the Gringotts' Goblins that the Dark Lord's rise to power could only benefit them.

Hybrids, bloodthirsty beasts, Half-Bloods and probably a handful of Mud-bloods made up most of the Death Eaters' ranks. It was not them Voldemort put in the spotlight, obviously, but the dozen of conceited and manipulable Pure-Bloods who were in high places.

Assisted by all this nervous and idolatrous flesh, who would sacrifice themselves without hesitation and with devotion, Voldemort was about to overthrow the Ministry of Magic.

Harry thought historians claimed the War began in 1970 more out of convenience than out of scientific morality: no event marked the entry into the seventh decade. No official declaration of civil war, no coup d'état.

The Death Eaters, as usual, terrorized people by spreading atrocious rumors, only half of which were true. The most inexperienced, those who were newly graduated from Hogwarts, committed petty offences in the name of the organization, actions that had never been sponsored by the Dark Lord. They were not afraid of reprisal, either from the Ministry or from their Lord, as if wearing a mask of Death protected them from her.

The major difference between 1969 and 1970 might have been the position of the press and of the Ministry. Under pressure from the Minister, The Prophet finally acknowledged the survival of the Death Eaters group and stopped publishing articles about Bertie Bott's latest Every Flavour Bean.

The Aurors were closely watching the actions of the Dark Lord's supporters. They could not be pleased with themselves on knowing some names and faces because that was them, the followers themselves, who did not care about keeping their identities secret. Thus, in 1971, Bellatrix Lestrange, twenty years old, left her magical signature on three crime scenes, as well as several vials of memories whose contents guaranteed her a one-way to Azkaban.

The Aurors, however, did not arrest anyone, partly because they could not compete with Lord Voldemort's protégés, partly because the Ministry was too corrupt. Inside its buildings, Imperiused wizards rubbed shoulders with Death Eaters, who made friends with Justice's big shots. No one knew who they could trust, so nothing was done, for fear of being yourself reduced to nothing.
It is this fetid immobility which characterized the dark years of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, as well as the incalculable number of disappearances and murders, both on the Muggle side and on the Wizarding side.

A handful of resistance fighters, however, began to gather under the care of Albus Dumbledore. They called themselves the Order of the Phoenix.

**XXX XXX XXX**

One day Harry was particularly lucid – he felt on the brink of sleep, ready to wake up, probably already partly awake, as if he had just hit 'snooze' for ten more minutes of coma – he wondered how old his parents were now.

Had they already taken their OWLS? Had Padfoot, Prongs, Wormtail and Moony already created the Map? Had his father, his godfather and the future traitor already discovered their Animagi forms? Had Snape, stung by unhealthy curiosity, already taken the secret passage leading to the Shrieking Shack and seen the creature who haunted it on full moon nights? Had he already called his mother a Mudblood?

These thoughts, hitherto faint and erratic, slow and uncertain, echoed in Harry's mind with almost blinding clarity, after years of lethargy. He was gradually regaining strength, his soul was reconstructed, and he dedicated his first relatively complex reflections to the beings he had lost far too soon.

He needed to meet those who, at the end of his first life, had only been memories ... ghostly figures who had surrounded him too briefly when he had entered the Forbidden Forest to meet Voldemort. In this world, at that time, all these people were living teenagers.

Tom Riddle's time was gradually catching up with his and Harry was devoured by the desire to see Lily Evans and James Potter and why not, Severus Snape, who would spend his entire life trying to repair his early mistakes.

But Voldemort did not care about the Order of the Phoenix. And of Snape, Harry had for the moment heard only once, at a dinner organized by Lucius Malfoy and his fiancee Narcissa Black, both young graduates.

"Master," Lucius said, "you asked me who at Hogwarts might rally our cause. Young Severus Snape might. He is a freshman, but he already knows more about Dark Magic than most advanced students. There is no doubt that at the end of his schooling he will find his place in our ranks ... if you consider him worthy."

"Thank you, Lucius," Tom replied, before turning to Rodolphus Lestrange to inquire about the negotiations with the Dementors’ progress.

**XXX XXX XXX**

The visions that followed were short and painful. All of them showed Dark Marks shining in the night, hovering over houses which had seen unsayable things. The images were all so similar, the Dark Marks so identical, that Harry wondered more than once if he was not making a recurring nightmare. But he could not be indifferent to the symbol Tom had assured him would never become a curse. Whenever the Mark shone, Harry suffered and thought he was dying from within.

Death had unfortunately never wanted him. He could neither wake up nor die. He was condemned to watch, without being able to act, the wizard he had been madly in love with killing and killing
again, for futile reasons. He had tried, he was still trying, to deflect Tom's wand. He gathered up the little energy he possessed to send him messages of distress and love. For despite all the vicious proofs constantly displayed, Harry did not want to believe Lord Voldemort was the Tom Riddle he had known.

This man, who was no longer a man, who spoke with his Tom's seductive voice, he was not the baby Harry had raised. This dark wizard who had plunged England into darkness and who was passing on to the kids around him an ideology he had only believed in during his tender youth, he was not the boy Harry had taught how to masturbate. This being devoid of feelings and for who only power was important, who killed aimlessly and who loved nobody, he was not Tom.

And yet ... And yet, yes he was. Pieces of his Tom's soul really resided in Hufflepuff' Cup and in the Diary. And when Voldemort had entrusted the first artifact to John Lestrange and the second one to Lucius Malfoy, it was his Tom's white, cold, long hands which had handed the Horcruxes to his followers.

The seventies went on without Harry finding any solution to commit suicide or to kill Voldemort. Maybe I died in the Forest long ago and this world is Hell. Maybe this is my eternal punishment, falling in love with Voldemort, believing I can make him change and ultimately seeing all my illusions collapse! Maybe it was not Fate who sent me back in the past but the Devil who made me share a body with Tom and then erased me from his memory ... Maybe all of this is nothing but torture from which even Death can not free me!

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Walburga and Orion Black's youngest son joined Voldemort's troops in 1977, at the age of sixteen. He was naive, idealistic and full of good will, three qualities Voldemort was fond of without truly knowing why. Regulus was also a Seeker, and Voldemort thought for no good reason that it was another good sign, which convinced him to Mark the teenager.

He was not used to give his Mark to an underage wizard. But it enabled him to visit 12 Grimmauld Place on several occasions, under the pretext of controlling Regulus' way of life. The house still had an inexplicable and obsessive attraction for the Dark Lord. He never found what he was looking for, but he often went back there, as if the key to his mysterious melancholy were hidden between these walls.

"Where's Sirius, your eldest?" he asked Walburga, on one summer afternoon.

Sirius and Regulus' mother had grown dreadfully old. Her face, in the past so delicate, had become coarse and unpleasant. Her mouth was distorted by a permanent grimace. Orion, meanwhile, still was the unassuming wizard who stood behind his wife, in the background.

"This swine ran away," Walburga replied bitterly, pointing at the ancestral tapestry where Sirius' name had been burned. “He has been living with Blood Traitors for one year to the day. He has always been the family's flaw, a Black in Gryffindor!”

Her husband gave her an anguished glance, as if the mention of their son's shameful sorting would bring the Dark Lord down on them.

Voldemort had known for a long time that Walburga and Orion's heir had been sorted in Gryffindor. This piece of news should have surprised and tensed him. It had not. He did not know the boy, having only seen him once as a baby, yet he had always sensed that Sirius and his little brother were pretty different. Sirius almost reminded him of someone, but even after years of reflection Voldemort
was unable to tell who.

"My dear Walburga, who are the Blood Traitors who have taken Sirius in?" he asked softly.

"Sirius, that naughty kid, has been hanging out with their son, James, since their first year. Bosom buddies, they are inseparable, in any case according to Regulus, for his ungrateful brother has never been very communicative. You should see his room, you'd understand he was born under a bad sign. A stain, a scumb –"

"Their name?" Voldemort insisted, in a calm voice, but his heart was racing.

James ... Walburga had just said that Sirius' best friend was a certain James. James? James, James, James! How familiar was this name to him!

"The Potters. Fleamont and Euphemia Potter, James Potter's parents, the parents of the best friend of this infamous disgrace we named Sirius. Apparently, the Potters are close to Dumbledore, they would come from the same village. They are most likely members of this secret organization the Black Knights spoke of yesterday."

"The Order of the Phoenix," Voldemort murmured, beholding 12 Grimmauld Place's living room.

The words remained suspended in the room.

If Harry had been awake at that time, he would have judge this omen ominously ironic.

XXX xxx xxx

Voldemort quickly forgot Sirius Black and the Potters. He had a lot to do. After many assaults, the Ministry finally fell. Unfortunately, the Death Eaters had not won yet. The Aurors and the Order of the Phoenix did not stop standing in their way. As soon as one of the Dark Lord's henchmen became Minister for Magic, he found himself in an unenviable position. Shut in the large office, he was constantly subjected to direct or indirect attacks, and he scarcely dared open his mail. Several Death Eaters were dead that way, sitting in an armchair behind the Minister's official desk.

If Voldemort declared himself Minister, there was a good chance the Ministry of Magic would be permanently under his control. But this position would oblige him to expose himself publicly and to take on a lot of tasks which did not interest him in any way. Yeah, he wanted to be at the top but he did not want to govern.

For the moment, he was content to bring down the authorities one by one. When neither the Ministry, nor the Wizenmagot, nor the Department of Mysteries, nor the Aurors, nor Hogwarts would be threats to his plans, then he could ... He would at last be a tyrant.

He would give back to Pure-Bloods the rank that was owed to them. He would banish Mudbloods and Squibs from schools and society. After that ...

Fortunately there were so many wizards to scare, torture, fight and kill that Voldemort did not have time to think about what he would do when he would win the War.

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The Order of the Phoenix had grown over the years and had become a very serious enemy. Its members were seasoned warriors or wizards barely of age. They were called Bones, Diggle, Doge, Fletcher, Hagrid, Mad'Eye, Longbottom, McGonagall, McKinnon, Prewett, Meadowes, Fenwick, Dearborn, Vance and Podmore. And then there was Dumbledore ...
Oh, how Voldemort dreamed of killing the old man! Dumbledore had the reputation of being a good and fair wizard. Yet the only time Voldemort had asked him for a favor – the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher – the Hogwarts' Headmaster had not even considered his request seriously. He had given him his nauseating speech about Love, a kind of magic so powerful and of which Voldemort was, according to him, sadly ignorant. He had offered him a glass of wine before dismissing him, without manners or fear.

If Dumbledore believed the most beautiful thing in the world was Love, he would regret it. Voldemort was going to take away everything he loved. Here was a wonderful aim! He was going to dismantle the Order of the Phoenix and kill his valiant resistance fighters one by one. He would then attack Hogwarts, his only home, the place he loved the most, and it would break his heart, or maybe not – he was not sure he still had a heart.

But the sacrifice would be worth it, so what if he suffered, if Dumbledore was hurt too! For Voldemort was persuaded of one thing: the school of wizardry's Headmaster was responsible for the enigmatic melancholy which had not left him since his return to London, fifteen years ago. How could this be possible, Voldemort did not know, but there was only one wizard powerful enough to create such a hole in his soul, and that wizard was Dumbledore.

Harry opened his eyes with a start. How much time had he spent in the obscure moistness of his mind? It was cold, but it was always cold now. It was dark, but it was always dark now.

"Oh, Tom ..." he whined softly for himself.

He had eventually convinced himself that Tom Riddle had died in 1962, along with him.

Their common death had given way to the Dark Lord, who was absolutely not Tom, just ... the negative of his soul or ... something like that.

Was that how it had happened the first time? Did the first Voldemort also spend his childhood with a little Harry in his head before forgetting him, in 1962, becoming a demonic psychopath? Had Harry really gone back in the past?

His Tom, would he kill James and Lily Potter? The boy, the teenager, the young adult Harry had loved so much – that Harry still loved, like a memory, a dream one does not want to let go – was he the same person that this hateful man who had taken the life of so many innocent people?

Harry was regaining strength, but could not find any answer to his questions.

"Severus Snape ... Lucius told me about you when you were only a first year," Voldemort smiled.

Harry shuddered violently at the name of the former, or of the future, Potions Master. He focused in order to see the scene better. It looked like he was behind a frosted glass window and he had the crazy desire to readjust his glasses on his nose.

"I'm not a first year anymore," Snape said, straightening up.

"Prove it to me," said Voldemort. "Kill and bring me back the glorious memory of your murder."

Snape came over to prostrate himself at his feet and Harry took the opportunity to stare at him.
His cheeks were more hollow than in the memory Harry had accidentally seen during his last Occlumency lesson, in fifth year. The Chosen One quickly understood that Snape was no longer a student. But he did not look very old and Harry concluded this might still be 1978. So Snape had joined the Death Eaters just after school.

1978. 1978 meant that Remus, Peter and his parents also had got their NEWTS and left Hogwarts. But if Snape had hurried to swear fidelity to the Dark Lord, the Marauders had rallied the Order of the Phoenix.

Harry did hate Snape, such a coward, such a weak bloke! But he did pity him ... The former Slytherin had lost the only person who mattered to him, Lily Evans. In the same way, Tom Riddle had lost his soul, Harry Potter. And it was these losses which had turn the two wizards bitter and cruel.

In many ways, the two former Slytherins were alike. Solitary, gifted, keen on Dark Magic, Half-Bloods, selfish lovers who would do anything for their loved one ... But Snape could at least cry over Lily for he remembered her. Lord Voldemort on the other hand ...

Voldemort had no idea that a part of his soul had been torn from him, a part that was not safe in a Horcrux but relegated to the bottom of his memory, a part that had been shouting for more than fifteen years to be heard, without success.

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The late Seventies were Voldemort's golden age. Harry's moments of lucidity were more and more frequent. He regained strength day after day. Enough strength to acknowledge that the man he had loved was the one he had hated, that the man he still loved was the one he hated with every bone in his body. Enough to see all the irrational murders Voldemort commited. Not enough to grab his arm and deflect his wand.

Enough to ardently desire to die and kill Lord Voldemort, who was staining Harry's memories of Tom Riddle, not enough to manage to kill himself.

The more energy Harry had, the more Voldemort's headache was violent. His melancholic mood, which took him from time to time and to which he had finally grown accustomed, was now accompanied by a hostile presence inside his head. It was as unpleasant as 12 Grimmauld Place.

These throbbing headaches altered his focus and made him feel more things than he would have liked, desires and emotions he could not analyze. In order to counter these moments of senseless weakness, he was more vicious than ever, organizing complicated actions which had no other aim than to entertain him.

Murders and plans of murder calmed him but they did not silence the complaint echoing in his ears. A part of Voldemort was almost attached to the unknown and familiar voice, which kept him company during the moonlit nights he could not find sleep.

