The Dark Prince's Coronation

by Madriddler

Summary

After using the Husk to revive Tom at the end of the Third Task, Harry thought that their troubles were over. But he was wrong. Faced with a plotting coup from the older Death Eaters and Dumbledore trying to figure out Tom's identity, The Dark Lord and his Prince must fight a battle on all sides in order to create their perfect reality. And then there's Umbridge...
Chapter 1

The Dark Prince’s Coronation

Chapter I

On the top of a hill was a manor that overlooked the village. Its windows were boarded, tiles missing from the roof, and ivy was spreading unchecked along its face. Once a fine-looking manor, and easily the largest and grandest building for miles around, the Riddle House now laid damp, derelict, and unoccupied. Which is why the community of Little Hangleton was surprised to see truckload after truckload of construction drive towards it. Trucks carrying lumber, words, metal, tools—everything needed to build a home was making their way through Little Hangleton towards the manor. Whispers started to grow around the community of a new owner for the manor. A boy of just seventeen who looked to be a relative of the poor Riddles who tragically died in that manor nearly half a century ago. Curiosity grew in the village as people started to make the trek up to the forgotten manor to catch a glimpse of the teen. People were coming back with stories of his handsomeness, of his tall figure and aristocratic face, of his hair as black as night and dark eyes that seemed to mesmerize anyone that falls under their gaze. Soon more and more people made the trip to the manor, peaking through shrubbery and fences, all in hopes of seeing the mesmerizing Riddle. He stood tall wearing a dark button-down shirt and black dress pants despite it being the beginning of summer. He seemed to be a person cloaked in mystery as his eyes never lingered from the propped-up table with multiple blueprints. The workers never seemed to wonder or think it odd that a seventeen year old was heading the project as they took the manor down brick by brick, saving what they could and throwing out the rest. Two weeks past like this, the young villagers (mostly girls around the mysterious boy’s age) flocked to the manor to watch the teen stand in front of blueprints, giving orders to the workers as they tore down the old Riddle Manor.

Stories about the boy began to rise about the boy. Some say that he is a long-lost relative, a grandson from a secret wedlock that just learned of his lineage. While others say that he is a distant cousin greedy for the Riddle prestige. Whoever the boy is, the entire village agreed that he was a complete mystery, especially when not a week later the last of the manor was taken down, leaving nothing but space and foundation, and another man came. This man looked older than the boy, much older, and was wearing a cloak over his clothes. The man and teen talked frequently, the man bowing down to the boy and calling him “master.” Perhaps he was a butler or servant? That only made the young teens more curious, some of them wanted to get close to the teen. Maybe he’ll hire them once the manor was finished? That way they would be close, and the mysterious teen would know their name.

The teen and butler stayed in a small cottage that seemed to spring up overnight. Only the bravest of the citizens would make their way to the cottage, but never look in.

One day, the teen seemed to disappear entirely from the construction site, leaving only the butler. That disappointed the villagers (especially the ambitious girls) but it only added to the rumor mill about his identity. Maybe he was in trouble with the law and had to hide, or maybe his family doesn’t know of the project and had to run away for a while. Maybe he went on vacation with his lover, an innocent fair girl who had a humble upbringing. The rumors about the boy with the mesmerizing eyes continued to grow and grow, each one more fantastical than the last. Then the owls started coming.
Tom smirked to himself. It was really all too easy. He picked a couple from random to play the role of his parents and after a few choice words, he had permission to stay at the Burrow with the Weasleys, and by extension, Harry. There was no way he would allow his prince to be separate from him during the summer. There were too many variables to look out for, too many ways for Dumbledore to find out about Harry’s affinity to the Dark Arts, to the Dark Lord. Besides, it is beneficial to learn more about your enemy. It was also to keep an eye on Draco Malfoy. Mrs. Weasley agreed that Tom would come and stay two weeks after summer break began, during which he began one of his long-term projects. The Dark Lord needed a proper manor, a proper headquarters, if he was going to rule. What better place than Riddle Manor? He would wipe away any traces of his muggle relatives and transform it into a manor fit for the Dark Lord and his beloved Prince. To escape suspicion from the wizarding world he decided to let muggles construct it with a wizard under his control supervise the project.

The Burrow, in Tom’s opinion, was somewhat impressive. It was a rather tall wooden house that seemed to be holding addition after addition without any thought of design and held up by magic. It seems that most of the Weasley clan was there except for three, one of which is apparently a Curse Breaker for Gringotts, the other a Dragon Keeper in Romania, and the third is not on talking terms with the rest of the family. Draco and Ronald were the ones who welcomed him. “Tom, there you are mate,” Ron grinned. “Harry isn’t here, we’re supposed to pick him up in two weeks but in the mean time you can make yourself at home.”

“Thank you very much Ronald,” Tom said, smiling politely. “Draco, it is good to see you in good health.”

“Thank you… Tom,” the Malfoy said. Tom gave him a polite smile and looked up at the Burrow. “So this is your home, Ron? I must say, it is impressive,” Tom said.

“But it needs a lot of chores,” Draco huffed.

“Yeah… it’s more dirty than usual now,” Ron blushed. “Dumbledore talked with my mum and dad and we’re actually moving somewhere later today.”

“Did he say where?” Tom asked.

“No, just that it’s the new headquarters for the Order of Phoenix or something,” Ron said.

“Interesting,” Tom said. “I’ve never heard of that.”

“It’s a group my parents were in with Dumbledore during the first war,” Ron said. “They fought against You-Know-Who and the Death Eaters… sorry Draco.”

Draco shook his head but said nothing.

“Anyway,” Ron continued, “why don’t you come in? Mum’s cooking breakfast.”

“I would love some,” Tom smiled. He followed Ron and Draco into the Burrow through a door that led straight into the kitchen it seemed. Mrs. Weasley was busy at the stove, waving her wand as pans cooked bacon and eggs simultaneously as a kettle bounced around with boiling water. Mrs. Weasley turned to see them as they walked in. “Tom! So good you can make it,” she said. “I hope your parents found the place alright.”

“They did, though unfortunately they’re needed back at home immediately so they could only have dropped me off,” Tom said, giving Mrs. Weasley yet another polite smile. He looked at the rather large table to see what he assumed were the Weasley twins, his new classmates. “Arthur’s already
at the Ministry for work, but he’ll be here for dinner. I am so sorry that everything is hectic around here. I’m sure Ron and Draco already told you, but Dumbledore is moving us to another place this afternoon and we have to finish packing.”

“Well not to worry, I have everything I need here,” Tom said. Mrs. Weasley looked at him confused as his hand went into his pocket and pulled out a minuscule trunk and a very tiny locked box filled with books that he decided would be good for Harry. Both the size of a piece of candy. “My parents didn’t want me to lug around my trunk and bookcase everywhere, so I’ve simply cast a Shrinking Charm as well as a Feather-light Charm on them once we reached here.”

“That’s smart,” one of the twins commented.

“What else do you expect from Harry’s egghead boyfriend?” the other said.

“I bet he reads an equation to put himself to sleep every night, don’t you think George?” the first said.

“If that’s the case Fred, then how did he and Harry get together?”

“I would gladly tell you in great detail, but I don’t think your mother would approve of it,” Tom said casually. The twins looked at Tom for a moment before laughing. Mrs. Weasley sighed and shook her head.

“What’s your name?” Fred asked.

“Thomas. Thomas Riddle. Though people just call me Tom,” Tom said walking to the twins and grasping their hands.

“Nice to meet’cha Tom! I’m Fred, this is my brother George,” Fred smiled.

“Harry told me all about you two,” Tom said. “But I think we already met… we’re in the same classes after all. Though you might not remember me, I was a quiet student.”

“Then we meet for real now,” George smiled. “Come on! Sit between us.” George moved over a seat to allow room for Tom to sit between the twins. Tom did so and Ron and Draco moved to sit.

“Draco, would you be a dear and set the plates on the table, please?” Mrs. Weasley asked.

“Yes ma’am,” Draco said without complaint. Tom watched amused as Draco moved to a cabinet, opened it up, and pulled out a stack of plates. He placed a plate in front of each person before sitting down next to Ron. He looked at Tom, who simply raised an eyebrow. “Everyone needs to help around here,” Draco said.

Tom chuckled. The twins looked at him and one of them said, “So Tom, how did you meet Harry?”

“It was during Harry’s second year,” Tom said. “We’ve met in the library, we talked and he somehow roped me into being his tutor. Naturally we got close, one thing led to another, and here we are.”

“That’s… a bit boring,” George said, “isn’t it Fred?”

“If it sounds boring to you, that is because I’m withholding information about Harry and mine activities,” Tom said so only the twins could hear it. “If you want to hear about Harry mewling and acting like an adorable animal in heat… you should ask him directly when we see him.”
The twins smirked. “I think we’re going to get along swimmingly Thomas,” Fred said. “Don’t you think so George?”

“A real trio we’ll make,” George said. “Would you please tell us that at least Harry was wearing something tight.”

“No, nothing tight,” Tom said. “Just something that I want to see again soon.” He gave a sly smirk. The twins seemed to eat that little fact up as they both gave perverted leers at Tom. “Is little Harry keeping something from us?” Fred asked.

“When did our little Harry grow into such a perverted boy?” George asked.

Tom laughed and smile. “Both are my fault. I have a way with words, and I’m afraid I seemed to have… mold Harry into who he is now. I’ve been teaching him the past two years, and still there is much that I wish for him to learn.”

“So it’s that kind of relationship huh,” Fred said. “Wicked.” They both gave approving smiles and thumbs-up.

There was the sound of pounding feet on a flight of wooden stairs. Tom looked to see the female Weasley come into the kitchen, still wearing her pajamas and looking like she just woke up. “Morning Mum, is breakfast ready yet?” Ginny yawned.

“Almost Ginny, have a seat,” Mrs. Weasley said looking over her shoulder.

Ginny turned to the table and froze, her eyes landing immediately at Tom. Tom smiled and stood up, extending his hand politely. “Hello Ginny,” he said, his smile looking too pointed. Ginny’s skin paled, all the blood from her face seemed to retreat as she stared at Tom. Her body started to shake.

“Hey Ginny,” George said as the twins stood up and hooked an arm each around Tom. “Meet our new friend, and Harry’s boyfriend— “

“Tom Riddle!” Fred announced.

A loud, sharp shriek pierced the air. Mrs. Weasley jumped, as did everyone else in the room as all eyes fell on Ginny. Her hand was outstretched, pointing at Tom as she screamed. Mrs. Weasley rushed to Ginny and wrapped her arms around her, hushing and petting Ginny’s hair as she tried to pull Ginny’s arm down, which was somehow as stiff as a board. “He-he-he-he…” Ginny stuttered, still pointing at Tom.

Tom donned a guilty, worrisome frown. “I’m sorry Mrs. Weasley,” he said.

“No, you did nothing wrong—Ginny what is the matter? This is Harry’s boyfriend, Tom, why are you screaming?” Mrs. Weasley asked, holding her daughter close.

“You-you can’t be here! Harry, he destroyed the diary—he showed me!” Ginny said frantically.

Tom frowned and looked at Mrs. Weasley. “I am sorry… this is sort of my fault. Harry told me about what happened to both of them. …The owner of the diary that Ginny wrote in during her first year… we share the same name and appearance apparently.”

“It’s him mum, I know it is,” Ginny sobbed.

“I should have guessed that something like this should have happened, I am so sorry Mrs. Weasley.
Perhaps I should go eat in another room? At least until Ginny calms down?” Tom said.

“Nonsense, you are our guest,” Mrs. Weasley said. “Let me talk with Ginny alone for a moment—come on dearie, let’s go have a sit, alright?” Mrs. Weasley said gently to Ginny whose eyes couldn’t leave Tom. Tom just watched until Ginny and Mrs. Weasley disappeared from sight before sitting down, sighing. “The boy who possessed the diary and I share the same name and looks, though we are not even closely related. He did some… horrible things in the past. That, plus what he put Ginny through, it is only understandable that she freaked out.”

“Well… we still like you Tom,” Fred said.

“Yeah, I’m sure it’s just a misunderstanding,” George said.

Tom nodded and leaned back into his chair. *Poor Ginny, she was helpful in the beginning. Giving me half her life unknowingly must have had unknown consequences. I hope she has a long happy life to her late forties, or even her fifties. That way I’d known that she would have had a long life without my meddling. Still, she had done her part, and done it well. I don’t need to be concerned about her anymore if at all. No need to end her like I would have long ago in my old life.*

Mrs. Weasley and Ginny came back a few minutes later, Ginny looking reasonably calmer although she refused to look Tom’s way, instead just staring down at her feet, and finally the table when she sat down. Mrs. Weasley quickly finished breakfast and served them all before sitting down herself. Tom made sure to not look at Ginny’s way, there was no reason to provoke or agitate the girl, but made sure to make small talk with Mrs. Malfoy and the other Weasleys. The twins seemed to latch onto Tom easily, offering to bring him to their room after breakfast was done.

Their room was filled with boxes upon boxes of joke toys and pranks. “We’ve made them all,” Fred said. “Gonna open a joke shop.”

“Once we get enough money,” George said.

“What are these?” Tom asked pulled out what looked to be a long flesh-colored string.

“Those are Extendable Ears,” Fred said proudly. “Simply put one end into your ear, put the other under a door, and you can listen to any conversation going on no matter how private.”

“Interesting,” Tom smirked, his mind already thinking of the possibilities. He looked around the room, noting that along with the boxes of product, the twins’ room was disgustingly messy with clothes laying around. “It seems to me that you two have not even start packing,” Tom said.

“Well… we meant to but…” George said sheepishly.

“We got bored,” Fred shrugged. “So we decided to work on something else.”

“I see…then I will leave you to it,” Tom said standing. “I want to look around your house a bit before we move again to wherever we’re going, and also I have a letter to write.”

“Is it a love letter?” Fred smirked.

“You can say that,” Tom said leaving the room. He looked around and decided to climb the stairs until he reached the top floor. There he found himself in a room surrounded by orange and two beds pushed together. “I guess this is Ronald’s room,” he said to himself. Finding himself alone, he closed the door and looked around the room until he found parchment, a quill, and a bottle of ink. Placing them on the desk, he aimed his wand at the door and locked it with the most powerful curse he knew.
It was time to work.

First off, however, he needed to write to Harry. It has been two days since his last letter and he hasn’t received a reply.

My loving Prince,

*It has been two weeks and still I miss your touch, your angelic voice is like a song ringing in my ears, and your scent is that of a nostalgic bliss. It has been two weeks since Summer tore us apart and though I write daily, I have yet received a reply from you, the boy who matters most in my heart. With each growing hour, my worry for you grows. I cannot help but think of increasingly horrible things that might have happened. Are my letters being intercepted? Is your odiously abhorrent Uncle taking your letters before ripping them up or throwing them in a fire? Have they harmed you? With each thought my worry for you Harry grows until I can do nothing but hate myself for this awful situation. I promised you a way out of your relatives but I have failed you. Harry my love, I promise that I will come to get you. I will steal away my prince from your captures and finally ravish you like I should have done weeks ago. But before I am able to do that, I must first move again. The Weasleys are moving to someplace Dumbledore thinks safer. Once we are settled I will waste no time in getting you. I need to see you again, I need to touch you again Harry. You have done so much for me, so much that even you do not know. I need my Prince at my side again.*

*Yours Forever,*

*Tom*

He read the letter twice before folding it gently. He placed it to the side before writing another letter.

*The bathrooms, four in total, should each hold a marble sink and full bathtub as well as a walled mirror. The master bathroom’s tub needs to be big enough to fit at least three people in and a full-length mirror that is approximately four feet in width. Make sure that there is a direct corridor from the master bedroom to the small cottage in case of emergencies. Remember not to kill any of the muggles once their work is done. Simply pay them and Obliviate those who need to forget about the basement. I will be sending constant requests via letters for now on.*

Another one.

*You will not move until you receive my permission. The Ministry and Dumbledore are currently at odds and we must use their quarrel to our advantage. Any disobedience will be met with the same punishment as Yaxley.*

And lastly.

*Yaxley. I do not approve of your actions nor of those of your co-conspirators. Do not take my youthful appearance for mercy or weakness. If either of you or conspirators plan to continue down your course, you will be used as an example for anyone else who wishes to doubt my judgement. I am not a man to be trifled with.*

With the letters written, Tom took his wand and conjured out three shadows which all took the shape of owls. He tied his orders to them and watched as they flew into the shadows of the room, disappearing from sight. With Harry’s letter he made sure that it was sealed properly and took it with him downstairs. Mrs. Weasley was washing the dishes from breakfast. “Mrs. Weasley…” he
said, putting on a likeable appearance. “I’ve written a letter… for Harry. Can I borrow an owl to send it to him?”

“Yes of course, you can borrow Ron’s. After that, can you be a dear and help Draco and Ron with the hens, it would be much appreciative,” Mrs. Weasley said, point towards the door that Tom came in from.

“Of course ma’am. … Can I ask how Ginny is doing? I feel so sorry for causing that reaction,” Tom said.

“Ginny is fine, she’s helping me do last minute laundry at the moment, but I think it would be best if you give her some space and time to get used to you.”

“Of course, Mrs. Weasley,” Tom said. He walked outside and saw Ron and Draco near a hen coop. Ron was feeding them as Draco just watched. He walked up to them and asked, “Ron, may I have your owl? I have a letter for Harry.”

“Huh, yeah sure,” Ron said. “One second.”

Tom turned his attention to Draco. “A Malfoy doing chores? I never thought I’d see the day,” he chuckled.

“I told you Tom… everybody needs to help out around here,” Draco said. “They don’t have any house-elves here. It’s actually… helping me.”

“I see, say no more,” Tom nodded. Ron threw the last of the feed into the coop and locked the door. “That’ll keep them good,” he said. He began to walk away, “Come on, I’ll show you to the feathery git.” Tom looked at Ron strangely while Draco chuckled. It seemed that in the two weeks, the Malfoy has successfully integrated into the Weasley lifestyle. Tom just hoped that Draco wouldn’t start dressing like them.

Ron led them up back into the Burrow and up the stairs to the top of the Burrow and into Ron’s room. Tom looked around, curious as he had not seen an owl when he was writing his letters in here. Ron walked over to his bed and said, “Wake up you useless bird.” He picked up what was the smallest owl that Tom has ever seen. It looked to be about the size of Tom’s fist. When the owl saw Tom’s letter it started hooting loudly in an excitable manner. “Pigwidgeon,” Ron said. “The most useless owl in the world. Give me the letter, I’ll tie it on him.”

Once the letter was tied, Ron opened the window and his owl started flying, dropping slightly before finding some sort of balance. Tom agreed to help Ron with last-minute packing once the owl was out of sight, his mind too focused on Harry. The afternoon came surprisingly swiftly and all of the Weasleys plus Tom and Draco, and a late-arrival from Granger, were lined up as Dumbledore walked in with some Order members that Tom remembered. The first was Kingsley Shaklebolt, an Auror, followed by a bald-headed wizard who Tom remembered was a smuggler. “Molly! Are we all here, good, good,” Dumbledore said. “I am sorry for the delay, and thank you so much for doing this Molly, we’ll be traveling by Floo. I believe it will be safest to get to where we need to.”

“And where is that, sir?” Draco asked.

“Huh? Oh yes… here,” Dumbledore gave a small slip of paper to Mrs. Weasley. She read it and looked up at Dumbledore, who motioned for her to pass it on. She did so and everyone read the small note on the slip of paper: 12 Grimmauld Place. The House of Black. Home of the traitor Regulus. How is it that now I remember him perfectly? He frowned in thought.
as he gave the slip of paper to Fred and George, both of whom somehow became his twin shadows.

“We all have read it? Perfect,” Dumbledore smiled. “Then we should be on our way. …Mr. Riddle, after you.”

“Of course sir,” Tom said, giving Dumbledore a polite smile.

“The floo powder is on the mantle,” Mrs. Weasley told Tom.

“Thank you,” Tom said quietly as he went to the mantle of the fireplace and opened a tin can that was only halfway filled with floo powder. “Number 12 Grimmauld Place,” Tom said clearly as he expertly threw the powder into the fireplace and stepped into the green flames. He couldn’t help but laugh to himself as he felt himself traveling away from the Burrow and to the House of Black.

This was all too easy.

Harry Potter had recently begun to favor dark colored clothing as well as dark green, especially dark green. He didn’t know if it was because of Tom or just growing up, but he found that recently half of his wardrobe consisted of shirts with dark colors, many silvers and greys, as well as emerald and jade. Today he was wearing a short-sleeved jade shirt with trousers.

It was one of the hottest days in summer yet. The past two weeks Harry spent trying to watch the news, to see if anything unexplainable has happened. The Daily Prophet tells him nothing, and Uncle Vernon isn’t allowing him to receive his normal letters. Harry frowned as he remembered the first day back with the Dursleys. Tom wrote him a letter and Dudley torn it from his hands. He laughed and told Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia about the love letter, which caused Uncle Vernon to toss the letter into the fire while calling Harry and Tom “flaming poofs.” Every day since that day, Uncle Vernon just chucked Harry’s letters into the fire.

Harry wished that he could do something, he wished he still had Wormtail’s wand. But Uncle Vernon had quick work of that. “Two! You have two bloody things?” Uncle Vernon yelled on the one time Harry tried to save the letters.

“Yeah! So give me my letters!” Harry yelled, gripping Wormtail’s wand.

“Give me that!” A fat purple hand slapped Harry’s cheek so hard he found himself being disorientated. His grip on the wand loosened slightly and Uncle Vernon grabbed the wand and threw it into the fire. “No!” Harry yelled. He rushed to the fire but Uncle Vernon grabbed him by the waist and pulled back violently. The wand began to crack and shoot black smoke in the fireplace, filling the living room. Uncle Vernon kept Harry in his meaty grasp as the small boy continued to struggle. After a while the black smoke disappeared, leaving only ashes burning in the fireplace.

“There, that’s done. As for you… Dudley! Get my belt!”

“Yeah Dad!” Dudley yelled out. Harry heard his cousin running up the stairs before coming down a second later.

The welts from Uncle Vernon’s belt crisscrossed across Harry’s back. They made wearing shirts a painful experience for Harry as the Dursleys doubled his chores. There was never a day where Harry went to bed crying, wishing for Tom to come save him. When the welts started to fade, Uncle Vernon made sure to punish Harry for something, anything, to scar Harry’s back with welts again.
It was two weeks since summer vacation started and Harry was walking in town, needing to get away from Uncle Vernon. “I’m the Dark Prince,” he muttered angrily. “I’ve resurrected the Dark Lord! Why am I so weak against one damn muggle?”

He continued to walk, alone to his thoughts as he moved further and further away from Number 4 Private Drive. Trees started to surround Harry and he decided to sit down. His back ached and screamed in pain as he did so, causing the young teen to wince. Laying on his stomach, Harry used his arms like a pillow and fell asleep.

The sun already set as he woke up. Harry groaned as he got to his feet and decided it was time to head back to number 4 Private Drive. When he reached Magnolia Road, Harry heard a few voices and turned to see Dudley’s gang.

Magnolia Road, like Private Drive, was full of large, square houses with perfectly manicured lawns, all owned by large square owners who drove very clean cars similar to Uncle Vernon’s. Harry preferred Little Winging by night, when the curtained windows made patches of jewel-bright colors in the darkness. He walked quickly, so that halfway along Magnolia Road Dudley’s gang came into view again; they were saying their farewells at the entrance to Magnolia Crescent. Harry stepped into the shadow of a large lilac tree and waited.

“Nice right hook, Big D,” Piers said.

“Same time tomorrow?” Dudley said.

“Round at my place, my parents are out,” Gordon said.

“See you then,” Dudley said.

“Bye Dud!”

“See ya, Big D!”

Harry waited for the rest of the gang to move on before setting off again. When their voices had faded once more he headed around the corner into Magnolia Crescent and by walking very quickly he soon came within hailing distance of Dudley, who was strolling along at his ease, humming horrible.

“Hey Big D!”


“Had fun beating a ten-year-old? I know you did Mark Evans two nights ago—“

“He was asking for it,” Dudley snarled.

“Oh yeah?”

“He cheeked me.”

“Yeah? Did he say you look like a pig that’s been taught to walk on its hind legs? ‘Cause that’s not cheek, Dud, that’s true. …”

A muscle was twitching in Dudley’s jaw. It gave Harry enormous satisfaction to know how furious he was making Dudley; he felt as though he was siphoning off his own frustration into his cousin, the only outlet he had.
They turned right down the narrow alleyway where Harry had first seen Sirius and which formed a shortcut between Magnolia Crescent and Wisteria Walk. It was empty and much darker than the streets it linked because there were no streetlamps. Their footsteps were muffled between garage walls on one side and a high fence on the other.

“Think you’re a big man carrying that thing, don’t you?” Dudley said after a few seconds. “You’re lucky Dad didn’t burn it like the other one.”

“You’re smarter than you look,” Harry chuckled. He pulled out his wand and held it in front of him in his fingertips, twirling it lightly. Dudley looked sideways at it.

“You’re not allowed,” he said at once. “I know you’re not. You’d get expelled from that freak school you go to.”

“How do you know they didn’t change the rules?” Harry asked, his eyes glinting in the darkness, a sinister smile gracing his face.

“Th-they haven’t,” Dudley said, though he didn’t sound completely convinced. Harry laughed softly.

“You haven’t got the guts to take me on without that thing, have you?” Dudley snarled.

“You just wait till I tell Dad you had that thing out! He’ll give you more lashes than you can even count!” Dudley said.

Harry looked up at Dudley, his eyes still glinting but his smile disappeared. He supposed that Dudley guessed Harry would feel fear, but instead Harry felt angry.

“All that talk and you’re gone by one small lick! You should hear yourself at night. ‘Come and help me, Dad! Mum, come and help me! Save me from my uncle! Help Tom! Help! He’s going to —‘ Don’t you point that thing at me!”

Dudley backed into the alley wall. Harry was pointing the wand directly at Dudley’s heart. Harry could feel fourteen years’ hatred of Dudley pounding in his veins—what wouldn’t he give to strike now, to jinx Dudley so thoroughly he’d have to crawl home like an insect, maybe become an insect. If only he had Wormtail’s wand—

“Don’t ever talk about that again,” Harry snarled. “D’you understand me?”

“Point that thing somewhere else!”

“I said, do you understand me?” Harry jabbed the wand directly onto Dudley’s heart.

“Point it somewhere else!”

“DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?”

“GET THAT THING SOMEWHERE—“

Dudley gave an odd, shuddering gasp, as though he had been doused in icy water.

Something had happened to the night. The star-strewn indigo sky was suddenly pitch-black and lightless—the stars, the moon, the misty streetlamps at either end of the alley had vanished. The distant grumble of cars and the whisper of trees had gone. The balmy evening was suddenly
piercingly, bitingly cold. They were surrounded by total, impenetrable, silent darkness, as though some giant hand had dropped a thick, icy mantle over the entire alleyway.

Dudley’s terrified voice broke in Harry’s ear. “W-what are you d-doing? St-stop it!”

“I’m not doing anything! Shut up and don’t move!”

“I c-can’t see! I’ve g-gone blind! I—”

“I said shut up! You’re not blind idiot.”

Harry stood stock-still, turning his sightless eyes left and right. The cold was so intense that he was shivering all over. It was impossible… They couldn’t be… Not in Little Whinging …He strained his ears. …He would hear them before he saw them. …

“I’ll tell Dad!” Dudley whimpered. “W-where are you? What are you d-do—?”

“But he fell silent. He had heard just the thing he had been dreading. There was something in the alleyway apart from themselves, something that was drawling long, hoarse, rattling breaths. Harry felt a horrible jolt of dread as he stood trembling in the freezing air. He heard Dudley running away, hitting the alley fence, stumbling. “YOU IDIOT COME BACK! YOU’RE RUNNING RIGHT AT IT!”

There was a horrible squealing yell, and Dudley’s footsteps stopped. At the same moment, Harry felt a creeping chill behind him that could mean one thing. There was more than one. Harry scrambled for his wand. A brief shot of light came from it. A towering, hooded figure was gliding smoothly toward him, hovering over the ground, no feet or face visible beneath its robes, sucking on the night as it came. Harry raised his wand, thinking of Tom and the loving pressure of his body over Harry’s. “EXPECTO PATRONUM!”

A silver snake, as large as a Basilisk, erupted from the tip of Harry’s wand; its fangs caught the dementor in the place where the heart should have been; it was thrown backward, weightless as darkness, and as the snake charged, the dementor swooped away, batlike and defeated.

“THIS WAY!” Harry hissed at the snake. Wheeling around, his sprinted down the alleyway, holding his wand aloft. “LUMOS! DUDLEY? DUDLEY!”

He had run barely a dozen steps when he reached them: Dudley was curled on the ground, his arms clamped over his face; a second dementor was crouching low over him, gripping his wrists in its slimy hands, prizing them, slowly, almost lovingly, apart, lowering its hooded head toward Dudley’s face as though about to kiss him. …

“KILL IT!” Harry snarled, and with a silent, rattling sound, the silver snake he had conjured came darting back past him. The dementor’s eyeless face was barely an inch from Dudley’s when the snake’s jaw caught, its fangs piercing the dementor’s body as it drove through it. The thing tore in two, both halves flung into the darkness where they disappeared. The snake slowed to the end of the alleyway and dissolved into silver mist.

Moons, stars, and the alleyway burst back into life. A warm breeze swept the alleyway. Trees rustled in neighboring gardens and the mundane rumble of cars filled the air again. Harry stood quite still, all his senses vibrating, taking in the abrupt return to normality. After a moment, he became aware that his shirt was sticking to him; he was drenched in sweat.
What were dementors doing in Little Whinging? They are dark creatures, they shouldn’t be doing this… they should be on Harry’s side. Did something happened? Was Tom unable to get control of the dementors? This will be troublesome if they cannot get the dementors under control.

Dudley lay curled up on the ground, whimpering and shaking. Harry bent down to see whether he was in a fit state to stand up, but then heard loud, running footsteps behind him; instinctively raising his wand again, he spun on his heel to face the newcomer.

Mrs. Figg, their batty old neighbor, came panting into sight. Her grizzled gray hair was escaping from its hairnet, a clanking string shopping bag was swinging from his wrist, and her feet were halfway out of her tartan carpet slippers. Harry made to stow his wand hurriedly out of sight, but—

“Don’t put it away, idiot boy!” she shrieked. “What if there are more of them around? Oh, I’m going to kill Mundungus Fletcher!”
Number 12 Grimmauld Place. What a filthy habitat. This is supposed to be the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black? Every piece of furniture was covered with a thick grimey layer of dust; the carpet seemed to cough up more dust with each step they took, bugs and it sounded like doxies made their home in the curtains. As well as boggarts, if what Alastor Moody says is true. Tom was disgusted at the horrendous look of the house, but hid his opinion as he faced his lover’s godfather: Sirius Black. “You’re all here, good,” he said giving the Weasleys a smile. “Well I’m sorry that this chore fell on you and your family, Molly, but somebody needs to clean this place if the Order’s going to use it.”

“Don’t worry about it, it’ll give them something to do,” Mrs. Weasley said.

“Well, let me show you around,” Sirius said. His eyes fell on Draco and Tom for a moment. “Wasn’t expecting you two…” he muttered. “Cousin,” he said shortly.

“Cousin.” Draco returned.

“And you,” Sirius said, his eyes falling on Tom. “You and I need to have a long talk if you plan on dating my godson.”

“Of course Mr. Black,” Tom said politely.

“Sirius… can we talk too?” Draco asked hesitantly.

Sirius looked at Draco, shocked, but nodded. He cleared his throat and turned around, beginning his tour of Number 12 Grimmauld Place. They first entered the drawing room and Tom felt a strange sensation inside him. He frowned and looked around, wondering what caused this strange feeling inside him. His attention turned to a glass box sitting on a pedestal and looked in it. His skin turned pale, his eyes growing wide as saucers.

No, what is that doing here? Tom thought.

Sitting in the glass case was a locket. The locket was large and oval made of heavy gold and a serpentine ‘S’ in green jewels. Tom’s hands began to shake softly as he stared at the locket. No! It can’t be here! I placed it in a place nobody could get to! Why is Slytherin’s Locket in this house?

Tom looked around quickly. Nobody seemed to have noticed him. Should he swipe it now? Or should he wait? If he waits Dumbledore might find it, but there is no way anybody in the Order would know what this locket is. But still, what would the others think if he just suddenly ask to keep the locket? Sirius would be suspicious, especially if Tom says that he wants to give it to Harry as a gift. No, the best thing to do is to leave it in the glass box for now. He and Harry will have to plan later when he comes to this place. Which reminds Tom… ”Sirius, can I ask when Harry will be here?” he asked.

“Harry? I don’t know,” Sirius said. “Dumbledore was talking about bringing him here in August. Which is a pity really, I wanted to at least celebrate his birthday with him.”

“Me too,” Tom said. “I have a gift for him I wanted to give to him personally.”

“Oh…” Sirius said, giving Tom a suspicious look. Tom met his glance and smiled. “All we ever do is kiss, I can promise you,” he said.
Sirius just stared at him. Tom ignored his stares and continued looking around the house. He had supporters here, he remembered. The husk’s memories and his were still weaving together so it was hard sometimes to remember everything the husk did. It came in bits and pieces gradually. Sirius decided to hold their conversation off for now and gave the Weasleys, Hermione, Draco, and Tom the rest of the tour, ending with showing them where they would be staying. Tom stayed in the room he and Harry would share, which was right next to the twins’ room, and looked around.

It looked uninhabitable. Cobwebs painted the ceiling and walls, wood looked rotted, and the bed looked as though it was covered with mold. “Sirius? When was the last time somebody step foot into here?” he asked.

“More than seventeen years I reckon,” Sirius said. “Although I never could stand this place.”

“I see…” Tom said taking out his wand. With a small flick the bed seemed to tidied itself, the sheets lifted into the air and taunted themselves, the grime, stains, and years of dust disappearing immediately. The sheets stayed hovering in the air as Tom turned his wand on the bed frame. With a quick swish, the grime and rust disappeared and Tom allowed the sheets to fall to the bed. He heard a gasp and turned to see Hermione looking shocked. “Tom! You’re not allowed to use magic out of Hogwarts!” she said. “You should know that!”

“The trace is on all of us, and we are currently surrounded by many adult wizards,” Tom shrugged. “They won’t know where it came from.”

“Still you shouldn’t do it,” Hermione said, sounding disappointed that Tom used his magic outside of school. Tom just shrugged again, uncaring. He just turned his attention back to his and Harry’s room and started cleaning it. It was dark when he finished; the room was now spotless, Tom’s clothes with plenty of room for Harry’s when he comes. There was a window next to Harry’s bed, now clear and perfectly useable, that Tom opened, it’s curtains drawn to its sides. Stretching slightly, he saw a shadow in the corner of his eye and smirked as one of his shadow birds returned with a reply. Taking it, the bird disappeared into the shadows and Tom unrolled the scroll.

_You are not my Lord, child._

Tom sighed and shook his head. “Pity,” he said. He dropped the scroll in a waste bin and with a small wave of his hand, it erupted into fire. He left his room finally and returned his way to the kitchen. Dumbledore was there, along with a young woman with bubble-pink hair, Mr. Weasley, and Sirius.

“Are you sure? Dementors?” Dumbledore asked.

“Yes Dumbledore, two of them,” Mr. Weasley said.

“How could dementors attack Harry? How do they know where to find them?” Sirius demanded.

“Dementors attacked Harry?” Tom demanded walking into the kitchen. “What happened?”

“I am sorry Tom, but this is Order business, nothing that you should worry about—“

“Forgive my rudeness Professor, but two dementors attacked my boyfriend of two years,” Tom said. “I believe I have a right to ask what is going on.”

“I do not have enough information to know precisely what is going on,” Dumbledore said. “I was just about to go to the Ministry before you interrupt, Tom.” Dumbledore said. Tom couldn’t help but notice the sharp look Dumbledore was giving him. _He’s wondering, thinking, _Tom thought. _Did I send the dementors? Are they already on my side? He knows that I am Voldemort, or he_
believes it. But he cannot prove it. Legally to the world I am just Thomas Riddle, a Muggleborn who unfortunately have the same face and name of a student only you know Dumbledore. I’m so sorry to disappoint you Dumbledore, but no, the dementors are not mine. I would never send them against my little Prince.

“I’m sorry then,” Tom said. He stepped to the side and watched as Dumbledore walked past them, their eyes meeting for a moment. Tom turned to Mr. Weasley, who was writing a letter. “What now?” he asked.

“We wait for Dumbledore,” Mr. Weasley said. “And I have to pop back to work, I only came here to tell Dumbledore what happened.”

“That’s it?” Tom asked. “’Wait for Dumbledore?’”

“Yeah, what else you expect to do?” the young woman asked. Tom turned to her.

“Something,” Tom said. “I particularly hate waiting. I’ve been doing that a bit too much in my life.”

“Well, you’re going to have to wait some more,” the young woman shrugged. “I’m Tonks by the way.”

“Tom. Thomas Riddle,” Tom said, taking her hand, his mind on Harry. There must be a way to get him quickly.

“What did you do to my son?” Uncle Vernon said in a menacing growl. Harry had to carry Dudley back to number 4 Privet Drive, he couldn’t believe that Mrs. Figg knew Dumbledore. Why hasn’t she told him about how the Dursleys treat him?

“Nothing,” Harry said, knowing perfectly well Uncle Vernon wouldn’t believe him.

“What did he do to you, Diddy?” Aunt Petunia said in a quavering voice. “Was it—was it you-know-what, darling? Did he use—his thing?”

Slowly, tremulously, Dudley nodded.

“I didn’t!” Harry said sharply, as Aunt Petunia let out a wail and Uncle Vernon raised his fists. “I didn’t do anything to him, it wasn’t me it was—“

But at that precise moment a screech owl swooped in through the kitchen window. Narrowly missing the top of Uncle Vernon’s head, it soared across the kitchen, dropped the large parchment envelope it was carrying in its beak at Harry’s feet, and turned gracefully, the tip of its wings just touching the top of the fridge, then zoomed outside again and off across the garden.

“OWLS!” Uncle Vernon bellowed, the well-worn vein in his temple pulsing angrily as he slammed the kitchen window shut. “OWLS AGAIN! I WILL NOT HAVE ANY MORE OWLS IN MY HOUSE!”

But Harry was already ripping open the envelope and pulled out the letter inside, his heart pounding somewhere in the region of his Adam’s apple.

Dear Mr. Potter,
We have received intelligence that you performed the Patronus Charm at twenty-three minutes past nine this evening in a Muggle-inhabited area and in the presence of a Muggle.

The severity of this breach of the Decree of the Reasonable Restrictions of Underage Sorcery has resulted in your expulsion from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Ministry representatives will be calling at your place of residence shortly to destroy your wand.

As you have already received an official warning for a precious offense under section 13 of the International Confederation of Wizards’ Statue of Secrecy, we regret to inform you that your presence is required at a disciplinary hearing at the Ministry of Magic at 9 A.M. on August 5th.

Hoping you are well.

Yours sincerely,

Mafalda Hophirk.

IMPROPER USE OF MAGIC OFFICE

Ministry of Magic.

Harry read the letter through twice. He was only vaguely aware of Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia talking in the vicinity. Inside his head, all way icy and numb. One fact had penetrated his consciousness like a paralyzing dart. He was expelled from Hogwarts. It was all over. He was never going back. After all he had done both for Hogwarts and the Wizarding World; after spending all of fourth year competing in a competition he never wanted to be in; after finally reviving his lover the Dark Lord, after all of that… it’s all over.