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On one morning in 1979, Voldemort suddenly found himself dead bored. He did not feel like doing anything, but he did not feel like doing nothing. He remembered his youth, punctuated by experiments on the Founders Relics and a wave of nostalgia quickly swelled in his belly. These distant days, when he was neither rich nor feared, when he was alone with himself, when he was thirsty for discovery, belonged to another life.
At the time, he had momentarily set aside his demagogic aspirations to go on the adventure. Memories poured in without him seeking them. The day he had slept with Hepzibah Smith, the day he had got his tattoo, the day he had killed the Albanian bird, and the day he had murdered the peasant. There was also the day he had given a name to the Death Eaters, the day he had cursed Hogwarts, the day he had bathed in the Ganges, the day he had pierced his tongue with a Mayan priest, the day he had killed Hepzibah Smith, the day he had learned what Dreamtime meant for Anangu.

All these memories were vivid but they were badly connected to each other, like a movie poorly edited. All this lacked coherence.

The Dark Lord, however, did not linger on this mystery for he had found how to get rid of Ennui. He had decided, in memory of the good old days, to use his creativity. It had been a while. After all, his last interesting invention was *Morsmordre*, a spell he had created in the early sixties, being twenty years earlier.

But he had no time to lose in childishness. He was going to mix business with leisure by hiding the last Horcrux in his possession, Slytherin's Locket. He already had a place in mind. He had always known Slytherin's relic would rest in the Cave by the sea. He did not know from where this certainty came.

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Harry's health had improved so much lately! He was able to watch, effortlessly, the whole Cave scene. For the first time in years, he was not just seeing what Voldemort was seeing. He *was feeling* what Voldemort was feeling, like before 1962. He felt the humidity, the cold around him and the warm wand in his hand.

Voldemort shuddered with jubilation when he protected the entrance with Blood Wards he had invented for the occasion. And Harry shuddered too.

Dumbledore had been openly disappointed by the Cave's door, which opened only after receiving a blood tribute. The Headmaster had said it was rude and lacked subtlety. But Voldemort was not trying to be subtle. He was having *fun*.

Hufflepuff's Cup was in the Lestranges' vault at Gringotts, the safest place after Hogwarts. The Diary was somewhere at Malfoy Manor, under the protection of the narcissist Lucius. Lucius was most likely ejaculating in his pants each time he remembered the Dark Lord had entrusted him with a personal property. The Ring was buried under the House of Gaunt, surrounded by effective spells. The Diadem was somewhere in the colossal disorder reigning in the Room of Hidden Things, at Hogwarts.

Harry had always wondered why the Locket's hiding place was so elaborate, compared to the other Horcruxes'. He now had his answer. That day, Voldemort had been in a poetic mood.

After setting up the vampiric door, the Dark Lord spent long moments gazing at the dark water body where no snakes had been slithering since it was infected by the Inferi Voldemort had himself drowned in it.

He would have liked to meet a snake. Any one, as long as it agreed to exchange a few words with him. For Voldemort missed Parseltongue, even though he did not remember having had long discussions with reptiles in the past. He loved the snakes' language as if he had learned it by imitating the sounds coming from his parents' mouths. As if it were his native language. But Voldemort had been raised in an orphanage. The thought was silly.
He forced himself to work. He cut a block of stone from the bottom of the lake and turned it into a tiny boat. Then, inspired, he made a small island float in the immobile water body's center. He added a little bowl similar to a Pensieve. And he put Emerald Potion in there.

When Voldemort had prepared the potion, Harry had no idea.

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Voldemort returned to the Cave the next day in company of 12 Grimmauld Place's House Elf. As soon as the Dark Lord had asked for a servant, dear Regulus had proposed to lend him Kreacher. Subsequent events happened as Kreacher had told Harry, Hermione and Ron. Merry and ruthless, Voldemort had the Drink of Despair drunk by the Elf, who had soon become delirious. Kreachur had begun to insult Blood Traitors, Mudbloods and Squibs.

Harry knew House Elves well enough to understand these swearing were an indirect way of insulting Master Regulus' Master. Harry terribly pitied his condition. After Dobby's death, he had repeatedly blamed himself for never having payed closer attention to SPEW. It was too late now.

What had Kreacher done with his time during the year Ron, Hermione, and he were Horcrux hunting? Had he waited for Harry to come back, cooking him every night delicious dishes? Harry felt nauseous. He had not seen Kreachur leading the House Elves of Hogwarts in the final battle … He did not know that Kreachur was alive and so questions were banging in his head.

Was the Elf dead now? Was his small corpse rotting under the kitchen stove in 12 Grimmauld Place, his open and glassy eyes eaten away by spiders and cockroaches?

No, Ron and Hermione would have checked on him … But what if they had no access to the Black House after Harry's death – disappearance – in the Forbidden Forest? What if the house had been bequeathed to a real Black, to Narcissa or Draco Malfoy?

What if Ron and Hermione had not been able to visit Kreacher because they were both dead after Harry was killed by Voldemort?

And what if, much worse, Fenrir Greyback had caught Hermione and had ...

Harry could not think of that any longer. Since his resurrection in Tom Riddle's body, he had been repressing as much as possible his first life's memories. He had them so repressed he had rarely wondered about his friends' fate. Even if he had been hit by Avada Kedavra in the Forbidden Forest fifty-two years ago, it was impossible for him to imagine what had happened next.

"Master Regulus!" Kreacher croaked. "Mistress Walburga ... 'Gulus! Master, Mistress ... Master, please ... "

Voldemort laughed wickedly, before dropping Slytherin's Locket into the stone basin. He filled it again with Emerald Potion before exiting the Cave, leaving behind him the delirious Elf he had never liked. He was secretly relieved to get rid of him.

Like almost everything related to 12 Grimmauld Place, Kreacher had often been the cause of one of his depressing melancholy crises.

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Three days later, Regulus Black did not respond to the Mark's call. The following times, he did not appear either. He must have died foolishly, as most mortals do, the Dark Lord thought, even though
he sensed Regulus had performed a last act of bravery – treachery – before leaving the world of the living.

He decided to pay a friendly visit to Orion and Walburga Black.

"I haven't seen Regulus for some time," he said to them as a greeting.

Frightened, Walburga and Orion retreated in concert. They exchanged a terrified look. Their Regulus had never come back home. And their House Elf, Kreacher, was not the same since the week before. He refused to tell them what happened, saying he had promised Master Regulus not to.

"I didn't kill your precious child, if that's what worries you," Voldemort whispered mockingly. "I am, however, sincerely sorry for having sacrificed your Elf. His death was not in vain, I can assure you."

Hearing these words, Orion looked like he had seen Merlin's ghost. His face turned white and his left eyebrow twitched stressfully. If Voldemort judged the former Slytherin more interesting than a clothespin, he would surely have sought to understand what had triggered this strange reaction. He would then have discovered that Kreacher, left for dead, this wretched Elf, had powers which had enabled him to evade the Cave.

But Voldemort did not pay attention to Orion's anxiety, and he never knew that Slytherin's Locket had only stayed a few days in its ingenious hiding-place.

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Two months later, Orion Black committed suicide, letting his eldest son, Sirius, fight alongside the Order of the Phoenix and his wife alone, bereaved, locked up in 12 Grimmauld Place with a fuked-up Elf. This time, Voldemort did not visit the witch who had once upon a time invited him to Slytherin's New Year's Eve parties. He did not send condolences to her either.

The more the year 1979 progressed, the more regular was the throbbing pain coshing his temples. Some days, it weighed on his mind from morning till night, like a naughty spirit who would press his veins with its hot fingers in order to make them swell.

It fucking spoiled his mood.

"Severus," he murmured, and his own voice got him a headache. "Have you made what I asked you to?"

"Of course, Master," Snape answered, taking a vial out of his pocket. "I've improved the Draught of Living Death, combining it with salamander blood and griffin nails, which are ingredients of the Strengthening Solution. I also hybridized it with the Wideye Potion, whose dried Billywig stings and snake fangs make the mind particularly —"

"Enough! Let me see that," Voldemort grabbed the vial, on which he cast a few detection spells for form.

He trusted Severus Snape. His feelings for him were indescribable, halfway between affection and esteem. A kind of respect, if the Dark Lord was able to respect anyone.

Snape's potion neutralized Voldemort's recurrent headache without suppressing it completely. For what was polluting Voldemort's mind and begging an audience was a small tenacious thing, Harry Potter.

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Harry killed the Bones. Or rather Voldemort killed the Bones but Harry felt like it was him, his hand, his mouth, his wand. After nearly twenty years of sleep, his soul was again resonating with Voldemort's body.

_No, seventeen years since 1963, he calculated. My soul died seventeen years ago. Seventeen, like the age I was when I died in the Forest._

Everything was of a dazzling clarity, making him want to squint. He had forgotten what it felt like to be alive, not to see events from afar, enclosed in an nearly opaque bubble. Voldemort killed Amelia Bones' parents, notorious Order's members, but it was him, Harry, who cast the Death Spell with obscene pleasure. It was him, Harry, who was laughing, insane, in front of their dead bodies.

Harry had never been so awake. He did not wait another moment to try to communicate with his other self.

_Tom! TOM!_ he called out with all his might, but Lord Voldemort Occlumencied the demon's voice in his ear, for it was spoiling his crime.

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By the end of 1979, Voldemort and the Death Eaters had killed so many people ... Harry had lost count. He had tried to memorize all names and faces, as if to pay them a mental tribute or to fill the Dark Lord's dreams with accusing ghosts, but there were just too many.

Wizards, civilians or Order's members, fell without a sound, stone dead, a second after Voldemort had pointed his wand at them. And Harry cursed his spectator's situation so much he did not understand why Voldemort's body had not imploded yet.

Why should he undergo this? Did Fate make him come back in the past so he could see with his own eyes Voldemort's madness? Was the lesson to be learned 'do not pity Voldemort'?

Then why had he fallen in love with the boy? Then why Tom wasn't fundamentally bad when he still remembered who Harry was?

The worst part might be that Voldemort sometimes looked compassionate. Indeed he spared some of his opponents. He did not kill Mad'Eye. He did not kill Dumbledore. He did not kill the Longbottoms. And above all, he did not kill the Potters.

James and Lily, nineteen, had been on the other side of Voldemort's wand three times, and three times they had miraculously escaped, as if the dark wizard had not fought seriously, as if he had heard his other soul's beseeching.

These vestiges of humanity perniciously inflated Harry's unfounded hope, a hope he still had despite himself, despite everything. He had brought up this man. He had _faith_ in him. His Tom was imitating Voldemort but they were not the same. Their actions were identical, their motivations were different.

Harry still firmly believed in Voldemort, even on the day he sent Severus Snape to land a job at Hogwarts, in order to infiltrate the school.

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**To Be Continued ...**
Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and reviewing! I hope you still enjoy this story. The end is coming near.
Chapter 16: A life consumed with regrets

"My Lord!"

Voldemort closed his eyes, imploring the gods he did not believe in to send him calm and patience, two qualities he really lacked lately. Since the beginning of the year, his head was constantly throbbing, as if a grotesque egg were growing in it. Sometimes he had the fleeting impression of feeling something moving in there. He was hardly able to stop himself from crashing his skull to check.

He had, of course, seen an Imperiused Mediwizard, but the latter, in a monotonous voice, had announced to him he had not detected anything abnormal. Voldemort had gone as far as visiting a Muggle doctor. Admittedly, his contempt for these non-magical folks was only matched by his dark genius, but he could not deny that sometimes a scientific and rational opinion could shed new light on a situation wizards could not deal with.

The general practitioner had taken his blood pressure, his pulse, looked at the white of his eyes and observed the inside of his ears before handing him his colleague's business card. His colleague was a masseur in the hospital because 'no offense, sir, but your migraine is due to overwork. Look at your complexion!'!

Voldemort had settled the consultation by turning the business card into a muggle note, because he had not intended for one second to make an appointment for relaxation sessions. The idea of prolonged physical contact with a man, a Muggle man, even in a professional setting, gave him the creeps. Other hands than his on his body? Fingers going all over his spine or massaging his temples?
Impossible.

In short, disappointed by the world and its ignorant inhabitants who were incapable of explaining his headache, Voldemort dealt with it as he did before: he closed his mind as much as possible, transforming the insolent beat in his head into a easily forgettable palpitation.

He was neatly doing his Occlumency exercises when one of his Death Eaters had called him so rudely. The crackpot had even dared to push the drawing-room's door without knocking.

But Voldemort had recognized Severus Snape's voice, so he turned towards him with a twisted smile.

"Have you got any good news for me, Severus?" he asked, approaching his supporter.

He immediately noticed that the young Death Eater was in an unusual panic. Despite his age, Severus was calm and taciturn, and the Dark Lord loved that about him. Seeing him nervous like that worsened his headache.

"Well, talk!" he ordered impatiently.

He looked carefully at the Death Eater's face, but he did not find the reason of his nervousness. Even if, by misforturne, Snape had failed to get a job at Hogwarts, there was no reason for him to fidget so much. It was possible, of course, that he simply was shuddering at the thought of disappointing and upsetting his Master, but the slightly mad gleam dancing in his eyes suggested otherwise. There was something else, something far worse than his mission failure.

Unfortunately, Severus was a great Occlumens and Voldemort could not infiltrate his mind during the few seconds of electrical silence before Severus finally decided to speak.

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"I was at the Hog's Head. I was planning to spend the night and make an appointment with Dumbledore tomorrow morning –"

"I know all that. I sent you there, do you remember, Severus? Or have the things that set you off also made you lose your memory?"

Severus straightened up in a burst of self-esteem. He was thin and his face was still juvenile, but he was taller than Voldemort. That, of course, was not that big of a deal to the Dark Lord.

"As the owner was not in the lower room, I went upstairs, hoping to find him. I then passed a room and heard a prophecy. A true prophecy," Severus said, his outward calm betrayed by the haunted look that had not left his eyes.

Voldemort opened his mouth to ask him to be more precise, Morgana's vagina, but Severus did not give him time to be gross.

"It was a prophecy about you, Master and ..." the young wizard hesitated, before looking directly at Voldemort. "It was a prophecy about you and an unborn child."

"And ...?" Voldemort insisted, so tense he could have been carved out of stone.

A prophecy? That there were prophecies about him, he wanted to believe that, given his notoriety. But about an unborn child? He had touched one woman only, Hepzibah Smith, but was he going to become a father? This stupid thought, in another context, might have made him laugh, but at that
moment he just banished it from his mind. What Severus had heard seemed of vital importance and Voldemort could not be distracted by unfounded reflections.

"This child ... According to the prophecy, this child will have a power that will enable him to defeat you, My Lord. With all due respect." Severus forced himself not to look away.

He had time to see complex, terrible emotions passing in the Dark Lord's eyes. On the day they met for the first time, Voldemort had noticed Severus had a rare gift to read minds. And what the Legilimens discovered that night in his Master's scrambled features, he would never forget.

Voldemort was blinded by anger, an anger oozing from all the pores of his skin, threatening to pour over the whole country in uncontrollable swells. How could a child who was not yet born, a kind of disgraceful and abject larva, be able to put him, the Dark Lord, in danger? It was absurd, it was humiliating!

But Voldemort's customary anger was mingled with another emotion, more rare, less obvious, halfway between stupor and gratitude. It was as if Voldemort had always known, in his wide open eyes there was something like a 'at last!'. He looked like a child who had succeeded in reciting his 7 times table for the first time and was amazed by his own performance, a child suddenly realizing that he finally knew, as if, back in the day, he had been knowing without knowing.

And one last emotion, harder to define, seemed to struggle to take control of Voldemort's facial nerves. It almost looked like there was someone else, younger, more ... Severus stopped examining his Master's face just a moment before his Master came to his senses. Voldemort had not noticed anything.

"Show me," the dark wizard ordered, clenching his teeth, his nostrils as open as the gills of a fish lacking oxygen.

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Voldemort did not need a wand or an incantation to use Legimency. He just needed a look to penetrate a mind. After Salazar Slytherin, he was most likely the wizard who had best understood the mental architecture linking memories, thoughts and images together.

For although he acknowledged Severus' talents, his disciple was no match for him. The Dark Lord did not remember at what point in his life, and for what reasons he had plunged so deeply into the Science of Mind, but if he had to thank Tom Riddle for something, it was for his hard work.

Severus Snape's mind was not ready to receive a visitor and the young Death Eater reflexively raised occlumensic wards. Voldemort shot them down without difficulty and made himself right at home. He did not dwell on Severus' current thoughts, he had no time to waste. He navigated in the direction of his fresh memories, clustered on top of one another. He carefully unfolded the packet of images and began to look at them.

He saw himself from the back, alone in the living room with thick carpet and rumbling fire. It was hot.

He then saw the heavy gates of the Manor where he was staying this month and was immediately struck by an unpleasant mixture of cold, rain and internal agitation. His stomach, or rather Snape's, formed a compact knot in his belly.

The following image was blurry, but it was accompanied by the peculiar choking feeling of Apparation.
Voldemort then found himself confronted with a turbid and turbulent vision he could not figure out. It was almost as if he had been kicked in the butt. He would take care of that later, he had not come for that.

He went further back in time in Severus Snape's memory and came face to face with the owner of the Hog's Head. The chap looked furious. Voldemort winced when a memory of a splutter landed on his cheek but he resisted the urge to wipe his face.

The next moment was the one he had been waiting for. Against his ear, the warm and worm-eaten wood of a door. And behind it, a woman's voice, clear and distinct, strangely familiar, though he had never heard it in his life ...

In Snape's memory, the prophecy echoed more eerily than it did in reality. The terrible words had made a great impression, they would be engraved in his mind for ever. But Voldemort could not blame Severus for this alteration, for when he heard it, even he was hit with an endless shudder.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches ... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ..."

Voldemort tried to go through Severus' mind a little more, but the latter violently and unwittingly repelled the invasion.

As a result, the Death Eater found himself in his Master's mind for barely half a second. He only had time to see, fugitively, James Potter's face, which was like no other in the UK, with his unruly jet-black hair and his round-rimmed glasses.

Severus almost lost his balance. What...? What was Potter doing in his Master's mind?

"How dare you throw me out of your mind?" Voldemort asked, but his fury was just for show.

He was far too worried by the prophecy and the child who was to be born at the end of July to waste time getting angry at Severus. He had to find this kid, he had to find the couple that had escaped him three times ... For he had no doubt the oracle was authentic. The demonic voice coming from another world, which had resonated strongly, even through a thick door, even in a memory, it did not made any sense, but he had waited for it, he had heard it all his life. he was born for this prophecy!

Voldemort dismissed Severus with a wave of his hand. He was so tormented by what he had just learned that he forgot to punish his man for his impertinence.

Snape left his Master's place as quickly as he could. He was also obsessed with prophecy, but for a different reason. Why did James Potter's face appear in Voldemort's mind? The messy hair, the glasses, the smug look ... Did Voldemort know something Snape did not?

Lily and James, who had defied his Master three times, were they expecting a child? Was Lily pregnant? What if she was, what if she really was going to give birth at the end of July, what had Snape done?

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In the following weeks, the Death Eaters saw little of their Lord. April became May and May became June, while Voldemort remained alone, pensive. He liked the heavy, unmoving calm presaging storms, for, where he was, he did not have to worry about a potential tidal wave. The country house John Lestrange had lent him was not by the ocean.

Voldemort knew full well he had nothing to fear from the child of the prophecy. It was so simple! He
only had to wait until he was born and kill this defenseless and symbiotic little runt. And then the story would be done. It was not as if the child's identity was an insoluble mystery.

The sibyl had clearly said he would be born of a couple of resistance fighters who had escaped him three times and Voldemort trusted the prophetess' lips, animated by the gods. By the way, the gods might have finally heard the dark wizard's lament and taken pity on him, for his headache had not shown its teeth since he had withdrawn from the city.

His mind freed from any parasitic voice, far away from the Death Eaters' turmoil, Voldemort had turned things over in his head to his heart's content. Escaping his wand three times ... Few were the ones who could boast of that. In reality, he only thought of two couples: the Longbottoms and the Potters.

He had a preference for the Potter lead. Lily and James were not more valiant than Alice and Frank, fearless and fearsome warriors, who had a tendency to throw themselves first into the battle.

However, James Potter ... James Potter irresistibly brought up 12, Grimmauld Place in Voldemort's mind. 12, Grimmauld Place, this strange house which had caused many of the Dark Lord's melancholy crises.

Had not Walburga Black said that Sirius, sixteen, brother of dear Regulus, had gone and lived with Fleamont and Euphemia Potter, James's parents?

Oh, it was several years ago now, but Voldemort remembered his own frenzy, when James Potter's name had escaped from Walburga Black's mouth. It was as if, at the time, he already had the intuition his destiny would be closely linked to the Potters'.

He could not help himself. He was so sure the prophecy boy was the Potter son, he just could not get it out of his head.

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Voldemort returned to the city in early July 1980. He gathered his Death Eaters for the kind of dinner where you eat little and talk a lot. Despite his followers' passionate speeches – all of them were trying to prove they had not been idle during his absence – Voldemort only perfunctorily listened to them, pushing food around his plate with the tip of his wand.

The only man he listened attentively was Severus Snape, which did not fail to annoy some of the guests. Barty Crouch Jr. suddenly Crucioed Karkaroff's owl. The poor bird and his owner took offense. Bellatrix and Rodolphus Lestrange, as well as Rabastan, were also jealous of Snape's inexplicably privileged status. So jealous they cast the Cruciatus Curse on Amycus Carrow, a young recruit, who collapsed on the ground.

Alecto jumped up. After checking her brother's state, she pulled out her wand, ready to avenge him, when Voldemort said, in a soft but uncompromising voice: "Enough, my friends. Are you worth more than Muggles? You're a disgrace."

The miserable Death Eaters returned to their places, and Alecto levitated her still unconscious brother to his chair. She kept him in place thanks to an Incarcerem. Her efforts did not bring her the Dark Lord's attention, for he was waiting patiently for Severus Snape to speak again.

"I'm afraid I have nothing else to tell you, My Lord, at least before such a committee," Severus whispered, glancing condescendingly at the assembly.

Bellatrix's briefcase caught fire and her eyes cast Avada Kedavra.
"We are now in private, Severus," Voldemort closed the door behind him. “Or would you rather have the windows sealed and the rooms sound-proofed?”

Severus remained impassive, as if he was not aware his Master was mocking him. That was a quality Voldemort particularly liked. He would not say the young wizard was going up against him but the Death Eater was at least smart enough to not adopt the servile and fanatic behavior of his comrades.

For several months now, Snape had been sharing cynical remarks with his Master and sneering openly when he was amused. Had he been another Death Eater he would have payed his impertinence with his life. But Snape diverted Voldemort.

"You were right, Master," Snape paced the living room. “The Potters and the Longbottoms are the only Order's members who are expecting a boy by the end of the month.”

"And how can you be sure?" Voldemort asked politely.

"I have my sources," the other wizard replied haughtily.

Voldemort let this go.

"So you think, as I do, that the prophecy child will be either the son of the Longbottoms, or the son of the Potters?"

"Exactly," Snape did not look happy, but Voldemort was not alarmed. After all, people rarely looked happy in his company.

"Find them, Severus."

"Who?"

"The Potters ... and the Longbottoms."

Snape did not miss his moment's hesitation.

Voldemort began to examine the moors through the window, urging Snape to get the hell out of there, but the young wizard did not move.

"What is it, Severus? Something more?" Voldemort did not turn round.

"I noticed … I was thinking you were perhaps giving more credence to the Potters' son," Severus said.

Voldemort kept his surprise to himself and continued to contemplate the monotonous landscape. Had be given himself away? He could not remember when … Severus was definitely a promising young man, perhaps a bit too promising ...

"And what business is it of yours?"

"I was wondering if there was a clue ... in the prophecy ... a clue which would have led you to this track. A clue I would not have seen."

"Don't insult your own intelligence, my friend," Voldemort said, looking at the discreet movements of the alstotratus clouds, which partly covered the sky. “But if you're anxious to know … It's true, I do feel like the child the prophecy talks about will be the son of the Potters.”
Severus apologized and left the house.

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August began without Severus communicating an address to Voldemort. Yet his failure brought him no reproach from the Master and rumors in the Death Eater circle were rife.

Bellatrix and Rodolphus, who in spite of their marriage both nurtured a fiery passion for the Dark Lord, told to anyone who would listen that Severus was nothing more than the Master's sexual toy.

"His time will pass, but our devotion to Him will be eternal! The day will come when we shall be rewarded!" they said in chorus.

When the sense of injustice weighed too much in their chests, they unleashed their hatred on Muggles. In August 1980, the Dark Mark shone steadily in the sky of England.

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Meanwhile, Harry was waiting. He had almost got all his mind back and it was a torture to see everything without being able to voluntarily lift a finger. Yet it was also a real relief. He would relive the previous seventeen years for nothing in the world, plunged into a mortal slumber, fitful by nightmares. Being in the front row of Lord Voldemort's sordid life was far more satisfying, albeit very distressing.

Since the prophecy, Harry had completely stopped thinking about Voldemort and Tom Riddle as the same person. The prophecy was his last hope; he thought it would awaken buried memories and open the Dark Lord's eyes. Obsessed by the Potters, Voldemort would finally understand why 12, Grimmauld Place had always oddly attracted him ... but none of that happened.

The man Harry shared his body with was Lord Voldemort, the dark wizard who had ruined his first life, the man who had killed his parents and caused the death of so many people he loved, the one who had tried so many times to kill him. Yes, this wizard was Voldemort, for he intended to kill the Potters' son, and Tom Riddle, despite his darkness, would never hurt the other part of his soul.

Harry was almost happy that Voldemort was so unlike the boy he had been one day. At least Harry was not at odds with himself when he was hating the dark wizard with all his soul and praying for his death! Oh, how dead he wanted Voldemort to be! For why should this heartless and shameless murderer still have the right to live, when Tom Riddle, who was infinitely better than he, was no longer with them? Why was he tarnishing the memory of Tom, the child Harry had brought up, the man he had loved?

Tom Riddle had not been without flaws, of course. Harry and he had killed, but never without a reason, never so selfishly ...

Harry hated Voldemort so much he did not try to communicate with him. Thus Voldemort's headache disappeared.

The year 1980 ended, the Potters still nowhere to be found and Voldemort's patience reaching its boundaries. As for Harry, whenever Severus appeared in his field of view, he expected the Death Eater to finally crack and beg Voldemort to spare Lily. But Severus made his unsuccessful reports with as much indifference as usual.

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Snape made his request in mid-January 1981.
His entrance was not as impressive as the evening he had reported Trelawney's prophecy to Voldemort. He knocked and waited for his Master to invite him in. His face was inexpressive and his arms dangling on both sides of his body like those of a dead man.

"My Lord ... I've discovered where the Potters are hiding," he said after a short silence.

"Well, I'm listening," Voldemort said calmly, but he was simmering with impatience.

Finally! Finally, he would be rid of this oppressive prophecy he remembered every single minute of every single day!

"I..."

"What is it, tell me! Or should I force your mind open?" Voldemort stood in front of his follower and waited.

Severus was nervous, Severus had something to ask him, something very important to him. Voldemort did not like that.

"May I ..." Severus began painfully. "May I take the liberty of –"

"Look me in the eye, my dear Severus," Voldemort ordered, grabbing Severus' chin so they made eye contact. "If you need to submit a request, it is common courtesy."

"Spare Lily Evans! I beg you!" The proud young man fell on his knees and, despite Voldemort's advice, he kept his eyes fixed on the ground. His shoulders trembled and he barely refrained from grabbing the Dark Lord's robes.

"You're pathetic, Severus. Stand up," Voldemort shifted with disgust, without an ounce of compassion for the man howling on the floor.

"I love her," the younger wizard confessed, motionless, as if he was talking to himself. "I love Lily Evans. I've loved her since I was a child! Kill her son, but her ... Spare Lily, she has nothing to do with the prophecy! She will no longer fight alongside the Order, she will never bother you again! Don't kill Lily!"

"You want me to spare your childhood sweetheart? How touching," Voldemort said ironically. "What about her husband, James Potter? Would you like me to spare him too?"

"Kill him!" Snape cried without hesitation. "Kill the child and the father, but Lily ... Not Lily, please ..."

"Get up, Severus, it's an order. To see you like this makes me sick. Do you know why?"

Severus hardly got up and he staggered, narrowly catching an armchair's high back. His face, deformed by despair, had no tears, but his dry eyes and dry cheeks screamed his distress and his love for Lily, his so little altruistic love ...

"Why?" he managed to ask between his teeth, his clenched jaws unable to move away from each other.

"Your excess, your loss of control remind me of Dumbledore's indigestible speeches about love," Voldemort explained. "Love, the most beautiful and powerful kind of magic, the love I've never known, according to him ... And yet, here I am, Lord Voldemort, without love. Do I look so bad? But you, who are consumed by love, look at yourself! Oh, look, Severus, and be ashamed!"
He made a theatrical gesture toward the Death Eater, before he resumed.

"And you pretend you love Lily, while the fate of her husband, the man she loves and she chose, and
the fate of her son, flesh of her flesh, do not worry you in any way .. What a selfish way to love,
Severus. What you really want, your real request, is not just that I spare Lily. Deep down, you're
hoping I kill James and the little one, so that the stage is free and you can go up on it. Then you will
take advantage of her grief to claim ownership on the pretty Mudblood, won't you?"