He looked up at the Dursleys. Uncle Vernon was purple-faced, shouting, his fists still raised; Aunt Petunia had her arms around Dudley, who started retching.

He had to run. There was no way the Ministry would get his wand. He needs it both inside and outside of Hogwarts. In an almost dreamlike state, he pulled his wand out and turned to leave the kitchen.

“Where d’you think you’re going?” Uncle Vernon yelled. When Harry didn’t reply, he pounded across the kitchen to block the doorway into the hall. “I haven’t finished with you, boy!”

“Get out of my way,” Harry said quietly.

“You’re going to stay here and explain how my son—“

A resounding CRACK filled the kitchen; Aunt Petunia screamed, Uncle Vernon yelled and ducked, but for the third time that night Harry was staring for the source of a disturbance he had not made. He spotted it at once: A dazed and ruffled-looking barn owl was sitting outside on the kitchen sill, having just collided with the closed window.

Ignoring Uncle Vernon’s yells, Harry ran the room and wrenched the window open again. The owl stuck out its leg, to which a small roll of parchment was tied, shook its feathers, and took off the moment Harry had pulled off the letter. Hands shaking, Harry unfurled the second message, which was written very hastily and blotchily in black ink.

Harry—

Dumbledore’s just arrived at the Ministry, and he’s trying to sort it all out. DO NOT LEAVE
YOUR AUNT AND UNCLE’S HOUSE. DO NOT DO ANY MORE MAGIC. DO NOT SURRENDER YOUR WAND.

Arthur Weasley

Dumbledore was trying to sort it all out. …What did that mean? How much powder did Dumbledore have to override the Ministry of Magic? Was there a chance that he might be allowed back to Hogwarts, then? His mind was racing. …He could run for it and risk being captured by the Ministry, or stay put and wait for them to find him here. He was much more tempted by the former course, but he knew that Mr. Weasley had his best interests at heart… and, after all, Dumbledore had sorted out much worse than this before. …There was no way Dumbledore knew he was the Dark Prince, or even if the Dark Prince even exists….

He turned to his relatives, not really wanting to explain what is going on, he was too busy worrying about whether or not Dumbledore knew that Harry is the Dark Prince. He just sat down peacefully, his wand twirling between his fingertips, ignoring Uncle Vernon’s yells. Breathing through his nose, he thought of Tom as he twirled his wand. He sat there in since for minutes before another owl come through the window like a feathery cannonball and landed with a clatter on the kitchen table, causing all three of the Dursleys to jump with fright. Harry tore a second official-looking letter from the owl’s beak and ripped it open as the owl swooped back out into the night.

Dear Mr. Potter,

Further to our letter of approximately twenty-two minutes ago, the Ministry of Magic has revised its decision to destroy your wand forthwith. You may retain your wand until your disciplinary hearing on 5th August, at which time an official decision will be taken.

Following discussions with the headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the Ministry has agreed that the question of your expulsion will also be decided at that time. You should therefore consider yourself suspended from school pending further inquiries.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Mafalda Hophirk

IMPROPER USE OF MAGIC OFFICE

Ministry of Magic

He was not expelled… the miserable knot that seemed to form in his chest loosened slightly. Everything seemed to hang on this hearing on the fifth of August. Again ignoring his relatives, Harry stood up and left the kitchen, letters and wand in hand. He found his anger rising as he thought about the letters. Was no one going to explain anything to him? The dementors, Mrs. Fig, what the Ministry was up to, how he, Dumbledore, intended to sort everything out. He shouldn’t be with his relatives, he should be with Tom! He should be with his boyfriend at wherever Dumbledore sent him and the Weasleys! Why did he have to return to this miserable awful—Harry groaned as he felt his shirt riding against his welts. If only he had Wormtail’s wand.

Harry returned to his room and locked it, using all of his strength to push his small bureau till it was blocking the door. He went to his desk and wrote four copies of the same letter: I’ve just been attacked by dementors and I might be expelled from Hogwarts. I want to know what’s going on and when I’m going to get out of here.
He addressed the first to Sirius, the second to Ron, the third to Hermione, and the fourth to Tom. His owl, Hedwig, was off hunting; her cage stood empty on the desk. Harry paced the bedroom waiting for her to come back, his head pounding, his brain too busy for sleep even though his eyes stung and itched with tiredness. Up and down he paced, consumed with anger and frustration, grinding his teeth and clenching his fists, casting angry looks out at the empty, star-strewn sky every time he passed the window. Dementors sent to get him, Mrs. Figg and this Mundungus Fletcher tailing him in secret, then suspension from Hogwarts and a hearing at the Ministry of Magic—and still no one was telling him what was going on! Even Tom is keeping information from him! Harry could feel it—none of his letters were about the Death Eaters or what they were planning.

Why was he trapped without information? Why was everyone treating him like some naughty kid? Don’t do any more magic, don’t leave the house…

He kicked his school trunk as he passed it, but far from relieving his anger he felt worse, as he now had a sharp pain in his toe to deal with in addition to the pain in the rest of his body from carrying Dudley.

Just as he limped past the window, Hedwig soared through it with a soft rustle of wings like a small ghost.

“About time!” Harry snarled. “You can put that down! I got work for you!”

Hedwig’s large round amber eyes gazed reproachfully at him over the dead frog clamped in her beak.

“Come here,” Harry said, picking up the four small rolls of parchment and a leather thong and tying the scrolls to her scaly leg. “Take these straight to Sirius, Ron, Hermione, and Tom and don’t come back till they’ve written decent-length answers if you’ve got to. Understand?”

Hedwig gave a muffled hooting noise, beak still full of frog.

“Get going, then,” Harry said.

She took off immediately. The moment she’d gone, Harry threw himself down onto his bed without undressing and stared at the dark ceiling. In addition to every other miserable feeling, he now felt guilty that he’d been irritable with Hedwig; she was the only friend he had at number four, Privet Drive. But he’d make it up to her when she came back with Sirius’s, Ron’s, Hermione’s, and Tom’s answers.

They were bound to write back quickly; they couldn’t possibly ignore a dementor attack. He’d probably wake up tomorrow to four fat letters full of sympathy and plans for his immediate removal to the Burrow. And with that comforting idea, sleep rolled over him, stifling all further thought.

But Hedwig didn’t return next morning. Harry spent the day in his bedroom, leaving it only to go to the bathroom. Three times that day Aunt Petunia shoved food into his room through the cat flap Uncle Vernon had installed three summers ago. The Dursleys kept well clear of his bedroom. Harry couldn’t see the point of forcing his company on them; another row would achieve nothing except perhaps making him so angry he’d perform more illegal magic.

So it went on for three whole days. Harry was filled alternately with restless energy that made him
unable to settle to anything, during which he paced his bedroom again, furious at the whole lot of
them for leaving him to stew in this mess, and with a lethargy so complete that he could lie on his
bed for an hour at a time, staring dazedly into space, aching with dread at the thought of the
Ministry hearing.

What if they ruled against him? What if he was expelled and his wand was snapped in half? What
would he do, where would he go? He could not return to living full-time with the Dursleys, not
now that he knew the other world, the one to which he really belonged. …Was it possible that he
might be able to move into Sirius’s house, as Sirius had suggested a year ago, before he had been
forced to flee from the Ministry himself? Would he be allowed to live there alone, given that he
was still underage? Or would the matter of where he went next be decided for him; had his breach
of the International Statute of Secrecy been severe enough to land him in a cell in Azkaban? What
would Tom do? Will he leave Harry? Would he abandon him? The thought made him sick and got
him to start pacing again.

On the fourth night after Hedwig’s departure Harry was lying in one of his apathetic phases,
staring at the ceiling, his exhausted mind quite blank, when his uncle entered his bedroom. Harry
looked slowly around at him. Uncle Vernon was wearing his best suit and an expression of
enormous smugness.

“We’re going out,” he said.

“Sorry?”

“We—that is to say, your aunt, Dudley, and I—are going out.”

Fine.”

“You are not to leave your bedroom while we are away.”

“Okay.”

“You are not to touch the television, the stereo, or any of our possessions.”

“Right.”

“You are not to steal food from the fridge.”

“Okay.”

“I am going to lock your door.”

“You do that…”

Uncle Vernon glared at harry, clearly suspicious of this lack of argument, then stomped out of the
room and closed the door behind him. Harry heard the key turn in the lock and Uncle Vernon’s
footsteps walking heavily down the stairs. A few minutes later he heard the slamming of car doors,
the rumble of an engine, and the unmistakable sound of the car sweeping out of the drive.

Harry had no particular feeling about the Dursleys leaving. It made no difference to him whether
they were in the house or not. He could not even summon the energy to get up and turn on his
bedroom light. The room grew steadily darker around him as he lay listening to the night sounds
through the window he kept open all the time, waiting for the blessed moment when Hedwig
returned.
The empty house creaked around him. The pipes gargled. Harry lay there in a kind of stupor, thinking of nothing, suspended in misery.

And then, quite distinctly, he heard a crash in the kitchen below. He sat bolt upright, listening intently. The Dursleys couldn’t be back, it was much too soon, and in any case he hadn’t heard their car. He snatched up his wand from his bedside table, and stood facing his bedroom door, listening with all his might. Next moment he jumped as the lock gave a loud click and his door swung open.

Harry stood motionless, staring through the open door at the dark upstairs landing, straining his ears for further sounds, but none came.

“Get out of the room Harry, and put that wand down!” a smooth voice said. Harry’s heart was thumping uncontrollably. He knew that voice, but he did not lower his wand.

“Tom?” he said uncertainly.

A wand lit and Tom’s figure appeared, standing in the doorway. “Yes, now come on, this lot waited long enough.”

Harry lowered his wand slightly but did not relax his grip on it. “What took you so long?” he demanded.

“Haven’t I told you? This lot is an assortment of the slowest people I have ever met,” Tom said, his wandlight going off. “They all wanted to wait for Dumbledore, and do what Dumbledore wanted and he wanted to take his time.”

“Did you find the boy?” a low, growling voice said.

“I did Mad-Eye,” Tom called from over his shoulder. ‘Come on Harry, let’s go. Don’t worry, he’s the real one. I checked.”

“I’m mad at you,” Harry said.

“Good. If you weren’t then I would be worried,” Tom said.

“I’m furious.”

“Excellent,” Tom said.

“Why did you leave me to the Dursleys?” Harry demanded.

“I had to Harry,” Tom sighed. “We can talk more about this later. Come on, everyone downstairs wants to see you.”

Harry just glared at Tom as he walked past, leaving his room. There were people standing in the shadowy hall below, silhouetted against the streetlight glowing through the glass door; eight or nine of them, all, as far as he could see, looking up at him.

“It’s all right, Harry. We’ve come to take you away,” a slightly hoarse voice floated upstairs.

Harry’s heart leapt. “P-Professor Lupin?” he said disbelievingly. “Is that you?”

“Oh right… him,” Tom frowned. “Forgot him…”

“Why are we all standing in the dark?” said a third voice, this one completely unfamiliar, a
woman’s. “Lumos.”

A wand-tip flared, illuminating the hall with magical light. Harry blinked. The people below were crowded around the foot of the stairs, gazing intently up at him, some craning their heads for a better look. Remus Lupin stood nearest to him. Though still quite young, Lupin looked tired and rather ill; he had more gray hair than when Harry had said good-bye to him, and his robes were more patched and shabbier than ever. Nevertheless he was smiling broadly at Harry, who tried to smile back through his shock.

“Oooh, he looks just like I thought he would,” said the witch who was holding her lit wand aloft. She looked the youngest there; she had a pale heart-shaped face, dark twinkling eyes, and short spiky hair that was a violent shade of violet. “Wotcher, Harry!”

“Yeah, I see what you mean, Remus,” said a bald black wizard standing farthest back; he had a deep, slow voice and wore a single gold hoop in his ear. “He looks exactly like James.”

“Except the eyes,” said a wheezy-voiced, silver-haired wizard at the back. “Lily’s eyes.”

Mad-Eye Moody, who had long grizzled gray hair and a large chunk missing from his nose, was squinting suspiciously at Harry through his mismatched eyes. One of the eyes was small, dark, and beady; the other large, round, and electric blue—the magical eye that could see through walls, doors, and the back of Moody’s own head.

“Are you sure it’s him, Lupin?” he growled. “It’d be a nice lookout if we bring back some Death Eater impersonating him. We ought to ask him something only the real Potter would knew. Unless anyone brought any Veritaserum?”

“Harry, when was our first kiss Harry?” Tom asked annoyingly.

“In the dungeons in my second year,” Harry said. “I kissed you. This was after you helped me with that potions essay Snape wanted.”

“There, it’s him,” Tom said. Moody growled and looked at Lupin.

“Harry, what form does your Patronus take?” Lupin said.

“A snake, but it used to be a stag like my dad’s,” Harry said.

“That’s him, Mad-Eye,” Lupin said. “Though I want to know when your Patronus changed, if you wouldn’t be so kind?”

“After the Third Task,” Harry said. He descended the stairs with Tom, very curious of everybody still staring at him, stowing his wand into his front pocket. Lupin held out his hand and shook Harry’s.

“How are you?” he asked, looking at Harry closely.

“F-fine…”

Almost three weeks with nothing, not the tiniest hint of a plan to remove him from Privet Drive, and suddenly a whole bunch of wizards was standing matter-of-factly in the house as though this were a long-standing arrangement. He glanced at the people surrounding Lupin; they were still gazing avidly at him. He felt very conscious of the fact that he had not combed his hair for four days.
“I’m—you’re lucky the Dursleys are out …” he mumbled.

“Lucky, ha!” said the violet-haired woman. “It was me that lured them out of the way. Sent a letter by Muggle post telling them they’d been short-listed for the All-England Best-Kept Suburban Lawn Competition. They’re heading off to the prize-giving right now. …Or they think they are.”

“Come on Harry, let’s pack your things,” Tom said taking Harry’s arm in his hand.

“Okay,” Harry said.

“Before you do that, Harry, let me just introduce you…” Lupin said. “This is Alastor Moody, and this is Nymphadora—“

“Don’t call me Nymphadora, Remus,” said the young witch with a shudder. “It’s Tonks.”

“—Nymphadora Tonks, who prefers to be known by her surname only,” Lupin finished. “And this is Kingsley Shacklebolt—“ he indicated the tall black wizard, who bowed—“Elphias Doge—“ the wheezy-voiced wizard nodded—“Dedalus Diggle—“

“We’ve met before,” squeaked the excitable Diggle, dropping his top hat.

“—Emmeline Vance—“ a stately looking witch in an emerald-green shawl inclined her head—“Sturgis Podmore”—a square-jawed wizard with thick, straw-colored hair winked—“Hestia Jones”— a pink-cheeked, black-haired witch waved from next to the toaster. “And you apparently know Thomas Riddle really well,” Lupin finished.

Tom just smirked. “I wouldn’t allow the mission to begin without me,” he said. “Come on, let’s go pack.”

“I’ll help,” Tonks said brightly. “These Muggles are very clean,” she said looking around.

“Yes, you are wincing?” Tom whispered to Harry.


“Funny place,” Tonks said, “it’s a bit too clean, d’you know what I mean? Bit unnatural. Oh this is better,” she added, as they entered Harry’s bedroom and he turned on the light.

His room was certainly much messier than the rest of the house. Confined to it for four days in a very bad mood, Harry had not bothered tidying up after himself. Most of the books he owned were strewn over the floor where he’d tried to distract himself with each in turn and thrown it aside. Hedwig’s cage needed cleaning out and was starting to smell, and his trunk lay open, revealing a jumbled mixture of Muggle clothes and wizard’s robes that had spilled onto the floor around it.

“Harry,” Tom said. “I hope you are not thinking of keeping our room this messy.”

“I won’t Tom,” Harry said as he started picking up books and throwing them hastily into his trunk. Tom picked up his clothes and examined them before putting them in the trunk as well. Tonks paused at his open wardrobe to look critically at her reflection in the mirror on the inside of the door.

“You know, I don’t think purple’s really my color,” she said pensively, tugging at a lock of spiky hair. “D’you think it makes me look a bit peaky?”

“Err—“ Harry said, looking up at her over the top of Quidditch Teams of Britain and Ireland.
“Yeah, it does,” Tonks said decisively. She screwed up her eyes in a strained expression as though she was struggling to remember something. A second later, her hair had turned bubble-gum pink.

“How did you do that?” Harry said, gaping at her as she opened her eyes again.

“She is a Metamorphmagus, Harry,” Tom said. “They are witches and wizards who can change their appearance at will. Don’t think about becoming one, it is a hereditary ability.”

“Yup. I got top marks in Concealment and Disguise during Auror training without any study at all, it was great.”

“You’re an Auror?” Harry said, impressed.

“Yeah,” Tonks said, looking proud. “Kingsley is as well; he’s a bit higher up than I am, though, I only qualified a year ago. Nearly failed on Stealth and Tracking, I’m dead clumsy, did you hear me break that plate when we arrived downstairs?”

“Do not worry,” Tom whispered, Harry barely able to hear him. “If what I am planning goes well… we’ve nothing to worry about.”

Harry just nodded subtly.

“I think it might be quicker if I—pack!” Tonks cried, waving her wand in a long, sweeping movement over the floor. Books, clothes, telescope, and scales all soared into the air and flew pell-mell into the trunk.

“It’s not very neat,” Tonks said, walking over to the trunk and looking down at the jumble inside. “My mum’s got this knack of getting stuff to fit itself in neatly—she even gets the socks to fold themselves—but I’ve never mastered how she does it—it’s a kind of flick—“

She flicked her wand hopefully; one of Harry’s socks gave a feeble sort of wiggle and flopped back on top of the mess within.

“Ah, well,” Tonks said, slamming the trunk’s lid shut, “at least it’s all in. That could do with a bit of cleaning, too—Scourgify—“ She pointed her wand at Hedwig’s cage; a few feathers and droppings vanished. “Well, that’s a bit better—I’ve never quite got the hang of these sort of houseboldy spells. Right—got everything? Cauldron? Broom? Wow! A Firebolt!”

Her eyes widened as they fell on the broomstick in Harry’s right hand. It was his pride and joy, a gift from Sirius, an international standard broomstick.

“And I’m still riding a Comet Two Sixty,” Tonks said enviously. “Your boyfriend here even has a Nimbus 2001!”

Harry looked at Tom who smirked. “Draco was… gracious enough to lend his to me, Harry. Come, let’s go.”

“Locomotor Trunk.”

Harry’s trunk rose a few inches into the air. Holding her wand like a conductor’s baton, Tonks made it hover across the room and out of the door ahead of them, Hedwig’s cage in her left hand. Harry followed her.

“Where is your relative’s rooms? Just point, but don’t make it obvious,” Tom whispered.
Harry nodded and using the fingers on his right hand, he pointed to two doors down the hallway. Tom’s eyes followed Harry’s fingers and waved his hand as if swatting a piece of hair that was out of place. Two small shadowy blobs left Tom’s shadow and hugged the wall, keeping to the darkness before disappearing under the doors. “What did you do?” Harry whispered.

“Just giving them a little scare,” Tom breathed.

They walked back to the kitchen where the others were waiting. “When are we leaving?” Harry asked.

“Waiting for the signal. “Come on,” Moody said, unlocking the back door with his wand. They all stepped outside onto Uncle Vernon’s beautifully kept lawn.

“Whatever Moody says, just stick with me,” Tom whispered to Harry, who nodded.

“Clear night,” Moody grunted, his magical eye scanning the heavens. “Could’ve done with a bit more cloud cover. Right, you,” he barked at Harry, “we’re going to be flying in close formation. Tonks’ll be right in front of you, keep close on her tail. Lupin’ll be covering you from below. I’m going to be behind you. The rest’ll be circling us. We don’t break ranks for anything, got me? If one of us is killed the others keep flying, don’t stop, don’t break ranks. If they take out all of us and you survive, Harry, the rear guard are standing by to take over; flying easy and they’ll join you.”

“Stop being so cheerful, Moody, he’ll think we’re not taking this seriously,” Tonks said as she strapped Harry’s trunk and Hedwig’s cage into a harness hanging from her broom.

“If I really wanted to capture you, my love, none of this would stop me,” Tom whispered in Harry’s ear. Harry blushed and chuckled.

“Mount your brooms, that’s the first signal!” Lupin said sharply, pointing into the sky. Far, far above them, a shower of bright red sparks had flared among the stars. Harry swung his right leg over his Firebolt, gripped its handle tightly, and felt it vibrating very slightly, as though it was as keen as he was to be up in the air once more.

“Second signal, let’s go!” Lupin said loudly, as more sparks, green this time, exploded high above them. Harry kicked off hard from the ground. The cool night air rushed through his hair as the neat square gardens of Privet Drive fell away, shrinking rapidly into a patchwork of dark green blacks, and every thought of the Ministry hearing was swept from his mind as though the rush of air had blown it out of his head. He felt as though his heart was going to explode with pleasure; he was flying again, flying away from Privet Drive as he’d been fantasizing about all summer, he was going home. …For a few glorious moments, all his problems seemed to recede into nothing, insignificant in the vast, starry sky.

“Hard left, hard left, there’s a Muggle looking up!” Moody shouted from behind him. Tonks swerved and Harry followed her, watching his trunk swinging wildly beneath her broom. “We need more height. …Give it another quarter of a mile!”

Harry’s eyes watered in the chill as they soared upward’ he could see nothing below now by tiny pinpricks of light that were car headlights and streetlamps. Tom kept looking to Harry, and Harry looked towards him. For all his power and grace, the Dark Lord looks uncomfortable on a broom. His hands were holding the broom to tightly, and his teeth were gritting.

“You okay Tom?” Harry couldn’t help but laugh.
“Bearing south!” Mad-Eye shouted. “Town ahead!”

They altered their course every now and then according to Mad-Eye’s instructions. Harry’s eyes were screwed up against the rush of icy wind that was staring to make his ears ache. He could remember being this cold on a broom only once before, during the Quidditch match against Hufflepuff in his third year, which had taken place in a storm. The guard around him was circling continuously like giant birds of prey. Harry lost track of time. He wondered how long they had been flying; it felt like an hour at least. They started to descend; Harry followed Tonks into a dive. They were heading for the largest collection of lights he had yet seen, a huge, sprawling, crisscrossing mass, glittering in lines and grids, interspersed with parches of deeper black. Lower and lower they flew, until Harry could see individual headlights and streetlamps, chimneys, and television aerials. He wanted to reach the ground very much, though he felt sure that someone would have to unfreeze him from his broom.

“Here we go!” Tonks called, and a few seconds later she had landed.

Harry touched down right behind her and dismounted on a patch of unkempt grass in the middle of a small square. Tom landed next to Harry and looked at him, his eyes narrow. “How you enjoy this, I will never understand,” he complained as Tonks unbuckled Harry’s trunk.

“What are we?” Harry asked, but Lupin said quietly, “In a minute.”

Moody was rummaging in his cloak, his gnarled hands clumsy with cold.

“Got it,” he muttered, raising what looked like a silver cigarette lighter into the air and clicking it.

The nearest streetlamp went out with a pop. He clicked the unlighter again; the next lamp went out. He kept clicking until every lamp in the square was extinguished and the only light in the square came from curtained windows and the sickle moon overhead.

“Borrowed it from Dumbledore,” Moody growled, pocking the Put-Outer. “That’ll take care of any Muggles looking out of their window, see? Now, come on, quick.”

He took Harry by the arm and led him from the patch of grass, across the road, and onto the pavement Lupin and Tonks followed, carrying Harry’s trunk between them, the rest of the guard, all with their wands out, flanking them. Tom followed silently, always by Harry’s side.

“Here,” Moody muttered, thrusting a piece of parchment toward Harry’s hand and holding his lit wand close to it, so as to illuminate the writing. “Read quickly and memorize.”

Harry looked down at the piece of paper: The headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix may be found at number twelve, Grimmauld Place, London.

“What’s the Order of the—?” Harry began.

“Not here, boy!” Moody snarled. “Wait till we’re inside!”

He pulled the piece of parchment out of Harry’s hand and set fire to it. “Think about the house, Harry,” Tom whispered in Harry’s ear. Harry thought about it and looked up at the houses. They were standing outside number eleven; to their left was number ten and their right number thirteen. Harry thought, and no sooner had he reached the part about number twelve, Grimmauld Place, than a battered door emerged out of nowhere between numbers eleven and thirteen, followed swiftly by dirty walls and grimy windows. It was as though an extra house had inflated, pushing those on either side out of its way. “Come on, hurry,” Moody growled, prodding Harry in the back.
“We need to talk once we’re inside,” Tom said. Harry walked up the worn stone steps, staring at the newly materialized door. Lupin pulled out his wand and tapped on the door once. Harry heard many loud, metallic clicks and what sounded like a clatter of a chain. The door creaked open.

“Come on, love,” Tom said. Harry heard a soft hissing noise as he walked in and then old-fashioned gas lamps sputtered into life all along the walls, casting a flickering insubstantial light over the peeling wallpaper and threadbare carpet of a long, gloomy hallway, where a cobwebby chandelier glimmered overhead and age-blackened portraits hung crooked on the walls.

There were hurried footsteps and Ron’s mother emerged from a door at the far end of the hall. She was beaming in welcome as she hurried toward him, though Harry noticed that she was rather thinner and paler than she had been last time he had seen her.

“Oh Harry, it is lovely to see you!” she whispered, pulling in a rib-cracking hug before holding him at arm’s length and examining him critically. “You’re looking peaky; you need feeding up, but you’ll have to wait a bit for dinner, I’m afraid. . . .”

She turned to the gang of wizards behind him and whispered urgently, “He’s just arrived, the meeting’s started. . . .”

The wizards behind Harry all made noises of interest and excitement and began filing past Harry and Tom toward the door through which Mrs. Weasley had just come; Harry made to follow Lupin, but Mrs. Weasley held him back.

“No, Harry, the meeting’s only for members of the Order. Ron and Hermione are upstairs, you can wait with them until the meeting’s over and then we’ll have dinner. And keep your voice down in the hall,” she added in an urgent whisper.

“Why?”

“I don’t want to wake anything up.”

“What d’you—“

“I’ll explain later, I’ve got to hurry. I’m supposed to be at the meeting—Tom, you’ll show Harry where he’s sleeping.”

“Of course, Mrs. Weasley,” Tom said. “Come on Harry, this way.”

They went past a pair of long, moth-eaten curtains, and started up the dark staircase, passing a row of shrunken heads mounted on plaques on the wall. A closer look showed Harry that the heads belonged to house-elves. They reached the second landing and went into the second door on the right, walking into a perfectly clean room with two beds against opposite walls. “Yours is just for show Harry. Now, before I explain what we are doing there, there is business to be done. Sit down my Prince.”

“Yes, my Lord,” Harry said, the two slipping easily into their Dark roles. He sat down on the edge of the nearest bed. Tom pulled a wooden chair and sat directly in front of Harry.

“First thing first, Harry,” Tom said and pulled Harry from the bed, onto his lap, and kissed him deeply, shoving his tongue in his little boyfriend’s throat. Harry moaned and wrapped his arms around Tom’s neck, closing his eyes as his Dark Lord ravaged his mouth and throat. “When I tell you to sit down, Harry,” Tom said in a commanding tone, “you sit on my lap, my little Prince. Understand?”
“Yes, my Lord,” Harry purred. Tom smirked. “What a good little pet you are,” he chuckled. “But we’ll play later. Now we need to be serious.”

“Okay,” Harry nodded. He stayed on Tom’s lap but brought his arms back to himself before hugging Tom’s waist. “What is going on?”

“We are in the enemy’s lair: The Order of the Phoenix. A group of wizards gathered together under Dumbledore’s banner, their main goal is eliminating me, and so by extension, you. But more about that later. Take off your shirt Harry.”

“What?”

“Take off your shirt,” Tom said again. “Now.”

Harry frowned, his hand hesitating on the edge of his shirt for a moment before pulling it off, revealing his smooth hairless body and perky nipples to Tom. “Let me see your back,” Tom commanded. Harry closed his eyes and turned on Tom’s lap so that his back was facing Tom. He heard an inclined breath. And Tom’s cold voice muttering, “I’ve been too kind to those Muggles.”

“Tom,” Harry said, wincing when he felt Tom’s fingers ghosting along his welts.

“Shh… it’s okay love, trust me,” Tom whispered. Harry felt Tom’s wand pressing against his back. A heat started from Tom’s wand and it slowly spread across Harry’s back, heating his frozen body until he was enveloped by a warm comforting heat as if he was sitting in a low flame. The heat then disappeared and Tom ran his hand down Harry’s back, the boy feeling no pain. “There… better,” Tom smiled. “You can put your shirt back on love.”

Harry did so, surprised to find that he had no pain on his back. “Thank you,” he said.

“Any time, now turn around. We need to talk,” Tom said. “I believe I have a mission for you already.”

“What is it?” Harry asked as he turned around so he was straddling Tom, linking his arms around Tom.

“Our followers aren’t so loyal, it seems,” Tom said. “I have been in contact with multiple Death Eaters who report that a small group of my older followers seem to think that they are superior to us.”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked.

“They are mistaking my youthful appearance for weakness,” Tom said. “A mistake that will ultimately be fatal for them.”

“They’re not following you because you look young?” Harry gasped. “How did you look before?”

“Let’s just say that I was missing a nose,” Tom said. “That and my… goals have changed from their ideals.”

“Meaning?”

“They wanted a world in which Purebloods, mainly them, rule the wizarding world and muggle world with an iron fist. They see muggles as worse than house-elves, muggleborns as filth that need to be wiped out of existence, and half-bloods as a miserable existence. Needless to say, they hate you. I wanted that sort of world once upon a time,” Tom said. “Then I realized that if it were...
just Purebloods, our world and wizardkind would easily be wiped out to extinction. So I have changed my focus to the hideous way the Ministry and Dumbledore treats magic. These traitors do not understand my change; they do not like my change… and it seems us being gay does not help it.”

“So what do you want to do? Who are these conspirators?” Harry asked.

“The old lot,” Tom said. “Yaxley leads them. From what I can gather, Parkinson is part of his little group as well as Nott Snr, Crabbe, Goyle as well as Avery Snr and his son.”

“Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, and Parkinson’s kids goes to school with me,” Harry said. “They’re all in Slytherin and in my year. Should we target them? To send a message or something?”

“That, but I was thinking of focusing on their children in another way,” Tom said. “If my old supporters do not agree with my methods, why bother with them?”

“You’re going to try and recruit their children?” Harry asked.

“Try? Harry love, I do not try, I simply do things,” Tom said. “And yes, we will recruit their children, as well as the other youths in Hogwarts. My current Death Eaters are turning inefficient.”

“So what do you want me to do?” Harry asked.

“Simple, we will need more information,” Tom said. “Go to Parkinson my Prince, interrogate both himself and his daughter. Make him scared for his daughter’s well-being.”

“Okay,” Harry nodded. “But how are we supposed to get out of… this house?” Harry asked.

“That we will think of later, for now there are other matters to attend to,” Tom said. “Firstly, our new home: I may have told you this but I am rebuilding the home of my father. I’ve torn his manor down and having it rebuild from scratch. It should be done by the end of our school year, and this is the first time I have to ask you, so do you have any wants or needs in our new home, Harry?”

Harry stared at Tom. “You’re… building a home… for us?” he breathed.

“Of course, my love, you deserve a house that equals your beauty,” Tom said softly, showing Harry a true genuine smile. Harry blushed and relaxed against Tom’s chest. “Whatever you want Harry, just say the word.”

“You, that’s all I want,” Harry whispered.

Tom smiled. “Does that mean I’m forgiven? Hedwig attacked me the moment she came here,” he chuckled.

“Yeah… you’re forgiven. The others… not so much,” Harry said.

Tom chuckled as well. “Good,” he said. “Now secondly, we are currently in enemy territory. Do not freak out, do not act suspicious. You will act like the Golden Boy everyone believes you to be, and I will be your protective, anti-social boyfriend.” They both shared a short laugh. “We are here for information Harry, never forget that. They don’t trust me, they don’t even tell me when they’re having a meeting so I currently know nothing.”

“Yes, my Lord,” Harry said. Tom smiled and brushed his knuckles against Harry’s cheek. “If we had the time, I would ravish you here my pet,” he breathed. “You would be on the bed completely at my will, your body exposed to my will, your hole loose and begging and your lips praying that I
would fuck you again.” Tom chuckled and swept a hand lightly across Harry’s pants, his fingers only centimeters away from Harry’s hardening member. “But we don’t… at least not until tonight. Be patient my Prince.”

Harry groaned in frustration but nodded. He knew that he and Tom missed each other’s touch equally. But before they could even think of kissing each other again, the door slammed open and Hermione rushed in, followed by Ron. Harry jumped off of Tom’s lap.

“HARRY! Ron, he’s here! Harry’s here! We didn’t hear you arrive! Oh, how are you? Are you all right? Have you been furious with us? I know you have, I know our letters were useless—but we couldn’t tell you anything. Dumbledore made us swear we wouldn’t, oh, we’ve got so much to tell you, and you’ve got to tell us—the dementors! When we heard—and the Ministry hearing—it’s just outrageous. I’ve looked it all up, they can’t expel you, they just can’t, there’s provision in the Decree for the Restriction of Underage Sorcery for the use of magic in life-threatening situations—“

“Let him breathe, Hermione,” Ron said, grinning, closing the door behind him. He seemed to have grown several more inches during their near month apart, making him taller and more gangly looking than ever, though the long nose, bright red hair, and freckles were the same. “Draco’s sleeping,” Ron said. “Also Hedwig’s in a right state. Pecked us half to death when she brought your last letters, look at this—“

He showed Harry the index finger of his right hand, which sported a half-healed but clearly deep cut.

“I wanted answers.”

“And we wanted to give them to you, but Dumbledore made us—“

“—swear not to tell me,” Harry said. “Yeah, Hermione’s already said.”

The warm glow that had flared inside him at the slight of his two best friends was extinguished as something icy flooded the pit of his stomach. All of a sudden—after yearning to see them for most a month—he felt he would rather Ron and Hermione left him alone. There was a strained silence in which Harry returned to his seat next to Tom, not looking at either of the others.

“He seemed to think it was best,” Hermione said, rather breathlessly. “Dumbledore, I mean.”

“Right,” Harry said. He noticed that her hands too bore the marks of Hedwig’s beak and found that he was not at all sorry.

“We argued whenever he came,” Tom said.

“I think he thought you were safer with the Muggles—“ Ron began.

“Yeah?” Harry said, raising his eyebrows. “Have either of you been attacked by dementors this summer?”

“Well, no—but that’s why he’s had people from the Order of the Phoenix tailing you all the time—“

“Fat luck that did,” Tom said. “I would at least have told you if I’m making someone follow you.”

Harry felt a great jolt in his guts as though he had just missed a step going downstairs. So everyone had known he was being followed except him.
“Didn’t work that well, though, did it?” Harry said, doing his utmost to keep his voice even. “Had to look after myself after all, didn’t I?”

“He was so angry,” Hermione said in an almost awestruck voice. “Dumbledore. We saw him. When he found out Mundungus had left before his shift had ended. He was scary.”

“Well, I’m glad he left,” Harry said coldly. “If he hadn’t, I wouldn’t have done magic and Dumbledore would have left me at Privet Drive all summer!”

“Aren’t you… aren’t you worried about the Ministry of Magic hearing?”

“Why should he?” Tom asked calmly.

“No,” Harry lied defiantly. “So why’s Dumbledore been so keen to keep me in the dark?” Harry asked, still trying hard to keep his voice casual. “Did you—er—bother to ask him at all?”

“Every day,” Tom said from his seat. Harry glanced up just in time to see them exchange a look that told him he was behaving just as they feared he would. It did nothing to improve his temper.

“We told Dumbledore we wanted to tell you what was going on,” Ron said. “We did, mate. But he’s really busy now, we’ve only seen him twice since we came here and he didn’t have much time, he just made us swear not to tell you important stuff when we wrote, he said the owls might be intercepted—“

“He still could have kept Harry informed,” Tom said. “I am sure he has ways of sending messages without owls. In fact Harry, there are some ways that I will be teaching you, love.”

Tom wasn’t helping his anger. “Maybe he thinks I can’t be trusted,” Harry said, watching their expression.

“Don’t be thick,” Ron said, looking highly disconcerted.

“Or that I can’t take care of myself—“

“Of course he doesn’t think that!” Hermione said anxiously.

“SO how come I have to stay at the Dursleys’ while you two get to join in everything that’s going on here?” Harry said, the words tumbling over one another in a rush, his voice growing louder with every word. “How come you two are allowed to know everything that’s going on—?”

“We’re not!” Ron interrupted. “Mum won’t let us near the meetings, she’s saying we’re too young —“

But before he knew it, Harry was shouting.


Every bitter and resentful thought that Harry had had in the past month was pouring out of him; his frustrations at the lack of news, the hurt that they had all been together without him, his fury at being followed and not told about it. All the feelings he was half-ashamed of finally burst their
boundaries.

“WHO HAD TO GET PAST DRAGONS AND SPHINXES AND EVERY OTHER FOUL
THING LAST YEAR? WHO SAW HIM COME BACK? WHO HAD TO ESCAPE FROM HIM?
ME!”

Ron was standing there with his mouth half-open, clearly stunned and at a lost for anything to say, while Hermione looked on the verge of tears.

“BUT WHY SHOULD I KNOW WHAT’S GOING ON? WHY SHOULD ANYONE BOTHER
TO TELL ME WHAT’S BEEN HAPPENING?”

“Harry!” Tom warned.

“CAN’T’VE WANTED TO THAT MUCH, CAN YOU, OR YOU’D HAVE SENT ME AN
OWL, BUT DUMBLEDORE MADE YOU SWEAR—“

“Well, he did—“

“THREE WEEKS I’VE BEEN STUCK IN PRIVET DRIVE, NICKING PAPERS OUT OF BINS
TO TRY AND FIND OUT WHAT’S BEEN GOING ON—“

We wanted to—“

“I SUPPOSE YOU’VE BEEN HAVING A REAL LAUGH, HAVEN’T YOU, ALL HOLED UP
HERE TOGETHER—“

“No, honest—“

“Harry, we’re really sorry!” Hermione said desperately, her eyes now sparkling with tears. “You’re
absolutely right, Harry—I’d be furious if it were me!”

Harry glared at her, still breathing deeply, then turned away from them again, pacing up and down.
Tom just gave him a sharp look before standing. “Harry,” he said shortly.

“What?”

“Mind your temper,” Tom said slowly. “You’re in the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix. It
wouldn’t be wise to yell.”

Harry gave him a sharp look. Tom turned to Ron and Hermione. “Get out,” he warned. The two
stood their ground. Tom just shook his head and ignored them. “Harry look at me,” Tom said. He
pulled Harry far away from Ron and Hermione. “You can’t lose your temper Harry, not here. You
are lucky you didn’t reveal anything,” Tom said in a hushed voice that only Harry could hear.
“You must keep your temper here, it is dangerous.”

“Tom,” Harry gritted out. “Stop telling me that. You try to keep your temper after being locked
with the Dursleys.”

“I have been locked up,” Tom said. “For fifty years. How do you think I felt during that time?”

“Horrible,” Harry said.

“Exactly,” Tom said. “I am not trying to excuse your three weeks with the Dursleys, but you need
to understand this, Harry: We are not safe. Not here, not while we are around our enemies. I need
to alter Lupin’s mind, add my existence to his memories before Dumbledore interrogates him about
me. This is the first time I’ve seen him, and I do not know when Dumbledore will ask him.”