Severus made a face, but he did not open his mouth.

"You can't even defend your ladylove when I insult her, when I call her filthy names? You love like
a coward, my friend."

"I beg you, My Lord. Lily, only Lily. That's my only request," Severus said quietly, as if he had
heard nothing from his Master's monologue.

His clenched fists only betrayed his desolation. Harry was impressed in spite of himself, although he
was struggling to fully sympathize with the Death Eater who had clearly admitted he did not give a
shit about James and him. But Harry could not blame him entirely. His selfishness would be largely
compensated by years of spying and repentance.

The respect Harry had earned for Snape, after the deceased had given him his memories in the
Shrieking Shack, finally had the opportunity to express itself. In his first life, it was too late, but this
one it was not. Severus was alive in front of him, and Harry tried very hard to convey his support
and admiration, even though it was a bit odd to admire a man for things he had not yet accomplished.

And perhaps ... After all, Severus might care about James and the child, but his love for Lily was
most likely so great, so invasive, that it occupied all his heart, just like the love Tom once had for
Harry took up all his chest.

Maybe Harry was finding him excuses, but Snape, even if he had made a mistake in committing
himself to Lord Voldemort and reporting the prophecy to him, even if he had act selfishly, thinking
only about Lily, had paid for his crimes. Harry could not imagine how enervating a life consumed
with regrets was.

"I'll think about it, Severus, but I'm not a promise-maker wizard," Voldemort finally said. "Now that
you have calmed down, could you to tell me where the Potters are?"

"They don't know you're looking for them. Like all the Order's members, they regularly move as a
precaution. They are currently living in a heavily warded house in a small Muggle village called
Clyst St Mary. The house belongs to Lyall and Hope Lupin, Remus Lupin's parents."

"The Order's werewolf?" Voldemort inquired.

"Indeed."

"Thank you for your work, Severus. I have a trip to organize. You know your way out."

Severus seemed about to say something but he left the room without a word.

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Voldemort could barely contain his anger. He had searched from top to bottom Clyst St Mary, a
small village of less than four hundred inhabitants, but he had not get a hold of either the Potters or
the Lupins. The house Severus had described to him was where it was supposed to be but it was
uninhabited and its wards were no longer active. A few spells had taught Voldemort that magic had been performed there just the day before.

Harry, for once, congratulated himself for not being able to communicate with Voldemort because all his thoughts would have betrayed Severus Snape.

After leaving Voldemort's house the night before, the Death Eater had met Dumbledore urgently on the hill, as in the Pensieve. He had begged the Headmaster to put Lily in a safe place, promising to do whatever he wanted. Oh, Harry would have liked to see that. Even if all of this had already happened in his first life and even if he already knew the outcome of the story, he followed the plot impatiently.

He had taken an affection for Severus. He mentally applauded his bravery and audacity, like he used to encourage the heroes of the adventure novels Dudley threw away without opening. Well, Harry was not really spoilt for choice when it came to having a favorite character. The other Death Eaters were many things, but they were not likable.

You were right to go and see Dumbledore, Severus! Voldemort isn't good at keeping promises. In the past he promised me the moon and the stars, his unconditional love, a body of my own ... And today he has forgotten me. Anyhow, can I say he has properly forgotten me, when he has been looking for me for months, when all his thoughts are about me, the son of the Potters?

Each time Harry thought of the irony of it, he was always surprised that another version of him could have been born. In this world, there were two Harry Potter. The infant James and Lily were raising lovingly ... when this baby would get his scar, would he experience the same fate as his counterpart? Would he grow up at the Dursleys, would he learn on his eleventh birthday that he was a wizard, hear for the first time about You-Know-Who and spend his years at Hogwarts escaping death?

Deep down, Harry knew all this would not happen. The child who bore the same name as him, but whose forehead was blank, would never grow up. After all these years wondering about the nature of this alternative universe, Harry believed he finally had come to an answer. But he would have to wait until Hallowe'en night to put his theory to the test.

Voldemort had no suspicion of Snape's double dealing, and even Harry, who knew the Death Eater was now on the Order's side did not see a thing. Snape reported to his Master with his usual self-assurance and elaborated complex theories explaining brilliantly Clyst St Mary's failure.

He always appeared with detailed maps and colored diagrams under his arm. Each time he had something new to propose and each of his assumptions was so plausible, his conviction seemed so authentic that Voldemort never used Legimency on him.

Harry wondered how much time a week Snape spent skilfully inventing false leads and carefully creating clues, so everything was perfectly orchestrated. Among all the whimsical information he gave to Voldemort, he concealed bits of truth, and so in April he pretended he had discovered the Potters were now under the Fidelius Charm.

He spent the following months falsely struggling to find their Secret Keeper, with so much effort and zeal, that Voldemort never doubted his loyalty.

Severus never talked again about his mid-January request. If the image of the wizard kneeling on the ground had not been so vivid in his memory, Harry might have thought he had imagined the whole scene. But his face, torn with sorrow, often haunted him. Sometimes he wished, strangely and
somewhat self-destructively, that his mother would have chosen Severus over James. For Harry Potter's non-existence would certainly have been largely balanced by Severus Snape's happiness.

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The year progressed slowly, violently and capriciously.

On one evening, it was five Death Eaters, led by Dolohov, who announced to no one in particular that they had had fun with Gideon and Fabian Prewett.

On another evening, it was Travers who presented himself as a hero, for he had killed the entire McKinnon family, including Marlene, a notorious Order's member.

And on the night after, Amycus and Alecto Carrow came back covered in blood and pieces of flesh, proud to wear the remains of Benjy Fenwick on them.

War was everywhere, Harry experienced it behind the scenes. Indeed, Voldemort rarely traveled to the field. He spent most of his time locked up in his quarters, waiting for Severus to bring him good news.

Harry had never wondered why the Dark Lord was not personally looking for the Potters. He was well aware of Voldemort's bad faith, for he had listened to his mental monologue a thousand times at least. It could be summarized as 'Me, the great, the famous Voldemort, descending to the indignity of hunting down a snotty-nosed kid?'

Harry hated these long, silent speeches more than anything. In those moments he did not fail to recognize, reluctantly, angrily, Tom behind Voldemort. As Voldemort, Tom Riddle would never have confessed being afraid of a baby.

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On one July morning, Harry got the unpleasant surprise of crossing paths with Peter Pettigrew again. Of course, he had expected to witness the former Gryffindor's changing sides. He had known he would see with his own eyes, or almost, the dastard wizard betraying his best friends.

Still, he was shaken up when Bellatrix Lestrange Apparated into the Goyles' dining room, their current den, firmly gripping the arm of the terrified young wizard.

July 1981... I never thought he would betray my parents so early, Harry thought furiously, waiting for the scene which would inevitably follow, with a mixture of excitement and apprehension.

"My Lord!" Bellatrix called lovingly, dragging Peter towards Lord Voldemort's austere chair. "Prostrate yourself!"

Peter curled up on the floor beside Bellatrix. Unlike her, who was eating Voldemort with her eyes, he stared at the floor as if his life depended on it. Which was not really silly, for his life did depend on it.

"Bella, what are you bringing me here?" Voldemort growled, leaving the two wizards on the ground.

"Peter Pettigrew, a member of the Order of the Phoenix, My Lord!"

"Former member," Peter squealed.

"He says he would like to join our ranks!"
"Why, Peter?" the Dark Lord asked the thing that trembled on the ground.

"I've seen what you do, you and the Death Eaters ... great things ... Yes, great things ... The Prewett, and the McKinnons, dead! Benjy Fenwick found in pieces! I never believed in the Order of the Phoenix or in Dumbledore. They'll lose and I want to fight with you!"

_Him, a future Death Eater? Him, a member of the Order?_ Voldemort thought dubiously, trying to see the wizard's face. _His name does ring a bell, though._

"I didn't know you were doing job interviews for seasonal contracts, Bella. Or is it a spontaneous application? How did you meet my dear Bella, Peter?"

"I ... I summoned the Dark Mark," Peter stammered, without looking up. "I summoned the Mark in the hope of meeting a Death Eater who would take me to you. Miss Bellatrix came to meet me and ... here I am."

Harry and Voldemort shared the same surprise.

"The Dark Mark? How could you know the spell? Is this the kind of experiments Order's members make in their free time? Does Dumbledore spend his Sunday nights studying my symbol, while people are _dying_?" Voldemort said in a falsely exaggerated tone, provoking the Death Eaters' raucous laughter.

But Lord Voldemort's disdainful tone did not unsettle Peter. On the contrary, his trembling subsided, his hands stopped twisting into each other and he asserted, in a more controlled voice: "Dumbledore or the Order have nothing to do with that. I've got some useful powers to unveil secrets, to see without being seen."

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Voldemort's imagination began to work at full speed, listing all the spells and artefacts which would have enable the wretched Peter Pettigrew to discover the Dark Mark's incantation and escape the Human Presence Reveling Spell.

He was really intrigued. Had he judged too hastily the weak and fearful man kneeling before him, who looked ready to pee on himself? Did Pettigrew hide great powers under his worn robe and his embarrassing haircut?

Harry listened, somewhat annoyed, to his other self's repetitive questions. He wanted to yell at him. He wished he could tell him Peter had no Invisibility Cloak or unheard magical powers, and that he was simply an Animagus whose form was very practical to trail oblivious Death Eaters. But that would have been of no avail, for Voldemort had not been able to hear his other soul's voice for nearly twenty years.

Harry had to keep his story for himself.

Peter the Rat had followed a group of careless Death Eaters to the scene of a future crime. He had hidden himself in a drawer and had waited patiently for Voldemort's supporters to finish torturing and killing their victims, without considering to help them for a second. When the Death Eaters had decided the party was over, one of them had shouted _'Mormordres'!_.

_A Hominum Revelio_ had confirmed there was no living human soul in the house and the Death Eaters had deserted the scene, leaving behind them a stressed rat who now knew how to summon the Dark Mark.
And as *Mormordres* was taboo for unmarked wizards, when Peter had cast the curse, the Patrollers, of which Bella was part, had immediately located him. End of the story.

"Well, Peter, you may be smarter than you look," Voldemort finally said, now believing the wizard was dangerous. "However, not everyone wishing to become a Death Eater can become one, especially not an Order's member ..."

"Former member," Peter underlined.

"How can I be certain you are not a spy? You saw our HQ, you saw the faces of many of my followers ... You can only agree with me, it is most likely more prudent to kill you right away," Voldemort pulled out his wand.

The half-dozen Death Eaters who were following the absence of action with relative boredom awoke as one man. All gazed at the tip of their Master's wand and awaited the Unforgivable with obscene impatience, enjoying in advance the moment Peter Pettigrew's heart would stop beating like a watch suddenly stops ticking.

"Wait!" Peter straightened up at last. "I know who is the Potters' Secret Keeper! I know you are looking for them!"

Voldemort lowered his wand and smiled too politely for someone who had been about to kill him two seconds earlier. The Death Eaters grunted.

"Well?"

"I'm a close friend of them!"

"A name, Peter."

"I ... I can not say. Their name is also under Fidelius," Peter moaned pitifully, shriveling on the ground.

Voldemort rolled his eyes and raised his wand again.

"You are wasting my time. And you disappoint me, Bella. I thought you had brought me a future friend, an informant ..."

Bellatrix's face turned white and her colleagues smugly laughed at her, but she did not give up.

"My Lord, Peter is really close to the Potters! He is their friend, their best friend, aren't you, Peter? That's what you told me, isn't it, Peter?"

Voldemort kept his wand pointed at Peter but he turned to Snape, who was sitting some chairs farther away.

"Severus? Is it true?"

Snape, who had shown no sign of recognition when Peter had entered the room, nodded briefly.

"Back in school, Peter Pettigrew followed James Potter everywhere. This is how Gryffindors display friendship."

Voldemort put away his wand, Peter sighed a little too loudly and the Death Eaters stiffened in their chairs with disgust.
"Well, I'll make a mistake if I don't take advantage of you and your mysterious powers, Peter Pettigrew. Your wand."

Peter handed him his wand with a timid gesture and looked, horrified, as Voldemort broke it in half.

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After Peter's betrayal, Harry wondered whether Snape and the Animagus had discussed in private their double dealing business. He never knew. Given that each of them reported to Voldemort face-to-face, they were rarely in the same room.

If Snape had questioned Pettigrew's motives, what kind of lies had Peter been able to tell? Had he said that, like Snape, he was commited to the Order, but that Dumbledore had found it wise to send him, so inoffensive in appearance, to spy on the Dark Lord? Had he dared say he was keeping an eye on Snape, that he was there to watch his actions and his fidelity?

Nevertheless, Severus might not be interested in coward Pettigrew the slightest. How could he have suspected that the former Gryffindor would betray the Potters? How could he have imagined Pettigrew would thwart the Fidelius Charm's protection by obtaining the status of Secret Keeper?

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The rest of the summer passed quickly, too quickly in Harry's opinion, too slowly in Voldemort's. The Dark Lord gave Snape's mission to Peter Pettigrew. As Harry had come to believe, the Secret Keeper's change had not been due to a hasty and unthinking decision, as he had been told, but to the pernicious and cautious work of the traitor.

Voldemort had asked Peter to find a way to break the Fidelius and, each time the Death Eater reported, Harry saw the plan tightening, its fatal outcome getting closer and closer, less and less avoidable.

Peter had planted the seed early in the summer and was growing it gently. He did not dwell on his fake doubts about Sirius at each of his visits to the Potters, it would have been too crude, too obvious.

However, from time to time, he insinuated, as if he knew more than he could say, as if speaking openly would put him in danger, that school friendships did not last, that in wartime, nobody could be trusted. He suggested that someone had broken his wand and was threatening to do the same to his neck, that Lily and James were not really safe.

One had to admit that his method was irreproachable. For who could have expected the eternal third wheel to mess with his former House-mates' minds? How could James and Lily have supposed they had less to fear from the impulsive Sirius, whose brother had been a Death Eater, than from the kind, awkward and mediocre Peter?

And Snape ... Snape thought Peter was keen to protect the Potters and that his real goal was to delay as much as possible the moment Voldemort would finally learn where they were hiding.

Why is the sole person who really knows what is happening, that is to say me, incapable of doing anything to prevent the course of events? Harry sighed.

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Voldemort was going round in circles in McNair's living room, listening, without being truly relaxed by them, the cries of the Muggles who were tortured in the adjoining room. He was waiting, he
longed for the burn, but his chest was still as cold as a body in the morgue. It had been three days since Peter had promised to contact him and Voldemort was overwrought.