“Why not just change Dumbledore’s mind as well?” Harry asked.

“It is part of my plan Harry. I need to discredit him. The Daily Prophet and the Ministry is already doing that, they’re doing a smear campaign against the man, but those smears can easily be ignored and argued against. But with this however, with Dumbledore trying to prove that I am the Dark Lord and seemingly attacking his student from paranoia… that cannot be argued against or refuted,” Tom said carefully. “So please Harry, calm down. We will get the information we need, but in order for that to happen, we’ll have to work together. Okay?”

“Okay Tom,” Harry said sheepishly.

“Good,” Tom smiled. “Now why don’t we take our time to… sort out that woman’s awful packing? I’ll deal with Weasley and Granger.”

“Alright,” Harry nodded, feeling immensely calmer. “Hey Tom?”

“Yes Harry?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too Harry,” Tom smiled. “And I’m glad I have you in my arms again.”

“I’ll never leave them again,” Harry promised.
Mrs. Weasley knocked and entered the room just as Harry slipped off of Tom’s lap. They were kissing. “The meeting’s over, you can come down and have dinner now, everyone’s dying to see you Harry. Would you be a dear and tell the others?”

“Yeah, sure,” Harry said.

“Now don’t forget to keep your voices down in the hall,” Mrs. Weasley said before leaving the room. Harry and Tom looked at each other.

“When was the last time you had a decent meal, love?” Tom asked, already knowing the answer.

“The last day of Hogwarts,” Harry said. Tom exhaled, “Come on, let’s go. We can talk more strategy after dinner. Which reminds me, what happened to Wormtail’s wand?”

“Uncle Vernon saw it and burned it,” Harry said casually as he stood up. They left the room and onto the landing. Harry heard movement above him and looked to see Ron, Hermione, and the others already coming downstairs. Harry saw Draco Malfoy and bit his bottom lip; he still felt guilty for what happened during fourth year. He and Tom waited for the others to join them.

“Hello Draco,” Harry said hopefully.

“Harry,” Draco said. “You look… too thin.”

“I know,” Harry said. He turned to Tom and gave a small gasp, “I just remembered… how’s Cedric?”

“Diggory?” Tom asked. Harry nodded. “He was sent to St. Mungo’s after the term was over. Dumbledore has someone watching over him, in case the Dark Lord has his followers attack the boy or something. It seems that after the term was over he fell in an exhausted coma.”

“A coma? But I thought he was fine,” Harry said sadly.

“You should be happy that he is just in a coma, love,” Tom said. “At least we know that he’s still alive.”

“I guess that’s good,” Harry said, though he wasn’t comforted. He looked over the banisters to see the last of a group of witches and wizards, most of who were in Harry’s guard, leaving. Among them Harry saw the dark, greasy-haired head and prominent nose of his least favorite teacher at Hogwarts, Professor Snape. Harry leaned farther over the banisters. He was very interested in what Snape was doing for the Order of Phoenix… but before he could begin to eavesdrop, the front door opened and closed.


“And don’t forget to keep your voice down in the hall, Harry,” Hermione whispered.

As they passed the row of house-elf heads on the wall they saw Lupin, Mrs. Weasley, and Tonks at the front door, magically sealing its many locks and bolts behind those who had just left.

“We’re eating down in the kitchen,” Mrs. Weasley whispered, meeting them at the bottom of the
stairs. “Harry dear, if you’ll just tiptoe across the hall, it’s through this door here—“

CRASH.

“Tonks!” Mrs. Weasley cried exasperatedly, running to look behind her.

“I’m sorry!” Tonks wailed, who was lying flat on the floor. “It’s that stupid umbrella stand, that’s the second time I’ve tripped over—“

But the rest of her words were drowned by a horrible, earsplitting, bloodcurdling screech.

The moth-eaten velvet curtains Harry had passed earlier had flown apart, but there was no door behind them. For a split second, Harry thought he was looking through a window, a window behind which an old woman in a black cap was screaming and screaming as though she was being tortured—then he realized it was simply a life-size portrait, but the most realistic, and the most unpleasant, he had ever seen in his life.

The old woman was drooling, her eyes were rolling, the yellowing skin of her face stretched taunt as she screamed, and all along the hall behind them, the other portraits awoke and began to yell too, so that Harry actually screwed up his eyes at the noise and clapped his hands over his ears.

Lupin and Mrs. Weasley darted forward and tried to tug the curtains shut over the old woman, but they would not close and she screeched louder than ever, brandishing clawed hands as though trying to tear at their faces.

“Filth! Scum! By-products of dirt and vileness! Half-breeds, mutants, poofs, freaks, begone from this place! How dare you befoul the house of my fathers—“

Mrs. Weasley abandoned the attempt to close the curtains and hurried up and down the hall, Stunning all the other portraits with her wand. Then a man with long black hair came charging out of a door facing Harry.

“Shut up, you horrible old hag, shut UP!” he roared, seizing the curtain Mrs. Weasley had abandoned. The old woman’s face blanched.

“Yooooooou!” She howled, her eyes popping at the sight of the man. “Blood traitor, abomination, shame of my flesh!“

I said—shut—UP!” roared the man, and with a stupendous effort he and Lupin managed to force the curtains closed again.

The old woman’s screeches died and an echoing silence fell. Panting slightly and sweeping his long dark hair out of his eyes, Harry’s godfather, Sirius, turned to face him.

“Hello, Harry,” he said grimly, “I see you’ve met my mother.”

“Your—“

“My dear old mum, yeah,” Sirius said. “We’ve been trying to get her down for a month but we think she put a Permanent Sticking Charm on the back of the canvas. It caused poor Malfoy here a fright when she first saw him. Anyway, let’s get downstairs, quick, before they all wake up again.”

“This is the Ancient and Most Noble House of Black, Harry,” Tom said. “However since Sirius is the last Black heir, it belongs to him.”
“And I offered it to Dumbledore for headquarters—about the only useful thing I’ve been able to do.”

Harry, who had expected a better welcome, noted how hard and bitter Sirius’s voice sounded. He followed his godfather to the bottom of the stairs and through a door leading into the basement kitchen. It was scarcely less gloomy than the hall above, a cavernous room with rough stone walls. Most of the light was coming from a large fire at the far end of the room. A haze of pipe smoke hung in the air like battle fumes, through which loomed the menacing shapes of heavy iron pots and pans hanging from the dark ceiling. Many chairs have been crammed into the room for the meeting and a long wooden table stood in the middle of the room, littered with rolls of parchment, goblets, and a heap of what appeared to be rags. Mr. Weasley and his elder son, Bill, were talking quietly with their heads together at the end of the table.

Mrs. Weasley cleared her throat. Her husband, a thin, balding, red-haired man, who wore horn-rimmed glasses, looked around and jumped to his feet.

“Harry!” Mr. Weasley said, hurrying forward to greet him and shaking his hand vigorously. “Good to see you!”

“Trip all right Harry? Moody didn’t try to make you come via Greenland then?” Bill said.

“He tried!” Tonks said, striding over to help Bill clear the table and immediately sending a candle toppling onto the last piece of parchment. “Oh no—sorry—“

Tom sighed and waved his wand before Mrs. Weasley was able to. He repaired the parchment, and the in the flash of light caused by Tom’s charm, Harry caught a glimpse of what looked like the plan of a building.

“Tom! What did I say about using magic out of school!” Mrs. Weasley chastised.

“Sorry ma’am, but the table was going to burn,” Tom said. “Besides, I’m already seventeen, my birthday is on December 31st.”

“Ohh… I didn’t know that…” Mrs. Weasley said, looking a bit flabbergasted. “Then stop setting a bad example for Harry, then.”

Tom just smiled ruefully and nodded. Harry leaned into Tom and whispered, “Why didn’t I know that?”

“You didn’t ask,” Tom whispered back.

“You’re awful.”

“I know,” Tom said a little louder as he sat down next to Harry.

“If you want dinner before midnight I’ll need a hand,” Mrs. Weasley said to the room at large. “No, you can stay where you are, Harry dear, you’ve had a long journey—“

“What can I do, Molly?” Tonks asked enthusiastically, bounding forward.

Mrs. Weasley hesitated, looking apprehensive. “Er—no, it’s all right, Tonks, you have a rest too, you’ve done enough today—“

“No, no I want to help!” Tonks said brightly, knocking over a chair as she hurried toward the dresser from which Draco was collecting cutlery. Soon a series of heavy knives were chopping
meat and vegetables of their own accord, supervised by Mr. Weasley, while Mrs. Weasley stirred a cauldron dangling over the fire and the others took out plates, more goblets, and food from the pantry. Harry was left at the table with Sirius.

“Had a good summer so far?”

“No, it’s been lousy,” Harry said.

For the first time, something like a grin flitted across Sirius’s face. “Don’t know what you’re complaining about, myself.”

“What?” Harry said incredulously.

“Personally, I’d have welcomed a dementor attack. A deadly struggle for my soul would have broken the monotony nicely. You think you’ve had it bad, at least you’ve been able to get out and about, stretch your legs, get into a few fights. …I’ve been stuck inside for a month.”

“How come?” Harry asked, frowning.

“Because the Ministry of Magic’s still after me, and Voldemort will know all about me being an Animagus by now. Wormtail will have told him, so my big disguise is useless. There’s not much I can do for the Order of the Phoenix …or so Dumbledore feels.”

There was something about the slight flattened tone of voice in which Sirius uttered Dumbledore’s name that told Harry that Sirius was not very happy with the headmaster either. He felt a sudden upsurge of affection for his godfather. However, that affection was quickly ruined by guilt as his thoughts turned to Wormtail. Sirius would never be free of his charges because Harry and Tom. Whereas Wormtail could have cleared Sirius’s name in a forced confession, he could never do so now that he’s dead by Harry’s hand. The two continued to talk as Mrs. Weasley and the others cooked dinner; Fred and George made a mess trying to use magic to have the food cook itself, causing a flagon of butterbeer to burst all over the floor and a knife to land ominously exactly where Sirius’s right hand had been seconds before. Some time during the cooking process, Tom left the room without Harry realizing it.

The room was dimly lit, the only source of light being a fireplace set opposite a circular table. Around the table sat several older men, all of them had their backs hunched forward, and their eyes shifting anxiously left to right as if they feared being listened to. Though the table was circular, the focal point seemed to be pointing to a standing man. The man had hard, blunt features. He was relatively tall, and had long, pale blond hair tied in a neat braid that hangs down to his lower back. He was wearing a long, magnificent flowing set of robes that billowed slightly with every movement that he made. “Gentlemen,” the man said. “Our Lord has abandoned us; he has fallen from our ideals of blood superiority and insists to rule with this new ‘Dark Prince’ figure.”

“‘Dark Prince,’” a second man spat. He had a piggish nose and short dark hair. “As if we would follow that brat.”

“Lucius would never stand for this,” a third man said.

“No Nott, he would not,” the first man said sighing. “Lucius would be the first to reject this ‘Prince’ figure, whoever the boy might be.”

“Then what do you suppose we do Yaxley?” Nott asked. “The Dark Lord assumed this younger appearance because of this ‘Prince’ did he not?”
“I am guessing so,” Yaxley said. “Whatever the reason, both he and this ‘Prince’ need to be dealt with. This is a dangerous conversation we are having gentlemen, so we must choose our words wisely. Parkinson, how is your daughter doing?”

“She cannot find Draco Malfoy,” the pug-nosed man said. “She tried talking to your son, Nott, but he seems unconvinced. And any attempt at the Zabinis are proving useless.”

“So they are taking the neutral route again?” Yaxley asked. “Traitors, the both of them. Nott, you will discipline your son of course.”

“Of course I will,” Nott said. “Theo has been proving disappointing as of late. He is refusing any girl that I have brought to his attention.”

“Then force one on him, he will not complain,” the fourth man said.

“A surprising thing for you to say, Greengrass,” Nott said.

Greengrass chuckled. “I’ve raised my girls to value pureblood supremacy and keeping it,” he said. “They know their role.”

“Then if we can keep to the matters on hand,” Yaxley said. “Finding Draco Malfoy is of the utmost importance. We must convince him to this side like his father would have wanted. It would help also if the boy accepts his Lordship.”

“That and find a suitable partner,” Greengrass said. “He honestly believes being with a male, a male Weasley no less, is acceptable? It’s disgusting.”

“Then perhaps we should force your second daughter on Draco as well,” Nott joked. The two old men shared a chuckle.

“If we can have the Malfoys on our side, then naturally the rest of the Death Eaters will ally with us against this ‘Dark Prince’ and young ‘Dark Lord,’” Yaxley said.

“Do we even have proof that it was the Dark Prince who murdered Lucius and Narcissa?” Nott asked.

“Sadly no, but why do we need proof when slander will service?” Yaxley asked. “Once the young Malfoy heir claims his Lordship and begins courting a suitable female, then it will be his word against the Dark Lord’s and this ‘Prince.’ Those who are doubtful of our cause, or is fearful of the young boy’s title of ‘Dark Lord’ will gravitate towards us and away from the Prince.”

“Then when that is done, how shall we kill this Prince?” Parkinson asked.

Yaxley paused and looked around the table, his eyes roaming over all ten who sits with him. They were all like him: Pureblood and longing for the ways wizardkind should be and was long ago. “In order for us to succeed, we must have our Lord see the errors of his way; this includes his youthful look as well as this… apprenticeship with the Dark Prince.”

“Apprenticeship? The boy turned our Lord into a poof!” Parkinson roared. There was a murmuring of agreement from the other nine Purebloods.

“Yes, he did, but nevertheless we must work together. We cannot bring back our privilege without our Lord’s help. Those disgusting Mudbloods and Half-breeds have denied what is ours. We have been oppressed for quite enough, and in order for us to return to grace we need our Dark Lord. I say we discredit this Dark Prince, made our Lord see the error of his way, and have the joy of
“Tom, where were you?” Harry asked as Tom walked into the kitchen. “Dinner started a while ago.”

“I’m sorry Harry, I had to use the bathroom,” Tom said sitting down next to him. He looked around at the table. Ron, Fred, and George were laughing at a joke Mundungus Fletcher was saying while Draco looked highly unamused. The Malfoy looked at Tom and muttered, “I’m in love with that idiot,” jabbing a finger in Ron’s direction.

Tom just smirked and chuckled.

Three helpings of rhubarb crumble and custard later and the waistband on Harry’s jeans was feeling uncomfortable. He lay down his spoon in a lull in the general conversation. Mr. Weasley was leaning back in his chair, looking replete and relaxed.
“Nearly time for bed, I think,” Mrs. Weasley said on a yawn.

“Not just yet, Molly,” Sirius said, pushing away his empty plate and turning to look at Harry. “You know, I’m surprised at you. I thought the first thing you’d do when you got here would be to start asking questions about Voldemort.”

The atmosphere in the room changed with the rapidity Harry associated with the arrival of dementors. Where seconds before it had been sleepily relaxed, it was now alert, even tense. A frisson had gone around the table at the mention of Voldemort’s name. Lupin, who had been about to take a sip of wine, lowered his goblet slowly, looking wary. Tom eyed Harry, as if waiting for the chance to jump in.

“I did!” Harry said indignantly. “I asked Ron and Hermione but they said we’re not allowed in the Order, so—“

“And they’re quite right,” Mrs. Weasley said. “You’re too young.”

She was sitting bolt upright in her chair, her fists clenched upon its arms, every trace of drowsiness gone.

“Since when did someone had to be in the Order of the Phoenix to ask questions?” Sirius asked. “Harry’s been trapped in that Muggle house for nearly a month. He’s got the right to know what’s been happen—“

“Hang on!” George interrupted loudly.

“How come Harry gets his questions answered?” Fred said angrily.

“We’ve been trying to get stuff out of you for two weeks and you haven’t told us a single stinking thing!” George said.

An argument between Sirius and Mrs. Weasley occurred. They’ve raised their voices, yelling at each other for the right to tell Harry and how to raise him. Tom chuckled and leaned into Harry. “I knew I could count on you,” he whispered in Harry’s ear. He relaxed back in chair and continued watching the argument. Lupin got involved, then Mr. Weasley. Finally Mrs. Weasley caved in and tried sending everyone but Harry to bed, but Tom just chuckled to himself in amusement as one by one they argued to stay. All Tom had to do was move his seat closer to Harry’s. “FINE!” Mrs. Weasley shouted. “Ginny—BED!”

Ginny did not go quietly. They could hear her raging and storming at her mother all the way up the stairs, and when she reached the hall Mrs. Black’s earsplitting shrieks were added to the din. Lupin hurried off to the portrait to restore calm. It was only after he had returned, closing the kitchen door behind him and taking his seat at the table again, that Sirius spoke.

“Okay, Harry …what do you want to know?”

_Think of the correct questions, Harry_, Tom thought to himself. Oh, if only Harry could still hear his thoughts. Harry took a deep breath and asked the question after careful consideration. “Where’s Voldemort? What’s he doing? I’ve been trying to watch the Muggle news and there hasn’t been anything that looks like him yet, no funny deaths or anything—“

“That’s because there haven’t been any suspicious deaths yet,” Sirius said, “not as far as we know, anyway. …And we know quite a lot.”

“More than he thinks we do anyway,” Lupin said. Tom leaned forward.
“How come he’s stopped killing people?” Harry asked.

“Because he doesn’t want to draw attention to himself at the moment,” Sirius said. “It would be dangerous for him. His comeback didn’t come off quite the way he wanted it to, you see. He messed it up.”

_No I didn’t._

“He didn’t want anyone to know he’d come back. But you survived to bear witness,” Sirius said.

“And the very last person he wanted alerted to his return the moment he got back was Dumbledore,” Lupin said. “And you made sure Dumbledore knew at once.”

_Only because I wanted him to know. I do not mess anything up, not anymore._

“So what’s the Order been doing?” Harry said, looking around at them all.

“Working as hard as we can to make sure Voldemort can’t carry out his plans,” Sirius said.

“How d’you know what his plans are?” Harry asked quickly.

“Dumbledore’s got a shrewd idea,” Lupin said, “and Dumbledore’s shrewd ideas normally turn out to be accurate.”

“So what does Dumbledore reckon he’s planning?”

“Well, firstly, he wants to build up his army again,” Sirius said. “In the old days he had huge numbers at his command; witches and wizards he’d bullied or bewitched into following him, his faithful Death Eaters, a great variety of Dark creatures. You heard him planning to recruit the giants; well, they’ll be just one group he’s after. He’s certainly not going to try and take on the Ministry of Magic with only a dozen Death Eaters.”

_Death Eaters who would rather try a useless rebellion against me instead of following my command. But they’re right so far… the werewolves should be mine before Harry’s birthday, and I am sure I can expand my horizon to more than just Dark creatures. I miss my army._

“Well, the main thing is to try and convince as many people as possible that You-Know-Who really has returned, to put them on their guard,” Bill said. “It’s proving tricky, though.”

“Why?”

“Because the Ministry’s attitude,” Tonks said. “You saw Cornelius Fudge after You-Know-Who cam back, Harry. Well, he hasn’t shifted his position at all. He’s absolutely refusing to believe it’s happened. He still believes Diggory is just a freak accident.”

“But why?” Harry asked. “Why is he being so stupid? If Dumbledore—“

“Ah, well, you’ve put your finger on the problem,” Mr. Weasley said with a wry smile. “Dumbledore.”

“Fudge is frightened of him, you see,” Tonks said sadly.

“Frightened of what’s he’s up to,” Mr. Weasley said. “You see, Fudge thinks Dumbledore’s plotting to overthrow him. He thinks Dumbledore wants to be Minister of Magic.”

_Stupid man. He has always been a paranoid one. As if Dumbledore wants his job, nobody does. I_
“...But it seems that he’s become fond of the power now, and much more confident. He loves being Minister of Magic, and he’s managed to convince himself that he’s the clever one and Dumbledore’s simply stirring up trouble for the sake of it.”

Tom hid a scoff as Harry asked, “How can he think that? How can he just accept that Dumbledore and I are making it all up? Voldemort almost killed Cedric! Just ask him!”

“The boy is still in a coma, besides accepting that Voldemort’s back would mean trouble like the Ministry hasn’t had to cope with for nearly fourteen years,” Sirius said bitterly. “Fudge just can’t bring himself to face it. It’s so much more comfortable to convince himself Dumbledore’s lying to destabilize him.”

“You see the problem,” Lupin said. “While the Ministry insists there is nothing to fear from Voldemort, it’s hard to convince people he’s back, especially as they really don’t want to believe it in the first place. What’s more, the Ministry’s leaning heavily on the Prophet not to report any of what they’re calling Dumbledore’s rumor-mongering, so most of the Wizarding community are completely unaware anything’s happened, and that makes them easy targets for the Death Eaters if they’re using the Imperius Curse.”

Of course we are. Though right now I am too preoccupied with Yaxley and his idiocy. Now Harry, ask them what Dumbledore is planning. We need to know.

“What is Voldemort after? Apart from followers?” Harry asked.

He thought he saw Sirius and Lupin exchange the most fleeting of looks before Sirius said, “Stuff he can only get by stealth.”

When Harry continued to look puzzled, Sirius said, “Like a weapon. Something he didn’t have last time.”

“Like what kind of weapon?” Harry said. “Something worse than the Avada Kedavra—?”

“That’s enough.”

Damn it.

Mrs. Weasley spoke from the shadows beside the door. Harry had not noticed her return from taking Ginny upstairs. Her arms were crossed and she looked furious.

“I want you in bed, now. All of you,” she added, looking around at Fred, George, Draco, Ron, and Hermione.

“You can’t boss us—“ Fred began.

“Watch me,” Mrs. Weasley snarled. She was trembling slightly as she looked at Sirius. “You’ve given Harry plenty of information. Any more and you might just as well induct him into the Order straightaway.”

Harry didn’t speak. He just looked at Tom, who had an inquisitive expression on his face. Mrs. Weasley beckoned imperiously to her sons and Hermione. One by one they stood up and Harry, recognizing defeat, followed suit. He and Tom were silent as they returned to their room. Mrs.
Weasley closed the door behind Harry with a sharp snap.

Tom turned to Harry. “What have we learned?” he asked.

“That Fudge is trying to keep his cool and ignoring that you are back; and that he’s doing his best to discredit Dumbledore,” Harry said.

“Good, what else?” Tom asked as he unbuttoned one of Harry’s buttons.

“They believe that you are after something; a weapon or something,” Harry said.

“Correct again,” Tom said, unbuttoning the second button. “Though what that weapon is, even I do not know… unless…” he reached for his back pocket and pulled out a scroll of parchment that looked exactly like the one he saved from the candle Tonks knocked over. He unrolled it and looked at it. “Interesting… this is the Ministry of Magic,” he muttered to himself. “Now what could be in… ahh of course,” he smirked.

“What is it?” Harry asked.

Tom looked up. “I will tell you in time. Once I am fully ready to obtain this… weapon.” He rolled the parchment up. “Anyway Harry, what else?”

“Umm… Oh! They know you’re gathering an army. You are doing that, are you?” Harry asked.

“Of course I am,” Tom said. “I am currently in negotiations with the werewolves and giants as we speak. Slowly our army will grow, especially once Hogwarts begins and I can talk with the students personally. What else, my love?”

Harry thought for a moment. “As long as you keep to the shadows, the Ministry will never know that you’re alive… Dumbledore will continue to look foolish and lose any credibility he has. If he and the Ministry continue to be at odds… they might try and send him to Azkaban. Which will leave everything open for us!”

“Brilliant, my love, I couldn’t have planned it better myself,” Tom smirked and he unbuttoned Harry’s remaining buttons and slipped his shirt off. “And now your reward… what will it be?”

Harry didn’t have to think. “Ravage me. Take me, fuck me till all I know is you Tom, fill me please; The Dark Prince needs his Lord inside him!”

Tom smirked. He took out his wand and tapped the side of Harry’s glasses. The black glasses morphed around Harry’s face; covering the top left in a black mask with snakes with emerald eyes indented into it. Harry’s eyes seemed to glow from the blackness. “Kneel before your Lord,” Tom said, power radiating from his voice.

Harry’s spine shivered as he knelt shirtless before Tom, the cold air of the room hardening his nipples. He looked up at Tom, his eyes pleading. “What do you want, Prince?” Tom asked.

“Your cock,” Harry answered giving a lewd look.

“Undo my pants,” Tom said. Harry reached to Tom’s pants and undid his buckle. He slid the buckle out of the loops and then unclipped the top of his pants, followed by pulling down his fly, revealing Tom’s boxers. “Pull them down,” Tom said, rubbing his hand in Harry’s hair. Harry grabbed the edges of Tom’s pants and pulled them down to his ankles. Tom stepped out of the pants and Harry placed them to the side. He reached for Tom’s boxers but Tom slapped Harry’s hands away. “Did I tell you to pull my boxers down yet, Prince?”
“No,” Harry blushed.

Tom smirked and pulled Harry’s head closer to his crotch until Harry was practically on top of it. “Kiss it Harry. Worship it through the cloth.”

Harry kissed Tom’s flaccid cock through the fabric of his boxers. He felt Tom’s member move and started licking the fabric, doing his best to try and get his tongue through the boxers to get to his prize. Tom slowly harden under Harry’s licks and kisses until his boxers tented, showing Tom’s impressive length. “You look bigger than I imagine,” Harry said looking up at Tom, who merely just gave a smirk.

“Take off my shoes and socks,” he said. Harry nodded and helped Tom out of his shoes and socks. He looked up at Tom’s hard cock trapped in his boxers and smiled to see a stain where the head of Tom’s cock is. “What do you want Harry?”

“Your cock… I want to suck it,” Harry said.

“Good prince,” Tom said. “You love my cock, don’t you Harry?”

“Yes,” Harry answered, kissing Tom’s cock through the fabric again.

Tom chuckled and rubbed the back of Harry’s head. “Go for it, show me how much you love my cock, Harry,” he said.

Harry pulled Tom’s boxers off excitedly and Tom’s impressively large and wide member smacked Harry in the cheek, leaving pre-cum on it with a wet smack sound. Harry groaned at the sight of it. Pale and beautiful with a fat pink head and two large balls hanging underneath in a smooth sac. Tom was completely hairless except for a small patch of hair directly above his cock. Harry leaned in and breathed in the musky scent of Tom’s cock, closing his eyes as the smell brought him to heaven. He gave a long teasing lick from the base of Tom’s cock all the way up to the tip where he swirled his tongue around the head before going back to the base and focused on Tom’s balls. He kissed them both, thinking of all the pent up cum aching to be inside him. The thought of being full of Tom’s seed, to be covered and filled to the brim with Tom’s cum made Harry’s cock grow. “Tom… that spell that makes a male pregnant,” Harry teased. “Have you thought of casting it on me yet?”

“Of course, but it will change your body forever,” Tom said. “Why prince? Do you want your body altered to carry my babies inside you?”

Harry looked up and gave a teasing smile. “Maybe for my next birthday,” he said.

Tom laughed and grabbed the base of his cock, smacking Harry’s cheek with it. “Suck,” he commanded, and Harry obliged.

He opened his mouth as wide as he could and swallowed as he leaned onto Tom’s cock, the Dark Lord guiding the cock into Harry’s mouth. It was bigger than the last time he sucked it. It now easily reached the double digits and it seemed to gain an extra inch in girth. Harry didn’t want to admit to Tom, but he has been practicing with whatever he could grab. So he just smirked at Tom’s surprised expression as he easily swallowed Tom’s entire cock, his nose resting in Tom’s pubic hair. He breathed through his nose, breathing in Tom’s lovely musk, as he felt his jaw and lips stretched out; drool already coating and starting to drip.

“I’m… impressed,” Tom said. He could feel the hotness of Harry’s throat hugging his cock. Harry moaned around Tom’s cock and began to move, giving Tom’s cock long strokes as he slowly
moved away from Tom’s pelvis until only the tip is in his mouth and then swallowing Tom fully, hollowing out his cheeks. “God Harry, when did you get this good?” Tom moaned.

Harry slipped Tom’s cock out fully and looked up at Tom. His emerald eyes were burning with desire that turned his eyes to a very light shade of green that reminded Tom of the Killing Curse; his lips were puffy and coated with a mixture of pre-cum and spit. “I practiced on anything I could,” Harry said. “Bananas, eggplant, zucchini… anything I could grab, I practiced for you.”

“Good boy,” Tom mused, stroking Harry’s cheek lovingly. “I’m so proud… you’ve come so far… now do you want to continue sucking me?”

“Yes please!” Harry said.

“Then keep your mouth open and do nothing,” Tom said. He aligned his cock with Harry’s open mouth and thrust it in. Harry gagged at the sudden force and kept on swallowing and breathing. Tom held Harry’s head between his hands and started moving, going at rough pace as he fucked Harry’s mouth, the young boy gagging with each thrust. “Keep still; breathe!” Tom commanded, his cock going deeper and deeper into Harry’s throat, destroying Harry’s gag reflex.

“You are my prince; that makes you my whore,” Tom spat out. “You’re going to love my cum Harry. You’re going to weep for it every day till I get you pregnant love!”

Harry moaned, already weeping for Tom to cum. He needed to taste Tom again. It felt like a flame deep inside him burned, he longed for so long for Tom to touch him to fuck him, and now that they’re finally consummating their promise Harry cannot take enough. Tom came with a roar and Harry swallowed every thick rope of cum Tom shot down his throat. As Tom pulled out Harry licked every inch of Tom’s cock, making sure to taste and take every drop of his precious, delicious seed. Fully hard and out of Harry’s mouth, Tom just stood as Harry kissed the tip of his cock and licked up and down again, cleaning it. “Good prince, good boy,” Tom murmured again.

“Take off all of your clothes and get on our bed,” Tom said, pointing to his bed. “Get on all fours and present your hole to me.”

Harry did so, practically jumping out of his clothes and onto Tom’s bed. On all fours, he lowered his back and pushed his butt out, revealing pale skin surrounded by darker tanned skin; and a pink tight hole that had some hair growing around on the cheeks.

“This time, I will take my time,” Tom breathed. “But first… just to make sure…” He grabbed his wand and aimed it at Harry’s hole, casting a Cleansing Charm. Harry gasped at the sudden sensation. “You are going to cast that on you every day from now on,” Tom said. “I want you ready whenever we want each other.”

“Yes my Lord,” Harry said. Tom smirked and removed his clothing, revealing his physical perfection. “Keep your head down,” Tom said as he placed a hand on each of Harry’s butt cheeks and spread them wide. Tom stuck out his tongue and gave one long, slow lick from Harry’s taint and across his hole, causing the small boy to groan. Tom licked and bit at the outside of Harry’s hole, making it wet with his spit. The insides of Harry’s butt was littered with bite marks by the time Tom hardened his tongue and darted it into Harry’s hole for the first time. Harry hitched and Tom swirled his tongue around, loosening the muscle lightly. He removed his tongue and backed only an inch to blow onto Harry’s hole, sending chills all over Harry’s body. He then pressed his face against Harry’s ass again and continued licking and biting it. Harry felt like he was melting into goo again in Tom’s touch. He loved every moment of it, it was as if he was giving all sense of control to Tom, and the Dark Lord gladly took it. Harry could barely find the strength to stand as Tom continued to play with his ass. He could feel Tom’s spit slowly leak down from his ass,
hugging his taint and reaching his balls with its coldness. The sensation drove Harry mad and he found himself leaking but did his best to keep from cumming. He can only cum, will only cum, when Tom tells him to.

He didn’t know how long they stayed in that position, but before he knew it, Harry felt a finger invading him. He groaned in discomfort as his ass instinctively tightened against the finger. “Relax love, relax,” Tom breathed, placing a strong, large hand on Harry’s back. Harry breathed and relax. He gasped as the finger slipped further into him. “You’re so tight love, so warm….” Tom curled his finger, causing Harry to make a high-pitched sound as Tom found and stroked his prostate. “You better be careful Harry… your godfather’s right next do,” Tom breathed. “Who knows what he’ll do if he hears you.”

“Wha—Tom!” Harry said, his face completely red. Sirius can’t hear this!

“No, don’t be like that Harry, I want to hear you scream, I want to hear you lose yourself because of my cock,” Tom said adding a second finger.

“Tom… please… Sirius—“

“Won’t hear us,” Tom said. “Now beg me for my cock.” He began moving his fingers, scissoring them inside Harry and twisting them around, making the boy go wild.

“Tom—please,” Harry cried, tears slipping through his mask. “Fuck me.”

“Again.”

“Fuck me. Fuck your prince… fuck your whore prince,” Harry moaned, completely submitting to Tom.

Tom smirked. “If you wish,” he said. He removed his fingers and grabbed his wand, lubricating his cock. “Are you ready?” he asked Harry.

“Yes,” Harry nodded. Tom lined his cock with Harry’s hole and pushed, ever so slowly, into him. Harry gave long, deep moans as Tom pushed into him, Harry’s ass taking inch by inch until he was fully sheathed into Harry. Tom waited until Harry was fully adjusted to his size and girth. Harry breathed deep breaths, forcing himself to relax as tears streamed his cheeks from his mask. They stayed there, motionless, for a couple of minutes. Then Harry nodded and Tom slowly started to move. Both boys moaned as Tom pulled his cock out of Harry’s ass until only an inch was still inside before slowly pushing back in, spreading Harry’s ass even more. Tom kept doing this over and over again until Harry’s ass no longer tried to tighten again and just stayed loose for the Dark Lord. Tom pulled out again slowly, before ramming inside Harry, causing a wet slapping sound as their bodies collide and Harry to gasp in both pain and pleasure. Tom leaned on top of Harry and wrapped his arms around Harry’s body. He began a furious pace, his cock pushing deeper and deeper into harry. Their pent-up desire quickly built and much too soon for either of them, they were both ejaculating. Tom’s cum filled Harry’s ass until it was leaking around his cock and dripping out of Harry’s ass while Harry’s cum stained the bed.

Tom pulled out slowly and casted a cleaning charm on his cock and the sheets. “Do you want to keep my cum inside you?” Tom couldn’t help but chuckle. Harry looked over his shoulder, cheeks burning, and nodded.

Tom gave a humorous smile and tapped Harry’s butt with his wand. “There, not a drop will come out until your body absorbs it all. Come here,” he opened his arms.
Harry shuffled his exhausted body until he was cradled on Tom’s lap. They kissed lazily as Tom maneuvered them under the covers. “I’m so happy you’re finally in my arms again Harry,” Tom breathed. “Our separation has been too painful.”

“It has,” Harry nodded. “I’m so happy… we get to sleep together… finally.”

“Yes,” Tom smiled. “Sleep my prince, I’ll be here in the morning. But before you do, let me tell you of your first task.”

“What is it?” Harry said sheepishly. His glasses returned to normal already and he pulled them off.

“You are to visit the Parkinson family, they are part of those who wish to betray us. Interrogate Pansy, learn all you can of her father’s plan and make sure she knows you are not to be dealt with,” Tom said. “You will be using my wand… do not worry, the Ministry cannot Trace it.”

“Yes… my Lord,” Harry yawned, closing his eyes. “G’night.”

“Good-night my love,” Tom said closing his eyes as well.
Chapter 4

Harry woke up feeling a bit warm. He looked down and saw that he was still naked; Tom was holding onto him, his pelvis moving against his backside in his sleep. Harry gave a lazy grin as he silently reached for his glasses, trying to be as silent as he could. He heard Tom groaned and stopped moving. Tom’s hold on Harry’s chest tightened momentarily before relaxing. Harry placed his glasses on, and looked around the room. The room was mostly lit by the sunlight outside the window, all expect for one corner which stubbornly refused to allow sunlight to reach it. It was remotely peaceful, until it was destroyed with a large cracking sound and George’s loud voice filling the room, “Mum says get up, your breakfast is in the kitchen and then she needs you in the drawing room, there are loads more doxies than she thought and she’s found a nest of dead puffskeins under the sofa. …Are you naked?”

“Yes, now get out,” Tom’s groggy voice said as he sat up, the covers pooling at his legs. George shrugged and walked out. Harry couldn’t help but chuckle at the idea of Tom being groggy.

“So the Dark Lord is not a morning person?” He chuckled.

“Shut up.”

Half an hour later, Harry and Tom, who had dressed and breakfasted quickly, entered the drawing room, a long, high-ceilinged room on the first floor with olive-green walls covered in dirty tapestries. The carpet exhaled little clouds of dust every time someone put their foot on it and the long, moss-green velvet curtains were buzzing as though swarming with invisible bees. It was around these that Mrs. Weasley, Hermione, Ginny, Fred, George, Draco, and Ron were grouped, all looking rather peculiar, as they had tied cloths over their noses and mouths. Each of them was also holding a large bottle of black liquid with a nozzle at the end. Draco looked rather amusing.

“Cover your face and take a spray,” Mrs. Weasley said to Harry and Tom the moment she saw them, pointing to two more bottles of black liquid standing on a spindle-legged table. “It’s Doxycide. I’ve never seen an infestation this bad—what that house-elf’s been doing for the last ten years.”

Mrs. Weasley bent over to check the page on doxies in Gilderoy Lockhart’s Guide to Household Pests, which was lying open on the sofa. “Right, you lot, you need to be careful, because doxies bite and their teeth are poisonous. I’ve got a bottle of antidote here, but I’d rather nobody needed it.”

She straightened up, positioned herself squarely in front of the curtains, and beckoned them all forward. Tom rolled his eyes and played along, glancing down at Harry. He really did not want to do this.

“When I say the word, start spraying immediately,” she said. “They’ll come flying out at us, I expect, but it says on the sprays one good squirt will paralyze them. When they’re immobilized, just throw them in this bucket.”

She stepped carefully out of their line of fire and raised her own spray. “All right—squirt!”

Harry had been spraying only a few seconds when a fully grown doxy came soaring out of a fold in the material, shiny beetlelike wings whirring, tiny needle-sharp teeth bared, its fairylike body
covered with thick black hair and its four tiny fists clenched with fury. Harry caught it full in the face with a blast of Doxycide; it froze in midair and fell, with a surprisingly loud *thunk*, onto the worn carpet below. Harry picked it up and threw it in the bucket. He turned to see Draco’s face in a totally grimace as he kept spraying the doxies but not picking them up. Harry raised an eyebrow at this. When Draco caught his look he said with a disgusted whisper, “I am not touching these disgusting things!”

Harry snickered and bent to put the small pile of immobilized doxies into the bucket. He looked at Tom who had a stoic expression on his face, but Harry could see the frustration and annoyance hiding behind his eyes as he methodically sprayed the curtains. The de-doxing of the curtains took most of the morning. It was past midday when Mrs. Weasley finally removed her protective scarf. The curtains were no longer buzzing; they hung limp and damp from the intensive spraying; unconscious doxies lay crammed in the bucket at the foot of them beside a bowl of their black eggs, at which Crookshanks was now sniffing and Fred and Georges were shooting covetous looks.

“I think we’ll tacking those after lunch.”

Mrs. Weasley pointed at the dusty glass-fronted cabinets standing on either side of the mantelpieces. Harry turned to Tom to see that he was eyeing them curiously. The clanging doorbell rang. Everyone looked at Mrs. Weasley. “Stay here,” she said firmly as Mrs. Black’s screeches started up again from down below. “I’ll bring up some sandwiches.”

She left the room, closing the door carefully behind her. At once, everyone dashed over to the window to look down onto the doorstep. They could see the top of an unkempt gingery head and a stack of precariously balanced cauldrons.

“Harry, over here,” Tom said away from the crowd as Hermione said, “Mundungus! What’s he brought all those cauldrons for?”

Harry moved to Tom and looked curious. “What is it?” he asked.

“We, more importantly you, need to get away from this mundane chores,” Tom said. “You have more pressing manners.”

“And you just don’t want to do cleaning,” Harry smirked. He leaned in and whispered, “The Dark Lord doesn’t want to do some spring cleaning?”

“I am already building a manor for us to live in, my love, I have no time worrying about another house,” Tom whispered.

Harry smiled and sighed. “Just… I know it’s frustrating but… we have a job, remember? We’ll get the information, we just need—“ Harry’s voice was interrupted by Mrs. Weasley’s shouting.

“WE ARE NOT RUNNING A HIDEOUT FOR STOLEN GOODS!”

“I love hearing Mum shouting at someone else,” Fred said, with a satisfied smile on his face as he opened the door an inch or so to allow Mrs. Weasley’s voice to permeate the room better. “It makes such a nice change.”

“—COMPLETELY IRRESPONSIBLE. AS IF WE HAVEN’T GOT ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT WITHOUT YOU DRAGGING STOLEN CAULDRONS INTO THE HOUSE—“

Mrs. Weasley’s voice was soon lost amid fresh shrieks and screams from the portraits in the hall. George made to shut the door to drown the noise, but before he could do so, a house-elf edged into the room.
Except for the filthy rag tied like a loincloth around its middle, it was completely naked. It looked very old. Its skin seemed to be several times too big for it and though it was bald like all house-elves, there was a quantity of white hair growing out of its large, bat-like ears. Its eyes were a bloodshot and watery gray, and its fleshy nose was large and rather snoutlike.

The elf took absolutely no notice of Harry and the rest. Acting as though it could not see them, it shuffled hunchbacked, slowly and doggedly, toward the far end of the room, muttering under its breath all the while in a hoarse, deep voice like a bullfrog’s, “…Smells like a drain and a criminal to boot, but she’s no better, nasty old blood traitor with her brats messing up my Mistress’s house, oh my poor Mistress, if she knew, if she knew the scum they’ve let in her house, what would she say to old Kreacher, of the shame if it, Mudbloods and werewolves and traitors and thieves, poor old Kreacher, what can he do. …”

“Hello elf,” Tom said very loudly as Fred closed the door with a snap.

The house-elf froze in his tracks, stopped muttering, and then gave a very pronounced and very unconvincing start of surprise.

“Kreacher did not see you Young Master,” he said, turning around and bowing to Tom. Still facing the carpet, he added, perfectly audibly, “Nasty little mudblood.”

“Please, repeat that elf, I did not catch that.” Tom said staring down at Kreacher. I remember you from somewhere…

“Kreacher said nothing,” the elf said. It straightened up, eyeing them all very malevolently, and apparently convinced that they could not hear him as he continued to mutter.

“…and there’s the female Mudblood standing there bold and brass, of if my Mistress know, of how she’d cry, and there’s the newest blood traitor—stain of Malfoy spawn, and there’s a new boy, Kreacher doesn’t know his name, what is he doing here, Kreacher doesn’t know …”

“This is Harry, elf,” Tom said rudely. “You will not go close to him.”

“The Mudblood is talking to Kreacher, if Kreacher’s Mistress saw him in such company, oh what would she say—“

“Don’t call him a Mudblood!” Ron said, very angrily.

Tom just shrugged. “Ignore it Harry,” he ordered. “Come here for a moment.” He pointed to the glass cabinets. “There is something I want you to see.”

“What is it?” They walked towards the cabinets as Kreacher bothered the others. Preoccupied by the house-elf, Harry and Tom were allowed to talk freely in a low voice. “Look inside… do you see anything, or, more precisely, feel anything similar?”

Harry peered into the glass cabinet and frowned. Nothing of the dusty objects inside really stood out to him.

“The golden locket,” Tom said, pointing it out. “It is not supposed to be here.”

“It’s not? Why?” Harry asked, turning slightly to Tom.

Tom met his eyes and mouthed the word ‘Horcrux.’

“From where?”
“It is supposed to be in a place hidden away... where nobody can possibly find it,” Tom muttered. “Somebody must have... I’ll concentrate on that. For now, you need to concentrate on what you’re supposed to do today.”

“Going to the Parkinsons,” Harry said.

“Correct.”

“How am I supposed to get there?” Harry asked.

Tom smirked and pulled out his wand. “Just use the shadows,” he said. “Travel the way crows do.”

“The shadows?” Harry asked, frowning, looking confused.

“Exactly,” Tom nodded. “I will show you once we’re able to get out of here.” The door opened and Sirius walked in. “For now, let us return to our roles.”

“What are you two planning?” Sirius asked, looking suspicious.

“Nothing,” Harry said quickly.

“Just a private conversation between boyfriends, Sirius,” Tom said, looking at his lover’s godfather.

At the sound of Sirius’s voice, Kreacher flung himself into a ridiculously low bow that flattened his snoutlike nose on the floor. “Stand up straight,” Sirius said impatiently. “Now, what are you up to?”

“Kreacher is cleaning,” the elf repeated. “Kreacher lives to serve the noble house of Black—“

“—and it’s getting blacker every day, it’s filthy,” Sirius said.

“Master always liked his little jokes,” Kreacher said, bowing again, and continuing in an undertone, “Master was a nasty ungrateful swine who broke his mother’s heart—“

“My mother didn’t have a heart, Kreacher,” Sirius snapped. “She kept herself alive out of pure spite.”

Kreacher bowed again and said, “Whatever Master says,” then muttered furiously, “Master is not fit to wipe slime from his mother’s boots, oh my poor Mistress, what would she say if she saw Kreacher serving him, how she hated him, what a disappointment he was—“

“I asked you what you were up to,” Sirius said coldly. “Every time you show up pretending to be cleaning, you sneak something off to your room so we can’t throw it out.”

“Kreacher would never move anything from its proper place in Master’s house,” the elf said, then muttered very fast, “Mistress would never forgive Kreacher if the tapestry was thrown out, seven centuries it’s been in the family, Kreacher must save it, Kreacher will not let Master and the blood traitors and the brats destroy it—“

“I thought it might be that,” Sirius said, casting a disdainful look at the opposite wall. “She’ll have put another Permanent Sticking Charm on the back of it. I don’t doubt, but if I can get rid of it I certainly will. Now go away, Kreacher.”

It seemed that Kreacher did not dare disobey a direct order; nevertheless, the look he gave Sirius as he shuffled out past him was redolent of deepest loathing and he muttered all the way out of the
room. Sirius walked across the room, where the tapestry Kreacher had been trying to protect hung the length of the wall. Harry and the others followed.

“How come I’ve never noticed this,” Draco muttered to himself, eyeing it rather distastefully.

The tapestry looked immensely old; it was faded and looked as though doxies had gnawed it in places; nevertheless, the golden thread with which it was embroidered still glinted brightly enough to show them a sprawling family tree dating back (as far as Harry could tell) to the Middle Ages.

“You’re not on here!” Harry said, after scanning the bottom of the tree.

“I used to be there,” Sirius said, pointing at a small, round, charred hole in the tapestry, rather like a cigarette burn. “My sweet old mother blasted me off after I ran away from home—Kreacher’s quite fond of muttering the story under his breath.”

“I imagine she would do the same if she saw me here today,” Draco said, squatting down and pointing to his own name.

“You two are related?” Harry gasped.

“The pure-blood families are all interrelated,” Sirius said, looking at Draco with a curious expression Harry couldn’t pin down. “If you’re only going to let your sons and daughters marry purebloods your choice is very limited, there are hardly any of us left. Molly and I are cousins by marriage and Arthur’s something like my second cousin once removed. But there’s no point looking for them on here—if ever a family was a bunch of blood traitors it’s the Weasleys.”

“Will the rest think of me like that now? A blood traitor?” Draco asked looking at Sirius.

“Do you care?”

“Not really.”

“Then it does not matter,” Sirius said slowly.

Harry was now looking at the name near Draco’s mother’s name: Bellatrix Black, which was connected by a double line to Rodolphus Lestrange.

“Lestrange…” Harry said aloud. The name had stirred something in his memory; he knew it from somewhere, but for a moment he couldn’t think where, though it gave him an odd, creeping sensation in the air of his stomach.

“They’re in Azkaban,” Sirius said shortly.

“They’re my aunt and uncle,” Draco said.

It was then that Harry remembered: He had seen Bellatrix Lestrange inside Dumbledore’s Pensieve: a tall dark woman with heavy-lidded eyes, who had stood at her trial and proclaimed her continuing allegiance to Lord Voldemort, her pride that she had tried to find him after his downfall and her conviction that she would one day be rewarded for her loyalty.

“A madwoman,” Tom said. “Bellatrix Lestrange was the Dark Lord’s most feared Death Eater, as well as the most insane. She took pride in torturing and glee from causing pain.”

“You never said she was your—“

“Does it matter if she’s my cousin?” Sirius snapped. “As far as I’m concerned, they’re not my
family. She’s certainly not my family. I haven’t seen her since I was your age, unless you count a
glimpse of her coming into Azkaban. D’you think I’m proud of having relatives like her?”

“Sorry,” Harry said quickly. “I didn’t mean—I was just surprised that’s all—“

Neither of them noticed Draco backing away slowly, his face dejected, and turned away from the
tapestry. He grabbed Ron’s arm and pulled him forcefully to the food, where they ate in quiet.
Sirius, Harry and Tom continued to talk in front of the tapestry, but Draco gave them no mind. He
just stared at his sandwich as he ate it, finishing half before giving the rest to Ron, who scarfed it
down.

Fortunately for Draco, the glass cabinets needed a lot of concentration to clean out, as many of the
objects in there seemed very reluctant to leave their dusty shelves. Sirius sustained a bad bite from
a silver snuffbox; within seconds, his bitten hand had developed an unpleasant crusty covering like
a tough brown glove.

“It’s okay,” he said, examining the hand with interest before tapping it lightly with his wand and
restoring its skin to normal, “must be Wartcap powder in there.”

He threw the box aside into the sack where they were depositing the debris from the cabinets;
Harry and Draco bot saw George wrap his own hand carefully in a cloth moments later and sneak
the box into his pocket.

They found an unpleasant-looking silver instrument, something like a many-legged pair of
tweezers, which scuttled up Draco’s arm like a spider when he picked it up, and attempted to
puncture his skin; Sirius seized it and smashed it with a heavy book that Draco’s father also had
called Nature’s Nobility: A Wizarding Genealogy. There was a musical box that emitted a faintly
sinister, tinkling tune when wound, and they found themselves becoming curiously weak and
sleepy until Ginny had the sense to slam the lid shut; also a heavy locket that none of them could
open (Draco barely saw Tom slipping it into his pocket), a number of ancient seals and, in a dusty
box, an Order of Merlin, First Class, that has been awarded to Sirius’s grandfather for “Services to
the Ministry.”

“It means he gave them a load of gold,” Sirius said contemptuously, throwing the medal into the
rubbish sack.

Draco felt a sense of shame as he threw away these objects; he knew that his father and mother
both had their fair collection of objects like these, and couldn’t help but wonder what would happen
if the people around him now would act if they find out. Would they ostracize him even more? He
just got on the twin’s good graces, and that’s just because he promised to invest in their joke shop.
Would they all hold these disapproving and disdainful looks if they step foot into his childhood
home? Would Ron leave him knowing the dangerous artifacts that his parents collected? The
Aura-Reader knew that his beloved practiced the Dark Arts, he is learning everything from Draco
after all, but they never even talked about Dark Artifacts or objects at all. …Would that be too
much for the Weasley?

He looked at Ron, who held a look of utter disgust at whatever thing he was holding. He stared at
the boy’s Aura, an invisible radiance that surrounds all witches and wizards that shows their
alignment to either Light or Dark magic, and just studied the emerald streaks that grew bolder and
brighter with each and every day, mixing with the golden. A smile started to come on Draco’s face
as he continued to stare. Perhaps, if he could hide away his parents’ objects, sell them before Ron
takes a step into Malfoy Manor, perhaps Draco will never have to worry about it.

“What’s wrong, Fox?” Ron asked when he noticed Draco was staring at him.
“Nothing,” Draco said. Ron didn’t look convinced, but he just shrugged and turned back to cleaning the glass cabinets. Draco sighed and looked around. *Would I be a better person if I gave up everything my parents gave me?* He couldn’t help but think. His eyes turned back to the tapestry. He was a blood traitor now, at least according to Sirius’s mother and the old Death Eaters who hold onto those values. He stared at his portrait, connected with everyone else. *Should I just cut my ties with them like Sirius did? Become someone else? … I wouldn’t mind being a Weasley if it means I have Ron at my side forever.*

They finally finished the task as the sun began to set. Mrs. Weasley, Hermione, and Ginny went to cook dinner, Mrs. Weasley dragging the two girls and a reluctant Fred and George Weasley to help. Tom turned to Harry and took his hand. *We’ll have a couple of hours, I would guess. Come.*

Tom led Harry back to their room, where he locked the door behind them. Harry looked around. The room was still properly lit and yet there was still that one corner where light simply refused to go near. *‘That,’” Tom said pointing to it, “is how you will do your duties as my Dark Prince.”*

“What is it?” Harry asked, going nearer to it, looking at it apprehensively.

*“Just a shadow, do not worry about it,”* Tom chuckled. *“What is important is how you are going to travel to the Parkinson’s with it. It is rather easy, really. Just walk through.”*

“What walk through?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Tom chuckled. *“Walk through, and follow the birds.”* He indicated to the shadows and Harry saw a pair of red eyes staring back at him. *“Do not worry, they are just crows,”* Tom chuckled. *“Tell them your destination, and they’ll lead you there.”*

“Oh, okay,” Harry nodded.

Tom took out his wand and moved to stand in front of Harry. He kissed him deeply and tapped his wand to the side of Harry’s glasses, transforming them into the Dark Prince’s mask. *“You’ll need proper attire, I believe,”* Tom whispered. *“The Dark Prince will not walk around in dust-covered clothing.”*

Harry looked down at his clothes and blushed. *“I’ll… get changed,”* he said.

*“Of course you will,”* Tom smirked. He walked over to a wardrobe and opened it; pulling out a set of black robes, tight black button-down shirt, and slacks. *“Dark wizards tend to have a liking for dark colors, especially the color black I found,”* Tom said showing Harry the clothes. *“These will help you keep hidden in the shadows; if you’re good enough people will just see your eyes.”* He ended by chuckling.

*“Are they like enchanted or anything?”* Harry asked.

“No, just black,” Tom said.

*“Oh.”*

Harry took off his dirty, dusty clothes, dropping them on the floor, and changed into the clothes Tom laid out for him. They fitted perfectly, the pants and shirts hugging the shape of his body, showcasing the correct angles, and the robe hung neatly off of his shoulders. Harry looked in the mirror, impressed. *“This is perfect!”* he smiled at Tom.
Tom chuckled and said, “Give me your wand.”

Harry pulled his own wand from the pocket of his dirty clothes on the floor and gave it to Tom, who gave him his wand. “The Trace was removed from this wand years ago, when I became of age, so do not worry about casting any spells needed to complete your duty. Remember: You are to just scare Pansy Parkinson. Learn all she knows of her father’s plan. Now go, my Prince! Your Lord will stay here and conduct… other business.”

Harry smiled and bowed with a flourish, he couldn’t help but grin to himself. His first mission as the Dark Prince!

He turned to the shadow and walked towards it again. Two red eyes peered out of the shadow and Harry could barely see the outline of wings fluttering. “Um hi… show me the way to the Parkinson house… please?” Harry said to the bird.

The bird gave a soft ‘craw’ and flew into the shadow, disappearing. Harry turned to Tom who just smirked. “Walk,” he commanded.

Harry did so, expecting to walk into a wall, but instead he continued walking and his vision turned to black. He looked over his shoulder but saw nothing. Blackness was surrounding Harry; he couldn’t see his hands in front of him. It was cold, and uncomfortable. He looked in front of him and squinted. Red eyes pierced the darkness, watching him, as if waiting for Harry to catch up. Harry ran towards the red eyes, which stood unblinking, and as soon as he caught up to the crow it moved again. Complete darkness returned for a moment only for red eyes to stare at him again in the distance.

Harry followed the bird twice. On the third time he caught up to it, light returned and Harry looked around an unfamiliar room. It was fairly big and lavishly decorated with curtains and feminine colors. There was a bed in the middle of the room, as well as a desk that had a mirror and loads of make-up and beauty supplies. Sitting there was a girl Harry immediately recognized as Pansy Parkinson, who was painstakingly doing her eyebrows.

Harry looked around silently, thinking to himself about how he was going to approach this. He supposed he could just go to her directly… he has Tom’s wand, he could jinx her a bit for the information. …Or he could make her guess where he is while he stays in the shadows like a cowardly snake.

Parkinson started to talk to herself. Harry listened intently. “Mrs. Pansy Malfoy… nice ring to it. Once Daddy and the others get him on the straight path of course,” she chuckled to herself.

Harry couldn’t help but chuckle. “Mrs. Pansy Malfoy?” he breathed.

Parkinson jumped and looked around, confused. Harry stood still. Parkinson turned in her chair for a moment before shrugged and returning to practicing her make-up. Is this seriously what she does in her free time? Harry thought to himself as he took a step out of the shadow. Parkinson didn’t notice him so Harry took his time looking around the room, twirling Tom’s wand between his fingers.

He had to admit to himself, he was surprised to see that Parkinson did not have a single picture of Draco. He was half expecting her to have some sort of secret shrine that matches her obsession with his friend. He smirked to himself and pointed his wand at the desk in front of Parkinson. The perfume bottles shattered, causing Parkinson to scream in fright.

“Shut up will you?” Harry said, his voice cold.
Parkinson turned to see the Dark Prince standing in front of her, smirking behind his mask. “What are you doing here? Who are you?” she demanded.

“You should know who I am, Pansy,” Harry said, holding the wand threatening between his fingers. “After all… your father and the other traitors are trying to kill me and my Lord.”

“The Dark Prince,” she whispered.

“Exactly,” Harry said. “Now… if you can take your fantasies of marrying a gay man, you will tell me what it is your father and his co-conspirators are planning.”

“Why would I tell you?” Parkinson sneered. “My Daddy told me that you’ve made our Lord weak! And you’re just a stupid poof who—" Her words were stopped as the Dark Prince moved his wand calmly, the wand obeying its master’s lover’s every move. The shattered perfume bottles hovered to the floor, the shards floating dangerously close to Parkinson’s skin.

“Do not threaten your Lord and Prince,” Harry said, feeling the odd sensation taking over him again. It felt like Malfoy Manor all over again. Harry took a deep breath. He had to keep control. “Do not take my youthful appearance for weakness Parkinson. Now tell me what is it your father is planning?”

Parkinson was breathing quickly, her nose flaring. Harry watched as she swallowed multiple times. “They’re… they’re planning to kill you,” she said.

“I get that part, what else?” Harry asked, his green eyes flaring.

“I don’t know—they just want you gone,” Parkinson said.

“Not good enough.” Harry said, his eyes narrowing. The shards of the broken perfume bottles floated closer to Parkinson, barely scratching her neck. “What are they planning? Mrs. Pansy Malfoy.”

“I—I don’t know, I swear to God!”

“Swear to me!” Harry yelled. He flicked his wand and the shards disappeared only for the table and mirror behind her break. Parkinson yelled as the mirror shards and broken pieces of the table started floating towards her.

“They’re trying to get Draco back on our side! You and the Dark Lord abandoned our way of blood supremacy so they’re trying to make Draco look like their mascot and focus point!” Pansy yelled.

“They’re using Draco as a rallying point? Interesting,” Harry said. “How are they planning to do that?”

“They want to bring him on his side—turn him straight again and have him gather the other Death Eaters by showing how important blood supremacy is,” Pansy said in a panicked tone. There was a shard of glass that threatened to slice her back. “They’re going to blame his parents’ murder on you and make him go after you and the Dark Lord.”

“That it?” The Dark Prince asked.

“Yes—“ The table’s leg swung under Parkinson’s leg and forced her to fall to the floor, her back landing on the shards of perfume bottles that Harry abandoned.

“You’re lying,” The Dark Prince said. “What else is there?”
“Me! I’m supposed to find Draco, but I can’t! And Nott—Theo Nott—he’s being uncooperative,” Parkinson cried out. “When we have them and kill you—Yaxley is going to bring our Lord to our side by any means necessary. If he can’t—he’s ready to kill him.”

Parkinson was shaking. She kept crying and Harry just knew that some of the perfume bottle shards were sticking in her back, causing small cuts to bleed a tiny amount of blood.

“Kill us?” the Prince scoffed. “Do you traitors really think you can kill your Lord?”

“D-Daddy says you are the traitors,” Parkinson groaned.

Harry shook his head and sighed. “Pathetic girl,” he said. He walked to her and knelt down. He carefully picked up a large shard of glass and held it over Parkinson. He let the strange odd feeling guide him as he let it go and Parkinson inhaled deeply as the shard floated in the air as if suspended by an invisible hand. “Look at me,” he said. “I want you to tell your Daddy and all his friends something, okay? It’s very simple, I’m sure even you Parkinson can remember it. Stop this stupid rebellion, or die.” Harry gave her a sick smile and gave her cheek a couple of light slaps.

“See you at school.”

He stood up and returned to the shadow from which he came from. Parkinson watched with horror as the Dark Prince disappeared; the strangely large shadow turned to normal and the shard hanging over her fell, missing her throat by a centimeter. Parkinson scrambled to her feet, her hands pressing against glass as the room around her was in ruined. She needed to tell her father what happened.

“That was quick,” Tom smiled as Harry returned. He had a crow in his lap holding a flesh-colored string.

“I think she got the message,” Harry said.

“I know, I’ve heard everything,” Tom said stroking the crow. “Harry, I want you to take as much money as you can and invest in the twin’s shop. This product is very useful,” he mused.

“I will but Tom, I need to tell you something,” Harry said. “I felt the strange feeling again. The one I felt when I was at the Malfoy Manor.”

“I see. I thought I could hear it in your voice, it was getting rather high,” Tom said. “But I believe what is truly happening. Before I thought that it was simply my actions taking over your body, but now… it seems it is the Horcrux inside you that is taking possession of you.”

“Your Horcrux is causing this?” Harry said, slightly angry.

“It seems so,” Tom nodded. “Which means that we must first conquer the Horcrux inside you, and harness its power. Learn to control it instead of it controlling you. Because Harry,” Tom’s voice became deep as he stepped to Harry, cupping his fingers under Harry’s chin and tilting the boy’s head up. “The only person allowed to control you, is me. Understand?”

“Yes Sir,” Harry sighed. Tom gave an approving smile and kissed Harry’s cheek. “Good prince,” he said.

Harry smiled, a warm feeling rising at Tom’s praise.
“Come my love,” Tom said. “I think we should inform Draco about what they are planning. I am finished with my orders.” He indicated to the three black crows who flew into the shadow, all three of them holding letters. Harry nodded. He returned Tom’s wand and dressed in the dusty clothing he was wearing before, packing away the clothes Tom gave him. They left the room together, Harry leaning lightly on Tom.

They found Draco and Ron lounging in their room, lazily making out. Draco was on top of the redhead whose hands were rubbing all over Draco’s back. Tom cleared his throat, which caused Draco and Ron to jump away. “Draco, can we talk with you please?” Harry asked, his eyes darting to Ron.

“Alone,” Tom emphasized.

Ron looked at Harry and Tom suspiciously, his hands tightening slightly around Draco’s body before the Slytherin shook his head and slapped Ron’s chest lightly. “It’s fine, we’ll continue this later.”

“We better Fox,” Ron growled. “Cub wanna play.”

“And we will,” Draco chuckled. He slipped off of Ron and sat on the bed as Ron got up and walked out of the room. Tom closed it and turned to Draco. “What is it?” Draco asked.

“I…we finally have news for you,” Tom said. “I am sorry if I am opening old wounds, but this is what we’ve learned. It seems that a handful of Death Eaters are plotting against Harry and I, and they are hoping to use you and your parents as rallying points.”

“What?” Draco said in an unbelieving tone.

“It’s true,” Harry said. “I’ve heard it from Parkinson right now. “They’re trying to put you against Tom and I, somehow make you straight and marry Pansy. They want you to be a posterchild of blood supremacy and bring the younger purebloods to their side as well.”

Draco sighed and looked at his knees. “I can’t escape it,” he muttered.

“Excuse me?”


“They’re looking for you,” Harry said. “And apparently Theo Nott is being disapproving for them.”

“Hmm,” Draco hummed. “What else?”

“They plan to frame your parents’ murders against myself and Harry,” Tom said. “This information is from a meeting that I’ve eavesdropped. They believe that by framing us as their murderers, this can strengthen their argument that Harry and I are traitors to their very being and lifestyle. They’ve took my original rebellion and shifted it to a case of blood supremacy. Naturally, I am not going to let it happen and instead make it that their leader is the one who murdered your parents.”

“Okay…” Draco said slowly, his eyes looking a bit downcast. Harry frowned, knowing what Draco was thinking of. Harry just watched his friend, not knowing what to say.

Tom continued unaffected. “I am going to frame it on Yaxley. The old fool started this rebellion and was closer to Lucius’s rank in my army during the first war. You will just have to believe and support the fact that Yaxley killed your parents, understand?”
“Yeah… is this it?” Draco asked.

“It is,” Tom sad. “If you can, I would like for you to contact Blaise Zabini. See if he can find Theodore Nott.”

“I’ll do it,” Draco said again. Tom turned to leave, beckoning Harry to follow. Harry stared at his friend.

“I’m…”

“Don’t say anything Harry, please,” Draco said looking up at his friend.

“Okay… I’ll tell Ron to come back in,” Harry said.

Draco just nodded and stared at his legs. The door opened and closed, only to open and close again five minutes later. Draco looked up to see Ron making his way quickly to him. “Draco, what’s the matter?” he asked concerned.

Draco leaned into his boyfriend and hugged him deeply. “Ron… just hold me, just hold me,” he said. Ron wrapped his arms around Draco and pulled up to the bed, curling his body around Draco’s. “You’ll top tonight. I need it,” Draco whispered.

“Yeah… of course,” Ron nodded, burying his head in Draco’s neck, kissing it softly.

Harry’s birthday was at the end of the week. Mrs. Weasley told him that he didn’t have to do any of the decontamination for the day, which left him some unusually large amounts of free time that he did not know what to do with. Tom gave him the locket for safe keeping, but didn’t tell him how to open it. It felt heavy in his hands; golden with a long chain. On one side of the locket was an ornate serpentine S, inlaid with glittering, green stones: It was easy to visualize it as a miniature snake. He held it up to his ear and shook it, what sounded like a small heartbeat rattled inside.

“Well, Tom’s soul is in here,” Harry muttered to himself. “Now how to open it?”

He tried pulling it open, but his fingers strained and kept slipping from the small slit on the side. “Come on!” Harry grunted. He continued trying this for ten more minutes until, in desperation, he threw the locket on the ground, hoping that the force would be enough to open it. It wasn’t. The locket just bounced on the carpeted floor unscathed and sat there, the serpentine S staring at him.

Harry glared at locket, his curiosity mixing with his annoyance. “Open up! Come on!” he practically yelled as he picked up the locket again. “Your creator is my damn boyfriend so open up!” he growled again. He reached for anything, grasping a quill, and tried shoving the quill inside but the quill just snapped in half. Harry’s frustration grew. He just wanted to look inside the locket. This was Tom’s Horcrux, it was like him, so why wasn’t the locket opening for Harry?

He tried opening it for an hour using everything he can reach and tried shoving it in but no matter how many times he tried, how many times he threw it against the wall or on the ground, the Locket stayed cleanly lock without a scratch on it.

“That’s it!” Harry said shoving the locket in his pocket. He was going to go to the source to get it open.

He found Tom in a dining room on the ground floor having to deal with spiders large as saucers lurking in the dresser (Ron was understandably absent). Harry took a rather large book and dropped it on a spider unceremoniously as he made his way to Tom. “Tom. Help,” he said.
“What is it Harry?” Tom said, eyeing a rather large spider distastefully. “Always hated these things,” he muttered. “I blame Hagrid.”

Harry grabbed Tom’s arm and forcefully pulled him out of the room and into the empty hallway. He pulled out the locket and said, “How the hell do you open this stupid thing? I’ve been trying for an hour and nothing! I broke ten quills just trying.”

Tom looked at the locket and chuckled. “That’s because it is no ordinary locket, Harry. It is Slytherin’s Locket. The founder of Hogwarts made it himself. So, knowing that, how do you think you’re supposed to open it?”

Harry glared at Tom. “If all I had to do was speak ruddy Parseltongue, you’re sleeping alone tonight,” he spat.

Tom smirked. “My Prince wouldn’t abandoned his Lord on his birthday, would he?”

“Just watch,” Harry said. He looked at the locket, staring at the serpent-like S and hissed, “Open.”

The golden doors of the locket swung wide with a little click. Behind both of the glass windows within blinked a living eye, dark and handsome as Tom Riddle’s eyes had been before he turned them scarlet and slit-pupiled. Harry stared down at the eyes before looking up at Tom, his annoyed glare still on his face. “Hate you,” he muttered.

Tom smirked. “Now that you’ve opened my locket, what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know… what were you planning to do with it?” Harry asked.

“Well, I need one Horcrux intact don’t I?” Tom asked.

“Do you?” Harry asked, raising an eyebrow. “You have me,” He whispered. “Besides, can’t you absorb this one as well?”

“There is only so much regret I can feel Harry,” Tom said shortly. “Besides if I do so now everybody will know who we really are, and I cannot risk that.”

Harry glared at him for a moment. “Fine. But in Hogwarts, you’ll absorb this. If you really need to keep one Horcrux remaining then I will be it, no arguments.” Harry shoved the locket back into his pocket.

“Alright then. Just don’t wear the locket Harry,” Tom said.

“Why not?”

“It has… side-effects to say the least,” Tom said. “A piece of my soul is in there. I am sure that it isn’t happy of being trapped.”

“Alright,” Harry said. He looked in the dining room and decided, despite Mrs. Weasley’s complaining that it was his birthday, to help. The china, which bore the Black crest and motto, was all thrown unceremoniously into a sack by Sirius, and the same fate met a set of old photographs in tarnished silver frames, all of whose occupants squealed shrilly as the glass covering them smashed.

Mrs. Weasley outright banned Harry from the kitchen as she cooked his birthday dinner and cake, every time he went near the kitchen she glared at him and pointed past his shoulder to tell him to get out. He spent the time with Tom in their room. Harry was examining the locket as he rested on
Tom, who was reading. When it was time for dinner the two headed down to see that Mrs. Weasley cooked all of Harry’s favorites, and the others, including Lupin and Tonks, were already sitting down.

“Happy Birthday Harry,” Mrs. Weasley beamed as Harry sat down and proceeded to give him triple helpings of everything on the table. For once the talk around the table was pleasant, with no mention of the Order or Voldemort (which Harry found funny considering The Dark Lord was sitting with them sharing their food and drink). Tom leaned forward and whispered, “They’re scared, I heard Tonks whispering to Moody about your work. It seems Parkinson was louder than we thought she would be.”

Harry chuckled and kissed Tom’s cheek as if he told Harry a joke. Mrs. Weasley gave them a warning look but both boys just smiled innocently at her. After dinner was done Mrs. Weasley brought in a huge cake that was covered in frosting and scarlet and gold icing that read “Happy Fifteenth Birthday Harry!!”

Harry didn’t mind that nobody had any presents for him, it was completely understandable due to the current situation they were in, and honestly, he didn’t want anything. After reassuring an apologetic Mrs. Weasley for the fifth time that he was perfectly okay without any presents, Harry stifled a yawn and Mrs. Weasley decided that it was time for everyone to go to bed. Tom and Harry retreated to their room and Tom locked the door. “I’m guessing you’re worried,” Tom said.

“About what?”

“Your trial love, it’s in five days,” Tom said.

“Oh… I honestly forgot,” Harry said, looking up at Tom. Tom wrapped his arms around Harry and whispered, “Everything will be fine Harry, I won’t be there but you’ll feel my presence nevertheless. I am sure that Dumbledore will swoop in and save you, it would be difficult fighting me without a wand, would it?” Tom chuckled.

“I can think of a few ways,” Harry smirked. Tom laughed and shook his head. “Good night Harry,” he said kissing Harry. He went to his own bed and changed.

Harry sat down in his own bed and bit his lip. Now that he was thinking about the trial, it wouldn’t leave his mind. Harry started to worry as he undressed and slipped into his bed; what will happen if they do snap his wand? What will Tom do? The old worries that he forgot about flooded in and Harry tried to block them out but couldn’t. In the end he moved to Tom’s bed and just laid there, his eyes closed but not sleeping, until morning came.
Chapter 5

Chapter V

“The boy just invaded once, he is nothing to worry about!” Yaxley said.

“That boy threatened by daughter,” Parkinson said, slamming his fist on his table. They were again in the room lit only by a fireplace, Yaxley, Parkinson, and the others surrounding the wooden table. “You should have seen the cuts he’d left on her!”

“All were shallow and healed rather quickly,” Yaxley said. “He didn’t kill her, nor seriously harmed or maimed her.”

“They why did the Dark Prince go after Pansy?” Nott asked.

“Information most likely,” Yaxley said with a small shrug. “He is targeting our children in order to cease our cause.”

“Our children Yaxley,” Nott said. “You have none.”

“True, but I care for yours just as much,” Yaxley nodded. “At least I care for their future. Listen to me when I say this: The Dark Prince is not a threat. He is a child, and all children are easy to dealt with.”

“But still the fact remains that The Dark Prince somehow invaded not only Parkinson’s house but got into his daughter’s room where she was alone,” Greengrass said. “We need to know how he got in there.”

“My home has every protection possible,” Parkinson said. “Anti-Apparition jinx, the anti-disapparition jinx, Muggle-repelling; I even have a small Repello Inimicum around my house! There is no way anyone can get in without me knowing.”

“But still the Prince did,” Nott said. “The Dark Lord has powers that we know not, should it just be obvious that we assume the same with the Dark Prince?”

“To even suggest that the brat is on the same level of power with the Dark Lord is an insult, Nott,” Yaxley said. “True, our Lord might have been tricked to teach this brat but that does not make him his equal.”

“Are we sure about that?” Greengrass asked.

“Gentlemen… if I can speak?” a fifth Death Eater asked, standing up.

“Flint, what is it? It is rare to hear you speak,” Yaxley said.

Flint stood up. He was a broad man like his son, with mismatched teeth. His face was square and had a scar on his chin. His voice was a deep baritone. “I’ve talked with my son about this often. He told me that the Prince is in Hogwarts but he won’t tell me who.”

“Your son seems to be more observant than I give him credit for,” Nott said.

Flint gave Nott a sharp look. “We’re… disagreeing on some things. He wants to follow the Prince while I tell him not to.”
"What is your son doing now?" Greengrass asked.

"Working. He finally graduated Hogwarts," Flint said.

"Is he looking at anyone special?" Greengrass asked.

"I don’t know, we don’t speak much because of our disagreement with the Dark Prince," Flint said. "He seems to really like him, as, it seems, all the young are."

"Not my girls, heavens no," Greengrass said. "They complain about him every day this summer; him and that Weasley filth."

"I’ve heard the same complaints from Pansy," Parkinson said. "She doesn’t know who the Dark Prince is, but that Weasley boy ruined Draco Malfoy. Made him soft."

“And a fag,” Crabbe grunted.

“That too,” Parkinson nodded.

“I think we are getting off topic," Yaxley said. "The Prince might have invaded Parkinson’s home but he is not someone to worry about."

“But you should be, you spineless fools," a cold high voice laughed from the shadows. The men all jumped in fear and looked around.

"M-My Lord!" Nott gasped.

"Do not bother looking for me, I am nowhere that you can find," the voice of Lord Voldemort said. "You all are a disgusting sight. Old men cowering in secret because they fear the change and power the Dark Prince and myself have caused. I am most disappointed in you, Yaxley. Lucius always thought you of a friend… or at least that was the impression I’ve gained. Please, light your wands, all of you, I want to see all of your faces." The Dark Lord said as all of the wizards scrambled to reached for their wands and light them.

The wandlight lit the room, casting away most shadows and revealing only empty space and furniture.

“There," the voice from nowhere said. "Now I can see all of you. Yaxley, Nott, Parkinson, Greengrass, Crabbe, Goyle, Alecto Carrow and Amycus, I should have known, and lastly, we have the Averys and Gibbon. Now I can put names to the insurgence. Such a shame. Most of your children believe in their Lords’ powers, both myself and the Prince’s. It will be such a shame if they would become orphaned because of their parents’ idiocy."

The parents in the room shared concerned looks as Yaxley stood tall. “You cannot threaten us, boy! You may call yourself the Dark Lord but you are not my Lord! You failed our goals and left us to rot.”

A crackling laugh filled the room. “You jest Yaxley. I am the Dark Lord, and you will cease this insurgence or else consequences will happen.”

“You’re too cowardly to show your face boy, you do not scare me,” Yaxley said.

“Then turn around,” the cold voice said, this time much closer. Yaxley turned and gave a scream of fright as Lord Voldemort stood in front of him, his young handsome face staring menacingly at the old man’s. “Do not judge by appearances Yaxley, it will lead to your downfall,” Lord Voldemort
tisked.

“You wouldn’t dare kill me boy,” Yaxley said.

“No… no that would be too quick,” Tom sighed. “Instead… *Avada Kedavra*!” Lord Voldemort pointed his wand at Avery Snr. The old man fell dead, his son staring horrified. “You are playing a game you’re not supposed to play Yaxley, and your choices will kill those around you.” Voldemort waved his hand and the wands that were being drawn from the Death Eaters were flung out of their hands.

Yaxley stared, his voice quivering. “A—Avery was old, he w-was a loyal supporter. If you were our Lord you wouldn’t have killed him.”

“Yet I am and I did,” Voldemort said. “Would you like another example? Perhaps another father?”

“No my Lord!” the parents begged. Avery Jr. was crouched over his father’s body, crying and holding onto his corpse.

Voldemort smirked. “You know nothing of fear Yaxley, because you’ve never felt it. You never had to worry about people you care about”—he pointed his wand at Avery Jr.—“never had people to support or look after”—he pointed his wand at Greengrass—“you never had anyone in your life to raise in this miserable world. But I have. I’ve raised The Dark Prince. He is my heir as much as he is my equal. The care I have for him is deeper than a father to his son. Look at Avery.”

Voldemort pointed to Avery Jr.

The man had finished crying and glared at Voldemort with enough hatred to melt the burning sun. Voldemort chuckled and slowly made his way to Avery; the others watching all too scared to move. “You’re angry,” Voldemort said. “You want revenge… you want to hurt me for taking your father from you. I can see it in your eyes Malicur Avery, but do not blame me, no, the man who deserves your hatred is Corban. After all… he cares not for your pain.”

Avery’s eye shifted from Voldemort to Yaxley.

“He is the one who led your father to his death; if it weren’t for him your father would be alive, sleeping in his bed peacefully instead of forcing himself to attend these meetings in the dark,” Voldemort said.

“You—Yaxley—I—“

“There, let it sink, let it brew in your mind Malicur,” Voldemort whispered gently in his ear like a soft hiss in the back of his mind. “Your father was a good man, a man I grew up with in Hogwarts. He knew my true name, he was a trusted ally, and Yaxley killed him. The childless man has caused your father’s death… stolen a grandfather from your son. I am not the monster, am I not?”

“N-No… my Lord,” Avery said.