Oh, he was not afraid of Peter's potential betrayal. The former Gryffindor was so cowardly, he just could not imagine himself fooling the Dark Lord, even in a dream.

Nevertheless, Voldemort was loosing patience. Summer was long past, the child was already one year old. Hallowe'en was just around the corner; Christmas and New Year's Eve would follow soon. Could he continue to lead his life as if nothing had happened, when somewhere in the world a child endowed with an unknown but necesseraly terrific power was growing up? Could he go back to his daily life, now he knew the Potters' son was threatening his life?

No, of course not. Since Snape had told him about the prophecy, he had abandoned crimes and coups d'etat to the Death Eaters, obsessed by the Potters' tracking. For a year and a half, he had only lived to meet and kill the boy. The days ending without Peter Pettigrew making some progress were lost. They were far too frequent for his taste.

And suddenly it happened. A delicious heat began to radiate on his chest, tracing the rings of a serpent and the gumless teeth of a skull. Such a sweet pain, which brought him back to the day a London tattoo artist had drawn on his skin lines which had scarred him for life!

Whenever a Death Eater called him, it was as if the wound on his chest re-opened, burning, cursed and enchanting.

The Mark's burn made Harry sick. It always made the back of his hand itch. He still had not forgotten the scar Umbridge had left on his first body.

After enjoying for a few seconds his Mark's tender tingling, Voldemort went to Peter Pettigrew.

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"Master!" Peter backed away, caught off guard, when Voldemort appeared before him.

"You were not expecting me, Peter?" Voldemort was obviously ironic. He could brag about many things, but not about being welcomed, even by his closest followers, in an outpouring of confetti and trumpeting. “Where are we?”

He looked around and saw a greyish and peaceful place, whose discreet inhabitants could do him no harm.

"A graveyard, Godric's Hollow's, the village where the Potters hide," Peter informed him. “I am ... I became their Secret Keeper! No one knows, only the Potters, Sirius and you, Master! And they don't suspect a thing, oh no. Sirius, James and Lily have a strong feeling in my accepting this dangerous role with reluctance but heroism. They believe I only have their safety in mind ...”

"Perfect!" Voldemort exclaimed, grinning from ear to ear, while a feeling almost forgotten, after all these months of anger and frustration, a feeling of joy exploded in his belly. “Perfect! Perfect!”

He rejoiced for a long time, under Peter Pettigrew's humble and anxious gaze. When he finally calmed down and the good news were printed for good in his mind, he casually erased the memory of the graveyard guard, who had come to see who was laughing like a madman among his tombstones and he listened, delighted, as the other wizard gave him the Potters' adress.

"When the child is dead, you'll be rewarded, Peter," he promised. “You won't have to use this borrowed wand, you will be entitled to something much more beautiful ...”
He was on the verge of Apparition when Peter dared to ask, biting his lips: "You ... don't you go right away? To kill the boy?"

After that, the spy made such a fearful and pitiful sound Harry almost expected him to turn into a rat and run away. But nothing could spoil Voldemort's euphoria, not even Peter's indiscreet and impertinent questions.

"I've been dreaming to meet this child my whole life, Peter, for so long it seems decades. It is not crazy to think this child and I were destined to meet before my own birth. Yes, I, the immortal Lord, and he, the boy who possesses a power I haven't, we might be united beyond time. For two beings like us, time probably means nothing," Voldemort sighed, letting his gaze glide over the graveyard. "To answer your question, Peter, waiting a few days will not be a great sacrifice."

"A few days, Master?" Peter repeated, mentally scourging himself for his curiosity.

"The night of Hallowe'en 1981 will be dark and bloody," Voldemort murmured affectionately, as if he had just made a love promise.

Finally, Harry thought, when Voldemort appeared in Godric's Hollow's graveyard. Finally, we are there!

He was not afraid. He should have been afraid. Anyone would be afraid if they knew they were going to kill their own parents within the hour and could do nothing to stop this tragedy.

In all honesty, Harry had always imagined that night was a terrible and awful night, a night worthy of one of the horror movies Dudley was watching with his friends on Saturday night, binging on chips and laughing nervously.

He had always thought that a strident and anguishing music, as in Psychose, would punctuate its highlights. Or perhaps that a long stony silence would weight on his soul and his shoulders, turning each of his steps toward the door of his parents' house into an almost insurmountable effort.

He had forgotten that night was a night of celebration. Children were running around, wearing ridiculous disguises of monsters, wizards and zombies. The younger ones pulled an adult by the hand, dragging them to the next house. The older ones knocked about in gangs, cheerfully giggling, their mouths full of sweets. No one was aware that a true dark wizard had crept among them and that he was fomenting infanticide.

Goth teenagers – the culture was just beginning in the early 1980s – gave an appreciative look to Voldemort's hooded figure, whose long black cape waved softly behind him as if by magic.

Yet it was not because of the festive atmosphere that Harry was not afraid. Despite the sweets, pumpkins and cheerful laughters around him, Harry had no trouble realizing what Voldemort and him were going to do.

Nor was it hope that prevented him from trembling because he had already lost hope. The murder of Lily and James Potter could not not happen, it was necessary.

No, if he was not afraid, it was because he now knew what he had to do and was filled with a sense of duty. He had not been afraid of Quirrell and his monstrous head, he had not been afraid of the Basilisk, he had not been afraid of the Dementors, he had not been afraid in Little Hangleton's graveyard, he had not been afraid in the Department of Mysteries, he had not been afraid at the top of the Astronomy Tower, he had not been afraid when he had entered the Forbidden Forest to face
Voldemort.

And he was not afraid, now that he was walking again towards his destiny. His reincarnation in Tom Riddle, the fifty-four years he had shared the body of a man he loved and hated ardently, all his second life would find its answer on that single night. Everything had led him until now, until ... "Nice costume, sir!"

Voldemort turned and the smile of the kid who had just called out to him disappeared immediately. He almost drew his wand but he changed his mind. There was a familiar hum in his head, like a vice, and he could not bring himself to cast the Death Curse when being so unfocused. He had thought his stay in the country during the previous summer had cured him of his chronic headache, but it seemed it had just hibernated for a long year.

The child ran to his mother without turning round and Voldemort continued on his way.

That night he would kill only one child, James and Lily's son. It was their night, to the little Potter and to him. Except that unlike him, the boy would never remember.

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Voldemort arrived in front of the Potters and, as promised by Peter Pettigrew, the house was waiting for him, its portal guarded by a pair of hollow pumpkins, its curtains wide open. He looked through the window and watched for a moment James Potter summoning colored smoke with his wand to amuse a little boy in blue pajamas. The toddler's hair was as black and ruffled as his father's.

The brat knew nothing of his destiny and bubbled with laughter. He was fidgeting, trying to catch the smoke in his little fist and at that moment Voldemort hated him with all that remained of his soul. How could he be so happy when he, Voldemort, had spent months looking for him? How could he be so careless when Death was looking at him from the window?

Don't you feel, little Potter, how I long to kill you? Don't you realize that you are the King of this night and that I'll make sure you won't see next sunrise? Don't you sense that I am here, my child, and that I cannot wait to tell you 'sweet dreams'? The little boy heard nothing of Voldemort's thoughts and he continued to laugh, but the version of Harry Potter surviving in Voldemort's soul did not lose a single word of the gentle threat.

Harry, I'm going to rescue you from Voldemort, Harry thought for himself.

Lily Potter entered the living room. She exchanged a few words with James, who handed him their son, with some relief, before swinging his wand on the couch and stretching, yawning.

The gate creaked slightly but James Potter, comatose, did not hear anything. Voldemort silently climbed the steps and pointed his wand at the front door. It opened wide, revealing a small corridor with walls decorated with photographs.

Finally, Harry thought again, when Voldemort broke into the Potter's house, a house where he had lived but of which his only memory was from his visit on Christmas Eve, when he was seventeen. Finally, I'll get rid of you, Voldemort, and you'll leave Tom in peace!

He was still not afraid. His decision was taken and he would not go back, even if what he was going to do would tear his soul and crush his heart.

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It was easy, too easy. James Potter had rushed into the corridor without grabbing his wand.

"Lily, take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off! he shouted.

Hold him off! Wandlessly! Voldemort laughed, before his gaze fell on James Potter's unruly hair, black-jet and indomitable. For no longer than the beat of a heart, he hesitated... This hair ... But he suddenly met the wizard's eyes, he read in his brown irises hatred, determination but no fear and Voldemort hated him.

For a moment he had believed ... but no, he hated this man, he hated his treacherous eyes!

“Avada Kedavra!” he yelled.

The green light exploded into the little hallway, illuminating the pram pushed against the wall, shining the banister of the stairs, as a divine thunderbolt would have. James Potter fell and the hall was plunged again in the twilight.

Lily, upstairs, was screaming, obviously trapped, obviously wandless. As long as she was sensible, she had nothing to fear. As long as she let him kill the child, she was safe.

The Dark Lord had not forgotten his winter discussion with Snape, but he honestly did not want to kill the young witch. It was not that he liked her long red hair, far from it. On the contrary, they reminded him of another young girl, whose name and face he could not recall. He was not even sure she had really existed, but he despised her a lot.

No, Voldemort had not noticed Lily Potter's hair but her eyes and those eyes ... Oh, these eyes were beautiful, even if they belonged to a Mudblood, even if they were gazing upon another man, even if they were always filled with fury on the battlefield.

*Despite your pretty speeches, you won't spare my mother, Harry thought. And that's why you're not Tom, you're not Tom anymore ...*

Voldemort climbed the steps, listening to the muffled sound of furniture pushed feverishly against a door. He did not feel any fun at Lily Potter's pathetic barricade attempt. No, he was rather worried and upset now, for his migraine was starting to throb into his head.

The demon in his ear – feminine, masculine? Animus, anima? – had most likely woken up for real from its hibernation. It shouted words at him, words that Voldemort did not understand or that he had forgotten. And, there he went, he was losing his focus, all because of this damn headache.

**xXx**

He blew up the door and, with a lazy wave of his wand, he swung in the air the chairs and the boxes blocking his way. And there she was, with her matchstick hair and her green eyes, shining like those of a dream. She was carrying the boy in her arms, but when she saw Voldemort she dropped her son into the crib behind her.

Voldemort noted absent-mindedly that they were in the boy's room. The wallpaper was covered with colored shapes and a mobile was suspended above the bed, slowly turning on itself; clicking and playing a little melody absolutely inappropriate.

Lily troubled his contemplation by throwing herself in front of her son's bed, her arms outstretched, as if to protect him from the gaze of a Basilisk.

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!” she shouted herself hoarse.
Harry had pity on his mother and it was a terrible feeling. She should have gone away at that moment, she should have run, leaving the boy behind her.

Lily's reaction also annoyed Voldemort. Her dedication to the child, to Harry, made him want to kill her on the spot. But the red lock crossing her face did not hide her green eyes and the Dark Lord decided to give her another chance.

That was what the voice in his ear – male – seemed to ask him, but he was not sure, Lily was crying too loudly.

"Stand aside, you silly girl ... stand aside now," he ordered, hoping sincerely that she was going to shift, that she would give him the choice not to kill her.

Snape would certainly be very happy and his fidelity renewed. And he, Voldemort, would be able to fall asleep without knowing that these green eyes, dead and dull, were no longer able to see anything. He did not know why, but Lily's life mattered.

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead –"

"This is my last warning –" Voldemort sighed.

"Not Harry! Please ... have mercy ... have mercy ... Not Harry! Not Harry! Please ... I'll do anything ..."

"Stand aside. Stand aside, girl!" Voldemort repeated, not knowing what to do.

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Harry looked helplessly at his mother, who was so young, scarcely older than him, defending him as best she could. He had already experienced the hallucination, after meeting Nagini-Bathilda Bagshot, but this vision was not the kind to which one can get used.

And he could not do anything, because all this had already happened, because James and Lily were already dead ... James was dead, and Lily had to die so Harry could accomplish his task, so he could do what he had to. He had reincarnated into Tom for this, although it was painful and hard to bear.

Lily fell to the ground, hit by the Death Spell. Harry forced himself to watch her last moment, to print in his mind the motionless figure with twisted arms. The green light flooding the room did not bother here. The child in the bed, the other version of Harry Potter, had also watched the scene closely.

He did not look scared, rather intrigued. With his hands clutching the bars of his crib, he looked gravely at Voldemort's face, most likely looking for his father's features. And Harry, at that moment, felt like a father. He wanted to pretend he was James Potter and reassure the boy, hug him, kiss his forehead, but it was absurd, because he was also a Harry Potter.

Ignoring the moods of the demon in his mind, Voldemort carefully pointed his wand at the child's head. He could not wait for the moment to finally come, for this unique, inexplicable danger to be destroyed. Moments later, this tiny, unfinished thing, which was supposed to be the biggest threat in his life, was going to die without even realizing it was dying.

*Harry Potter, your last memory will be my face! You're going to die without knowing for what reason. I could pity you, but, you see, I lost my heart long ago. I think I never had one.*

The little boy began to cry. He had just realized that Voldemort was not James, despite the mental cries of his older counterpart.
Voldemort hated his tears. He had never been able to endure the toddlers' cries and chirps at the orphanage, and this twisted face, these eyes blurred by tears, these red cheeks, suddenly seemed unbearable to him. There was something that made him sick, in this grief so openly expressed.

Why should this little bit of a man be allowed to scream his grief to the moon when he, the great Voldemort, had to repress his rushes of melancholy and his migraines ... And that name, Harry, which sent shivers down his spine ...

But he was not there to feel sorry for himself. So Voldemort retreated a bit, raised his wand to the boy's forehead and exclaimed: "Avada Kedavra!"

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A lot of things happened in a very short time, and it was not until much later, with a rested mind, that Harry managed to put all the pictures in order.

By the time Voldemort had cast the Death Curse, Tom had remembered everything. Everything had sprung in a flash and memories had flooded in his head like a torrent in which he thought he was drowning.

*Harry, Harry, Harry!* Voldemort or Tom had yelled mentally.

Their childhood at the orphanage, the evening stories, the discovery of magic, their first visit to Diagon Alley, their sorting to Slytherin, their first handjob, and all the next ones, the murder of the Riddles by Harry, Harry's first vital crisis on the day Tom had turned older than him, their craving for even more, their initiatory trip in search of the Founders' Relics, the full moon nights' rituals, their disappointment at the gathering of the cup, the locket, the diadem and the sword, Harry's repeated crises, his agony, his promise ... his promise!

His promise to be the guarantor of Harry's existence, to be the one who would testify eternally that Harry Potter had lived! His promise to mourn forever, he who could not die ... His promise to cherish his memories with the same passion which would never falter, forever!

How could he have forgotten everything? How could what remained of his soul cope so easily with Harry Potter's disappearance, when they were twins, when they were one sole being?

How could he not have understood the signs? Loneliness, headaches, his attraction for 12, Grimmauld Place and his tragic obsession for the son of the Potters?

Tom, yes, Tom, – he did not want to be Voldemort anymore, he hated so much the Dark Lord who was none other than himself, he felt like he was going to die from his hatred – at the very moment the curse was about to reach the boy, Tom had been overwhelmed with infinite remorse.

An immense and destructive wave had gone through his whole body and made him flinch and then, as he was mentally crying 'Forgive me, Harry! Forgive me!' without knowing if Harry could heard him, the Death Curse had turned against him.

It had not bounced against the child's forehead. It had not even touched him. It had gone back to Tom, as if it had suddenly changed its mind and now would rather kill the dark wizard than the child.

*Why?* Tom wondered vaguely, but he was not afraid.

He welcomed Death with relief, because in death, Harry and he would finally find each other again. Because in death, Harry could perhaps forgive him. Because in death, even if Harry did not forgive him, Tom could no longer hurt anyone ... Oh, the remorse he felt, was is what had deviated the
Death Curse's trajectory?

Was it because he was feeling remorse that the Unforgivable was coming to him, to free him from his pain?

Voldemort had not had time to elucidate the question because the green lightning had touched him in the chest and he was dead. There had been no pain, no terror, no flight to Albania. His mutilated soul had not broken up again, no part of him had flown and buried itself in the weeping child's forehead.

No, the Death Curse had hit Voldemort and he had collapsed on the floor, like Lily and James Potter, like any other mortal.

And everything had turned black for Tom Riddle and for Harry Potter.

To Be Continued ...

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading guys! I'll post the two last chapters pretty soon, for I'll be travelling in November and I don't want to leave you hanging for a month ;)

Remember reviews are like warm bread and writers love warm bread.
In Limbo (May 2d 1998)

Chapter Summary

Harry wakes up in a familiar but depressing place ... and has to face reality.

Chapter Notes

Last official chapter of this fanfic (but don't worry, I'll post the coda right after this chap)
I'm a bit anxious, for some of you will probably hate me just reading the header but here we go.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In Limbo (May 2d 1998)
Epilogue: But a world none the less

Harry woke up facedown, like the first time. However, unlike the first time, he did not stay there, motionless, with his eyes closed, listening to the silence and wondering if he existed or if time existed. He did not even take a second to get used again to his body. He did not stretch out, he did not rub his eyes, he did not touch his face.

No, he savagely lifted his tee-shirt, uncovering his flat stomach, definitely too hollow to shelter a little bit of being. The mutilated baby, whom he had devoured like an ogre and carried like a mother, it was no longer in him.

But he did not give up. The baby had to be there, it had to be alive even though Tom was dead, otherwise Harry would have to accept that they... Oh, he did not want to think about that.

Harry remembered having felt, just before leaving limbo and reincarnating in Tom Riddle, like he was bursting inside out, as if he was giving birth to a shooting star. The baby may have been expelled from his body at that time. It was no longer in his belly, but it might be somewhere in King's Cross.

The Chosen One jumped up, did not pay attention to the vertigo assaulting him, and began to pace all limbo, looking for the piece of bloody flesh, furiously listening, on the lookout for weak movements or repugnant groans.

In vain. The thing he was so afraid of, fifty-four years earlier – or a moment earlier – was nowhere to be found. The floor of King's Cross was immaculate.

But Harry still did not give up. Alright, the baby was not physically in the station or in his body, but
that did not necessarily mean that it was dead. Oh, how undead Harry wanted it to be!

The creature might exist now in a different way, in a more subtle form than its previous one ... After all, delivering a meteoroid was most likely different than delivering a child, Harry thought. The strange metamorphosis which had taken place when the thing had hatched in his stomach – peeling of the skin, dissolution of the bones, loss of all matter – might have been less a sign of separation than of fusion.

There was not an infinite number of ways to test this hypothesis. If the fetus was what Harry suspected it was ... and if had not came to life but had merged with Harry, then ...

*My name is Harry Potter, Harry* thought distinctly, picturing a wavy snake, with a lively and sharp tongue.

It did not work.

"**My name is Harry Potter,**" he said out loud, a mental Basilisk dancing and whistling in his mind. "**My name is Harry Potter!**"

But it was no use, he was not a Parselmouth anymore. He had become Harry Potter, *just* Harry Potter. He could not deny it any longer, the baby was definitely dead.

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He was not thrilled with the news.

It confirmed what he already suspected at the end of his second life but did not want to believe back then, the fact he had totally refused to admit even when he had suddenly awakened in his first body, in limbo, in King's Cross.

Unfortunately, the mocking truth had no pity on his moods, and it exploded in his mind, despite his denial, despite his anger, despite his despair.

If Harry no longer knew the language of snakes, it was because the piece of Lord Voldemort's soul living in his body, the Horcrux which had accidentally been created on the night of October 31, 1981, had been finally destroyed.

But if the accidental Horcrux's destruction coincided so well with the mutilated baby's disappearance, it meant that the flayed thing Harry had decided to save, against Dumbledore's advice, the thing he had brooded in limbo for days, was in fact the accidental Horcrux itself.

But that was not the worst part of it. Harry definitely did not want to think about that, but the truth did not care about what he wanted.

If the death of the Horcrux – and of the baby – had coincided so perfectly with Tom's death in Harry Potter's second life ... it meant that Tom, his Tom, was actually the mutilated baby, the accidental Horcrux.

The newborn, the child, the teenager, the man Harry had cared for and loved for more than fifty years, against all odds, had never been anything but a cursed piece of soul. In falling in love with Tom Riddle, Harry had in fact fallen under the spell of a Horcrux.

All his second life had been a long dream orchestrated by the piece of soul. Harry had never left limbo.
After eating the baby – after reincorporating the Horcrux – he thought he had gone back in time, but he had simply fallen asleep. He had lived in an illusion, possessed and fascinated by a Horcrux, as Ginny had been before him.

"Fuck!" he yelled, scanning the white and dead space surrounding him, cursing its vaporous architecture, too impalpable to be reliable.

He remembered finding the place peaceful and reassuring. He remembered feeling safe there, away from the Forbidden Forest and from Lord Voldemort's wand. But that was the first time.

He had been betrayed by the bloody creature that haunted King's Cross. Limbo now made his hair stand on end.

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"You came back, Harry," Dumbledore looked serene, sitting on his right.

Had Hogwarts' former Headmaster suddenly appeared next to him or had he banally walked to the bench? Harry did not know. To tell the truth, he did not give a shit.

He had been ruminating his thoughts for a long time, his eyes fixed on the aseptic ground of limbo, which whiteness was without contour or limit. Now he had realized he, *Harry Potter*, had stupidly fallen into the trap of a Horcrux, he no longer felt any interest in anything.

"Fuck!" he repeated for the umpteenth time, his fists clenched and his eyes dry, without a glance at Dumbledore.

"Oh, Harry ... I told you you could not help it," Dumbledore sighed. "You should have let it die rather than give it a second chance. It would have been better for you, as for it."

"For it? It deserved its fate!" Harry cried, trembling with hatred. "You were right, this thing deserved no pity. I should have watched it agonizing, I should have enjoyed its pain ... Why didn't you stop me from reincorporating it, Professor? Why did you let me make such a detour? Why didn't you hold me back when I was going on a trip you knew was going to drive me crazy?"

The anger in his voice did not hide his distress. He had never been back in the past. He had never had a second life. He had been possessed. And yet, his Tom ... all they had shared in this illusory world, he was unable to spit on it. He still cherished these beautiful and false memories!

If only he had not had pity on the skinned creature, on the accidental Horcrux! He would not have loved a dream, he would not have been suffering so much from Tom's betrayal ...

Dumbledore leaned toward him, looking polite and interested, but Harry stubbornly refused to turn his head. If he met the tranquil gaze of the old man, he would not be able to contain his anger. He would shake up the deceased so strongly that his stupid lessons about morals and wisdom would sprout through all his orifices and squirt on the milky walls of Harry's mental prison, a prison which looked like King's Cross.

His lack of civility did not seem to disturb Dumbledore.

"I'm sorry to disabuse you, Harry. In truth, I had not considered you could be attracted to the agonizing being to the point of devouring it and falling into its world. A mistake with my calculations, most likely ... Would you be kind enough to tell me what happened to you?" he asked softly, which only reinforced Harry's annoyance.
Yet the Gryffindor forced himself to loosen his fists and his teeth and began to narrate his story.

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The very beginning of his second life came back to him with difficulty, like a dream one can hardly remember when one has woken up.

*It's because everything was just a dream!* he thought bitterly.

"I ... I ate the bloody thing. At the time, I couldn't tell why but today I know better. I wonder how I could have been so blind. I've seen enough Horcruxes in my life to be aware they naturally attract people, they make you want to keep them as close as possible ... In short, like a fool, I reintegrated the Horcrux I had just been separated from. And then I grotesquely carried it in my belly!"

Dumbledore did not laugh, he did not say a word. Harry went on.

"At one point, the thing began to fidget and I felt as if I were giving birth from the inside, losing all my matter. Everything disintegrated and I found myself in the body of a newborn."

"Tom Riddle, I guess," Dumbledore commented, almost bored, as if the story Harry was telling him was commonplace and predictable.

"Himself. I really thought I'd gone back in the past, I thought I had a mission. I thought God, or Magic, was giving me the opportunity to kill Voldemort before he committed crimes. But afterwards, when the conscience of ... when *his* conscience began to emerge, I totally changed my mind. I should have realized at that moment I was bewitched, that he was corrupting my mind! But I was fond of *him* and since his third birthday I've been convinced, he had convinced me that my mission was actually to save him. I was his only family, I was his imaginary friend. I adopted him, I pampered him, Sir! How could I've been so stupid!"

Harry monologued for a long time. With a rage tinged with nostalgia, he confided to Dumbledore about the first years spent in the Horcrux's world. He recounted the orphanage, the discovery of magic, Billy Stubbs' rabbit, the cave by the sea, Tom's little misdeeds. He spoke of them starting Hogwarts, of the Slytherin's difficult temper and of the unhealthy development of their relationship.

He should have been ashamed, but he took a malicious, almost cathartic pleasure in listening his obscene confidences resounding in limbo. He described to Dumbledore, sometimes with a little too much detail, the long sessions of carnal exploration which had punctuated their schooling; he did not conceal from him they loved each other in a perverse and unbalanced way.

In passing, he evoked the doubts of young Tom about his imaginary friend's identity.

"I sometimes felt him entering into my mind and sneaking up information about me ... I thought he was just curious. If I had known, at the time, that he was only pretending not knowing a thing about me! What could he ignore of me, he who had lived into my scar? He deceived me so skillfully, he made me believe in so many improbable things ... and I've swallowed everything!"

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When Harry was about to talk about the Chamber of Secrets, Dumbledore interrupted him. "Until then, you had no suspicion about the nature of the world in which you were living?"

"There were ... Yes, there were anomalies,” the teenager conceded, “but I never tried to understand. Yet they were clues, telling me I wasn't really in the past but in a different world, a world which didn't exist. For example, when you set fire to his wardrobe at the orphanage, he didn't scream. He
also didn't ask where he could get a wand.

“Also, at Ollivanders, my wand’s box was stowed exactly in the same place as it would be half a century later – it makes no sense. And when we started school, Theastrals were pulling the carriages, whereas Hagrid didn't domesticate them until much later ... There were also impossible phenomena, almost hallucinatory, like poor Turnip's hanging or our chat with the snake in the country. One day the Basilisk even whistled a musical tune, that's an obvious evidence I was in a dream!”

Dumbledore looked thoughtful.

"Please, go back to your story, Harry."

Harry explained how, after Myrtle's death, he no longer doubted he was the cause of Evil in Tom. In spite of his efforts to fix the past, dark events were happening as before. The Horcrux, that damn Horcrux, it had succeeded in making him believe Voldemort had never been bad, that it was he, Harry, who had driven him to commit all these crimes!

The Horcrux had introduced him to a Tom Riddle aspiring to nothing but to offer a body to his imaginary friend. Such a noble, pathetic goal! He had made him believe it was Harry's bad choices which had pushed the Slytherin towards Voldemort. All this was part of its plan to destroy Harry's soul, for that was its true purpose.

Harry noticed with frustration that Dumbledore was not interested in the Horcrux's evil stratagem. The deceased seemed strangely absent-minded and only interrupted him to ask for details about things that did not matter, since they had never happened.

"Could you tell me about the Horcruxes you created in this world, Harry?" he asked. “By the end of sixth year, Tom Riddle had two, right?"

"Whatever," Harry snapped. “We had a theory, a beautiful and stupid theory, most likely dictated by the only true Horcrux. Anyway, when I was in its world, I was sure that in order to split a soul in two, one had to experience simultaneously two contradictory drives: a life drive and a death drive.”

"Eros and thanatos," Dumbledore pointed out.

"That's it, and that's where it gets vicious. What enabled to create Horcruxes wasn't the indifference of a monster but the hesitation of a man. Horcruxes were not profoundly evil. On the contrary, they enabled to isolate in an object an evil feeling, like anger or fear. How could I've believed this bullshit?"

"Go on," Dumbledore told him.

"We committed one murder in two. I'm the one who killed the Riddles, the one who changed Morfin's memory! I was as guilty as he was and even guiltier than he was, because I knew. I could have, I should have, found a way to prevent these murders. I did not try. In the end, it would have made very little difference, for none of this was real ... And to say I've let fictitious crimes eat away at my peace of mind...

And to say I've loved a fictitious being, he added mentally.

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"No matter how much you blame yourself, Harry, I know you," Dumbledore said. “Even under Tom Riddle's spell, you wouldn't have allowed him to kill so many people without a good reason. The quest for immortality doesn't seem to me to be one. Why all the other Horcruxes, Harry?"
"Is it really useful to talk about imaginary events?" Harry sighed, but he still explained. "Tom didn't intend to create Horcruxes at first. He only planned to learn from them in order to imagine a protocol which would allow me to have a proper body. If we could separate our two souls --"

"By killing."

"Yes, by killing!" Harry exclaimed in horror. "I know, it's miserable, but I was desperate, I was crazy about him, I feel terrible now! You have no idea what it's like to share the same body, Professor."

"No, I have no idea," Dumbledore said softly.

"In short, that was the initial plan, but my first crisis upset everything."

"A crisis?"

"When Tom was almost the same age as my first life's body ... well, as me, if this is still the 2d of May 1998, I started to get weaker. I was dying. Tom was forced to transfuse a piece of his soul into the Diary so he could get back the fragment of mine which was there. That's how he delayed the deadline, that's how he kept making my guilt grow healthily. I guess the Horcrux hoped that, after a while, I would collapse under the weight of my sins. It did everything it could in order to make me disgusted with my own selfishness."