Voldemort smirked. “Good. Now leave, take your father and bury him. And decide what is right.” He stood up from the crouched Avery and looked around at the small group of men. “The Averys’ fate is the fate of all of you if you continue to follow Yaxley. Look at Avery and the pain he feels from losing his father—switch your fellow Death Eater with your children and imagine their pain knowing that Corban Yaxley sent their fathers to die.”

“You do not scare us,” Yaxley said.

Voldemort chuckled, his voice high and cold. “Yaxley, but I do. I scare you very much.” And with
that the Dark Lord disappeared as the wandlights went out and shadows returned to the room.

The men look around at each other in confusion before looking hesitantly at Yaxley. The old man quivered with anger, his fists shook, his lower lip pouted. He looked at the ones around him, his eyes ablaze with anger and humiliation. His voice unusually high, he screamed, “Someone find me Draco Malfoy!”

Harry awoke on the day of the trial at half-past five as abruptly and completely as if somebody had yelled in his ear. For a few moments he lay immobile as the prospect of the hearing filled every tiny particle of his brain, then, unable to bear it, he leapt out of bed and put on his glasses. Mrs. Weasley had laid out his freshly laundered jeans and T-shirt at the foot of his bed. Harry scrambled into them.

Tom was lying in their bed fast asleep. He did not stir as Harry crossed the room, stepped out onto the landing, and closed the door softly behind him. Trying not to think of the next time he would see Tom, when they might no longer be Dark Lord and Prince, Harry walked quietly down the stairs, past the heads of Kreacher’s ancestors, and into the kitchen.

He expected it to be empty, but it was not. When he reached the door he heard the soft rumble of voices on the other side and when he pushed it open he saw Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Sirius, Lupin, and Tonks sitting there almost as though they were waiting for him. All were fully dressed except for Mrs. Weasley, who was wearing a quilted, purple dressing gown. She leapt to her feet the moment he entered.

“Breakfast,” she said as she pulled out her wand and hurried over to the fire.

“M-morning, Harry,” Tonks yawned. Her hair was blonde and curly this morning. “Sleep all right?”

“Yeah… Tom took most of the bed again,” Harry grumbled.

“O-o-oh, you two are there,” she said with another shuddering yawn. “I’ve been up all night. Come sit down.”

“I couldn’t sleep and Tom suggested I sleep in his bed,” Harry said noticing the sharp look Sirius and Mrs. Weasley were giving him. “He failed to tell me that he usually sprawls out.”

Tonks snickered.


“Just toast, thanks,” Harry said.

Harry felt vaguely grateful that he was not required to join in the conversation. His insides were squirming. Mrs. Weasley placed a couple of pieces of toast and butter in front of him; he tried to eat, but it was like chewing carpet. He wished that Tom could come with him, invisible to everyone but him and hovering over his shoulder like last year. One of the disadvantages of getting Tom’s body back: He can’t be with Harry everywhere he goes.

“Harry,” Mr. Weasley said. “The hearing’s on my floor, in Amelia Bones’s office. She’s Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and she’s the one who’ll be questioning you.”
“Amelia Bones is okay, Harry,” Tonks said earnestly. “She’s fair, she’ll hear you out.”

Harry nodded again.

“The law’s on your side,” Lupin said quietly. “Even underage wizards are allowed to use magic in life-threatening situations.”

Something very cold trickled down the back of Harry’s neck; for a moment he thought someone dropped ice cubes down his shirt, then he realized that Mrs. Weasley was attacking his hair with a wet comb. She pressed hard on the top of his head.

“Doesn’t it ever lie flat?” she said desperately.

Harry shook his head. “Useless. Tom tried for hours.”

Mr. Weasley checked his watch and looked up at Harry. “I think we’ll go no,” he said. “We’re a bit early, but I think you’ll be better off there than hanging around here.”

“Okay,” Harry said automatically, dropping his toast and getting to his feet. He looked around the kitchen and his eyes centered onto a small corner of the room. A small crow was sitting in the shadow before disappearing. At least he’ll have those.

Mrs. Weasley hugged him goodbye. Mr. Weasley and Harry walked out of the kitchen, along the hall, and out of the door. “You don’t normally walk, do you?” Harry asked Mr. Weasley as they set off briskly around the square.

“No I usually Apparate,” Mr. Weasley said, “but obviously you can’t, and I think it’s best we arrive in a thoroughly non-magical fashion … make a better impression, given what you’re being disciplined for. …”

Mr. Weasley kept his hand inside his jacket as they walked. Harry knew it was clenched around his wand. The run-down streets were almost deserted, Harry kept noticing more and more bits of shadows where red eyes stared at him. The Underground station was already full of early morning commuters, and Mr. Weasley was hard put to contain his enthusiasm seeing the Muggles going about their daily business.

“Simply fabulous,” he whispered, indicating the automatic ticket machines. “Wonderfully ingenious.”

“They’re out of order,” Harry said noticing the sign.

Yes… but still…” Mr. Weasley beamed.

Harry brought their tickets from a sleepy-looking guard and five minutes later they were boarding an Underground train that rattled them off toward the center of London. Mr. Weasley kept anxiously checking and rechecking the Underground map above the windows.

“Four stops, Harry … three stops now… only two to go, Harry…”

They got off at the very heart of London, the crows in the nooks and crannies of shadows watching Harry and Mr. Weasley as they walked through the ticket barrier and emerged onto a broad street lined with imposing-looking buildings, already full of traffic. It took Mr. Weasley a moment or two to realize where they were exactly before setting off on a side road.

They walked and walked as the imposing buildings gotten smaller and smaller until they reached a
street that contained several rather shabby-looking offices, a pub, and an overflowing dumpster. There was even one of those old blue police box that Harry heard about once. Harry had expected a rather more impressive location for the Ministry of Magic.

“Here we are,” Mr. Weasley said brightly, pointing at an old red telephone box, which was missing several panes of glass and stood before a heavily graffitied wall. “After you, Harry.”

“That’s a telephone box, Mr. Weasley,” Harry pointed out.

“No, no, you’ll see,” Mr. Weasley smiled as he opened the telephone box door. “It’s the visitor’s entrance to the Ministry, come on.”

Harry stepped inside, wondering what on earth this was about. Mr. Weasley folded himself in beside Harry and closed the door. It was a tight fit; Harry was jammed against the telephone apparatus, which was hanging crookedly from the wall as though a vandal had tried to rip it off. Mr. Weasley reached past Harry for the receiver. He dialed a number and a cool female voice sounded inside the telephone box. “Welcome to the Ministry of Magic. Please state your name and business.”

“Arthur Weasley, Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, here to escort Harry Potter, who has been asked to attend a disciplinary hearing. …”

“Thank you,” the cool female voice said. “Visitor, please take the badge and attach it to the front of your robes.”

There was a click and a rattle, and Harry saw something slide out of the mettle chute where returned coins usually appeared. He picked it up: It was a square silver badge with Harry Potter, Disciplinary Hearing on it. He pinned it to the front of his T-shirt as the female voice spoke again.

“Visitor to the Ministry, you are required to submit to a search and present your wand for registration at the security desk, which is located at the far end of the Atrium.”

The floor of the telephone box shuttered. They were sinking slowly into the ground. Harry watched apprehensively as the pavement rose up past the glass windows of the box until darkness closed over their heads. Then he could see nothing at all; he could only hear a dull grinding noise as the telephone box made its way down through the earth. After about a minute, a chink of golden light illuminated his feet and, widening, rose up his body until it hit him in the face and he had to blink to stop his eyes from watering.

“The Ministry of Magic wishes you a pleasant day,” said the woman’s voice.

The door of the telephone box sprang open and Mr. Weasley stepped out of it, followed by Harry. They were standing at one end of a very long and splendid hall with a highly polished dark wood floor. The peacock-blue ceiling was inlaid with gleaming golden symbols that were continually moving and changing like some enormous heavenly notice board. The walls on each side were paneled in shiny dark wood and had many gilded fireplaces set into them. Every few seconds a witch or wizard would emerge from one of the left-handed fireplaces with a soft woosh and a small queue of witches and wizards waited to go to a fireplace on the right-hand side.

“This way,” Mr. Weasley said. They joined the throng of people, wending their way between the Ministry workers, some of whom were carrying tottering piles of parchment, others battered briefcases, still others reading the Daily Prophet as they walked. Mr. Weasley led Harry to a desk on the left of a set of golden gates. A badly shaven wizard in peacock-blue robes looked up as they approached and put down his Daily Prophet.
“I’m escorting a visitor,” Mr. Weasley said, gesturing towards Harry.

“Wand.”

Harry produced his wand. The wizard dropped it onto a strange brass instrument which looked like a set of scales with only one dish. It began to vibrate. A narrow strip of parchment came speeding out of a slit in the base. The wizard tore this off and read the writing upon it.

“Eleven inches, phoenix-feather core, been in use four years. Correct?”

“Yeah,” Harry said nervously.

“I keep this,” the wizard said, impaling the slip of parchment on a small brass spike. “You get this.” He added, thrusting the wand at Harry.

“Oh Arthur there you are!” Harry and Mr. Weasley turned to see a nervous looking wizard running at them. “I didn’t know what to do, should I have waited? I’ve just sent an owl to your home but obviously you missed it—an urgent message came ten minutes ago—“

“What is it?”

“It’s the Potter boy’s hearing—they’ve changed the time and venue—it starts at eight o’clock now and it’s down in old Courtroom Ten—“

“Down in old—but they told me—Merlin’s beard!” Mr. Weasley looked at his watch, let out a yelp, and leapt in the air.

“Quick Harry, we only have ten minutes!” Mr. Weasley said. He and Harry joined the crowd of wizards and pushed through, Mr. Weasley muttering “sorry” to everyone he passes by, into one of twenty lifts at the end of a smaller hall.

“Courtroom Ten, Courtroom Ten,” Mr. Weasley muttered. “Why in Merlin’s Beard would they put it in Courtroom Ten? They haven’t used those in years.”

Harry found himself getting nervous by Mr. Weasley’s muttering. His nerves started to get the best of him as he was jostled to the back of the lift as more and more Ministry workers got into the lift with himself and Mr. Weasley. The lift gave a shuddor then started to move down, stopping at each floor as the cool female voice spoke. Harry didn’t listen, his nerves getting the best of him. What’s Courtroom Ten? Why there? What happened?

His thoughts were interrupted by Mr. Weasley’s voice. “Come on Harry!” he said, getting off the lift. Harry followed. The walls were bare; there were no windows and no doors apart from a plain black one set at the very end of the corridor. Harry expected them to go through it, but instead Mr. Weasley seized him by the arm and dragged him to the left, where there was an opening leading to a flight of steps.

“Down here, down here,” Mr. Weasley panted, taking two steps at a time. “The lift doesn’t even come down this far … why they’re doing it there …”

They reached the bottom of the steps, and ran along yet another corridor, which bore a great resemblance to that which lead to Snape’s office in Hogwarts, with rough stone walls and torches in brackets. In the shadows Harry again saw the crows staring at him curiously. They opened their beaks to squawk at him but no noise came from them, just an eerie silence as their red eyes watched Harry.
Mr. Weasley stumbled to a halt outside a grimy dark door with an immense iron lock and slumped against the wall, clutching at a stitch in his chest.

“Go on,” he panted, pointing his thumb at the door. “Get in there… I’m not allowed. Good luck.”

The large dungeon he had entered was horribly familiar. He had not only seen it before, he had been here before; this was the place he had visited with Tom inside Dumbledore’s Pensieve, the place where he had watched the Lestranges sentenced to life imprisonment in Azkaban.

The walls were made of dark stone, dimly lit by torches. Empty benches rose on either side of him, but ahead, in the highest benches of all, were many shadowy figures. They had been talking in low voices, but as the heavy door swung closed behind Harry an ominous silence fell.

“You’re here?” a voice said from above, as if sounding surprised.

“Yeah… you’ve changed it but I’m here,” Harry said.

“That is not the Wizengamot’s fault,” said the voice. “Take your seat.”

It kind of is, Harry thought as he dropped his gaze to the chair in the center of the room, the arms of which were covered in chains. He went to sit on the seat and the chains clinked threateningly but did not move. Out of the corner of his eye Harry saw a crow sitting on a seat holding a flesh-colored string. Somehow that sight relieved Harry as he turned his gaze to the people seated at the bench above.

There were about fifty of them, all, as far as he could see, wearing plum-colored robes with an elaborately worked silver W on the left-hand side of the chest and all staring down their noses at him, some with very austere expressions, others with frank curiosity.

In the middle of the front row sat Cornelius Fudge, looking as portly as ever. A broad, square-jawed witch with very short gray hair sat on Fudge’s left; she wore a monocle and looked forbidding. On Fudge’s right was another witch, but she was sitting so far back on the bench that her face was in shadow. She must have a hideous scar or something, Harry thought.

“Very well,” Fudge said. “The accused being present, let us begin. Are you ready?” he called down the row.

“Yes sir,” said the eager voice of Percy Weasley. Harry looked at Percy, expecting some sign of recognition from him, but none came. Percy’s eyes, behind his horn-rimmed glasses, were fixed on his parchment, a quill poised in his hand.

“Disciplinary hearing of the fifth of August,” Fudge said in a ringing voice, and Percy began taking notes at once, “into offenses committed under the Decree for the Reasonable Restrictions of Underage Sorcery and the International Statute of Secrecy by Harry James Potter, resident at number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging Surrey.

“Interrogators: Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Minister of Magic; Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement; Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister. Court Scribe: Percy Ignatius Weasley—“

“Witness for the defense, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore,” said a quiet voice from behind Harry, who turned his head. Dumbledore was striding serenely across the room wearing long midnight-blue robes and a perfectly calm expression. The crow in the corner stared at Dumbledore as he walked in, taking a tiny hop forward.
The members of the Wizengamot were muttering. All eyes were now on Dumbledore. Some looked annoyed, others slightly frightened; two elderly witches in the back row, however, raised their hands and waved in welcome.

Harry ignored Dumbledore. Dumbledore just looked up at an obviously flustered Fudge.

“Ah,” Fudge said, who looked thoroughly disconcerted. “Dumbledore. Yes. You—er—got our—er—message that the time and—er—place of the hearing has been changed then?”

I must have missed it,” Dumbledore said cheerfully. “However, due to a lucky mistake I arrived at the Ministry three hours early, so no harm done.”

“Yes—well—I suppose we’ll need another chair—I—Weasley could you—?”

“No need, no need,” Dumbledore said pleasantly; he took out his wand, gave it a little flick, and a squashy chintz armchair appeared out of nowhere next to Harry. Dumbledore sat down, put the tips of his long fingers together, and looked at Fudge over them with an expression of polite interest.

“Yes,” Fudge said again, shuffling his notes. “Well, then. So. The charges. Yes.”

He extricated a piece of parchment from the pile before him, took a deep breath, and read, “The charges against the accused are as follows: That he did knowingly, deliberately, and in full awareness of the illegality of his actions, having received a previous written warning from the Ministry of Magic on a similar charge, produce a Patronus Charm in a Muggle-inhabited area, in the presence of a Muggle, on July the twenty-eighth at twenty-three minutes past nine, which constitutes an offense under paragraph C of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875, and also under section thirteen of the International Confederation of Wizards’ Statute of Secrecy.

“You are Harry James Potter, of number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surry?” Fudge said, glaring at Harry over the top of his parchment.

“Yes,” Harry said. He's already bias against me.

“You received an official warning from the Ministry for using illegal magic three years ago, did you not?”

“Yes but—“

“And yet you conjured a Patronus—“

“I wasn’t done!” Harry said hotly. “The first time was for a house-elf that Lucius Malfoy sent to keep me from Hogwarts; followed by me blowing up my aunt which you, Minister, pardoned. This time was against two dementors that attacked my cousin and myself!”

“You do not interrupt me, Potter!”

“Then don’t interrupt me Minister,” Harry glared.

The witch with the monocle on Fudge’s left cut across him in a booming voice. “You produced a fully fledged Patronus?”

“Yes, because—“

“A corporeal Patronus?”
“A—what?”

“Your Patronus had a clearly defined form? I mean to say, it was more than vapor or smoke?”

“Yes,” Harry said, feeling both impatient and slightly desperate, “it’s a snake. Used to be a stag, now a snake.”

“Use to be?” Madam Bones boomed. “You have produced a Patronus before now?”

“Yes,” Harry said. “I’ve been doing it for over a year—“

“You are fifteen years old.”

“Yes—“

“You learned this at school?”

“Yes, Professor Lupin taught me in my third year, because of the—“

“Impressive,” Madam Bones said, staring down at him, “a true Patronus at that age …very impressive indeed.”

Some of the wizards and witches around her were muttering again; a few nodded but others were frowning and shaking their heads.

“It’s not a question of how impressive the magic was,” Fudge said in a testy voice. “In fact, the more impressive the worse it is, I would have thought, given that the boy did it in plain view of a Muggle!”

Those who had been frowning now murmured in agreement, but it was the slight of Percy’s sanctimonious nod that goaded Harry to yell again.

“I did it because of the dementors!” he said loudly, before anyone could interrupt him again. “Two dementors attacked myself and my cousin in the alley—do not snicker Minister I am not done talking!” He fully yelled at the Minister. He got to his feet and continued talking, his voice growing louder as the Minister looked to interrupt. “Two dementors, one came after me the other my cousin! I forced the first one away with the Patronus Charm before sending it at my cousin before the dementors that are supposed to be in your control Minister could suck out the soul of a Muggle!”

“If you yell at me one more time Potter, I will snap your wand this instant!” Fudge yelled, his face turning purple and reminding Harry of Uncle Vernon.

“It would be useless, Cornelius, to remind you that such an act would be illegal,” Dumbledore spoke for the first time. “But if it helps Madam Bones, we do have a witness. To the presence of dementors in that alleyway, other than Dudley Dursley, obviously.”

“I see, who is this witness?” Madam Bones asked as Fudge sputtered angrily.

“I brought her with me,” Dumbledore said. “She’s just outside the door. Should I?”

“No—Weasley, you go,” Fudge barked at Percy, who got up at once, hurried down the stone steps from the judge’s balcony, and hastened past Dumbledore and Harry, without glancing at them.

A moment later, Percy returned, followed by Mrs. Figg. She looked scared and more batty than ever.
Dumbledore stood up and gave Mrs. Figg his chair, conjuring a second one for himself.

“Full name?” Fudge said loudly.

“Arabella Doreen Figg,” Mrs. Figg said.

“And who are you exactly?”

“I’m a resident of Little Whinging, close to where Harry Potter lives,” Mrs. Figg said.

“Tell us what you’ve seen,” Madam Bones said.

Harry looked around the courtroom as Mrs. Figg testified on what she had seen and felt. The one crow with the flesh-colored string had moved; it was no longer in the corner at a bottom bench but somehow got to a corner on the floor where Harry’s chair was located. Harry stared at the black crow and wondered briefly how nobody else could notice it. Maybe they were a thing of Tom’s creation; or maybe they’re just an animal that only Dark Wizards could see. But they’re crows! Just normal crows! How could anybody not see them? Maybe it was just that the others weren’t looking for them.

The single crow was not alone, Harry saw, as a half dozen crows stood in the room’s shadows, all of them holding flesh-colored strings that Harry now realized were Extendable Ears. Harry breathed a small sigh of relief. I knew Tom would be listening in somehow, he thought. He turned his attention back to the fifty or so wizards and witches sitting before him, all of whom were bickering to each other. Sometime during Harry’s staring at the crows Mrs. Figg left.

“Then,” Dumbledore’s voice snapped Harry out of his thoughts, “we must ask ourselves why somebody within the Ministry ordered a pair of dementors into that alleyway on the twenty-eighth of July.”

In the complete silence that greeted these words, the witch to the right of Fudge leaned forward so that Harry saw her for the first time. He thought she looked just like a large, pale toad. She was rather squat with a broad, flabby face, as little neck as Uncle Vernon, and a very wide, slack mouth. Her eyes were large, round, and slightly bulging. Even the little black velvet bow perched on top of her short curly hair put him in mind of a large fly she was about to catch on a long sticky tongue.

“The Chair recognizes Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister,” Fudge said.

The witch spoke in a fluttery, girlish, high-pitched voice that took Harry aback; he had been expecting a croak.

“I’m sure I must have misunderstood you, Professor Dumbledore,” she said with a simper that left her big, round eyes as cold as ever. “So silly of me. But it sounded for a teensy moment as though you were suggesting that the Ministry of Magic had ordered an attack on this boy!”

She gave a silvery laugh that made the hairs on the back of Harry’s neck stand up.

“If it is true that the dementors are taking orders only from the Ministry of Magic, and it is also true that two dementors attacked Harry and his cousin a week ago, then it follows logically that somebody at the Ministry might have ordered the attacks,” Dumbledore said politely. “Of course, these particular dementors may have been outside Ministry control—“

“There are no dementors outside Ministry control!” Fudge snapped.
“Then undoubtedly the Ministry will be making a full inquiry into why two dementors were so very far from Azkaban and why they attacked without authorization.”

“We are here to examine Harry Potter’s offenses under the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery!” Fudge said.

“Of course we are,” Dumbledore said, “but the presence of dementors in that alleyway is highly relevant. Clause seven of the Decree states that magic may be used before Muggles in exceptional circumstances, and as those exceptional circumstances include situations that threaten the life of the wizard or witch himself—“

“We are familiar with clause seven, thank you very much!” Fudge snarled.

_Are you?_ Harry thought.

“Then we are in agreement that Harry’s use of the Patronus Charm in these circumstances falls precisely into the category of exceptional circumstances it describes?”

“If there were dementors, which I doubt—“

“You have heard from an eyewitness,” Dumbledore said. “If you still doubt her truthfulness, class her back, question her again. I am sure she would not object.”

“I—that—not—” blustered Fudge, fiddling with the papers before him. “It’s—I want this over with today, Dumbledore!”

“But naturally, you would not care how many times you heard from a witness, if the alternative was a serious miscarriage of justice,” Dumbledore said.

“Serious miscarriage, my hat!” Fudge said at the top of his voice. “Have you ever bothered to tot up the number of cock-and-bull stories this boy has come out with, Dumbledore, while trying to cover up his flagrant misuse of magic out of school?”

“You cleared me of that time!” Harry yelled, “And the floating charm was a house-elf—“

“A house-elf! In a Muggle house! I ask you—“

“The house-elf in question is currently in the employ of Hogwarts school,” Dumbledore said. “I can summon him here in an instant to give evidence if you wish.”

“I—not—I haven’t got time to listen to house-elves.”

“And yet you have time to push lies and your blatant bias in our faces,” Harry said. “You are wasting everyone’s time, including mine, and I think I would like to reclaim it now. You heard my testimony of what happened in the alleyway along with Miss Figg’s. I had to use magic in front of my cousin or we both would have had our souls sucked out of us.”

“The Ministry does not have the power to expel Hogwarts students, Cornelius, as I reminded you on the night of the twenty-eighth of July,” Dumbledore said. “Nor does it have the right to confiscate wands until charges have been successfully proven, again, as I reminded you on the night of the twenty-eighth. In your admirable haste to ensure that the law is upheld, you appear to have overlooked a few laws yourself.”

“Laws can be changed,” Fudge said savagely.
“Of course they can,” Dumbledore said, inclining his head. “And you certainly seem to be making many changes, Cornelius. Why, in the few short weeks since I was asked to leave the Wizengamot, it has already become the practice to hold a full criminal trial to deal with a simple matter of underage magic! As far as I am aware, however, there is no law yet in place that says this court’s job is to punish Harry for every bit of magic he has ever performed. He has been charged with a specific offense and he has presented his defense passionately. All he and I can do now is to await your verdict.”

The crows now seemed to triple. They all held Extendable Ears and crowded the shadows in the dungeon. The members of the Wizengamot whispered to each other as Fudge glared at Dumbledore and Harry with open hatred. Harry met his gaze unblinking, wishing ever so much that he had his mask on him so that he could constructively output a building anger flaring inside him. The crows cawed silently, one of them daring to hop near Fudge and still nobody noticed. I guess I’m right. They can only be seen if you know where to look for. Harry thought to himself. The whispering stopped and Madam Bone’s booming voice ranged.

“There were hands in the air, many of them… more than half! “And those in favor of conviction?”

Fudge raised his hand, so did half a dozen others, including the witch on the right. Fudge glanced around at them all, looking as though there was something large stuck in his throat, then lowered his own hand. He took too deep breaths and then said, in a voice distorted by suppressed rage, “Very well, very well… cleared of all charges.”

“Excellent,” Dumbledore said briskly, springing to his feet, pulling out his wand, and causing the two chintz armchairs to vanish. “Well, I must be getting along. Good day to you all.”

And without looking once at Harry, he swept from the dungeon.

The room was filled with crying. Blaise Zabini stood awkwardly near the bed along with Marcus Flint. The graduated Slytherin had his arms crossed; over the summer he seemed to grow larger and broader than ever while Blaise Zabini stayed his slim, tall, graceful self. On the bed lying in week’s old clothes and legs curled to his chest was Theodore Nott.

“I came to check on him,” Zabini said looking up at the tall broad eighteen year old. “Haven’t heard from him in nearly two weeks.”

“So what you want me to do?” Flint grunted. “I had interview today.”

“For what?”

“Dragon handling.”

“Oh… sorry,” Zabini said. “But I cannot lift him and I think something horrible happened, but he won’t tell me.”

“You think he would tell me?” Flint asked, looking annoyed.

“Maybe,” Zabini shrugged. “More importantly I need you to lift him up and carry him.”

“Excuse me?” Flint said as Nott’s body froze. He looked up weakly at the two of them. His face looked extremely gaunt, dark large bags laid under his eyes; his skin looked paper-thin and almost

Nott just hid his face and continued to cry. “I don’t think he’s eaten for a week,” Zabini said.

“Why wouldn’t he do that? Idiot,” Flint said. Nott flinched and tried to move away but couldn’t.

Flint sighed and said, “Grab his wand.” He reached and easily lifted Theodore Nott off of the bed, his face scrunching. “You stink horribly,” he said.

Nott said nothing as he moved his arms weakly to cover his body. He opened his mouth and tried to make noises. His voice was rough and scratchy, as if a stone was dragged across a pavement. “Father… brought… she touched… I’m…” he began to cry again and his hands grabbed Marcus’s shirt.

Flint looked at Zabini with an annoyed expression. “You, boy, are going to write a letter to my interviewer explaining why I had to cancel it.”

“As soon as I make sure my friend is alright,” Zabini said. He picked up Nott’s wand and led Flint out of the bedroom. “I’ll send some house-elves to get his stuff,” Zabini said mostly to himself. Flint just grunted and followed him.

The two of them walked down the short hallway and stairs from Nott’s bedroom and left through the front door. Outside there was a sleek black car waiting for them in the curved driveway. Zabini knocked on the car window and said, “Bring us home,” before opening the back door for Flint.

“Why do you have such a Muggle thing?” Flint asked.

“Mother won it in a bet with a Ministry official,” Blaise said. “Besides, I think it might be the best way of travel for Theo right now.”

Flint just nodded and gave another annoyed grunt as Theodore Nott curled up against his body, resting his head on Flint’s lap and crying into it. Blaise sat on the other side of Theo and looked down at him. “Did he say anything?”

“Father, brought, she touched,’ and ‘I’m,’” Flint listed in a bored matter. “You know I was very close to getting this job in Romania.”

“I’ll make it up to you later, this is more important,” Blaise said.

“I have a life, you know, why couldn’t you ask those two trolls you hang around with?” Flint asked.

“Because they’re morons who asks questions,” Zabini said.

“And what am I?”

“A moron who asks the right questions,” Zabini said.

A silence fell over them that was broken only by Nott’s quivering sobs. “She touched… she touched…”

“Go to sleep Theo,” Blaise said gently. “You need it.” He looked at Flint and said, “You should go to sleep as well, it’ll take a while until we’re home.”

“My interviewer was a real looker you know,” Flint complained. “He had these nice big arms and sexy red hair.”
“I know, I know, I’ll make it up to you, now sleep,” Blaise grumbled closing his own eyes as his thoughts turned to brunet hair.

Lying alone in a bed of St. Mungo’s, Cedric Diggory rest, still in a supposed coma. His parents had gone home for rest and a change of clothes. Sunlight filtered through the window next to his bed, hitting his shrunken face. The curtains around the bed fluttered lightly in the breeze. The room was silent, his heartbeat was slow. In the empty room, a single crow flew in through the open window. It landed on Cedric’s chest and hopped lightly as it looked around. It cawed once, twice, three times before pecking curiously. It hopped towards Cedric’s stomach and pecked. Then it flew into the air again and circled around Cedric before flying off. Cedric’s body moved very subtly. His fingertips winced and his eyes fluttered; but that movement was enough to set off silent sensors that was observing his body. As his eyes opened groggily Cedric’s eyes looked around with great effort to see Healers and mediwizards looking at him as if he was a miracle.

“Good morning Cedric,” one of them smiled.
Dumbledore’s abrupt departure took Harry completely by surprise. The Wizengamot were all getting to their feet, talking, and gathering up their papers and packing them away. Harry stood up. Nobody seemed to be paying him the slightest bit of attention except the toadlike witch on Fudge’s right, who was now gazing down at him instead of at Dumbledore. Ignoring her, he left. Mr. Weasley was standing right outside, looking pale and apprehensive.

“Dumbledore didn’t say—“

“Cleared,” Harry said, pulling the door closed behind him, “of all charges!”

Beaming, Mr. Weasley seized Harry by the shoulders. “Harry, that’s wonderful! Well, of course, they couldn’t have found you guilty, not on the evidence, but even so, I can’t pretend—I wasn’t—“

But Mr. Weasley broke off, because the courtroom door had just opened again. The Wizengamot were filing out.

“Merlin’s beard,” Mr. Weasley said wonderingly, pulling Harry aside to let them all pass, “you were tried by the full court?”

“I think so,” Harry said quietly.

One or two of the passing wizards nodded to Harry as they passed and a few, including Madam Bones, said, “Morning, Arthur,” to Mr. Weasley, but most averted their eyes. Fudge and the toadlike witch were almost the last to leave the dungeon; Fudge acted like Harry and Mr. Weasley was part of the wall, but again, the witch looked almost appraisingly at Harry as she passed. Last of all to pass was Percy, Like Fudge, he completely ignored his father and Harry; he marched past clutching a large roll of parchment and a handful of spare quills, his back rigid and his nose in the air. He reminded Harry of Draco, before he and Ron started dating.

“I’m going to take you straight back so you can tell the others the good news,” Mr. Weasley said, beckoning Harry forward as Percy’s heels disappeared up the stairs to the ninth level. “I’ll drop you off on the way to something I have to take care of. A toilet in Bethnal Green started spraying muggles and saying swear words as they pass. Come on…”

“So what will you have to do about the toilet?” Harry asked, grinning. Everything suddenly seemed five times funnier than usual. It was starting to sink in: He was cleared, he was going back to Hogwarts.

“Oh, it’s a simple enough anti-jinx,” Mr. Weasley said as they mounted their stairs, “but it’s not so much having to repair the damage, it’s more the attitude behind the vandalism, Harry. Muggle-baiting might strike some wizards as funny, but it’s an expression of something much deeper and nastier, and I for one—“

Mr. Weasley broke off in mid-sentence. They had just reached the ninth-level corridor, and Cornelius Fudge was standing a few feet away from them, talking quietly to a tall man with long pale hair that was tied in a neat braid. The second man turned at the sound of their footsteps. He too broke off in mid-conversation, his cold hard eyes narrowing and fixed upon Harry’s face.

“Well, well, well … Patronus Potter,” said Corban Yaxley coolly. “The Minister was just telling
me all about your trial and lucky escape, Potter. It truly must be a useful trait to have, wiggling out of very tight holes. Almost snakelike, isn’t it?”

Mr. Weasley gripped Harry’s shoulder in warning.

“Yeah,” Harry said. “I’m good at escaping. It’s good to know what exactly you’re going into first, Yaxley. Maybe you should remember that.”

Corban Yaxley raised his eyes to Mr. Weasley’s face. “Red hair… smell of poverty… you must be a Weasley. What are you doing here?”

“I work here,” Mr. Weasley said shortly.

“Not here, surely? Your intelligence is far too low to even have a step in here,” Yaxley said.

“Only those who lack faith in their intelligences mocks others, Yaxley,” Harry said.

“Really? And where did you steal that quip from, Potter?” Yaxley asked, raising an eyebrow. Harry just smiled.

“Why don’t you tell me what you’re doing here, Yaxley?” Harry said.

“I don’t think private matters between myself and the Minister are any concern of yours, Potter,” Yaxley said, smoothing the front of his robes; Harry distinctly heard the gentle clinking of what sounded like a full pocket of gold. “Really, just because you are Dumbledore’s favorite boy, you must not expect the same indulgence from the rest of us. …Shall we go to your office, then Minister?”

“Certainly,” Fudge said, turning his back on Harry and Mr. Weasley. “This way, Corban.”

“The same should go to you, Yaxley,” Harry called out. “You play Lucius Malfoy well, but you will never be him. You’ll need more than just reading scripts.”

Yaxley stopped and turned to stare at Potter. “And do you know of reading scripts, Potter?” he asked, clear annoyance in his voice. He turned back to the Minister and left with him, both speaking in low tones. Mr. Weasley did not let go of Harry’s shoulder until they had disappeared into the lift.

Harry immediately scanned the corridor and gave a loud noise of annoyance when he saw no shadow or crow.

“Come alone,” Mr. Weasley said. “Don’t worry about them, I’ll leave a note for Dumbledore when I drop you off, he ought to know Yaxley’s been talking to Fudge.”

“What private business have they got together anyway?”

“Gold, I expect,” Mr. Weasley said angrily. “Malfoy’s been giving generously to all sorts of things for years… I think Yaxley’s picking up the slack. …What was it you say? He’s ‘playing Lucius Malfoy’?” Mr. Weasley gave Harry a wily smile. It didn’t sound as cool coming from Mr. Weasley, Harry decided.

The lift arrived; it was empty except for a flock of memos that flapped around Mr. Weasley’s head as he pressed the button for the Atrium and the doors clanged shut; he waved them away irritably. Harry looked up and noticed them for the first time. They were paper owls.
What would a Death Eater want with Fudge? Harry wondered to himself. *He could having Fudge under the Imperius Curse… but then again I think he might be too preoccupied being a poor pretender.*

The door slid open and they stepped out into the now almost-deserted Atrium. They walked straight down before Mr. Weasley stopped in front of a newsstand. “One second Harry,” He said picking up a magazine called *The Quibbler*. “Sirius will find this very amusing,” he said under his breath looking through the articles. “Come along.”

“Of course you got off Potter, nothing bad ever sticks to you,” Draco said from his seat looking over his book.

“I knew it!” Ron cheered punching the air. “You always get away with stuff!”

“Like I said,” Draco shrugged, talking mostly to himself. “Harry escapes everything.”

“They were bound to clear you,” Hermione said, who had looked positively faint with anxiety when Harry had entered the kitchen and was now holding a shaking hand over her eyes. “There was no case against you, none at all. …”

Mrs. Weasley was wiping her face on her apron, and Fred, George, and Ginny were doing a kind of war dance to a chant that went “He got off, he got off, he got off—“

“Enough,” Tom said as he entered the room, stopping their chanting immediately. He looked at Harry and gave a short smile and nodded his head to the side. Harry followed and they reached a small room where a collection of Extendable Ears sat on a table that looked freshly clean.

“How many do you have?” Harry gasped.

“Enough,” Tom said. “Sit down, I want to talk about the trial.” Harry sat down in the seat next to Tom. “First, I want to congratulate you on getting cleared. Of course, using Dumbledore’s assistance would naturally lead to that conclusion. That said…” Tom took out his wand before Harry even realized it and he felt a hard stinging pain on his lower backside.

“Ow!”

“That was for losing your temper,” Tom said. “You do not simply scream at the Minister of Magic and expect to just get away with it. You are lucky that Dumbledore was there or else the idiot would have thrown you into Azkaban without a second thought.” He flicked his wand again and Harry felt the stinging pain once more.

“OW!”

“That was for letting Dumbledore and Fudge talk for too long,” Tom said. “If you want to have influence with just your words Harry, you are going to have to use them. Letting Fudge and Dumbledore bicker is in no way beneficial to you as my Dark Prince, understand?”

“Yes, Tom,” Harry said, rubbing his backside with his hand. Tom smirked and whipped his wand again. “Ow! What was that for?”

“Because I like it,” Tom chuckled. “Come, my love, we should return to the others before your godfather figures we’re doing something you shouldn’t know even exists yet.” He took Harry’s hand and pulled the boy into a dominating kiss. “Congratulations,” he whispered, “my little
prince.”

Over the next few days Harry could not help noticing that there was one person within number twelve, Grimmauld Place, who did not seem wholly overjoyed that he would be returning to Hogwarts. Sirius had put up a very good show of happiness on first hearing the news, wringing Harry’s hand and beaming just like the rest of them; soon, however, he was moodier and surlier than before, talking less to everybody, even Harry, and spending increasing amounts of time shut up in his mother’s room with Buckbeak.

“Don’t you go feeling guilty!” Hermione said sternly, after Harry had confided some of his feelings to Hermione, Ron, and Draco while they scribbled out a moldy cupboard on the third floor a few days later. “You belong at Hogwarts and Sirius knows it. Personally, I think he’s being selfish.”

“You’re very harsh, Granger,” Draco said. “You wouldn’t want to be left in this house without company.”

“He’ll have company, Malfoy!” Hermione said. “It’s headquarters to the Order of the Phoenix, isn’t it? He just got his hopes up that Harry would be coming to live here with him.”

“I don’t think that’s true,” Harry said, wringing out his cloth. “He wouldn’t give me a straight answer when I asked him if I could.”

“He just didn’t want to get his own hopes up even more,” Hermione said wisely. “And he probably felt a bit guilty himself, because I think a part of him really hoped that you’d be expelled. Then you’d both be outcasts together.”

“Come off it!” Harry and Ron said together, but Hermione merely shrugged.

At this point Mrs. Weasley entered the bedroom behind them. “Still not finished?” she said, poking her head into the cupboard.

“I thought you might be here to tell us to have a break!” Ron said bitterly. “D’you know how much mold we’ve got rid of since we arrived here?”

“You were so keen to help the Order,” Mrs. Weasley said, “you can do your bit by making headquarters fit to live in!”

“I feel like a bloody house-elf,” Draco grumbled.

“Don’t you still have those?” Harry asked.

“No, for some reason they won’t come when I call for them. Lazy asses, the lot of them,” Draco cursed. Ron snorted while Hermione looked at him disapprovingly.

“Well now you understand what dreadful lives they lead, perhaps you’ll be a bit more active in S.P.E.W.!” Hermione said hopefully, as Mrs. Weasley left them to it again.

Draco stared at her and said, “Granger the hell is spew?”

“Her house-elf rights thing,” Ron grumbled. “Be lucky I didn’t try to rope you in on it.”

“I would have broken up with you right then and there,” Draco said. Ron chuckled and smirked at
“But who would have make you speak the way you do now?” he asked.

“You mean who would have introduce ‘bloody’ and ‘asses’ into my vocabulary? I don’t know Cub, I’m sure someone would introduce them to me,” Draco said, giving Ron a wolfish grin. They both chuckled at each other, causing Harry to roll his eyes and Hermione to huff as their ignorance to the horrible conditions of house-elves.

Harry and Tom were lounging in their room, Harry resting on Tom’s chest as the Dark Lord played with his hair. “So far nothing,” Tom sighed. “We know that the Order of the Phoenix is looking for this weapon more powerful than the Killing Curse before I can get to it, but still I do not know what is it. … I don’t like this Harry, we need to distract them somehow.”