"The deadline?"

"All the remaining of my second life, I had crises of agony, Professor, at increasingly shorter intervals. The first one, as I've just told you, was after seventeen years, nine months, and a day. The next one after eight years, ten months and sixteen days, and so on. I should have understood these crises were not evil. It was just my body struggling to surface. But as a bloody idiot, I wanted to stay in the dream."

"You said earlier that Tom finally did not use the Horcruxes to give you a body, even if it was his original plan. Has Tom been forced to create Horcruxes, in order to save your presence during your crises?"

"Indeed. He had to sacrifice a part of his soul so mine would persist. I then returned to this world of moonbeans, at once happy to be with him again, and horrified to survive thanks to the death of another man. The Horcrux could not have invented a more ingenious process to hurt me. I owe my life to my mother, a second time."

"Hum," Dumbledore was twisting the tip of his beard. "Please, continue with your story."

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Harry spoke of the forced revelation of his identity under Veritaserum in the Chamber of Secrets during Tom's seventh year.

"There's plenty of drama," Dumbledore smiled. "If I understand you correctly, Tom had finally learned you came from the future and that e would become a dark wizard, but he still didn't know a thing about the prophecy?"

"Yeah. And that too was a clue," Harry muttered. "Me, such a poor Occlumens, hiding something so important to Voldemort? I believed it, though."

He soon moved quickly on Borgin & Burkes and Hepzibah Smith, but he did not fail to mention
another inexplicable fact, another clue of the Horcrux's deception.

“Hepzibah did not die the day we got the Cup and the Locket. I killed her years later. And I thought it was strange, but I was too lazy, too afraid to ask myself the right questions ...”

"The Cup and the Locket were not Horcruxes yet when Tom went on an initiatory trip?" Dumbledore asked, as if he had not heard Harry's comments.

"That's it," Harry replied impatiently. "Otherwise, our rituals would have failed."

With less anger than sadness, he depicted the full moon nights' rituals, the transformation of the Diadem, hardly found, into a Horcrux and the return of Tom Riddle to England after years of travel.

"Full moon nights' rituals, all because Lupin ... Lupin is ..." the teenager stammered, the image of Remus Lupin and Nymphadora Tonks lying in the Great Hall in mind.

Though imprecise, the picture was painful.

"This filthy Horcrux has played around with me," he concluded with aversion.

He did not linger over the two years Tom had spent at the head of the Death Eaters and finally came to the day of their conversation with Dumbledore, to the day the four Founders' relics had finally been gathered in the Room of Requirement and nothing had happened.

"In any case, the legend of the four Relics has most likely been completely made-up by the Horcrux, inspired by the Deathly Hallows' tale. Anyway, I now know why our initiatory trip's tent made me think so much of ours, of the one Hermione, Ron and I used. It was the very same! The Horcrux stupidly picked up some of my memories to build its world, and I haven't noticed anything.

Again, Dumbledore did not seem interested in this new evidence of the unreality of Harry's second life.

"You say I left Tom Riddle in my office with the Sorting Hat? Alone?"

"Yes, Sir," Harry replied quickly. "But this is not the most important, listen to the whimsical turn of the next events! Although we could not appeal to the four Relics' power, Gryffindor's sword wasn't useless. It improved our ritual. You see, after having absorbed holy waters – I went to India in this dream! – it now had the ability to separate a soul from a body. Tom was performing seppuku and I thought it was absolutely normal that he was unscathed! A dream, nothing but a dream ...”

Dumbledore looked surprised but he did not interrupt Harry and the boy kept talking.

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Harry brought up the homeless Muggle's and Hepzibah Smith's murders. Their deaths had extended his life expectancy but they had defiled the cup and the locket, items needed for the rituals of full moon nights.

He spoke of their stay in Australia, as well as of the shorter and shorter deadlines in the early 1960s. He mentioned the disappearance of Gryffindor's sword, the creation of the Inferi, Tom's distress and his own resignation in front of his impending death. He finally came to the morning of June 23, 1962.

"On that day your soul left Tom's body ... is that the end of your adventure?"
"Not at all, I've been in pain much longer," Harry grumbled. "I could not communicate with Tom but I was still there. I existed, very feeble, as a trace or as a memory. I've been stuck in this illusion for many more years ..."

"But what did he think of it? Did he feel free, being at last alone in his body? Was he happy you had disappeared?"

"Ah", breathed Harry, bitter. "No. Tom Riddle, in this unlikely parallel universe, loved me more than anything, Professor. When I died, he promised to be the eternal guarantor of my passage on earth. Grieving over me had become his reason for living. You were right, Voldemort knows nothing about love ... but he knows how to fake it to perfection."

Dumbledore said nothing, so Harry resumed his story. His speech lacked coherence and accuracy. He managed to tell that Tom had suddenly forgotten him one morning and that he had gone back to England to find the Death Eaters, but the next vicissitudes were beyond him. It was like trying to write a story based on a dream.

That was exactly that.

"All this dreamlike period ... it looked like an endless blackout, interspersed with brief hallucinations. My body should have been in a deep sleep phase, where one dreams little. I was witnessing tortures and murders, but it was not me, I was a spectator ... I could feel, from afar, the melancholy of Voldemort. And then, after several years, I began to regain strength."

"Let me guess ... After seventeen, nine months and a day, isn't it?"

"I can't say precisely, but it probably comes close," Harry admitted. "Anyway, the war was in full swing, the Order knew how to defend itself and Voldemort had a migraine."

xXx

Harry talked for a long time about Severus Snape and Peter Pettigrew, more in order to postpone the end of the story than anything else. It was too fresh, too hard. If he could never talk about the Horcrux's death, if he could never think about it again, he might perhaps be able to get on with his first, his only, life.

He would treat his grief as an unreal feeling, for it came from unreal events. Yes, he might be able to convince himself that his pain was just the backlash of a particularly realistic nightmare and that it would disappear at the same time than the fog of sleep and limbo.

Lucky for him, Dumbledore was fascinated by the prophecy.

"Why do you think Voldemort chose you, rather than little Neville Longbottom?"

"My name was familiar," Harry replied. "I was him, I shared his body for so many years, it's natural he had his heart set on the Potters! In addition, my father reminded him of Sirius, who himself reminded him of Grimmauld Place ... And I've already told you, haven't I, that he had a problem with this house? Even if he had forgotten me, he was looking for me everywhere. It's strange, isn't it? But a Horcrux's way of thinking is mysterious, maybe it was just a creative way of torturing me."

"Captivating," Dumbledore said, without irony. "But it looks like the outcome of your story is coming ..." "

Harry took a deep breath and blinked several times. The tragic events of the year 1981 were so recent, so clear in his memory it seemed odd to relate them using past time. His father was falling in
the corridor, dead, every time Harry closed his eyes. His mother's cries and tears echoed in his ears. And the huge green eyes of the boy in the crib haunted his mind.

*It happened just a few hours ago, just before I woke up. It's so sharp! And yet, it sounds surreal in the stagnant and eternal limbo. My second life was a mad dream, during which I've lived terrible and extravagant things. Now I've woken up and everything is calm around me, this nightmare makes no sense, but at the same time, I find it hard to believe none of this has really happened. Nothing was real and yet I am no longer the same. How is it possible?*

No one answered Harry, so the teenager eventually resolved to tell the end of his second life.

"Pettigrew managed to become the Secret Keeper. By late October, he gave my parents' address to Voldemort, who patiently waited for Hallowe'en night."

"Were you afraid, Harry?"

"Oh no!" the Gyffindor denied, louder than he would have liked. "I'd finally came to understand what he, what it was, I was eager to get out of this fantasy world and I knew Hallowe'en 1981’s events would enable me to kill the Horcrux. I wasn't afraid to kill it, but I've got to say, I was totally freaked out by the consequences of its death. If I was right, after the Horcrux's destruction, I'd have to wake up and face the truth, which means ... find myself in limbo again and accept Tom had never existed."

xXx

"There's something I don't quite understand, Harry," Dumbledore said softly. "The Horcrux's plan was to destroy you on Hallowe'en. He hoped that the Death Curse, rebounding and turning against you two, against your shared body, would choose your weak soul rather than his. How come you managed to get through this?"

Harry laughed briefly and disenchantedly.

"I must be immune to *Avada Kedavra*," he joked piteously. "For real, I guess my desire to see us dead was so great the wand just obeyed my will."

Dumbledore remained silent for a moment, looking at King's Cross' cloudy ceiling. Meanwhile, Harry thought about the last moments of the Horcrux. In truth, everything had been very fast and very confused, and he felt like something was escaping him. Had Voldemort's wand truly acceded to Harry's desire for murder, thereby betraying its master? Could an Unforgivable be so easily diverted?

In the thick of things, it seemed plausible but in the silence of limbo ... There was most likely something else, another way of explaining the Horcrux's death.

"Sir, now I think about it, I'm pretty sure Voldemort remembered everything at the last moment," he said in a strangled voice. "He killed my mother, he cast the Death Curse at little Harry ... but just before *Avada Kedavra* hit the baby's forehead ... I think his memories of our cohabitation came back to him."

"Merlin's hat."

Harry finally turned towards Hogwarts' former Headmaster. The old wizard did not look serene. He seemed to meditate cautiously on what Harry had said to him, as if he were afraid of his own thoughts, as if he were questioning everything he had always believed in.

"It should not have happened like this," he whispered at last. "I thought ... yes, I thought you'd be the
one who would kill the Horcrux, but not that –"

"He committed suicide, right?" Harry cut him off, terrified. "The Horcrux regretted all his actions and he killed himself, he was the one who wanted to die and that's why the Curse turned against him!"

_Oh, Tom …_

He pulled nervously on his hair, looking for an answer in Dumbledore's tense face. For the first time since he had proof that the baby, the Horcrux and Tom were one and the same, his heart was filled with hope.

Tom may have been a Horcrux, but he had been human enough to choose to rid the world of his presence. He had killed himself, he who had been conceived to be immortal.

"Oh, I'm afraid you're wrong, Harry," Dumbledore frowned. "In fact, in my humble opinion, you misinterpreted all the things which had happened to you during your absence."

Flabbergasted, Harry looked at him with big bright eyes.

"You don't think I've really been in the past, Professor? There is enough evidence that – "

"Oh no, if it makes you feel better, I don't doubt that everything you have experienced was some kind of dream. But it is because it was a dream that your adventure can be interpreted in so many ways," Dumbledore analyzed. "Let's start with the end, what do you think? You say that Tom's memories suddenly returned to him and that, eaten up with remorse, Tom wanted to die, which deviated the Death Curse. In my opinion, the truth is a little more complex than that. Do you know how a person who has torn their soul and created Horcruxes can put themselves back together?"

The answer gushed out instantly, as if Harry had been possessed by Hermione: "Remorse. Authentic remorse can mend a mutilated soul, but it's so destructive, so painful that the one who tries might die."

"That's right," Dumbledore smiled, looking pleased. "What attracted _Avada Kedavra_ was not your own desire to kill Voldemort. It was a much more bitter feeling, which came from the Horcrux itself. Remorse alone which ravaged him."

"It does not change anything. It was a Horcrux. All that matters is that it's gone now," Harry said as his heart crackled gently into his chest and as the hope which had sprouted in his belly a moment earlier had turned into a skeletal figure.

**XXX XXX XXX**

The two wizards sat silently beside each other, alone in the motionless limbo. Harry spent a long time motivating himself to get up, to join the world of the living, to complete his task, and once Voldemort and Nagini would be dead, to cry all the tears he wanted in a cupboard at 12, Grimmauld Place. As he managed to lift his butt, Dumbledore motioned for him to sit down again.

"Not so fast, Harry. Let me tell you another story. In many respects, it resembles the one you have just told me. However, it is as different as two translations of the same Beedle's tale. It is another version, another *interpretation* of your dream."

"Do I really have the time, Professor? Voldemort …"

"Voldemort can wait. Your heart will not survive long in the world below, if you leave limbo
Harry wanted to move. He needed to return to the Forbidden Forest, which promised him action and distraction. During his duel to the death with Lord Voldemort, he would not have time to think and therefore no time to hurt.

But Dumbledore was peering at him out of the corner of his eye, with a smile that was not perfunctory, so Harry swallowed his fidgeting and forced himself to stay on the bench.

The former Headmaster joined his fingers and took a storyteller's voice: "Once upon a time, a piece of soul – accidentally separated from its original body – found refuge in a child's scar. It did not mean him harm, on the contrary, it lent him its magic and powers, never invading his mind. It was so careful, the boy simply never noticed he was hosting a fragment of soul which was not totally his.

"Years passed and the two souls cohabited peacefully, even if the accidental Horcrux was aware that the connection between the boy and Voldemort was unfortunate and that it put its host in danger. One day a Death Curse separated the boy and the clandestine soul. The Horcrux could not survive outside the body of his host. It was agonizing in limbo, time was running for it. But instead of abandoning it to his fate, the boy reincorporated his parasite and was transported into a long, long fantasy.

"The Horcrux brought the boy into a world of memories. It was honest. It did not hide from him the awful things it had committed. However, it managed to find an explanation for each of its actions. It tried to show to the boy that Tom Riddle was not necessarily a bad person. Even if one could not excuse his actions, one could understand them.

"The Horcrux invented a beautiful adventure, a story of dramatic love and, by a miracle, the boy wanted to play along. Indeed, the boy fell in love, although he knew that the end of their romance could not be anything but tragic. He gave the Horcrux a chance, and the Horcrux was happy, very happy to be loved.

"But the fantasy could not last forever, it was only the last whim of a being in agony. Then, once its dream was realized, once it had obtained the boy's love, it had let remorse take it towards the other world.

"Harry, I do not think the Horcrux which lived in your scar was a bad part of Voldemort. I sincerely believe that it was the best fragment of Tom Riddle and that it simply wanted, before leaving your body definitively, to make you aware of its existence."

"I knew it existed," Harry whispered.

"You did not learn it until very late, through the memories of Severus Snape," Dumbledore replied. "The Horcrux wanted you to realize the importance it had in your life. It did not want to die without anyone to weep over it. That was its selfish dying will, but never forget, Harry, that its dearest wish, as you yourself have said many times, has always been to give you a body. The Horcrux wanted to free you from its curse, to give you back your own body."

Harry had trouble breathing. He called Tom in silence, prayed for him to answer, but the Horcrux was no longer with them.

Why reveal your existence to me, if it is to disappear at once? he lamented mentally.