“How are we going to do that?” Harry asked. Tom looked down at the boy on his chest and smiled. “Simple, my prince, you need to make a name for yourself.”

“A name?”

“Yes,” Tom nodded. “So far the Order only knows of myself and the Death Eaters, who are mostly all against me. But if we can distract them, given them a new name to worry about—”

“Then that’ll give you more time to figure out what the Order is afraid you’ll get,” Harry said.

“Exactly,” Tom nodded. He moved to a drawer next to the bed and pulled out a heavy chained locket. “With each Horcrux I absorb, I gain more and more of the husk’s memories,” he said. “My diary, Slytherin’s Locket, Gaunt’s Ring, that snake, Ravenclaw’s Diadem, you, and one more that we still need to get our hands on. Each hold memories from the husk, and with each I can fill in the blank pieces that the damn husk dares to leave.”

“Well if he didn’t then this would be too easy,” Harry smirked. “And where’ the fun in that?”

Tom nodded and chuckled softly. “Each of the Horcruxes have a history Harry, a long and powerful history that leads back to the founders of Hogwarts. One day I’ll tell you their history, but for now we must focus.”

“On distracting the Order,” Harry said.

“Correct,” Tom nodded. “But what to do? What can we do that will make the Order notice you?”

“I could simply draw the Dark Mark on the walls here,” Harry chuckled.

“True, but that seems a bit too juvenile, my pet,” Tom said. He thought for a moment, stroking Harry’s hair in contemplation, before finally saying “Azkaban. …We could look to try and formulate a breakout in Azkaban.”

“Azkaban? But your more… insane and ruthless supporters are imprisoned there,” Harry said.

“Exactly,” Tom nodded. “If the Order were to worry about a breakout, it would leave plenty of time for us to figure out this ‘weapon.’”

“But what if one of your supporters accidently breaks out?” Harry asked.

“Then we will simply kill them,” Tom shrugged. “Most likely most of them will rally to Yaxley
and his cause once they’ve learned of the events in the graveyard. But if they just see you walking around the place, see the Dark Prince infiltrating the prison and leaving your own mark… then that will make enough of a distraction.”

“And I’m guessing I’m using the crows again?” Harry asked.

“Of course, my love,” Tom nodded. “How else would you get to the island prison?”

“Do you want me to do it tonight?” Harry asked with a slight whine in his throat.

“No,” Tom said. “All you are doing tonight is saying here, in my arms.”

Harry smiled and turned so he could burrow his head in Tom’s chest. “I like that idea,” he said, placing a hand flat on Tom’s chest in front of him. Tom chuckled and continued to play with Harry’s hair as Harry drew figures with his finger on Tom’s chest.

“Draco. Tell me what’s the matter,” Ron demanded. “I know something’s the matter, you’ve been strange ever since we’ve got home.”

“Nothing’s the matter,” Draco said. They were in a third dining room scrubbing a cabinet. They opened the drawers and threw away every utensil that were embroidered with the Black family crest.

“Don’t lie to me Draco,” Ron said, throwing an entire drawer in a waste bag.

Draco looked over at Ron and gave him a small glare. “They hate me, I just know it,” he muttered.

“Who?”

“They,” Draco said, throwing a hand out to indicate the house. “Everyone. They all hate me.”

“They don’t hate you!” Ron said, looking insulted. “My mother doesn’t hate you.”

“She tolerates me,” Draco sneered. “Your family tolerates me because of you. But the rest of them? They just look at me like ‘that Malfoy kid’ whose parents were large obnoxious prats. One of which was a Death Eater.” He sighed and shook his head. “It’s like they’re expecting me to lash out and say I’m a Death Eater or something.”

“No, they don’t believe that—“

“Look at how they ignore me! Or just listen to how my damn cousin talked about our family!” Draco yelled, accidently pulling out a drawer from the cabinet, its contents slipping all over the floor. “He hates even being related to me.”

“You’re over reacting Draco, it’s not that bad,” Ron said.

Draco gave him a look. “Then tell me this Ron,” he said. “How would you guys react if you come to my home? I come from a Pureblood family just like the Blacks, we have Dark Artifacts just like the Blacks if not more. Would you treat my home like trash as you guys do with the Black House?”

“I…no of course not!” Ron said. Draco just gave him a long look and shook his head as he bent down to pick up the spilled utensils. “Draco seriously!”

“There’s a cup in my home,” Draco said. “When used it turns any liquid that’s poured into it into a
poison that weakens the drinker drastically. Father used to keep it in a glass cabinet in the main dining room where guests can see. It is always in view and placed next to the guest’s silverware. He told me that the only reason he used it was to remind everyone who visit that he is in charge. If you, or the rest of the Weasleys or anyone of the Order come to my home… would you throw out the cup without a thought and judge me because of it?”

“No of course I wouldn’t,” Ron said.

“I’m not asking about you Ron,” Draco said. “I’m asking about the others! How would Tonks react? Moody would try and throw me into Azkaban the second he sees them! And Mrs. Weasley… your mother would never let us even be in the same room ever again!”

“She wouldn’t—“

“Ron, please,” Draco said. “You know that she’ll do something like that. If she even takes a step in my home, she’ll have us apart faster than you can even argue.” Ron frowned and said nothing. Draco sighed and threw away the utensils that fell. “It doesn’t matter, they’ll always just see me as my parents’ son.”

“That’s not true, Draco and you know it,” Ron said, his tone getting irritable. Draco looked up at him and said, “How would you know? You don’t see the way they avoid me, you’re too busy laughing with them, belonging with them.”

“And where do you think you be if you weren’t here? Hmm?” Ron asked angrily.

“I don’t know, maybe with Zabini or Nott, or maybe just stay home by myself,” Draco shrugged.

“You’re an idiot Malfoy, you know that?” Ron said. “You are not going to Zabini or Nott’s place and you are definitely not going to stay hole up in your house all alone! You’re here with me, and Harry, and Tom. Stop with this stupid nonsense they don’t hate you—“

“I’m an idiot? I’m the idiot!” Draco yelled. “Are you kidding me? Open your damn eyes Weasleys! Or are you so blinded by the fact that there are people who gives a damn about you that you can’t even do that?”

“Don’t you yell at me!”

“Then don’t act like a big idiot!” Draco yelled. “You know my history, you know your family and the lot they keep with—“

“The lot they keep with? What are they not good enough for you anymore Malfoy?” Ron snarled. “Are you just realizing that we’re dirt poor and trying to get out of it?”

“As if! As if this is about money! They don’t care about that! I DON’T CARE ABOUT THAT!”

“Then what the hell is this about!” Ron screamed back at Draco.

“MY LAST NAME!” Draco roared. “My damn last name you stupid idiot! I’m a Malfoy! They will only see me as a Malfoy! It doesn’t matter who I am, or how much I’ve changed because to them I’m just a damn Malfoy! The son of a Death Eater and his wife! And a representation of everything my cousin and everyone else hates!”

“Stop it! Just stop it! That is not true!” Ron yelled. “My mum does not hate you, my family does not hate you—do you think they would allow you to be here if they hated you?”
“I’m a damn orphan and your boyfriend, where else would I go?” Draco said. “All of this is out of pity!”

“Sod off with your pity and grow a brain Malfoy!”

“That’s it!” Draco slammed shut a drawer and stomped away towards the door.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Ron yelled.

“To get a drink! I’m thirsty!” Draco yelled. He opened the door and slammed it behind him, causing the portraits on the walls to start yelling again. “Will you all shut up!” Draco yelled at them. The portraits stopped, shocked to see a person daring to speak to them in that matter. Draco made his way down the stairs where the yelling of Mrs. Black’s portrait filled the halls. “And you!” he screamed in anger. “JUST SHUT UP!”

“FILTH! YOU DARE YELL AT ME LIKE THAT YOU BLOOD TRAITOR!”

“I DO SO SHUT UP!” Draco yelled, and with inhuman strength he pulled the curtains shut. His body huffed with anger as he descended into the kitchen where Harry was. “What’s with all the screaming?” He asked.

“Nothing,” Draco spat. “Keep your nose out of it Potter.”

Harry just gave Draco a look before shrugging. Draco reached for two mugs and filled them both with water. Harry just watched him silently as the Malfoy heir muttered darkly to himself. The door to the kitchen opened again and Sirius walked in. “What was with the screaming? I thought we told you to keep it down,” he said.

“Draco and Ron were having a row,” Harry said from his seat.

“We were not—“

“Keep it down Malfoy, we were in the middle of an important meeting,” Sirius said. “You should know better, anyways.”

Draco just looked at him darkly. “We’ll try to keep it down,” he said bitterly.

“Good,” Sirius smiled. “That’s right, Molly wanted me to tell you both that lunch we’ll be when the meeting’s over.” Sirius turned and left, leaving the two boys alone. Draco looked at Harry and noticed that he had several crumpled up pieces of parchment all around him.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Nothing, just drawing,” Harry said. Draco scoffed and walked towards the table, looking over the paper. “You’re a horrible drawer, Potter.”

“Thanks for your input, Malfoy,” Harry said.

“Is that supposed to be a snake? Looks more like a screwed up line,” Draco said.

“Thanks, Malfoy,” Harry sighed.

“And that skull looks off center and unsymmetrical,” Draco pointed out. “And is that really supposed to be a crown or just a pile of thorns?”

“Thank you, Draco, feeling better?” Harry asked irritably.
“No, but you help,” Draco said. He took the two mugs of water and left the kitchen, making his way back to the room he and Ron were working on. He entered to see Ron working with a stubborn focus as he threw everything he could touch into the waste bag. Draco walked up and tapped Ron on the shoulder with one mug. The redhead looked around and took the mug, drinking deeply.

“I still think you’re an idiot,” Ron muttered.

“Good, I still think you’re one too,” Draco said taking a sip. “Come on, we’re almost done here,” he said before working on the cabinet again.

On the very last day of the holidays Harry was sweeping up Hedwig’s owl droppings from the top of the wardrobe while Tom sat at the desk (after days of failures he gave up and dump the drawing job to Tom) when Ron entered their bedroom carrying a couple of envelopes.

“Booklists have arrived,” he said, throwing one of the envelopes up to Harry, who was standing on a chair, and carefully placing a second one next to Tom. “About time, I thought they’d forgotten, they usually come much earlier than this. …”

Draco entered looking slightly annoyed and snatched a third letter from Ron’s hands. “Oaf,” he muttered before sitting down on Harry’s bed. Harry swept the last of the droppings into a rubbish bag and threw the bag over Ron’s head into the wastepaper basket in the corner, which swallowed it and belched loudly. He then opened his letter: It contained two pieces of parchment, one the usual reminder that term started on the first of September, the other telling him which books he would need for the coming year.


Crack.

Fred and George Apparated right beside Harry. He was so used to them doing this by now he didn’t even fall off his chair.

“We were just wondering who assigned the Slinkhard book,” Fred said conversationally.

“Because it means Dumbledore’s found a new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher,” George said.

“By the way Tommy, do you have the same list like we do?” Fred asked.

“Tommy?” Harry asked, looking at Tom. His boyfriend just gave the two twins sharp looks before looking down at his list. “Yes, I do,” he said shortly.

“Ron? Ron? You okay?” Draco asked. Ron did not answer. Harry looked around. Ron was standing very still with his mouth slightly open, gaping at his letter from Hogwarts.

“What’s the matter?” Fred said impatiently, moving around Ron to look over his shoulder at the parchment. Fred’s mouth fell open too.

“Prefect?” he said, staring incredulously at the letter. “Prefect?”

George leapt forward, seized the envelope in Ron’s other hand, and turned it upside down. Harry saw something scarlet and gold fall into George’s palm.
“No way,” George said in a hushed voice.

“No one in their right mind would make Ron a prefect. …”

“Shut it,” Draco said snatching the letter from Fred’s hand.

“But you didn’t think he would get it, did you Malfoy?” Fred asked.

Draco shrugged and showed them his own Prefect badge. George snatched that up and they both stared at the two of them. “Prefect …ickle Ronnie the prefect…”

“And his boyfriend Draco,” Fred groaned. “Oh Mum’s going to be revolting,” he thrust the prefect badge back at Ron as though it might contaminate him. Ron, who still had not said a word, took the badge, stared at it for a moment, and then held it out to Harry and Draco as though asking mutually for confirmation that it was genuine. Harry took it. A large P was superimposed on the Gryffindor lion. He looked at Draco’s badge, which the Slytherin snatched from George when he wasn’t paying attention, and saw the same P superimposed on the Slytherin snake.

The door banged open. Hermione came tearing into the room, her cheeks flushed and her hair flying. There was an envelope in her hand. “Did you—did you get—?”

She spotted the badge in Harry’s hand and let out a shriek.

“I knew it!” she said excitedly, brandishing her letter. “Me too, Harry, me too!”

“No,” Harry said quickly, pushing the badge back into Ron’s hand. “It’s Ron, not me.”

“It—what?”

“Ron’s prefect, Granger, not Harry here,” Draco said wrapping an arm around Ron’s waist and holding up both badges.

“Ron?” Hermione said, her jaw dropping. “But… are you sure? I mean—“

She turned red as Ron looked around at her with a defiant expression on his face.

“It’s my name on the letter,” he said.

“I…” Hermione said, looking thoroughly bewildered. “I… well… wow! Well done, Ron! That’s really—“

“Unexpected,” George said, nodding.

“No,” Hermione said, blushing harder than ever, “no it’s not …Ron’s done loads of … he’s really…”

Tom chuckled, causing Harry to look at him for the first time as the door opened a little wider and Mrs. Weasley backed into the room carrying a pile of freshly laundered robes.

“Ginny said the booklists had come at last,” she said, glancing around at all the envelopes as she made her way over of the bed and started sorting the robes into two piles. “If you give them to me, I’ll start taking them over to Diagon Alley this afternoon and get your books while you’re packing. Ron, I’ll have to get you more pajamas, these are at least six inches too short, I can’t believe how fast you’re growing… what color would you like?”
“Get him red and gold to match his badge,” George said, smirking.

“Matching his what?” Mrs. Weasley said absently, rolling up a pair of black socks and placing them on Harry’s pile.

“His badge,” Fred said, with the air of getting the worst over quickly. “His lovely new prefect’s badge.”

Fred’s words took a moment to penetrate Mrs. Weasley’s preoccupation about pajamas.

“His… but… Ron, you’re not…?”

Ron held up his badge.

Mrs. Weasley let out a shriek just like Hermione’s.

“I don’t believe it! I don’t believe it! Oh Ron, how wonderful! A prefect! That’s everyone in the family!”

“What are Fred and I, next-door neighbors?” George said indignantly, as his mother pushed him aside and flung her arms around her youngest son.

“Wait until your father hears! Ron, I’m so proud of you, what wonderful news, you could end up Head Boy like Bill and Percy, it’s the first step! Oh, what a thing to happen in the middle of all this worry, I’m just thrilled, oh Ronnie—”

Fred and George were both making loud retching noises behind her back but Mrs. Weasley did not notice; arms tight around Ron’s neck, she was kissing him all over his face, which had turned a brighter scarlet than his badge.

“Mum… don’t… Mum get a grip. …” he muttered, trying to push her away.

She let go of him and said breathlessly. “Well, what will it be? We gave Percy an owl, but you’ve already got one, of course.”

“W-what do you mean?” Ron said, looking as though he did not dare believe his ears. Draco’s arm returned to it’s previous place around Ron’s waist.

“You’ve got to have a reward for that!” Mrs. Weasley said fondly. “How about a nice new set of dress robes?”

“We’ve already brought him some,” Fred said sourly, who looked as though he sincerely regretted this generosity.

“Or a new cauldron, Charlie’s old one’s rusting through, or a new rat, you always liked Scabbers —”

“Mum,” Ron said hopefully, “can I have a new broom?”

Mrs. Weasley’s face fell slightly; broomsticks were expensive.

“Not a really good one!” Ron hastened to add. “Just—just a new one for a change…”

Mrs. Weasley hesitated, then smiled.

“Of course you can. …Well, I’d better get going if I’ve got a broom to buy too. I’ll see you all
later…. Little Ronnie, a prefect! And don’t forget to pack your trunks. …A prefect… Oh, I’m all of a dither!”

She gave Ron yet another kiss on the cheek, sniffled loudly, and bustled from the room. Fred and George exchanged looks.

“You don’t mind if we don’t kiss you, do you, Ron?” Fred said in a falsely anxious voice.

“We could curtsy, if you like,” George said.

“Oh, shut up,” Ron said, scowling at them.

“or what?” Fred said, an evil grin spreading across his face. “Going to put us in detention?”

“No, but I’ll force to sit down all alone while Ron and I do this,” Draco said pulling Ron for a long, passion-filled kiss as their tongues entangled in the middle. Fred and George’s faces quickly fell into an embarrassed look as the two continued to kiss. Draco moved away with a smirk and rested his head in the crook of Ron’s neck, looking at the twins. “Well? No witty comeback or anything?” he asked.

The twins just shook their heads and with another loud crack, Disapparated.

“Ignore them Ron, they’re just jealous,” Draco said.

“I don’t think they are,” Ron said doubtfully, also looking up at the ceiling. “They’ve always said only prats become prefects. …Still,” he added on a happier note, “they’ve never had new brooms! I wish I could go with Mum and choose. …She’ll never be able to afford a Nimbus, but there’s the new Cleansweep out, that’d be great. …Yeah, I think I’ll go and tell her I like the Cleansweep, just so she knows. …”

He dashed from the room, leaving Harry, Hermione, Tom, and Draco alone. For some reason, Harry found that he did not want to look at Hermione and Draco. He turned to Tom, and pretended to busy himself by looking at the drawing. Tom gave him an odd look.

“Harry?” Hermione said tentatively.

“Well done,” Harry said, so heartily it did not sound like his voice at all, and still not looking at her. “Brilliant. Prefect. Great.”

“Thanks,” Hermione said. “Erm—Harry—could I borrow Hedwig so I can tell Mum and Dad? They’ll be really pleased—I mean, prefect is something they can understand—“

“Yeah, no problem,” Harry said, still in the horrible hearty voice that did not belong to him. “Take her!”

A few moments passed; Harry heard the door close. “Sit,” Tom said.

“Tom—“

“Sit down, Prince,” Tom said darkly. Harry frowned and sat down. “What was that?”

“Nothing,” Harry said.

“Harry,” Tom said warningly. “That was not you.”

“How would you know?”
“Because I’ve been inside you for two years,” Tom said. “I know that they were all expecting you to become prefect. In fact I had the same thought.”

“You did?”

“Of course,” Tom said. “I was Head Boy, after all. However, do not use this as an excuse to act like a jealous dog. You should be happy for Ronald, as well as Draco here, and think of it as a blessing.”

“What about?”

“You have three friends who are Prefects,” Tom said. “They can help you gain privileges you don’t normally get.”

“Besides Harry,” Draco interrupted. “You’re too much of a trouble-maker to become prefect. And are you really going to be so egotistical that you can’t be happy for Ron getting something that you can’t? For besting you in one thing? I never knew you were so shallow, Potter.”

“I am not shallow!”

“You sound like it to me,” Draco said indifferently looking at his own badge. “I’m guessing you’re jealous of me as well?”

“No! I’m not jealous!”

“Then act like it Potter,” Draco said.

“Harry, look at me,” Tom said. Harry turned his attention to Tom. “Be happy for Ron, he deserves this from everything we’ve experienced. And instead of worrying about him, focus on the task on hand.”

“You mean the one you gave me,” Harry said.

“Does it have to do with those awful drawings Harry’s been trying to do?” Draco asked.

“Yes, this is official Dark Prince business,” Tom said. “You know about the small insurgence from the Death Eaters, Draco.”

“Yes.”

“This is to just to remind them of who we are,” Tom said. “As well as distract Dumbledore and the Order.”

“And how exactly are you going to do that?” Draco asked. Tom smirked and looked at Harry. “When he is finally finish crafting his own mark, the Dark Prince will be sneaking into Azkaban and placing it where everyone can see it. We don’t need to worry about the Ministry worrying, the Minister will mark it up as a prank to try and scare the community—“

Footsteps could be heard on the stairs and Ron bounded back through the door. “Just caught her!” he said happily. “She says she’ll get the Cleansweep if she can.”

“Cool,” Harry said, the atmosphere in the room changing dynamically as Tom turned back to his drawing, any thoughts or talk of the Dark Prince lay forgotten. “Listen—Ron—well done, mate.” Harry said.

“Yes, congratulations,” Tom said.
The smile faded off Ron’s face.

“I never thought it would be me!” he said, shaking his head. “I thought it would be you!”

“Nah, I’ve caused too much trouble,” Harry said, echoing Draco.

“Yeah,” Ron said, “yeah, I suppose. …Well, we’d better get our trunks packed, hadn’t we? Come on Draco!”

“I’m not a pet,” Draco grumbled as he shook his head and followed Ron out of the room, leaving Harry and Tom alone.

“Tom—“

“I’m almost done Harry, just give me a few moments. The design is done, but the spellwork needs completing,” Tom said a bit shortly. Harry could feel his disappointment radiating from his body. He did his best to ignore it and started packing his trunk.

It was odd how widely their possessions seemed to have scattered themselves since they had arrived. It took Harry most of the afternoon to retrieve his books and belongings from all over the house and stow them back into his school trunk. Harry noticed that Tom’s possessions had never really left the room; they were either sitting on the desk or waiting in the wardrobe, which made packing for him easy.

Mrs. Weasley returned from Diagon Alley around six o’clock, laden with books and carrying a long package wrapped in thick brown paper that Ron took from her with a moan of longing.

“Never mind unwrapping it now, people are arriving for dinner, I want you all downstairs,” she said, but the moment she was out of sight Ron ripped off the paper in a frenzy and examined every inch of his new broom, an ecstatic expression on his face.

Down in the basement Mrs. Weasley had hung a scarlet banner over the heavily laden dinner table, which read CONGRATULATIONS RON AND HERMIONE—NEW PREFECTS. Ron opened his mouth to correct it, but Draco just shook his head and gave him a look. “She just forgot,” Ron whispered.

“It doesn’t matter,” Draco said.

Sirius, Lupin, Tonks, and Kingsley Shacklebolt were already there and Mad-Eye Moody stumped in shortly after Harry had gotten himself a butterbeer.

“Oh, Alastor, I’m glad you’re here,” Mrs. Weasley said brightly, as Mad-Eye shrugged off his traveling cloak. “We’ve been wanting to ask you for ages—could you have a look in the writing desk in the drawing room and tell us what’s inside it? We haven’t wanted to open it just in case it’s something really nasty.”

“No problem, Molly …”

Moody’s electric blue eye swiveled upward and stared fixedly through the ceiling of the kitchen.

“Drawing room,” he growled, as the pupil contracted. “Desk in the corner? Yeah, I see it. …Yeah, it’s a boggart. …Want me to go up and get rid of it, Molly?”

“No, no, I’ll do it myself later,” Mrs. Weasley beamed. “You have your drink. We’re having a little bit of a celebration, actually. …” She gestured at the scarlet banner. “Fourth prefect in the
“Prefect, huh?” Moody growled, his normal eye on Ron and his magical eye swiveling around to gaze into the side of his head. “Well, congratulations,” Moody said, “authority figures always attract trouble, but I suppose Dumbledore thinks you can withstand most major jinxes or he wouldn’t have appointed you.”

Ron looked rather startled at this view of the matter but was saved the trouble of responding by the arrival of his father and eldest brother. Mrs. Weasley was in such a good mood she did not even complain that they had brought Mundungus with them too; he was wearing a long overcoat that seemed oddly lumpy in unlikely places and declined the offer to remove it and put it with Moody’s traveling cloak.

Ron tried to get Mrs. Weasley’s attention but every time he tried, Draco would stop him again repeating that it didn’t matter to him. The more he repeated it, the more stubborn and annoyed Ron seemed to get so that when Mr. Weasley said, “Well, I think a toast is in order. To Ron and Hermione, the new Gryffindor prefects!” Ron stood up and yelled at the top of his voice, “Draco’s also the new prefect for Slytherin!”

Everyone choked in their drinks a little and Mr. Weasley looked at Ron. “He is?” he asked.

“Ron, don’t,” Draco said.

“He is,” Ron said dragging Draco to stand and pulling out Draco’s prefect badge from his pocket. “See?”

Mrs. Weasley looked at it and gave a small shriek. “Draco! Oh I’m so embarrassed! I didn’t know! Oh how awful of me—ignoring you like that—Oh! Arthur! ARTHUR! Why didn’t you tell me Draco’s also a prefect? Come here Draco!” Mrs. Weasley pulled Draco into a bone-crushing hug and said, “Your parents would have been proud of you, I’m sure of it.”

“They would,” Draco said softly. The room was oddly quiet as everyone stared awkwardly at Mrs. Weasley and Draco. Draco was avoiding everyone’s gaze as Mrs. Weasley finally let him go only for Mr. Weasley to grab his hand and shake it furiously telling him “congratulations.” The others joined in, Harry and Tom saying it earnestly while the others seemed a bit hesitant, but in the end they all applauded for the three of them.

Mrs. Weasley kept fussing over Ron and Draco, apologizing so much that she didn’t realize that Draco was a prefect. “—and I had your book list and everything! How could I have not realized—your letter was a bit fatter than the others but still—” Draco kept telling Mrs. Weasley that it didn’t matter, but Harry couldn’t help but notice the small upwards curls at the end of Draco’s mouth.

Draco and Tonks listened along with Ginny and Ron gushed over his new broom; Tom was talking with Sirius, Lupin, and Kingsley while the twins and Mundungus were crouched in a corner. Harry sat down and listened to the conversations around him for a bit as he ate.

When Mrs. Weasley was done eating, which she did after Draco finally convinced her that it wasn’t her fault, she announced, “Well, I think I’ll sort out that boggart before I turn in …Arthur, I don’t want this lot up too late, all right? ‘Night, Harry, dear.”

A few minutes later Harry patted Tom’s shoulder as he got up to leave. Tom immediately followed and the two tiptoed up the stairs in the hall past the stuffed elf heads. As they approached the first landing they heard noises. Someone was sobbing in the drawing room.
“Hello?” Harry said.

There was no answer but the sobbing continued. They climbed the remaining stairs two at a time, walked across the landing, and opened the drawing-room door.

Someone was cowering against the dark wall, her wand in her hand, her whole body shaking with sobs. Sprawled on the dusty old carpet in a patch of moonlight, clearly dead, was Ron.

All the air seemed to vanish from Harry’s lungs; he felt as though he was falling through the floor; his brain turned icy cold—Ron dead, no, it couldn’t be—

A hand squeezed his shoulder and he looked up at Tom. “Not him,” he whispered.

“Mrs. Weasley?” Harry croaked.

“R-r-riddikulus!” Mrs. Weasley sobbed, pointing her shaking wand at Ron’s body.

_Crack._

Ron’s body turned into Bill’s, spread-eagle on his back, his eyes wide open and empty. Mrs. Weasley sobbed harder than ever.

“R-riddikulus!” she sobbed again.

_Crack._

Mr. Weasley’s body replaced Bill’s, his glasses askew, a trickle of blood running down his face.

“No!” Mrs. Weasley moaned. “No… riddikulus! Riddikulus! Riddikulus! RIDDIKULUS!”

_Crack._ Dead twins. _Crack._ Dead Percy. _Crack._ Dead Draco. _Crack._ Dead Harry…

“Mrs. Weasley, just get out of here!” Harry shouted, staring down at his own dead body on the floor. “Let someone else—“

“What’s going on?”

Lupin had come running into the room, closely followed by Sirius with Moody stumping along behind them. Lupin looked from Mrs. Weasley to the dead Harry on the floor and seemed to understand in an instant. Pulling out his own wand he said, very firmly and clearly, “Riddikulus!”

Harry’s body vanished. A silvery orb hung in the air over the spot where it had lain. Lupin waved his wand once more and the orb vanished in a puff of smoke.

Tom squeezed Harry’s hand and gently pulled him away from the sobbing Mrs. Weasley as Lupin comforted her. The two continued their walk to their room in silence, Harry staring straight ahead of him but not really looking. Tom ignored it until they were inside the safety of their room. He sat Harry down on his bed and looked down at him. “Harry, focus,” he said.

Harry’s head turned slowly to look at Tom. “I need you to focus right now,” Tom said. He went to the drawer and pulled out a piece of paper. “See this? It’s done,” he said. “Once Moody leaves, you follow the crows to Azkaban, climb to the highest point, and cast the spell written on the bottom. You’ll be using my wand, alright?”

Harry just nodded. How could he be worrying about who had gotten a prefect’s badge only an hour ago? He felt older than he had ever felt in his life in that moment as he remembered seeing his dead
body. Tom sighed and took off Harry’s shoes. “Sleep, you’ll feel better when you wake up. Besides, you’ll need your energy,” Tom said as he gently tucked Harry into his bed. Tom pulled off Harry’s glasses and bade him to close his eyes.

Harry did so and quickly fell into an exhausted sleep.
Harry sat alone in his room eating chocolate bar after chocolate bar that Tom gave him. He just returned from Azkaban, and never wished to think of or visit that place again. Between them was an extendable ear held by a crow, the end of which led to a dark corner. They were both listening to it quietly.

“This is very troubling news…to think that an imposter or at least a mimic would appear?” Dumbledore’s voice said.

“Professor, if I may,” Snape said. “There have been whispers of this ‘Dark Prince’ in certain circles. I have heard from… others that on the night of Lord Voldemort’s resurrection, there has been a boy standing next to him.”

“A boy?”

“Yes. Though none could even begin to describe his features because of a mask,” Snape said. “All we know for certain is that he appears to be around the age of a regular student.”

“How could he possibly… do you think that Voldemort might have enthralled the boy?” Dumbledore asked. “Promise him of tales or riches? Or, mayhap, the boy is more a prisoner than a servant.”

“The poor dear if that is true,” Mrs. Weasley’s sadden voice said. “What would his parents think? Do you think he might of run away, or—”

“Most likely he’s an orphan,” Snape said. “Who else would be stupid enough to fall for the Dark Lord’s promises?”

“Either way, the situation has become much more dangerous,” Dumbledore said. “With the inclusion of the child, this Dark Prince, we must make sure that no harm comes to this boy. If he is in ranks with the Dark Lord, he must be removed from his influence immediately.”

“How so?” Lupin’s voice asked calmly.

“The best situation would be to rescue him and do our best to help with his readjustment,” Dumbledore said.

“And if that fails?”

“No, this is the only way,” Dumbledore said. “I will say it again: No harm will come to this Dark Prince.”

“You might not have an opinion on that matter, Dumbledore,” Snape said. “It seems that certain other Death Eaters are not fond of the boy. Even now they are plotting his torturous demise.”

“That is troubling news, Severus, are you certain about this?” Dumbledore asked.

“They have approached me on several manners to join their cause,” Snape said. “Though I’ve declined each time. From what I can hear, it seems they also have a fascination with Draco Malfoy.”
“Malfoy? Why him?” Shacklebolt’s deep voice questioned.

“Simply because of his parents, or more precisely, their deaths,” Snape said. “It seems they are trying to pin their deaths on this Dark Prince boy.”

“Are we sure that he did it?” Dumbledore asked.

“There is no evidence saying he did,” Snape said.

“I see…” Dumbledore said. There was a long pause of silence and Tom and Harry looked at each other. Harry’s eyes glanced down at a drawing in front of him, a simple design of a Dark Mark with a crown on the top of the skull. Tom’s gaze followed and looked up at Harry. “Destroy it,” he whispered.

Harry nodded and crumbled the piece of paper in his hand as Dumbledore talked again. “Needless to say, it seems our focus will need to shift momentarily. Draco will be safe with his friends in Hogwarts. As for this Dark Prince… it is most unlikely he is a student in Hogwarts, but if he is… then it is up to myself and my colleagues to find his identity and save him.”

“But what if he puts up a fight?” Tonks asked.

“Then the Dementor’s Kiss will be his fate… or worse,” Snape said.

“You can’t be serious!” Mrs. Weasley yelled. “He is a boy! He mustn’t know what he’s doing!”

“Molly! Quiet down,” Sirius hissed. “We don’t want to wake them.”

Ohh!” Mrs. Weasley’s muffled voice said. Harry guessed that she must have covered her mouth.

“Severus, do you think that this rebellion within the Death Eaters will succeed?” Dumbledore asked after a moment’s silence.

“Doubtful, from what I heard the Dark Lord killed one of them already. Avery, the senior,” Snape said.

“And the results?”

“It just stroke the fires within the daft lunatics,” Snape said. “They claim that this Dark Prince has pacified the Dark Lord in some way… it seems though that he did not pacify him enough.”

“What do you mean by that?” Lupin asked.

“Simply a difference of goals now,” Snape said. “Though, I cannot say what goals the Dark Lord now strives for, the Death Eater’s are the same as ever.”

“Troubling…” Dumbledore muttered.

“Do you think… that maybe they’ll just off each other?” Tonks asked. “That’ll save us the trouble, and the danger.”

“It is highly unlikely that they will cancel each other out, I am afraid,” Dumbledore said. “In the end, one side will stand victorious while the other either eliminated or forced into submission. Though, it is not all a bad thing. We should use their distraction in order to learn as much as we can about our enemy and, more importantly, about what Voldemort is searching for.”

“Right-o,” Tonks yawned. “If that’s all… I think it’s time for all of us to tuck in for the night…”
morning.”

“Indeed,” Dumbledore’s voice chuckled. “The Hogwarts express will leave nine hours. Scarcely enough time for us to have a full sleep. Severus, can I trust you to know what to do?”

“Yes, Dumbledore,” Snape’s oily voice said.

“Then this meeting is over,” Dumbledore said.

Harry and Tom listened to the sound of chairs scrapping and the Order all saying “goodnight” to each other. Tom pulled the flesh-colored string from the crow and looked at Harry. “I’ve had the idea to just have a crow sit in a corner of that room since we woke up. I’ve made sure that the crow was there when you left for Azkaban.”

Harry looked at Tom, a strange look in his eyes, and shook his head. “I’m not going back there… I never want to go back. Even with my Patronus, just hearing them made me feel like my soul was being torn apart.”

“Still, what you did was successful. I can fairly say that Yaxley and his crew are all scared right now, some probably thinking of some way to cover the story, not that they need to anyway. Most likely Fudge will try and cover it up, calling it a fear tactic, an inmate in Azkaban who somehow got hold of a wand and wanting to scare the Wizarding Community,” Tom said.

“Think that’ll work?”

“Of course it will,” Tom said. “Now, what Dumbledore said is true, we’ve only nine hours till the Hogwarts Express leave, and we are leaving in only six hours. I suggest you sleep.”

“Good thinking,” Harry yawned. He stood up and dropped the crumbled paper in a wastebasket which ate it greedily. Without even changing, Harry climbed into his bed and fell asleep as he pulled off his glasses.

Harry had a troubled night’s sleep. His parents wove in and out of his dreams, never speaking; Mrs. Weasley sobbed over Kreacher’s dead body watched by Ron and Hermione, who were wearing crowns, Dementors and Azkaban inmates were flying overhead. He awoke abruptly with his scar prickling to find Tom already dressed.

“Finally. You should hurry up Harry, I believe Mrs. Weasley is worrying that we’ll miss the train,” Tom said.

There was a lot of commotion in the house. From what he heard as he dressed at top speed, Harry gathered that Fred and George had bewitched their trunks to fly downstairs to save the bother of carrying them, with the result that they had hurtled straight into Ginny and knocked her down two flights of stairs into the hall; Mrs. Black and Mrs. Weasley were both screaming at the top of their voices.

“—COULD HAVE DONE HER A SERIOUS INJURY, YOU IDIOTS—”

“—FILTHY HALF-BREEDS, BESMIRCHING THE HOUSE OF MY FATHERS—”

Hermione came hurrying into the room looking flustered just as Harry was putting on his trainers; Hedwig was swaying on her shoulder, and she was carrying a squirming Crookshanks in her arms.

“Mum and Dad just sent Hedwig back”—the owl fluttered obligingly over and perched on top of her cage—“are you ready yet?”
“Yeah—is Ginny alright?”

“Mrs. Weasley’s patched her up,” Hermione said. “But now Mad-Eye’s complaining that we can’t leave unless Sturgis Podmore’s here, otherwise the guard will be one short.”

“Guard?” Harry asked. “We have to go to King’s Cross with a guard?”

“No, you have to go to King’s Cross with a guard, Harry,” Tom corrected.

“Why?” Harry said irritably. “I thought th—Voldemort was supposed to be lying low, or are you telling me he’s going to jump out from behind a dustbin to try and do me in?”

Tom sniggered as Hermione said distractedly, “I don’t know, it’s just what Mad-Eye says. But if we don’t leave soon we’re definitely going to miss the train. …”

“WILL YOU LOT GET DOWN HERE NOW, PLEASE!” Mrs. Weasley bellowed and Hermione jumped as though scalded and hurried out of the room. Harry seized Hedwig, stuffed it her unceremoniously into her cage, and set off downstairs after Hermione, dragging his trunk.

“Harry, you’re to come with me and Tonks,” Mrs. Weasley shouted over Mrs. Black’s repeated screaming. “Leave your trunk and your owl, Alastor’s going to deal with the luggage. …Oh, for heaven’s sake, Sirius, Dumbledore said no!”

A bearlike black dog had appeared between Harry and Tom as the two boys clambered over the various trunks cluttering the hall to get to Mrs. Weasley.

“Oh honestly…” Mrs. Weasley said despairingly, “well, on your own head be it!”

She wrenched open the front door and stepped out into the weak September sunlight. Harry and the dog followed her. The door slammed behind Tom and Mrs. Black’s screeches were cut off instantly.

“Where’s Tonks?” Harry asked, looking around as they went down the stone steps of number twelve, which vanished the moment they reached the pavement.

“She’s waiting for us just up here,” Mrs. Weasley said stiffly, averting her eyes from the lolloping black dog beside Harry.

“Harry, please tell your dog not to growl at me when I try to touch you,” Tom sighed as he moved to Harry’s other side, casting an annoyed look at Sirius.

They met up with Tonks down the street, who said, “Better hurry up, hadn’t we, Molly?”

“I know, I know,” Mrs. Weasley moaned, lengthening her stride, “but Mad-Eye wanted to wait for Sturgis. …If only Arthur could have got us cars from the Ministry again …but Fudge wouldn’t let him borrow so much as an empty ink bottle these days. …How Muggles can stand traveling without magic…”

But the great black dog gave a joyful bark and gamboled around them, snapping at pigeons, and chasing its own tail. Harry couldn’t help laughing. Sirius had been trapped inside for a very long time. Mrs. Weasley pursed her lips in an almost Aunt Petunia-ish way.

It took them twenty minutes to reach King’s Cross by foot and nothing more eventful happened during that time than Sirius scaring a couple of cats for Harry’s entertainment. Once inside the station they lingered casually beside the barrier between platforms nine and ten until the coast was
clear, then each of them leaned against it in turn and fell easily through onto platform nine and three quarters where the Hogwarts Express stood belching sooty steam over a platform packed with departing students and their families. Harry inhaled the familiar smell and felt his spirits soar. …He was really going back …

“It has been a long time since I saw this with my own eyes,” Tom whispered as he pointed to the train. Harry just nodded.

“Oh good,” Mrs. Weasley said, sounding relieved, “here’s Alastor with the luggage, look …”

A porter’s cap pulled low over the mismatched eyes, Moody came limping through the archway pushing a cart full of their trunks.