He could imagine without difficulty Tom's, or the Horcrux's answer:

Harry, it's so simple. I wasn't afraid of dying but of being forgotten ... forgetfulness is the worst thing
that can happen, that's true death. You were the only one who knew about me and who was still alive. I trusted you, I knew you weren't going to die for a long time. So I showed you my life. I made you fall in love and I fell in love – I might have been already in love since the beginning, who knows? Our try is no bad spell, but it will follow you forever, it's now part of you and until you die, you will be the guarantor of my existence. You will watch over our memories and you will treasure the scar you hated so much, for it's the proof I've existed. I have disappeared, Harry Potter, but you can only declare me dead when you'll forget me, and it will never happen.

xXx

After Dumbledore's speech, Harry got up at once. He was not afraid to go and kill the Dark Lord. On the contrary, he wanted him dead from the bottom of his soul, for he was sure now that the wizard waiting for him in the Forbidden Forest was not Tom.

Lord Voldemort's remaining piece of soul had nothing to do with the piece of soul Harry had cherished. Even if they had one day formed one and the same soul, it had been years since they had become two different entities. As proof, Harry hated one and loved the other. And one was still alive while the other was dead.

*I must destroy what remains of Voldemort! How could the worst pieces of his soul continue to exist, when his best fragment, the Horcrux I have housed, has been destroyed?*

"I’ve got to go back, haven't I?” he asked resolutely.

"Like last time, that is up to you.”

"I still have a choice?”

"Oh yes. Trains continue to come and many people are waiting for you at the last stop, it seems to me.”

Harry watched the evanescent rails and wondered if the accidental Horcrux was not at the end of the tunnel. That was not an insane idea. Instead of dying in limbo, unable to return to the world beneath, unable to get to the other side, the Horcrux had died trying to bring its soul together by remorse. In the form of the bloody baby, it probably would not have been able to enter the other world ... but in the form of a honest piece of soul ...

*It was not an ordinary Horcrux. Death did not destroy it, on the contrary, it freed it from Voldemort's hold. And now it ... he ... he is waiting for my soul.*

For a quivering second, Harry considered taking a train to join Tom. It was tempting and easy, he almost heard him calling, lovingly.

But the dead could wait and if their story had not been a lie but a fantasy, if Tom had really loved him ...

Suddenly, the question which had obsessed Harry when he had reborn in Tom, burst into his throat: "Tell me one last thing," he said hastily. “Was this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?”

Dumbledore smiled.

"Of course it happened inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that was not real?"
Harry breathed at length, relieved. His second life had happened in Dreamtime, but that did not mean it had not happened. Dreamtime was just another world, a more subtle, more astral world, but a world none the less. Tom and he had lived in this dream, they had loved each other, and nothing now could make him doubt the reality of their story.

Harry left, without a glance at Dumbledore and at the station.

After all, sooner or later he would go back to King's Cross and ride a train. He would go to the end of the tunnel and at last join the one he would have missed all his life, a being without whom he felt so incomplete he could have sworn it was not a Horcrux but a fragment of his own soul.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

About the end: You sure have noticed the prologue and the epilogue answer each other. Indeed, even though I wrote Harry and Tom's story as being the Horcrux's dream or fantasy, it can be read in ignoring this 'detail'. In short, for those whose heart is bleeding, conscientiously ignore the two passages in limbo (and don't be too angry with me). Moreover, I don't really think this end is a 'everything was only a dream' end. Be sure our two cuties have loved each other for real.

About this story in gen: I spent eight months on this project for the french version, a few more for the english one. For the first time, I had a precise plot in mind, with defined chapters and themes. It's also the first time I work with such an important timeline and that I try to be as canon as possible. In short, there are many reasons why I am sad, proud and happy to finish this story, but one of them is that it enabled me to read very touching messages.

So I thank you all for giving this long story a chance. I'm always amazed (and moved!) that my fanfictions find such adorable and understanding readers. Thank you, really, to those who have followed this story from the beginning, to those who have arrived along the way, to those who read this story once it was complete, to those who have reviewed a little and those who reviewed passionately.

As I said, a Coda will increase this story of one chapter and it will be sweety. Because you deserve it and because, yeah, I love Harry and Tom. Well, 'sweety' doesn't mean 'Mpreg', 'Harry names his son after Tom', 'Tom resurrects'. But we'll visit the afterlife. Don't hesitate to leave a comment, here or on FF.net :)
Harry did not need to open his eyes to know that he was, many years after May 2d, 1998, back in limbo. Yet he was not lying on the smooth, cool surface of King’s Cross. He was curled up into a ball on a damp, grainy soil smelling like dirt and stagnant water. The setting reminded him less of London station than of the Amazonian rainforest.

But the sultry air and the tropical substrate did not deceive him. Harry could recognize limbo's eerie and dreamlike atmosphere with his eyes tightly closed.

After long seconds, the wizard finally unglued his eyelids from one another and took a look around him. Everything was as in his memories. Water was stagnating in a basin, just a few inches from his face. A thick bare branch was suspended above his head. And to his right an immense window covered with fingerprints reflected his stupefied look.

Limbo had nothing to do with King's Cross anymore. They were still as white, still as ethereal, but now it looked like a *vivarium*.

A very banal *vivarium*, moreover, just worthy of a communal zoo, but a *vivarium* Harry knew well and that he carried in his heart, even if he had only seen it once in his life, It was so long ago ...

It was in front of this very glass cage that he had discovered he could talk to snakes. It was in this Surrey zoo on Dudley's birthday that he *really* became aware he was not an ordinary boy.

King's Cross ... King's Cross, this gigantic and turbulent station, how much he had loved it! It would always be the gateway to the magical world, the place where, for the first time, a sense of belonging
had burst in his chest. According to him, the railway station was the ultimate turnaround place.

The fact Limbo appeared to him as a white King's Cross had never surprised Harry, quite the contrary. After all, Limbo was nothing but a mental in-between, it takes the form of one's conception of the 'intermediary'. What other place than the London's station to represent the passage from one world to another?

But it was clear that Limbo had drastically changed. It was still so pure, but it was more humble. The ceiling height was ridiculous compared to the previous limbo's and let's not even talk about the decoration. However, this modest glass box was perfect for Harry.

For now Harry was older, the small unnamed zoo located a few miles from Little Whinging was a more important place for him than the imposing King's Cross. It was there that his life had taken an irreversible turn, more than a month before Hagrid told him he was a wizard, more than a month before he took the secret passage to Platform 9 3/4 for the first time.

It was at the zoo that his entire existence had been turned upside down, although he only understood that years later. But it was obvious now. How could he have stayed the same, after his human tongue had become forked, after he had suspected there was a snake in him?

In summary, the wizard liked vivarium Limbo a lot, although he felt no pain at the thought of leaving.

xXx

Harry stood up and noticed that, while he was daydreaming, the vivarium's glass had disappeared. It was so simple, the window to the other world was wide open ... He did not have to wait for a train, he just had to step forward. And that's what he did.

As soon as his left toes were on the other side of the vivarium, they began to disintegrate like the end of a cigarette that had just been lit. It was pretty, in truth. There was at the end of his foot a delicate golden halo, composed of tiny fragments of soul seeking to disperse in the air. It waved like the round smoke which escapes from a pipe and it was attracted by the rest of the world.

Before this unusual sight, Harry was not disturbed. Indeed, he did not suffer at all from this dissolution. On the contrary, he craved to let himself be dispersed, he dreamed of disappearing like this, like a weary vampire touched by the sun's blessed rays.

It would have been so easy for him to leave his dust-body in the hands of the flow! All struggle seemed absurd; what was the point of delaying the most tender end? Why be afraid, why refuse to get lost in the Universal Soul? Was he not returning to the Mother he would return whatever happened?

But even though the urge was strong, Harry resisted. He had one last thing left to do.

So the wizard collected all his strength, recalled to him the aura of particles coming from his toes and continued to move forward. Soon his whole foot, then his leg, and even a piece of his right hand were going up in smoke, and Harry, in spite of himself, with shame, enjoyed this impression of lightness.

This did not prevent him from doing all he could to reincorporate the runaway particles. He silently ordered his body to remain united; he begged the dust to stick to his skin.

But many were the particles which were too far away to hear him calling or which were too small to go against the flow. Wandering, unconscious, they no longer belonged to his soul ... Harry let them
go without shuddering. He did not have time to weep over their disappearance. He focussed all his attention on the still salvable pieces of his being. There were few, but he did not need much of them, to fulfill his last will.

When Harry was entirely on the other side of the vivarium, he no longer was made of matter. What had once been his body was now nothing more than a cluster of barely interconnected microscopic elements, a vague form, less precise than a phantom.

But although there were very few fragments left, the pain was as acute as when he was a living being. And it did hurt to fight against the flow! Each of his particles was itching, eager to join the rest of the universal soul, extending all around him.

For, having taken a step forward, Harry had definitely left Limbo. He had cross over into the world of souls, or rather, into the world of the Universal Soul, the soul from which all souls are born and the one to which all return, after the death of the body.

The Universal Soul was at once a sky and an ocean. It was a flow and a wind, it was blue and green, it was water and night. It was One and Multiple, for all the dead souls' particles it ingested, it immediately digested them.

It was an infinite and vibrant stretch of universe, nervous and rumbling, opaque as an *altostratus opacus* and translucent as an *altostratus translucidus*, and it reclaimed its own. Was it singing a lullaby or a siren song? Harry did not know. On the other hand, he did not doubt he would soon succumb to the maternal voice. But not yet.

He struggled to navigate the waters of the endless Mother, swimming with difficulty, with a mixture of respect and apprehension, in the Being which had been his cradle and was about to become his coffin.

But not yet, he repeated. Before giving back his soul to the world, he had to find someone ...

It was not his parents. Although very weak, Harry was even less deluded than in his lifetime. His parents, but also Sirius, Lupin, Tonks and even Snape, all the people he would have liked to meet on the other side of the veil were already lost forever in the universal soul. If the persons he loved had waited for him, he would have felt their reassuring presence at the very moment he had set foot outside the vivarium.

Harry could not blame them. The idea of releasing the tension he exerted to keep his elements in place seduced him as a love promise and, had it not been for Tom, he would also have run straight into the arms of the Mother Soul.

The powerful flow echoed around him like an *Imperius* or a *Felix Felicis* order, telling him to join the harmony. Yes, that was it, going against the flow in the Universal Soul's sky was like going against Felix. It was dumb, but Harry still was a bit dumb, for even though he was dead and disembodied, he was still a bit human.

xXx

As a result, Harry did his best not to lose focus and he continued to explore the Mother Universe, looking for another individual soul which was like him, struggling to stay in one piece or so.

It took him more time than he wished. He lost several of his elements, but after drifting for a long time he finally met the Horcrux.

He recognized him as one recognizes his own reflection in a distorting mirror, without a doubt,
without a second thought. That thing floating in the Universal Soul, gasping like a Japanese carp, it was Tom, it was the Dark Lord's accidental Horcrux, it was a fragment of soul which had not been nor quite Tom Riddle's, nor quite Harry Potter's. Well, that was what was left of it.

The Horcrux, which already was only a piece of soul when it had joined the world of dead souls on the day of the Battle of Hogwarts, was now only a crumb. It had been confronting the flow during all those years, grabbing itself, like a pathetic shrimp with broken legs clinging on a rock, and the terrible flow had carried away most of its carapace, leaving it every time more naked, more vulnerable.

Its particles did not shine like Harry's, with a lively and joyful glow. They crackled faintly and looked like a very old Christmas garland, its few remaining bulbs busting a gut working, in a pitiful effort.

Yet, when Harry found the Horcrux in this saddening state, he felt no pity. If destiny had decided otherwise, their places could have been reversed, and if it had been him, Harry, who had had to pass into this world first, he too would have waited for his Other self to join him for ages, he would have relentlessly fought the flow, till Tom would find him or till his exhausted soul would completely crumble apart.

He had not considered for a moment that the Horcrux could have done things differently. And Tom had not disappointed him. He was there, blunted and shattered, yeah, shining with great difficulty, but within reach of particles. Harry was not thankful. That was how things were to happen. But if he still needed one, he had before him the proof his mental adventure with the accidental Horcrux had not been a dream. Despite his lies, despite his dark status, Tom had loved him.

Harry came a little closer. Their respective particles were so close ... if one of the two souls was to slightly release the tension, they would inextricably get mixed up. By mutual agreement, Tom and Harry were postponing the fateful moment.

They began to wiggle awkwardly against each other, holding their breath, holding back their dust, celebrating in their own way their first encounter or their last reunion. It lasted only a short time, truth to tell, just enough time to murmur an oath without echo in the world of the dead. And they felt like algae a fish's tail would have accidentally stirred or like the tentacles of a jellyfish, lovingly entangled.

When they had had enough of pretending to be alive and in the flesh, their individual souls finally blended together, in a rush as tender as an elusive sigh. Those who had once had a body allowed themselves to be dispersed, and their dust amalgamated, attracting one another, for they were saturated with static electricity.

Nothing painful or harrowing, in this. No tearing or bursting, nothing oppressive; simply a dual soul giving itself over to the elementary unity. And at last they found themselves intimately mixed, and it was impossible to guess that they had ever been anything but a single ray of dust.

Nobody was there to laugh at the absurdity of their story, for they had long wanted to separate their two souls and, in the end, they had only managed to confused themselves even more. No one was there either to laugh at the irony of their destiny, at the fact their only way to become One had been to become crumbs.

No, their audience, the Universal Mother, did not laugh. It was a delight for her to see her two children annihilate themselves one into the other, collapsing on themselves after such a long separation. It waited patiently for their emulsion to be complete before recalling them, so they would drown for good in the simplest and largest unit.
When nothing remained of them but a sand lump, which quartz grains could not be distinguished from its shellfish remnants, the Soul among souls made its waves rumble. The flow quickly swept away the small pile of dust.

xXx

It would be wrong, however, to say that Harry's and Tom's souls had disappeared. For every particles of every individual souls, after having slided for some time in unison, into the waters and the tumultuous skies of their mother, end up sinking, falling upon the world of the living.

And they feed a river, and they cause a storm, and they make a child teething. Splinters of Harry and Tom were falling on Earth and in every being and every thing they touched, they created a spark of magic.

THE END FOR GOOD

Chapter End Notes

When I talk about 'Dust', I'm refering to Philip Pullman (His Dark Materials is the best saga ever, I'm sorry Harry Potter).
When I talk about Individual and Universal Souls, I'm refering to Plotinus, a neoplatonist. The Enneads is terribly difficult to read though.
You're totally free to imagine Harry's life and death as you want to.

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This story is finally over! Thank you everyone for reading this monster. Do not hesitate to leave a comment on Ao3 or on FF.net, it was a pleasure to translate my fav work and such a treat to read your comments.
(Special shout out for JukeSkylar who was a big support during this story <3 <3 )

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!