“All okay,” he muttered to Mrs. Weasley and Tonks. “Don’t think we were followed. …”

Seconds later, Mr. Weasley emerged onto the platform with Ron, Draco, and Hermione. They had almost unloaded Moody’s luggage cart when Fred, George, and Ginny turned up with Lupin.

“No trouble?” Moody growled.

“Nothing,” Lupin said.

“I’ll still be reporting Sturgis to Dumbledore,” Moody said. “That’s the second time he’s not turned up in a week. Getting as unreliable as Mundungus.”

“Well, look after yourselves,” Lupin said, shaking hands all round. He reached Harry last and gave him a clap on the shoulder. “You too, Harry. Be careful.”

“Now Draco, you’re already coming to us for the Christmas holidays,” Mrs. Weasley said, her voice leaving no room for argument. “And next time you’ve gotten an achievement, you better tell us straight away young man, do you hear me?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Draco said.

“Good.”

“It’s been great meeting all of you,” Tonks said, hugging Hermione and Ginny. “We’ll see you soon, I expect.”

A warning whistle sounded; the students still on the platform started hurrying onto the train.

“Quick, quick,” Mrs. Weasley said distractedly, hugging them all at random and catching Harry twice. “Write… Be good… If you’ve forgotten anything we’ll send it on. …Onto the train, now, hurry. …”

“See you!” Harry called out of the open window as the train began to move, while Ron, Hermione, and Ginny waved beside him. The figures of Tonks, Lupin, Moody, and Mr. and Mrs. Weasley shrunk rapidly but the black dog was bounding alongside the window, wagging its tail; blurred people on the platform were laughing to see it chasing the train, and then they turned the corner, and Sirius was gone.

“That was pointless,” Draco sneered. “The guard. And Black coming with us.”

“Lighten up you,” Ron said. “He hadn’t seen daylight for months, poor bloke.”

“Well,” Fred said, clapping his hands together, “can’t stand around chatting all day, we’ve got
business to discuss with Lee. See you later,” and he and George disappeared down the corridor to the right.

The train was gathering still more speed, so that the houses outside the window flashed past and they swayed where they stood.

“Let’s go find a compartment Harry,” Tom said grabbing Harry’s hand. He looked at Ron, Hermione, and Draco and said, “They have prefect duty.”

“They do?”

“Yeah…” Ron and Hermione exchanged looks.

“We’re—well—Ron and I are supposed to go into the prefect carriage,” Hermione said awkwardly.

“And I will have to go and see which idiot they’ve chosen as the other prefect for Slytherin,” Draco said. “Most likely it is Parkinson…” Draco sighed and walked on without waiting for the Gryffindor prefects.

“Right. Fine,” Harry said.

“I don’t think we’ll have to stay there all journey,” Hermione said quickly. “Our letters said we just get instructions from the Head Boy and Girl and then patrol the corridors from time to time.”

“Fine,” Harry said again. “Well, I-I might see you later, then.”

“Yeah” Ron said, casting a shifty, anxious look at Harry. “It’s a pain having to go down there. I’d rather—but we have to—I mean, I’m not enjoying it, I’m not Percy,” he finished defiantly.

“I know you’re not,” Harry said and he grinned. But as Hermione and Ron dragged their trunks, Crookshanks and a caged Pigwidgeon off toward the engine end of the train, Harry felt an odd sense of loss. He had never traveled on the Hogwarts Express without Ron.

He felt Tom squeeze his hand hard and looked up. “Temper,” Tom muttered before they followed Ginny who decided to search for a compartment with them.

“I missed the train!” Cedric Diggory moaned. He was still in St. Mungo’s, dressed in a hospital gown as he sat in his bed. His parents were sitting by his bedside, both of them looking rather anxiously at each other before turning to the mediwizards. “Why am I still here? I can walk.”

“Cedric, dear, it’s not going to take just a summer to recover from what you’ve been through,” his mother said. “Why don’t you just sit down and…”

“Mum, I’m fine. Just let me go,” Cedric said.

“Your mother’s right, sit down.”

“Mr. Diggory, you can barely walk by yourself, and need additional support,” the mediwizard said. “You’ve suffered extreme—”

“I know what I suffered through, but I have to go back to Hogwarts! I have to,” Cedric said.

“Hogwarts! The last thing I would suggest is to strain yourself there,” the mediwizard said. “Mr.
Diggory, just moving from the bed to the reception desk requires an significant amount of energy from you. Going from class to class would exhaust you at your current state.”

“No, you don’t understand, I need to go to Hogwarts,” Cedric pleaded. “I’m fine, look!” He swung his legs out of the bed, stomped them on the floor and stood up straight. He swayed for a moment before taking a step, and then another step, and then another. He started to fall, but caught himself on the bed next to him. His parents rushed to help him but Cedric yelled, “Don’t touch me! I need… to get to Hogwarts.” There was a wooden cane with a hooked handle that looked almost like a staff lying next to the bed Cedric fell on. The cane’s owner, an extremely old man who was sleeping, didn’t bulge or complain as Cedric swiped the cane and stood up. Using the cane he walked around the room, showing some strain but clearly in no danger of falling. He turned to walk back to his bed when a voice said, “Knew I’d fine you walking around Cedric. Nice to see you’re in top shape.”

“Professor Sprout, what are you doing here?” Cedric’s mother asked.

“Checking on my student,” the Head of Hufflepuff said. “Dumbledore sent me to see how Cedric’s doing, and to see if he’s able enough to go back to school.”

“But I missed the train, Professor,” Cedric said.

“Yeah so there’s other ways to get there Cedric, don’t you worry. Now come on, let me see how well you’re doing,” Professor Sprout said. She looked at the mediwizard and asked, “How’s his magic doing?”

“His magical abilities are the same, there has been no damage or drastic change to his spell-casting abilities,” the mediwizard said. “But right now I am more worried about his walking ability. As you can see, he can barely walk a couple of steps on his own without falling.”

“Well, Pomfrey will look after that, I’m sure,” Professor Sprout nodded. “And the cane?”

“He, ah, borrowed it from that gentlemen over there,” the mediwizard pointed to the sleeping old man. “But beside that point, if he has access to a cane or walking staff I’d say that he can safely attend to all of his classes, it’s the stairs I am worried about.”

“Not to worry, he has plenty of friends to help him out,” Professor Sprout said. “Besides it’s his final year and he’s a hard boy, I’m sure he’ll make a full recovering before the Quidditch season starts.”

“No. I’m sorry but that is where I’m drawing a line,” the mediwizard said. “Mr. Diggory is forbidden to play Quidditch or any physical straining activity without consent from myself or a train mediwizard from St. Mungo’s.”

“Understandable,” Professor Sprout nodded. “Anything else?”

“He needs physical therapy, but I can trust to say that Madam Pomfrey is certified?” the mediwizard asked.

“She is.”

“Then good. I’ll owl her Mr. Diggory’s schedule, hopefully it will not interfere with any of his classes. I’ll see about getting a walking stick for him to use at Hogwarts as well, maybe one that is not as decorated as he neighbor’s?” the mediwizard turned to Cedric’s parents, who both nodded their heads. “That settled, there really isn’t any other reason to keep him here. As long as the Hogwarts staff keeps an eye on him, he’s good to go.”
“You mean, I’m going back to Hogwarts?” Cedric asked.

“Yes, you are.”

“Good,” Cedric sighed. His hand raised to his chest and settled there, the indescribable pull that was driving him away from St. Mungo’s lessened as relief filled his entire body. He is going back to Hogwarts, he is going back to where he’s needed.

Harry, Tom, and Ginny found a compartment filled with only one person. The girl beside the window had straggly waist-length, dirty-blond hair, very pale eyebrows, and protuberant eyes that gave her a permanently surprised look. The girl gave off an aura of distinct dottiness. Perhaps it was the fact that she had stuck her wand behind her left ear for safekeeping, or that she had chosen to wear a necklace of butterbeer caps, or that she was reading a magazine upside down. Ginny introduced her as Luna Lovegood, a Ravenclaw.

“You are in Ravenclaw?” Tom asked, his hand in his pocket.

“I am… though I do not remember seeing you around,” the girl said. “Have you been infected by Wrackspurts and didn’t want to infest the rest of us with them? If so, that is very generous of you.”

Tom frowned. “Excuse me, but I don’t believe I know of this creature you are talking about.”

“Wrackspurts, they get into a person’s ear and make them have foggy thoughts,” Lovegood explained.

“I see. Anyway, no it was not because of these… creatures that I’ve hid myself from the public eye,” Tom said. Harry watched as his wrist flicked in his pocket and Luna Lovegood just nodded.

Ron and Hermione did not turn up for nearly an hour, by which time the food trolley had already gone by. Harry and Ginny had finished their Pumpkin Pastries and were busy swapping Chocolate Frog cards when the compartment door slid open and they walked in, accompanied by Crookshanks and a shrilly hooting Pigwidgeon in his cage.

“Where’s Draco?” Harry asked.

“I’m starved,” Ron said, stowing Pigwidgeon next to Hedwig, grabbing a Chocolate Frog form Harry and throwing himself into the seat next to him. He ripped open the wrapper, bit off the Frog’s head and leaned back with his eyes closed as though he had a very exhausting morning. “Parkinson’s the other Slytherin Prefect,” he said. “Took Draco from me before I could kiss him good-bye.”

“And what did Draco do?” Harry asked.

“Curse her out with words he learned from Ron and the twins,” Hermione sighed. “There are two fifth-year prefects from each House. Boy and girl form each.”

“And Draco and Parkinson are Slytherin’s,” Harry said. “Least we have one on our side.”

“You can say that, though he’s not here right now,” Ron muttered.

“Who’s Hufflepuff?” Harry asked.

“Ernie Macmillan and Hannah Abbott,” Ron said thickly.
“And Anthony Goldstien and Padma Patil for Ravenclaw,” Hermione said.

Ron checked his watch. “We’re supposed to patrol the corridors every so often,” he told Harry and Tom, “and we can give out punishments if people are misbehaving. I can’t wait to get Crabbe and Goyle for something, …”

“You’re not supposed to abuse your position, Ron!” Hermione said sharply.

“Yeah, right, because Draco won’t abuse it at all,” Ron said sarcastically.

“So you’re going to descend to your boyfriend’s level?”

“No, I’m just going to get his mates for all the years they’ve done to us! And don’t tell me you’re just going to lecture me and not him!”

“Believe me I have some choice words for him, Ron,” Hermione said hotly.

“I’ll make Goyle do lines, it’ll kill him, he hates writing,” Ron said happily, ignoring Hermione. He lowered his voice to Goyle’s low grunt and, screwing up his face in a look of pained concentration, mimed writing in midair. “I… must…not…look…like…a…baboon’s…. backside. …”

Everyone but Tom laughed, but nobody laughed harder than Luna Lovegood. She let out a scream of mirth that caused Hedwig to wake up and flap her wings indignantly and Crookshanks to leap up into the luggage rack, hissing. She laughed so hard that her magazine slipped out of her grasp, slid down her legs, and onto the floor.

“That was funny!”

Her prominent eyes swam with tears as she gasped for breath, staring at Ron. Utterly nonplussed, he looked around at the others, who were not laughing at the expression on Ron’s face and at the ludicrously prolonged laughter of Luna Lovegood, who was rocking backward and forward, clutching her sides.

“Are you taking the mickey?” Ron said, frowning at her.

“Baboon’s…backside!” she choked, holding her ribs.

Everyone else was watching Luna laughing, but Harry, glancing at the magazine on the floor, noticed something that made him dive for it. Upside down it had been hard to tell what the picture on the front was, but Harry now realized to was a fairly bad cartoon of Cornelius Fudge; Harry only recognized him because of the lime-green bowler hat. One of Fudge’s hands was clenched around a bag of gold; the other hand was throttling a goblin. The cartoon was captioned: HOW FAR WILL FUDGE GO TO GAIN GRINGOTTS?

Beneath this were listed the titles of other articles inside the magazine.

CORRUPTION IN THE QUIDDITCH LEAGUE: How The Tornados Are Taking Control

SECRETS OF THE ANCIENT RUNES REVEALED

SIRIUS BLACK: Villain or Victim?

“What is it?” Tom said looking over Harry’s shoulder. Harry asked Luna if they could borrow it, who nodded still gazing at Ron, breathless with laughter.
Tom took the magazine from Harry and flipped through it idly. “Nothing but trash and poorly joked spoofs,” he said. “A disgusting waste of time and devoid of any talent.”

“Of course, it’s the Quibbler,” Hermione said. “It’s rubbish, everybody knows that.”

“Excuse me,” Luna said; her voice suddenly lost its dreamy quality. “My father’s the editor.”

“I—oh,” Hermione said, looking embarrassed. “Well… it’s got some interesting… I mean it’s quite…”

“I’ll have it back, thank you,” Luna said coldly, and leaning forward she snatched it out of Tom’s hands. Riffling through it to page fifty-seven, she turned it upside down again and disappeared behind it.

“What a sorry child,” Tom drawled in Harry’s ear.

“Don’t be mean,” Harry said slapping Tom’s shoulder lightly as the compartment door opened for a third time.

Harry looked around; he had expected this; Draco was smirking at him from between his cronies Crabbe and Goyle. “Where the bloody hell were you?” Ron asked.


“Nowhere else,” Ron shrugged.

“Ron!” both Hermione and Ginny snapped.

“Nowhere else,” Ron shrugged.

“Ron!” both Hermione and Ginny snapped.

“Well, ignoring your company… I’m here for a simple thing,” Draco said. He turned his gaze to Crabbe and Goyle and said, “Do it.”

The two gargoyles looked at each other annoyed, as if what they were about to do harmed them worse than the Crucius Curse as they’ve got on their knees and said, “Sorry… Ron… Sorry… Harry… Sorry… Hermione…”

“For?” Draco drawled, clearly enjoying his power over the two brutes.

“Bullying and being idiots,” Crabbe and Goyle said. Draco chuckled as he clapped his hands slowly. “Good show boys… now sod off.”

They both got to their feet and shot dirty looks at the Gryffindors and Draco as they left, muttering under their breath. Draco just stood there for a moment before smirking at Ron. “I love being a Prefect,” he said.

Ron laughed and got up to hug his boyfriend as Hermione’s lips thinned. “Honestly Malfoy,” she said. “The prefect’s position is not to be abused!”

Draco snorted and said, “I’m just trying to even things out between us Granger, I promise to be a good boy and not abuse my position after that.” Hermione just gave him a sharp look. “I’m honest,” Draco said.

“Sure you are… anyway, shouldn’t you return to the Slytherins? I’m sure they’re lost without their leader,” Hermione said.

“Oh I’m sure they are… but I wanted to be with my boyfriend for a bit, so excuse us,” Draco
pulled Ron out of the compartment, closing the door behind them.

“Honestly that boy,” Hermione grumbled.

“If we haven’t lived with the guy for an entire summer, I’d say he’s just full of it,” Ginny said, nodding in agreement to Hermione. “It’s a lot like you and Harry before you go snogging off!” She pointed to Tom and Harry.

Tom just smirked and said, “Honestly, Ginny I can assure you that I am much more graceful when I want to… snog… Harry.” Harry just nodded.

Ron returned ten minutes later, his hair disheveled and lips extraneously puffed and face blushed redder than his hair. The weather remained undecided as they traveled further and farther north. Rain spattered the windows in a halfhearted way, then the sun put in a feeble appearance before clouds drifted over it once more. When darkness fell and lamps came on inside the carriage, Luna rolled up The Quibbler, put it carefully away in her bag, and took to staring at everyone in the compartment instead.

Harry was sitting with his forehead pressed against the train window, trying to get a first distant glimpse of Hogwarts, but it was a moonless night and the rain-streaked window was grimy.

“We’d better change,” Hermione said at last. She and Ron pinned their prefect badges carefully to their chests.

At last the train began to slow down and they heard the usual racket up and down it as everybody scrambled to get their luggage and pets assembled, ready for departure. Ron and Hermione were supposed to supervise all this; they disappeared from the carriage again, leaving Harry and the others to look after Crookshanks and Pigwidgeon.

“Come on Harry,” Tom said gripping Harry’s hand very tightly. He had his and Harry’s luggage in his other (they were tied together with rope that Harry did not see materialize). They shuffled out of the compartment feeling the first sting of the night air on their faces as they joined the crowd in the corridor. Slowly they moved toward the doors. Harry could smell the pine trees that lined the path down to the lake. He stepped down onto the platform and looked around, listening for the familiar call of “Firs’ years over here… firs’ years…”

But it did not come. Instead a quite different voice, a brisk female one, was calling, “First years line up over here, please! All first years to me!”

A lantern came swinging toward Harry and by its light he saw the prominent chin and severe haircut of Professor Grubbly-Plank, the witch who had taken over Hagrid’s Care of Magical Creatures lessons for a while the previous year.

“Hagrid is missing…” Tom noted.

“Where is he?” Harry said out loud.

“I don’t know, probably on a task for Dumbledore,” Tom said. “Never mind that, let’s move on…”

The two separated from Ginny as they moved off along the platform and out through the station. Jostled by the crowd, Harry squinted through the darkness for a glimpse of Hagrid: he had to be here, harry had been relying on it—seeing Hagrid again had been one of the things to which he had been looking forward most. But there was no sign of him at all.

“We have to go Harry,” Tom said in a short tone. “The giant is fine by himself, let’s go.”
Tom pulled Harry to the hundred or so horseless stagecoaches that always took the students above first year up to the castle. Harry glanced quickly at them, turned away to keep a lookout for Ron and Hermione, then did a double take.

The coaches were no longer horseless. There were creatures standing between the carriage shafts; if he had had to give them a name, he supposed he would have called them horses, though there was something reptilian about them, too. They were completely fleshless, their black coats clinging to their skeletons, of which every bone was visible. Their heads were dragonish, and their pupil-less eyes white and staring. Wings sprouted from each wither—vast, black, leathery wings that looked as though they ought to belong to giant bats. Standing still and quiet in the gloom, the creatures looked eerie and sinister. Harry could not understand why the coaches were being pulled by these horrible horses when they were quite capable of moving along by themselves.

“I knew you could see them,” Tom said, shocking Harry out of his thoughts.

“Huh?”

“The creatures pulling the carriages,” Tom said. “You can see them too… I knew you would.”

“But why are they there?” Harry asked.

“They were always there,” Tom said. “You just didn’t see them—”

“Where’s Pig?” Ron’s voice said, right behind the couple.

“That Luna girl was carrying him,” Harry said turning quickly, eager to consult Ron about Hagrid.

“Where d’you reckon—”

“—Hagrid is? I dunno,” Ron said, sounding worried. “He’d better be okay…”

A short distance away, Draco, followed by a small gang of cronies including Crabbe, Goyle, and Pansy Parkinson, was pushing their way to get a coach for themselves. Draco barred Parkinson from entering, and instead allowed a second-year Slytherin boy who looked both shocked and deeply intimidated. Seconds later Hermione emerged panting from the crowd. “Parkinson was being absolutely foul to a second year back there, she’s only had her badge three minutes and she’s using it to bully people worse than ever. …Where’s Crookshanks?”

“Ginny has him,” Tom said distractedly. “And I believe young Draco is taking care of Parkinson by himself… at least that is what I guess his pushing her out of the carriage was.

“What?”

“He just pushed Parkinson from the carriages,” Ron said. “There’s Ginny”

Ginny had just emerged from the crowd, clutching a squirming Crookshanks.

“Thanks,” Hermione said, relieving Ginny of the cat. “Let’s get a carriage together before they all fill up. …”

“I haven’t got Pig yet!” Ron said, but Hermione was already heading off toward the nearest unoccupied coach, Harry remained behind with Ron.

“Don’t ask him about the creatures,” Tom whispered in Harry’s ear, “he won’t see them.”

“What?”
“They can’t see the creatures, they’re not supposed to,” Tom said. Luna appeared holding Pigwidgeon’s cage in her arms; the tiny owl was twittering excitedly as usual.

“What are you talking about?” Harry asked as Luna gave Ron his bird.

“These creatures can only be seen by those who’ve seen death and comprehend it,” Tom said. “You’ve seen Wormtail die, in fact you’ve killed him along with me. It’s only natural that you can see these creatures. Don’t question it any longer, let’s just go.”

Tom led Harry into the carriage, both of them following Ron and Luna. Once they were all safely in the carriage, the door closed by itself and the horses pulled the carriage along towards the path up to Hogwarts.

Tom sat stoic as the carriage went on, always staring at the castle with an unreadable expression on his face. Harry stared at his Lord’s face, studying every detail, every crevasse, as he stared out into the distance. Tom’s brown eyes were glistening and shadowed, his lips turned upward slightly as a cold smile fought to show itself. He was happy, ecstatic even. Harry knew that if they were alone, if it was just him and his Lord, that the Dark Lord would be laughing his cold, inhuman laugh as they’ve traveled closer and closer to Hogwarts, Dumbledore’s stronghold. A castle thought impenetrable for Voldemort and his followers, and now it is welcoming Tom with open doors.
Chapter 8

Chapter VIII

The carriages jingled to a halt near the stone steps leading up to the oak front doors and Harry got out of the carriage first. He turned to look for lit windows down by the forest, but there was definitely no sign of life within Hagrid’s cabin. Unwillingly, because he had half hoped they would have vanished, he turned his eyes instead upon the strange, skeletal creatures standing quietly in the chill night air, their blank white eyes gleaming.

Harry had once become had the experience of seeing something that Ron could not, but that had been a reflection in a mirror, something much more insubstantial than a hundred very solid-looking beasts strong enough to pull a fleet of carriages.

“Stop thinking about them and walk,” Tom said grabbing Harry’s arm. They joined the crowd hurrying up the stone steps into the castle.

The entrance hall was ablaze with torches and echoing with footsteps as the students crossed the flagged stone floor for the double doors to the right, leading to the Great Hall and the start-of-term feast. The four long House tables in the Great Hall were filling up under the starless black ceiling, which was just like the sky they could glimpse through the high windows. Candles floated in midair all along the tables, illuminating the silvery ghosts who were dotted about the Hall and the faces of the students talking eagerly to one another, exchanging summer news, shouting greetings at friends from other Houses, eyeing one another’s new haircuts and robes. Again Harry noticed people putting their heads together to whisper as he and Tom passed; he gritted his teeth and tried to act as though he neither noticed nor cared. Tom escorted Harry to the Gryffindor table and before Harry sat, he pulled the taller teen into a long, deep, passionate kiss.

“What?” Harry smirked as he pulled away. “I can’t show you off in front of everyone? …My Lord.” He whispered the last part in Tom’s ear. Tom smirked and held Harry’s chin in his fingers. “Then let me show you how to kiss properly… my Prince,” Tom whispered, kissing him.

There was a fake retching noise and Ginny’s voice floating in the air, “Gross! You two are worse than Ron and Malfoy!”

Tom smirked and respectfully stepped aside. “How can I not, knowing that this is the first time in a while that I won’t be able to see my Harry at night?” he said.

Ginny rolled her eyes and said with the same fake disgusted look, “Just don’t start trying to swallow each other tongue like my brother and Malfoy.”

Harry laughed through his blushing as Tom held his hand. “We’ll talk later,” he promised before making his way to the Ravenclaw table. Harry sat down with Hermione and Ron as Ginny was hailed by some fellow fourth years and left to sit with them. Harry looked at the staff table and saw that Hagrid wasn’t there.

“You don’t think he’s… doing something for Dumbledore?” Hermione asked.

“I never thought of that,” Harry admitted.

“Yeah… yeah, that’ll be it,” Ron said, sounding reassured. Hermione stared at the staff table. “Who’s that?” she said sharply, pointing toward the middle of the staff table.
Harry’s eyes followed hers. They lit first upon Professor Dumbledore, sitting in his high-backed golden chair at the center of the long staff table. Dumbledore’s head was inclined towards the woman next to him, who was talking into his ear. She looked, Harry thought, like somebody’s maiden aunt’ squat, with short curly, mouse-brown hair in which she had placed a horrible pink Alice band that matched the fluffy pink cardigan she wore over her robes. Then she turned her face slightly to take a sip from her goblet and he saw, with a shock of recognition, a pallid, toadlike face and a pair of prominent, pouchy eyes.

“It’s that Umbridge woman! She was at my hearing, she works with Fudge!” Harry said. His eyes immediately shifted to the Ravenclaw table. Tom was sitting surrounded by fellow seventh years, and he too was staring at the staff table, his face in peculiar curiosity and his eyes falling on Umbridge.

The doors to the Great Hall was opened suddenly and all heads turned to see two people walking in. One was the stout figure of Professor Sprout, and next to her was a tall, handsome boy wearing Hufflepuff robes and leading on a plain wooden cane. The Hufflepuff table erupted into a loud cheer of applause for Cedric Diggory. The teen gave a pained smile and, using the cane, walked slowly towards the Hufflepuff table. The staff, sans Umbridge, joined the Hufflepuffs in their applause, Ravenclaw and Gryffindor joining politely. When Cedric sat down the applause stopped and every Hufflepuff near him leaned forward to talk, see, or even listen about his recovery. Professor Sprout joined the staff table, followed shortly by Professor Grubbly-Plank; she worked her way along to the very end and took the seat that ought to have been Hagrid’s. That meant that the first years must have crossed the lake and reached the castle, and sure enough, a few seconds later, the doors from the entrance hall opened again.

A long line of scared-looking first years entered, led by Professor McGonagall, who was carrying a stool on which sat an ancient wizard’s hat, heavily patched and darned with a wide rip near the frayed brim.

The excitement of Cedric’s return took longer to calm down than usual pre-feast buzz. The first years lined up in front of the staff table facing the rest of the students, and Professor McGonagall placed the stool carefully in front of them, then stood back.

The whole school waited with bated breath. Then the rip near the hat’s brim opened wide like a mouth and the Sorting Hat burst into song:

_In times of old, when I was new,_
And Hogwarts barely started,
The founders of our noble school
Thought never to be parted.

United by a common goal,
They had the selfsame yearning
To make the world’s best magic school
And pass along their learning.

"Together we will build and teach"
The four good friends decided.
And never did they dream that they
Might some day be divided.

For were there such friends anywhere
As Slytherin and Gryffindor?
Unless it was the second pair
Of Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw,

So how could it have gone so wrong?
How could such friendships fail?
Why, I was there, so I can tell
The whole sad, sorry tale.

Said Slytherin, "We'll teach just those
  Whose ancestry's purest."
Said Ravenclaw, "We'll teach those whose
  Intelligence is surest."

Said Gryffindor, "We'll teach all those
  With brave deeds to their name."
Said Hufflepuff, "I'll teach the lot
  And treat them just the same."

These differences caused little strife
  When first they came to light.
For each of the four founders had
  A house in which they might

Take only those they wanted, so,
  For instance, Slytherin
Took only pure-blood wizards
  Of great cunning just like him.

And only those of sharpest mind
  Were taught by Ravenclaw
While the bravest and the boldest
  Went to daring Gryffindor.

Good Hufflepuff, she took the rest
  and taught them all she knew,
Thus, the houses and their founders
  Maintained friendships firm and true.

So Hogwarts worked in harmony
  for several happy years,
but then discord crept among us
  feeding on our faults and fears.

The Houses that, like pillars four
  had once held up our school
now turned upon each other and
  divided, sought to rule.

And for a while it seemed the school
  must meet an early end.
what with duelling and with fighting
  and the clash of friend on friend.
And at last there came a morning when old Slytherin departed and though the fighting then died out he left us quite downhearted.

And never since the founders four were whittled down to three have the Houses been united as they once were meant to be.

And now the Sorting Hat is here and you all know the score: 
I sort you into Houses because that is what I'm for.

But this year I'll go further, listen closely to my song:
though condemned I am to split you still I worry that it's wrong,

Though I must fulfil my duty and must quarter every year still I wonder whether sorting may not bring the end I fear.

Oh, know the perils, read the signs, the warning history shows, for our Hogwarts is in danger from external, deadly foes

And we must unite inside her or we'll crumble from within I have told you, I have warned you... let the Sorting now begin.

The hat became motionless once more; applause broke out, though it was punctured, for the first time in Harry’s memory, with muttering and whispers. His eyes directly went to Tom and saw that the Dark Lord was deep in thought, his brows furrowed, a small wrinkle appearing on his forehead. Harry bit his lip and looked around him. Did they know? No, of course not, there’s no way they could possibly… yet Tom’s expression worried Harry. He needed reassurance. Hermione looked anxious, asking if the hat as ever given warnings before, and Nearly Headless Nick was about to answer before he was cut off by Professor McGonagall who started the sorting.

Harry didn’t pay any attention to this, he looked around his immediate area trying to find anything to write on and with. He saw a pencil sticking out of one of Hermione’s pockets and swiped it as the Gryffindor table cheered their first newcomer. There was no paper around him, nothing parchment-like of the sort, so in an act of desperation Harry subtly took out his wand and, pointing it at the hem of his shirt, whispered a severing jinx that cut off a small piece off of the cloth. He tapped the pencil hard against the cloth to write on it, the writing appearing fade but legible. He pressed the pencil hard against the cloth to write on it, the writing appearing fade but legible. He tapped the piece of cloth and it quickly flew under the table, rushing by the nervous first year’s feet unnoticed, and straight into Tom’s lap at the Ravenclaw Table. Tom looked at his lap, read the
note and looked up at Gryffindor Table where Harry was anxiously waiting his reply. Tom just
gave a dismissive shake of his head and motioned to pay attention to the Sorting.

Frowning, but feeling a little relieved, Harry turned his attention to the Sorting Hat. Dumbledore
stood and said some words that weren’t able to pierce Harry’s mind as he kept staring at Tom who
was sitting quietly and normally. The food appeared and everyone started to eat. Harry ignored the
conversations around him as he ate, his mind too busy swirling with the Sorting Hat’s warning. He
busied himself with the food in front of him, waiting for the time he can talk with Tom. He got
through an entire steak-and-kidney pie, then a large plateful of his favorite treacle tart when the
food all vanished and Dumbledore stood up. Harry forced himself to pay attention.

“Well, now that we are all digesting another magnificent feast, I beg a few moments of your
attention for the usual start-of-term notices,” Dumbledore said. He went through the rules that
Harry knew by heart: no one is allowed in the Forbidden Forest, Mr. Filch asked to remind
everyone that magic is not permitted in corridors between classes, as well as other things that
nobody listened or followed. “We have had two changes in staffing this year. We are very pleased
to welcome back Professor Grubbly-Plank, who will be taking Care of Magical Creatures lessons
we are also delighted to introduce Professor Umbridge, our new Defense Against the Dark Arts
teacher. Tryouts for the House Quidditch teams will take place on the—”

“Hem, hem.”

Dumbledore broke off, looking inquiringly at Professor Umbridge, who had got to her feet and was
intending to make a speech. Dumbledore only looked taken aback for a moment, then he sat back
down smartly and looked alertly at Professor Umbridge as though he desired nothing better than to
listen to her talk. Other members of staff were not as adept at hiding their surprise. Professor
Sprout’s eyebrows had disappeared into her flyaway hair, and Professor McGonagall’s mouth was
as thin as Harry had ever seen it. No new teacher had ever interrupted Dumbledore before. Many of
the students were smirking; this woman obviously did not know how things were done at
Hogwarts.

Harry’s attention turned to Tom, who was staring directly at Umbridge, his face stoic as he leaned
against his hands, which were propped on the table by his elbows and held together in a fist. His
eyes sparkled with a curious intrigue as he and the rest of the school waited for Professor
Umbridge’s words/

“Thank you, Headmaster,” Professor Umbridge simpered, “for those kind words of welcome.” Her
voice was high-pitched, breathy, and little-girlish and again Harry felt a powerful rush of dislike
that he could not explain to himself. “Well, it is lovely to be back at Hogwarts, I must say! And to
see such happy little faces looking back at me!” None of the faces staring at her looked happy; on
the contrary, they all looked rather taken aback at being addressed as though they were five years
old. “I am very much looking forward to getting to know you all, and I’m sure we’ll be very good
friends.

“The Ministry of Magic has always considered the education of young witches and wizards to be of
vital importance. The rare gifts with which you were born may come to nothing if not nurtured and
honored by careful instruction. The ancient skills unique to the Wizarding community must be passed
down through the generations lest we lost them forever. The treasure trove of magical knowledge
amassed by our ancestors must be guarded, replenished, and polished by those who have been
called to the noble profession of teaching.

“Every headmaster and headmistress of Hogwarts has brought something new to the weighty task
of governing this historic school, and that is as it should be, for without progress there will be
stagnation and decay. There again, progress for progress’s sake must be discouraged, for our tried and tested traditions often require no tinkering. A balance, then, between old and new, between permeance and change, between tradition and innovation…”

Harry found his attentiveness ebbing, as though his brain was slipping in and out of tune. The quiet that always filled the Hall when Dumbledore was speaking was breaking up as students put their heads together, whispering and giggling. Over at the Ravenclaw table, Cho Chang was chatting animatedly with her friends. A few seats along from Cho, Tom was still staring, being one of the very few paying full attention to Umbridge.

Professor Umbridge did not seem to notice the restlessness of her audience. The teachers, however, were still listening very attentively, and Hermione seemed to be drinking in every word Umbridge spoke, though judging by her expression, they were not at all to her taste.

“…because some changes will be for the better, while others will come, in the fullness of tie, to be recognized as errors of judgment. Meanwhile, some old habits will be retained, and rightly so, whereas others, outmoded and outworn, must be abandoned. Let us move forward, then, into a new era of openness, effectiveness, and accountability, intent on preserving what ought to be preserved, perfecting what needs to be perfected, and pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited.”

She sat down. Dumbledore clapped. The staff followed his lead, though Harry noticed that several of them brought their hands only once or twice before stopping. Harry stared at Tom. His boyfriend leaned forward to a Ravenclaw and procured a piece of paper and pen. He wrote a note and even before Harry noticed it, he felt a piece of paper fly up his legs and sit on his lap. He looked down to see a simple note with Tom’s neat cursive handwriting on it:

*We need to talk, my prince.*

Harry pulled up the note and looked at Tom, who’s attention was turned to Dumbledore as he continued his start-of-term speech. He took Hermione’s pencil again and wrote *OK* on it. He tried to return the pencil to Hermione without her noticing, but failed.

“Harry?”

“Sorry… Tom wrote a note,” Harry said quickly. Hermione looked at the piece of paper. “’My prince?’” he asked in a low voice.

“His nickname for me,” Harry said. “He chose it, not me.”

“How egotistic, just ask next time you need a pencil okay?”

“Yeah, sorry.”

He gave Hermione her pencil back and the note moved by itself, returning to Tom. Dumbledore stopped talking and there was a great clattering and banging all around them; Dumbledore had obviously just dismissed the school, because everyone was standing up ready to leave the Hall. Hermione jumped up, looking flustered.

“Ron, we’re supposed to show the first years where to go!”

“Oh yeah,” Ron said, who had obviously forgotten. “Hey—hey you lot! Midgets!”

“Ron!”
“Well, they are, they’re titchy…”

“I know, but you can’t call them midgets. …First years!” Hermione called commandingly along the table. “This way, please!”

A group of new students walked shyly up the gap between the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff tables, all of them trying hard not to lead the group. They did indeed seem very small; Harry was sure he had not appeared that young when he had arrived here. He grinned at them.

“Stand up and walk normally,” a voice said behind him. Harry jumped and turned to see Tom standing behind him. “Move.”

Harry did so, the two cutting through the crowd. Harry did everything he could to ignore more whispering, staring, and pointing as he passed. He kept his eyes fixed ahead as he and Tom wove their way though the crowd in the entrance hall. He moved towards the marble staircase but Tom stopped him, pulling him down the corridor next to it, stopping in a concealed shortcut. “Tom what —”

“What did you learn from Umbridge’s speech?” Tom asked.

“What?”

“What did you learn, Harry, from Umbridge’s speech?” Tom stressed again.

“Umm… err…”

“Were you paying attention?” Tom asked, his face darkening and eyes growing sharp. Harry felt as if he was shrinking under Tom’s stare. A blush appeared on his cheeks and he nodded, “Mostly—”

With surprising strength and swiftness, Tom leaned against the wall, pulling Harry towards him and over a raised leg. Harry felt a blow to his backside that sent a shiver of pain along his spine and body. “Mostly? Mostly?” Tom repeated. “Harry Potter, that speech was important, it affects everything that we can do here at Hogwarts and you tell me that you weren’t paying attention?”

Tom’s voice was a violent hiss, Harry felt at that moment as if he was caught by a venomous snake that entangled around his body and kept giving blows to his backside. “My prince, My Dark Prince, how can you do your duties if you do not know fully what are enemies are doing, what they are saying?” Tom smacked Harry’s backside roughly again. “If you were anyone else, you would have felt my full disappointment. Because I am disappointed Harry. I expected you to be more attentive, to listen while that vile woman talked.”

“I listened to most of it,” Harry argued. “It’s just that as she talked my mind began to slip! It’s not my fault that she’s boring—Ow!” Tom smacked his butt again.

“This is important Harry,” Tom said. “She said important things in that boring speech.”

“I-I guessed that,” Harry said. “About discouraging ‘progress for progress’s sake’ and ‘pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited.’”

“At least your ears work,” Tom said. He rested his hand on Harry’s butt, rubbing soothingly.

“Now, my prince, what could this possibly mean?”

“Can I have time to think?” Harry asked. Tom nodded, his hand never leaving Harry’s butt. Harry continued to be bent over Tom’s knee, but neither boy thought about their position as Harry frowned in concentration. They were both silent for about a minute or two when Harry said, “She’s from the Ministry… so um… they’re interfering with Hogwarts?”
“That’s a good start,” Tom said. “Now why would the Ministry want to interfere with Hogwarts?”

“What about Dumbledore?” Harry said questionably.

“What about Dumbledore?”

“Err… the smear campaign they have against him and me?” Harry asked.

Tom nodded, his hand on Harry’s butt squeezed gentle, kneading it through Harry’s pants. It felt relaxing the way Tom’s expert fingers pressed and massage him. “Good, Harry,” he breathed. “Do you see? When you pay attention and learn, you’re rewarded. I reward good progress just as much as I punish disappointment. I thought I didn’t need to remind you of this, however.”

Harry just made a throaty noise as he began to relax in Tom’s arm. “The… Ministry’s watching Dumbledore,” he said in a relaxed voice. “Looking for… anything to get rid of him.”

“Exactly,” Tom said nodding. “Professor Umbridge is here because the Ministry of Magic, more specifically the Minister of Magic wants her here. It seems the good Minister is taking his incompetence to a new level and actively trying to frame Dumbledore in a horrible light. All in an attempt to avoid the responsibility and reality of my return. I—”

There was a small tapping sound and they turned to see Cedric Diggory standing in front of the hidden corridor, leaning on his cane as he stared at the couple in the lewd and suggestive position. Harry’s face flared up but Tom’s didn’t even change. He forced Harry to stay on his knee, pushing down on his back with the hand that was on his butt as his other hand supported Harry’s body by hugging his chest. Tom looked at Cedric and said, “I am happy to see you on your feet Cedric.”

“I—thank you Tom… Harry, for everything,” Cedric said. He took a step closer, the tap of his cane hitting the stone floor filling the empty corridor. “I almost died and you two… you guys…”

“Please, do not mention it,” Tom said with a polite smile. “You seem like a competent wizard, and most importantly, you are friendly to Harry, nice to him. We’re entering a time where we can use all the friends that we can gather. Isn’t that right, Harry?”

“Uh—yeah,” Harry said through his blush. He looked up at Tom and shot him a confused look. Why isn’t he embarrassed by this?

“I know…” Cedric said. He gripped his cane tighter and took another step. Harry saw tears forming Cedric’s eyes as the Hufflepuff moved towards them. He placed his cane against the wall and, much to Harry’s shock, hugged Tom, who remained still. “You saved my life,” Cedric cried. “I will always be grateful to you… both of you… thank you, My Lord.”

Harry had to suppress his gasp as Tom said, “Think nothing of it Cedric. Go, sleep and relax. You’ve earned the right. If you wish to be useful, to be helpful, then learn the healing arts that they deem legal, then come to me so I can show you more. Until then sleep and focus on gaining your energy back. I want you to walk by yourself before you talk to me like this again.”

“Yes my Lord, I understand,” Cedric nodded. “I—thank you, again.” He kissed Tom’s cheek and, with great difficulty, bent to his knee to look at Harry. “Thank you, my Prince,” he breathed. “I hope that I’ll be able to show how appreciative I am.” Harry, still utterly shocked, just nodded as Cedric kissed his cheek as well.

Cedric used his cane to get back on his feet and slowly walked away, leaving the two lovers alone. Harry looked up to Tom, the bastard’s face still stoic as if he wasn’t shocked at all from Cedric’s words. “Explain!” he finally croaked out, finding his voice.
“Later,” Tom said. “For now, I believe we both should return to our dormitories. Good night, my love.” He moved Harry so he was standing on his own feet.

“Tom—” Harry’s protest was smothered by Tom’s lips, the Dark Lord kissing his Prince deeply. His tongue invaded Harry’s mouth and any thought of protest was swept away. Tom’s tongue twisted around Harry’s, poking and edging it to push back against it, which Harry did. He pushed his tongue against Tom’s, his eyes slipping close as every thought started to fade away, leaving only a darkly, lustful bliss in their wake. Harry started to moan and succumb to Tom’s influence. His hands moved to latch onto the taller teen, his body collapsing against Tom’s as the older teen took full control. But before they could progress any further, Tom slipped away and whispered, “I will tell you later my love, for now go and sleep.”

Harry opened his eyes only to see that Tom was gone. Frustration and anger quickly filled in and he gave a sort of animalistic growl of annoyance that reverberated against the walls. Harry turned around and walked along the shortcut, his feet landing too heavily as he made his way to the end of the corridor to the Gryffindor common room and came to a halt in front of the portrait of the Fat Lady, realizing that he did not know the new password.

“Er…” he said glumly, staring up at the Fat Lady who smoothed the folds of her pink satin dress and looked sternly back at him.

“No password, no entrance,” she said loftily.

“Harry, I know it!” someone panted from behind him, and he turned to see Neville jogging toward him. “Guess what it is? I’m actually going to be able to remember it for once—” He waved a stunted little cactus, “*Mimbulus mimbletonia!*”

“Correct,” the Fat Lady said and her portrait swung open toward them like a door, revealing a circular hole in the wall behind, through which Harry and Neville now climbed.

The Gryffindor common room looked as welcoming as ever, a cozy circular tower room full of dilapidated squashy armchairs and rickety old tables. A fire was crackling merrily in the grate and a few people were warming their hands before going up to their dormitories; on the other side of the room Fred and George Weasley were pinning something up on the notice board. Harry waved good night to them and headed straight for the door to the boys’ dormitories; he was not in much of a mood for talking at the moment, still frustrated and shocked at Tom and Cedric. Neville followed him.

Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnigan had reached the dormitory first and were in the process of covering the walls beside their beds with posters and photographs. They had been talking as Harry pushed open the door but stopped abruptly the moment they saw him.

“Hi,” he said, moving across to his own trunk and opening it.

“Hey, Harry,” Dean said, who was putting on a pair of pajamas in the West Ham colors. “Good holiday?”

“Yeah,” Harry muttered, “Tom and I spent a lot of time together. You?”

“Seamus and I went to the beach,” Dean said. “Never knew he was so pale.” He laughed as Seamus threw a balled-up pair of socks at him. Harry chuckled and yawned. He told them goodnight, decided to only wear his pajama pants, and went to his bed, pulling the curtains closed.
Tom strolled calmly towards Ravenclaw Tower. He stopped in front of a statue of Rowena Ravenclaw. A female voice came out of the statue, however Tom noticed that its lips did not move. “Where do Vanished objects go?” the statue asked.

“Into non-being, which is to say everything,” Tom answered. The wall next to the statue moved, revealing an archway. Tom walked through the archway and into the common room. The Ravenclaw common room was one of the airiest rooms at Hogwarts. It was a wide, circular room with arched windows hung with blue and bronze silks and a midnight blue carpet covered in stars, which is reflected onto the domed ceiling. A white marble statue of Rowena Ravenclaw stood next to a door which led to the common rooms. The room was filled with students all talking and sharing their summer experiences. Tom ignored all of them and walked into the boys’ dormitory. He smirked when he saw a bed made for him, his trunk sitting at the edge of it. Two boys immediately followed after him.

They stared at Tom for a moment, confusion on their faces, but Tom simply smiled. “Eddie, Bradley so good to see you. How were your summers?”

“Good Tom,” Eddie Camichael said, the confusion magically gone from both boys’ faces. “How was yours? You didn’t spend it all in your room, I hope.”

“No, I was with my boyfriend, Harry,” Tom said.

“Nice,” Bradley said.

“It was,” Tom smiled politely. “But, if you excuse me, the train ride was very exhausting. …Good night, and tell Roger and Duncan I’ve said the same.” He turned to his bed, changed into a slim pair of pajamas, and closed the curtains. He made sure that the lights were out around him so shadows could creep into the bed through the curtains. Smirking to himself, he pulled out parchment and ink. The crows appeared, and Tom began to work quietly, wondering briefly to himself if the shameful insurgence will end soon, for they are starting to give him a headache.
“And that’s a good thing?” Blaise asked.

“Of course it is!” Draco scoffed. “I think I needed a summer where I could just be away from my name, you know? And summer with Ron was that.”

“And it was just you and the Weasleys?” Blaise asked.

“No, Harry was there as well as … Tom,” Draco said, mentally reminding him to call the Dark Lord by his name. Even after all this time, it felt weird.

“Really? Must be a pack house,” Blaise smirked.

“Think you can keep a secret?” Draco asked as he leaned in closer to his friend. Blaise leaned in as well and Draco whispered, “We’ve actually spent summer at the Black house, you know my cousin Sirius Black? He was there, he’s Harry’s godfather and he gave the house to Dumbledore for reasons I can’t tell you here.”

“Really?” Blaise asked, his eyebrows raised.

“Yeah,” Draco nodded. He leaned back and sighed. “I think I can get used to them, the Weasleys.”

“Why would you mutter that name here?” Parkinson’s whiny voice said. She forced herself into the conversation, sitting in the armchair next to Draco’s. “Who cares about the blood traitors? I was almost killed this summer, Draco!”

“Shame it was only ‘almost,’” Blaise said leaning back in his own chair, ignoring Pansy’s glare.

“It’s true!” Pansy whined. “That Dark Prince guy broke into my room and almost killed me! He had me tied to my chair! I thought he was going to grope me or worse! The monster broke all my glass perfume and—and he stabbed me with them! But my Dad healed me quickly so I was ok.”

“As if somebody would want to grope you,” Blaise sneered. “Which reminds me… Draco, we need to see Theo.”

“That poof! You care more about that damn poof then me, Draco!” Pansy cried.

“I’m a poof, you idiot, and yes I do,” Draco said. He stood up and followed Blaise as the two walked towards the boy’s dormitory. “What’s wrong with Theo?” he asked on the staircase.

“I think it’s better if he tells you,” Blaise frowned. “I haven’t heard from Theo in a few weeks, no owl or floo-calling. I went to his manor concerned and… well, I found him on his bed in week old clothes. He looked awful, face gaunt, skin paper-like… it was a sick sight. I had to get Marcus Flint to lift him and carry the boy to my manor where he stayed for the rest of the summer.”

“Damn…” Draco whispered. “What the hell happened to him?” They walked into their dormitory. Theo was in it, busy looking in his trunk.

“Theo…” Blaise said carefully.

The boy jumped and turned. “Oh Blaise, it’s just you guys,” he said. “What do you guys want?” he offered a smile. Draco looked at him critically. Theo looked thinner, he was relatively median height, his arms and legs shooting out like lanky twigs. His skin did not look as papery as Blaise described, but it was several shades paler than the last time Draco saw him during the end-of-term feast. His hair was shaggier, growing long past his ears and his eyes had hints of bags under them.
And his eyes… they were faded.

“I… told Draco,” Blaise said hesitantly. “About what happened.”

“Oh…” Theo’s voice was lifeless. Whatever light was in Theo’s faded eyes were left leaving them completely dead-looking. His entire body slacked and shook.


“Theo, trust us… you know our Lord,” Blaise said. “You know about him. Even if he cursed us that Christmas day so we couldn’t talk about him, you know who he is. Draco is friends with him, with Harry. They can help.”

“Are you certain?” Theo asked in a hollowed voice. He looked as if he could fall, as if a simple breeze would blow him away.

“Yes Theo, I am certain,” Draco said.

Theo was quiet. He looked up at Draco, his dead eyes meeting silver, and said, “Okay… I trust you. Come closer.”

Both boys did and Theo talked, his voice hollow and barely above a whisper, his lips trembling from even the act of sounding out the words as he said in a broken, hallowed voice, “My father… had me raped… by a woman.”
“Tom!” Draco said. It was the next morning and Draco was waiting in the entrance hall for the Dark Lord to walk by. He was by himself and turned to Draco. “What is it?”

Draco’s eyes shifted, not wanting passersby to eavesdrop on their conversation. He looked at Tom and mouthed, ‘My Lord’ before walking down the dungeon steps. Tom followed him and they walked together until Draco was sure they were alone. “My Lord… I’m sorry to have to talk to you like this, but I need your help,” Draco said.

“Speak Draco, and I will listen.”

“It’s Theodore Nott, my Lord. His father… his father did something terrible, something that I would never expect or think of a parent to do to their kid,” Draco said. “He had a woman rape Theo. …He had my friend raped.”

The Dark Lord’s eyes turned red as they slanted, anger radiating from him. “I see… is Theo unharmed?”

“He won’t leave his bed,” Draco said.

“Take me to him,” Tom said.

“Yes my Lord,” Draco said and he led the Dark Lord through the twisting corridors of the dungeons and to the Slytherin Common Room. The two walked into the Slytherin common room, ignoring the other Slytherins, and walked into the boy’s dormitory. Draco pointed out Theo’s bed and Tom walked towards it.

“Theodore Nott,” he said. The boy flinched and looked up at Tom. “You know who I am,” he said.

“Y-Yes… the Dark Lord,” Theo said.

“And you know why I am here,” Tom said.

“Yes… but please… don’t kill my father,” Theo begged. “He…he… don’t kill him.”

“You don’t want me to kill the man who ordered your rape?” Tom asked.

“No.”

“Why?”

“He’s my father… I never thought…I can’t even begin to think about my life without him,” Theo stuttered.

Tom stared down at the boy and said, “Very well. If that is what you wish. But in return, I wish for —”

“You don’t need to do that my Lord,” Nott said, his heavy eyes looking up at Tom. “I… I was always on your side.”

“Good, it is a relief to hear that you will honor your family’s loyalty,” Tom said. “Now I want you
to stand and take care of yourself. You will be no use to me in this state.”

“Yes, my Lord,” Theo said, and he obeyed. He got out of his bed and stood up. He looked at the Dark Lord and went to his knees, bending to kiss Tom’s feet.

“There is no need for that,” the Dark Lord said. “I will only allow one boy to touch me.”

“You mean the Dark Prince?”

“Yes,” Tom said. “Now go about your day, and remember: Everything we’ve talked about you may not speak of to another soul.”

“Yes, my Lord,” Theo said and Tom turned to leave. He couldn’t help but smirk. It was not even breakfast and he already had the Notts back on his side. It was going to be a good day.

There was a whoosh and clatter that signaled the hundreds of owls coming soaring in through the upper windows. They descended all over the Hall, bringing letters and packages to their owners and showering the breakfasters with droplets of water; it was clearly raining hard outside. Hedwig was nowhere to be seen, but Harry was hardly surprised; his only correspondent was Sirius, and he doubted Sirius would have anything new to tell him after only twenty-four hours apart. Hermione, however, had to move her orange juice aside quickly to make way for a large damp barn owl bearing a sodden Daily Prophet in its beak.

“What are you still getting that for?” Harry said irritably, suddenly remembering the smear campaign. Luckily it didn’t have any effect on the people Harry knew or cared about. “I’m not bothering…load of rubbish.”

“It’s best to know what the enemy are saying,” Hermione said darkly, and she unfurled the newspaper and disappeared behind it, not emerging until Harry and Ron had finished eating.

“Nothing,” she said simply, rolling up the newspaper and laying it down by her plate. “Nothing about you or Dumbledore or anything.”

Professor McGonagall was now moving along the table handing out schedules.

“Look at today!” Ron groaned. “History of Magic, double Potions, Divination, double Defense Against the Dark Arts …Binns, Snape, Trelawney, and that Umbridge woman all in one day! I wish Fred and George’d hurry up and get those Snackboxes sorted…”

“Do mine ears deceive me?” Fred said, arriving with George and squeezing onto the bench beside Harry. “Hogwarts prefects surely don’t wish to skive off lessons?”

“Look what we’ve got today,” Ron said grumpily, showing his schedule under Fred’s nose.

Harry felt a peck at his ankle and looked under the table. A crow was sitting there, a piece of parchment in it’s mouth. Harry opened his hand near the crow’s mouth and it dropped it in before disappearing in the shadows. Harry pulled his hand up and unrolled the note.

Your talent is required. The next one will tell you your task. Do not tell anyone.

“Is that a love letter?”

“Looks strange to me.”
“Tom’s a strange guy, he is.”

“Indeed George. I wonder what it says.” The twins turned their attention to Harry, both pushing against him to see the note. Harry squeezed his fist and shot a look at them.

“This is none of your business,” Harry said coldly, his voice sounding so unlike himself.

The twins, Ron, and Hermione looked utterly shocked at the glare Harry was giving the twins. “W-Well… we were only playing,” George said.

“Yeah… no need to go off on us,” Fred said.

“Anyway… we just wanted to see if you could go and tell Tom something,” George said, reclaiming his cool.

“What?”

“That he’ll be sitting with us at all the classes we have together,” Fred said. “We want to make sure that we have a proper talk with him. See if he’s up to snuff.”

Harry chuckled, “You mean interrogate him? That is impossible.”

“Oh, why not Harry?”

“Easy, because as soon as you two begin your questioning, he will interrogate you and in the end, he will win,” Harry smiled. “My Lord always win.”

“Your lord?” George asked.

Harry silently cursed himself for the slip of the tongue. “Yes, “he said quickly, his mind working a little faster than his lie. “My Lord. It’s part of the nick names we give each other… when we met his self-esteem was small so I tried building him up by calling him that. And it sort of just… stuck.”

“Ohhh… So we should call him Lordy Tom when we talk to him,” George said.

“No, no George, we must bow and say ‘Your Lordship,’” Fred teased.

“You will call him Tom or you will regret it,” Harry said, stopping their fun.

The two stared at Harry, unamused that their fun was cut off, and left saying, “We thought to unburned your load in your O.W.L. year… but if you want to be so boring, bye. Have fun with your important, life-threatening and life-deciding exams.”

“Do they really mean that?” Harry frowned, wanting the conversation to move as far away from Tom and his letter as possible. “As this year being life-deciding?”

“Oh yeah,” Ron said. “Bound to be, isn’t it? O.W.L.s are really important, affect the jobs you can apply for the everything. We got career advice later this year, Bill told me. So you can choose what N.E.W.T.s you want to do next year.”

“D’you know what you want to do after Hogwarts?” Harry asked the other two as they left the Great Hall shortly afterward and set off toward their History of Magic classroom.

“Not really,” Ron said slowly. “Except… well…”
He looked slightly sheepish.

“What?” Harry urged him.

“Well, it’d be cool to be an Auror,” Ron said in an offhand voice.

“Yeah, it would,” Harry said fervently.

“But they’re, like, the elite,” Ron said. “You’ve got to be really good. What about you, Hermione?”

“I don’t know,” Hermione said. “I think I’d really like to do something worthwhile.”

“An Auror’s worthwhile!” Ron said.

“Yes, it is, but it’s not the only worthwhile thing,” Hermione said thoughtfully.

“She is right,” Tom said from behind them. Harry turned and smiled. “There are many worthwhile career choices you can choose from beside becoming an Auror.”

“Really? What are you going to be, then?” Ron asked.

Tom smiled. “Easy. I’m going to teach here.”

“You want to teach?” Hermione asked.

“Yes,” Tom nodded. He looked at Harry and said, “Teaching Harry since his second year has sort of gotten me a bit obsessed with it. And from the results, I think I’ve done a very good job.”

“Well, you are a really good teacher,” Harry flirted. Hermione blushed and looked away from the couple to give them some privacy. Ron didn’t.

“Anyway,” Hermione said. “What class were you thinking of teaching?”

“Defense Against the Dark Arts,” Tom said at once.

“What about Umbridge… and Snape?” Harry asked.

“Oh, I don’t need to worry about them,” Tom smiled confidently. “One way or another, I will be teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts in Hogwarts.”

“Wow… can you imagine being taught by Tom?” Ron gasped. “Or Hogwarts with no Snape! Sounds like heaven.”

“There is no way Dumbledore would remove Professor Snape,” Hermione said. “What would most likely happen is that Tom will be our Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher and Snape would continue teaching Potions. That’s assuming that he’ll be hired for our sixth or seventh year.”

Tom nodded. “That is exactly what would happen if I was hired during that time. However, since I am very much in love with Harry, and Teacher/Student relationships are frowned upon for good reason, I will have to wait until you three graduate to apply for the post.”

“That’s a shame,” Ron sighed. “I was looking forward to getting taught by you.”

Tom laughed and smiled. “I can be a very strict teacher, Ronald. Just ask Harry.”
Harry blushed and nodded.

“Anyway, I currently have Transfiguration, which is a floor above the History of Magic classroom, so I’ll take my leave,” Tom said. He kissed Harry again and clasped their hands together. Harry felt something papery press against his palm and closed his hand as they separated. “I’ll see you later.”

History of Magic was by common consent the most boring subject ever devised by Wizard-kind. Professor Binns, their ghost teacher, had a wheezy, droning voice that was almost guaranteed to cause severe drowsiness within ten minutes, five in warm weather. He never varied the form of their lessons, but lectured them without pausing while they took notes, or rather, gazed sleepily into space. Harry and Ron had so far managed to scrape passes in this subject only by copying Hermione’s notes before exams, she alone seemed able to resist the soporific power of Binns’s voice.

So it seemed a perfect opportunity for Harry to look at the note Tom gave him. It was much longer than his first.

_Hopefully this will keep you awake in History of Magic. Do not worry about others seeing this, they will be too sleepy or distracted to even notice. Even Professor Binns will not notice you reading my note (in case you were wondering, he was the same alive as dead)._

Draco’s friend Theodore Nott has suffered a terrible, awful event that needs to be rectified. Do not worry my love, there will be no killing as I know how much you detest it. Instead, you are to interrogate his father, who is part of Yaxley’s insurgence. Interrogate him for every morsel of knowledge he has on Yaxley’s insurgence as well as whom Nott used to desecrate his only son. As always follow the crows, they will be waiting for you.

_Do not talk to me about this mission directly. If you have any concerns or questions give a message to a crow._

Harry sighed. Not even a full day of classes have finished and already Tom decided to become his Dark Lord instead of just his boyfriend. He pocketed the note and stared glassily out of the window, his mind wondering how exactly he will do what his Lord ask him.

“How would it be,” Hermione asked Harry and Ron coldly as they left the classroom for break (Binns drifting away through the blackboard), “if I refused to lend you my notes this year?”

“We’d fail our O.W.L.s,” Ron said. “If you want that on your conscience, Hermione …”

“Well, you’d deserve it,” she snapped. “You don’t even try to listen to him, do you?”

“We do try,” Ron said. “We just haven’t got your brains or your memory or your concentration—you’re just cleverer than we are—is it nice to rub it in?”

“Oh, don’t give me that rubbish,” Hermione said, but she looked slightly mollified as she led the way out into the damp courtyard.

They stayed in a secluded corner until the bell rang and made their dreaded way towards Potions. Ron and Draco reunited as if they were long-lost lovers seeing each other after decades of being apart (Draco refusing to let go of Ron’s hand as they kissed) and they joined the queue lined up outside Snape’s classroom door. “Get in,” Snape said as he opened the door. They filed into the classroom and went to their usual table at the back.

“How would it be,” Hermione asked Harry and Ron coldly as they left the classroom for break (Binns drifting away through the blackboard), “if I refused to lend you my notes this year?”

“We’d fail our O.W.L.s,” Ron said. “If you want that on your conscience, Hermione …”

“Well, you’d deserve it,” she snapped. “You don’t even try to listen to him, do you?”

“We do try,” Ron said. “We just haven’t got your brains or your memory or your concentration—you’re just cleverer than we are—is it nice to rub it in?”

“Oh, don’t give me that rubbish,” Hermione said, but she looked slightly mollified as she led the way out into the damp courtyard.

They stayed in a secluded corner until the bell rang and made their dreaded way towards Potions. Ron and Draco reunited as if they were long-lost lovers seeing each other after decades of being apart (Draco refusing to let go of Ron’s hand as they kissed) and they joined the queue lined up outside Snape’s classroom door. “Get in,” Snape said as he opened the door. They filed into the classroom and went to their usual table at the back.

“How would it be,” Hermione asked Harry and Ron coldly as they left the classroom for break (Binns drifting away through the blackboard), “if I refused to lend you my notes this year?”

“We’d fail our O.W.L.s,” Ron said. “If you want that on your conscience, Hermione …”

“Well, you’d deserve it,” she snapped. “You don’t even try to listen to him, do you?”

“We do try,” Ron said. “We just haven’t got your brains or your memory or your concentration—you’re just cleverer than we are—is it nice to rub it in?”

“Oh, don’t give me that rubbish,” Hermione said, but she looked slightly mollified as she led the way out into the damp courtyard.

They stayed in a secluded corner until the bell rang and made their dreaded way towards Potions. Ron and Draco reunited as if they were long-lost lovers seeing each other after decades of being apart (Draco refusing to let go of Ron’s hand as they kissed) and they joined the queue lined up outside Snape’s classroom door. “Get in,” Snape said as he opened the door. They filed into the classroom and went to their usual table at the back.

“How would it be,” Hermione asked Harry and Ron coldly as they left the classroom for break (Binns drifting away through the blackboard), “if I refused to lend you my notes this year?”

“We’d fail our O.W.L.s,” Ron said. “If you want that on your conscience, Hermione …”

“Well, you’d deserve it,” she snapped. “You don’t even try to listen to him, do you?”

“We do try,” Ron said. “We just haven’t got your brains or your memory or your concentration—you’re just cleverer than we are—is it nice to rub it in?”

“Oh, don’t give me that rubbish,” Hermione said, but she looked slightly mollified as she led the way out into the damp courtyard.

They stayed in a secluded corner until the bell rang and made their dreaded way towards Potions. Ron and Draco reunited as if they were long-lost lovers seeing each other after decades of being apart (Draco refusing to let go of Ron’s hand as they kissed) and they joined the queue lined up outside Snape’s classroom door. “Get in,” Snape said as he opened the door. They filed into the classroom and went to their usual table at the back.
Snape’s mere presence was usually enough to ensure a class’s silence.

“Before we begin today’s lesson,” Snape said, sweeping over to his desk and staring around at them all, “I think it appropriate to remind you that next June you will be sitting an important examination, during which you will prove how much you have learned about the composition and use of magical potions. Moronic though some of this class undoubtedly are, I expect you to scrape an ‘Acceptable’ in your O.W.L. or suffer my… displeasure.”

His gaze lingered this time upon Neville Longbottom, who gulped.

“After this year, of course, many of you will cease studying with me,” Snape went on. “I take only the very best into my N.E.W.T. Potions class, which means that some of us will certainly be saying good-bye.”

His eyes rested on Harry and his lip curled. Harry glared back feeling a grim pleasure at the idea that he would be able to give up Potions after fifth year. Not that Tom would allow him.

“But we have another year to go before that happy moment of farewell,” Snape said softly, “so whether you are intending to attempt N.E.W.T. or not, I advise you to concentrate your efforts upon maintaining the high-pass level come to expect from my O.W.L. students.”

Tom was honestly surprised to see the Weasley twins in class with him. They were in the back of the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. There was a good handful of students in the classroom, not that Tom remembered, or really cared, about their names. Already Professor Umbridge seemed to irk Tom. She spent the first couple of minutes lecturing the class of seventeen-year-olds of how to properly greet her at the beginning of class. Next there was the textbook. It was a boring thick thing. Defensive Magical Theory by Wilbert Slinkhard. A tedious, disgusting, and only too obvious propaganda text that served to teach the students nothing. The Dark Lord stared at the book and couldn’t help but smirk to himself. If Headmaster Dippet or Dumbledore hadn’t refused his wish to teach, the students around him wouldn’t be stuck with the useless information in front of them. He looked up at Umbridge, who was talking yet saying nothing at the same time (a truly marvelous feat usually shared only by politicians and idiots) and decided to test her. He raised his hand.

Umbridge stared at him, unamused that a student would dare interrupt her. “Yes, Mr…”

“Riddle, Thomas Riddle,” Tom said. “I’m sorry, Professor, but I was wondering about your credentials. In the past we’ve had a retired Auror and a competent man who traveled all of England and knew all of the magical creatures she houses. Unfortunately, we also had a man who, while knowing his subject material, failed to venture into practicality as well as a fraud with a talent for memory charms. Our education was, as you said, rather disrupted and fragmented, but what is there to say that you are not just another fragmentation or disruptor?”

“I am teaching a Ministry-approved curriculum, as I have said—”

“But I am asking about your personal qualifications for teaching us,” Tom interrupted. “If the curriculum is approved by the Ministry and involves this heavy, laborious, and redundant text, then surly anyone, for example myself or the twins sitting on either end of me, could teach it. What have you done, Professor Umbridge, during your tenure in the Improper Use of Magic Office, or your time as Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic and position on the Wizengamot that qualifies you, and you alone, to teach us here at Hogwarts? I mean, yes, there was the Anti-werewolf legislation in 1993, but that is your only act of note to bring up. Other than that, you
seem to just do whatever means necessary to raise your position of power. So what, in this personal history which I just only so briefly laid out, qualifies you to teach us?”

The Weasley twins on either side had to clap their mouths to stifle their smirking snickers while the rest of the class stared at Tom with confusion, wondering who exactly he was. Tom stayed calm as he stared at Umbridge, waiting quietly for her answer.

Umbridge gave a sickly-sweet smile, “You seem to know a lot about me, Mr. Riddle. However, you seemed to have forgotten my current position as your teacher, and thus I both require and demand your respect. I have been chosen by the Minister himself to rectify and fix the broken education that you all have received. I am here because the Minister of Magic trusts me personally with this task—”

“I am sorry to interrupt again, Professor Umbridge, and please note that not once during my questioning did I disrespect your position as teacher, but it seems to me that you are saying the Ministry of Magic, a governmental position, is interfering in the private instructional institution that Hogwarts is. Such an act would not only be incredible illegal but, if the truth is known to the public, will have not only cast the Ministry in a horrible light, but most likely be the killing of both yours and Minister Fudge’s careers. Although, I must admit that I have no experience or interest in politics, I am simply stating what I am observing and following it down to its logical path.”

Professor Umbridge stared at Tom, he could see her anger being barely withheld behind her toady face; her face turned into a weird pink-ish purple that matched the cardigan she was wearing. Her eyes began to bulge out of their sockets and, much to her displeasure, the Weasley twins’ laughter increased so that it was heard by the class. “Detention!” she roared. “Detention, Mr. Riddle! Tomorrow evening. Five o’clock. My office. And twenty points from Gryffindor!”

“I’m in Ravenclaw, Professor.”

“Then twenty points from Ravenclaw too!” Umbridge yelled, but it only caused Fred and George to laugh even harder. She ignored them and addressed the rest of the class. “Open your books to page five, and read chapter one, ‘Basics for Beginners.’ There will be no need to talk.”

“Beginners? We’re in seventh year mate,” Fred whispered to George and Tom.

“Yeah, what does she think we are, Tommy-boy?” George whispered.

“It is not what she thinks we are, Weasleys, but rather what she thinks she is,” Tom whispered. “Did you notice how quick she took to anger?”

“Yeah, was funny,” Fred smirked.

“That’s not the point,” Tom said. “Just the fact that I got her angry enough to not only forget her composure, but my House as well, can reveal a lot about Umbridge as a character.”

“Which is?”

“Hmm? You haven’t noticed? Pity,” Tom said. His eyes turned towards the desk nearest the door where Cedric Diggory sat, his cane leaning against the desk as the handsome boy kept his head down in the book. Though Tom could see a slight shake of Cedric’s shoulders, and a glare that did not fit the handsome boy’s face, Tom gave a slight smile like a parent watching his son. *I shouldn’t cause trouble, at least not until Diggory’s stamina returns,* he thought to himself, his mind going back to the day he saved Diggory. He was very near death, if not dead by the time Tom intervene. Normally he wouldn’t do such a thing, he was fine with leaving Diggory for his fate. But Harry
begged, and Tom would never deny a request from his Dark Prince. It was difficult, but in the end Tom brought the boy back to life, only modified a tiny bit, made him more agreeable, more understanding to the Dark Lord’s words and views.

He decided that he had done enough fooling around for one day and turned to the textbook on his desk. He pulled out a quill and small piece of parchment and quickly wrote two notes, one for Harry and another for Cedric.

The one for Cedric read:

*Remember your loyalties. You’re housing a part of me, and so you must focus on recovering. Do not do anything reckless that will not only expose yourself, but risk further damage to your body. You are useless to me with your cane, learn to walk again on your own in order to serve your Lord.*

And Harry’s

*My Prince,*

Umbridge is quick to anger, and I daresay we might have some fun with it. During your class, play the perfect Golden Boy we both know you aren’t. Pretend to be Dumbledore’s defender so that we might further know the limits of Umbridge’s powers. I have detention with her tomorrow evening, do not make me have to suffer her alone. Together we’ll learn the fullest of her ability and decide if she is a threat or not.

*Your Lord.*

He rolled the two pieces of parchment and left them in his hand as he brought it to under his desk. He felt two pairs of beaks peaking lightly at the palm of his hand, picking up the rolls of parchment before disappearing. He looked at Cedric and smirked as he watched Cedric’s hand move down to under his desk. It is very interesting at how many shadows the castle was filled with. The shaking of Cedric’s shoulders stopped, and his glare faltered until he looked peaceful and submissive. Cedric returned to his book, reading, and stayed that way for the rest of class.

The bell rang and Tom stood up. He walked towards Cedric and placed a hand on his shoulder. Cedric flinched and looked up. “I’m sorry,” he muttered.

“It is not your fault, but you must learn to control yourself,” Tom said. “Come, let’s walk for a bit.” He grabbed Cedric’s bag and held it for him as the Hufflepuff stood up. The two walked out of the classroom, Tom taking slow strides to math Cedric’s cane, and he said in a low voice, “You may have noticed but your body is changing, your magic affinities reacting and resisting mine. You are changing, Cedric, into a Dark Wizard. Or at least a wizard who can easily produce the Dark Arts. It can be a painful transition, but it doesn’t have to be.”

“What do you mean?” Cedric asked.

Tom pointed to his cane. “Much of your current disabilities can be sourced to the struggle you are unconsciously fighting. Do not resist my magic, Cedric, do not resist the temptation. Instead allow it to touch you, to surround you, and you will find a pleasure tenfold than the pleasure any human has given you before.”

Cedric’s cheeks blushed.

“The sooner you allow my magic to take root in you, the sooner your legs can heal and you can be
helpful. You do want to be helpful to your Lord and Prince, correct?”

“Yes my Lord! Want need to be helpful,” Cedric pleaded.

Tom chuckled and pat Cedric’s shoulder. “Then all you need to do is accept the changes happening to you,” he said. “Accept them, and you will find yourself more powerful and more confident than ever before.”

“It’s that easy?” Cedric asked.

“It is Cedric, it is,” Tom smiled.

“Thank you, my Lord,” Cedric said. “I’ll do my best to accept.”

“Good.”

Tom patted Cedric’s shoulder again and watched the Hufflepuff move down the corridor. He had to admit that he was starting to like the Hufflepuff, even if a little bit. His eagerness to please the Dark Lord was amusing as well as his honesty, something that much of Tom’s old followers lacked. He reminded Tom much like a dog, or a puppy, all too eager to please his owners. But he will. The Dark Lord doesn’t invest in waste, and he will personally make sure that any and all of Cedric’s talents will not be wasted.

Harry had to admit to himself, he was a bit excited for Umbridge’s class, if only to play the role of Golden Boy. He had to pretend to be someone he wasn’t, someone who hated Lord Voldemort, someone who wished for Voldemort’s demise and followed, and cared about, Dumbledore. It was fun pretending.

When they entered the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom, they found Professor Umbridge already seated at the teacher’s desk, wearing the fluffy pink cardigan of the night before and the black velvet bow on top of her head. Harry was again reminded forcibly of a large fly perched unwisely on top of an even larger toad. A toad that is apparently quick to anger, Harry thought to himself.

The class was quiet as it entered the room; Professor Umbridge was, as yet, an unknown quantity and nobody knew yet how strict a disciplinarian she was likely to be.

“Well, good afternoon!” she said when finally the whole class had sat down.

A few people mumbled, “Good afternoon,” in reply.

“Tut, tut,” Professor Umbridge said. “That won’t do now, will it? I should like you, please, to reply ‘Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge.’ One more time, please. Good afternoon, class!”

“Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge,” they chanted back at her.

“There, now,” Professor Umbridge said sweetly. “That wasn’t too difficult, was it? Wands away and quills out, please.”

Many of the class exchanged gloomy looks; the order “wands away” had never yet been followed by a lesson they had found interesting. Harry shove his wand back inside his bag and pulled out quill, ink, and parchment. Should he lash out now? He wondered. No, no it was too soon. He had to wait. Professor Umbridge opened her handbag, extracted her own wand, which was an unusually
short one, and tapped the blackboard sharply with it; words appeared on the board at once.

Defense Against the Dark Arts
A Return to Basic Principles

“Well now, your teaching in this subject has been rather disrupted and fragmented, hasn’t it?” Professor Umbridge stated. “The constant changing of teachers, many of whom do not seem to have followed any Ministry-approved curriculum, has unfortunately resulted in your being far below the standard we would expect to see in your O.W.L. year.

“You will be pleased to know, however, that these problems are now to be rectified. We will be following a carefully structured, theory-centered, Ministry-approved course of defensive magic this year. Copy down the following, please.”

She tapped the chalkboard, and the first message disappeared, being replaced by:

Course aims:

1. Understanding the principles underlying defensive magic.
2. Learning to recognize situations in which defensive magic can legally be used.
3. Placing the use of defensive magic in a context for practical use.

There’s nothing about using Magic, Harry thought to himself.

Umbridge assigned them all to read the first chapter of their textbook, Defensive Magical Theory by Wilbert Slinkhand, and Harry saw his chance. After all it was desperately dull, quite as bad as listening to Professor Umbridge. He read the first two sentences and closed the book, raising his hand. Ron and Hermione looked at him questionably, but Harry kept his hand in the air. Hermione saw that his book was closed, and getting the idea, raised her hand as well, both staring at Professor Umbridge, who was looking just looking as resolutely in another direction.

After several more minutes had passed, however, Ron was not the only one watching Harry and Hermione. The chapter they have been instructed to read was so tedious that more and more people were choosing to watch the two’s mute attempt to catch Professor Umbridge’s eye than to struggle on with “Basics for Beginners.”

When more than half the class were staring at Harry and Hermione rather than their books, Professor Umbridge seemed to decide that she could ignore the situation no longer.

“Did you want to ask something about the chapter, dear?” she asked Hermione, completely ignoring Harry and acting as if she just noticed her.

“Not about the chapter, no,” Hermione said.

“Well, we’re reading just now,” Professor Umbridge said, showing her small pointed teeth. “If you have other queries we can deal with them at the end of class.”

“I have a query about the course aims,” Hermione said.

Professor Umbridge raised her eyebrows.

“And your name is—?”

“Hermione Granger.”
“Well, Miss Granger, I think the course aims are perfectly clear if you read them through carefully,” Professor Umbridge said in a voice of determined sweetness.

“Well, I don’t” Hermione said bluntly. “There’s nothing written about using defensive spells.”

There was a short silence in which many members of the class turned their heads to frown at the three course aims still written on the blackboard.

“Using defensive spells?” Professor Umbridge repeated with a little laugh. “Why, I can’t imagine any situation arising in my classroom, that would require you to use a defensive spell, Miss Granger. You surely aren’t expecting to be attacked during class?”

“No, but how are we to learn the spells if we aren’t using them?” Harry interjected.

“You are to raise your hand before asking, Mr. Potter,” Professor Umbridge said.

“My hand has been up! Longer than Hermione’s,” Harry said. “The whole point of Defense Against the Dark Arts is to practice defensive spells!”

“Are you a Ministry-trained educational expert, Mr. Potter?” Professor Umbridge asked in her falsely sweet voice.

“No, but neither are you,” Harry said quickly.

“Excuse me! I’ll have you know that Wizards much older and cleverer than you, Mr. Potter, have devised our new program of study. You will be learning about defensive spells in a secure, risk-free—”

“If we’re attacked, it’s not going to be risk-free—”

“Hand, Mr. Potter!” Professor Umbridge sang.

Harry thrust his fist in the air. Professor Umbridge promptly turned away from him again, but now several other people had their hands up too.

“And your name is?” she said to Dean.

“Dean Thomas.”

“Well, Mr. Thomas?”

“Well, it’s like Harry said, isn’t it?” Dean said. “If we’re going to be attacked, it won’t be risk-free—”

“I repeat,” Umbridge said, smiling in a very irritating fashion at Dean, “do you expected to be attacked during my classes?”

“No, but—”

“I do not wish to criticize the way things have been run in this school,” Umbridge said, an unconvincing smile stretching her wide mouth, “but you have been exposed to some very irresponsible wizards in this class, very irresponsible indeed—not to mention,” she gave a nasty little laugh, “extremely dangerous half-breeds.”

“If you mean Professor Lupin,” Dean Thomas piped angrily, “he was the best we ever—”
“Hand, Mr. Thomas! As I was saying—you have been introduced to spells that have been complex, inappropriate to your age group, and potentially lethal. You have been brightened into believing that you are likely to meet Dark attacks every other day—”

“No we haven’t,” Hermione said, “we just—”

“Your hand is nut up, Miss Granger!”

Hermione put up her hand; Professor Umbridge turned away from her.

“It is my understanding that my predecessor not only performed illegal curses in front of you, he actually performed them on you—”

“Well, he turned out to be a maniac, didn’t he?” Dean Thomas said hotly. “Mind you, we still learned loads—”

“Your hand is not up, Mr. Thomas!” Umbridge trilled. “Now it is the view of the Ministry that a theoretical knowledge will be more than sufficient to get you through your examinations, which, after all, is what school is about—”

“And what good is that? So the first time we’ll be performing those spells is during the examination? Theory’s not that good in the real world!” Harry said loudly, his fist in the air again.

Professor Umbridge looked up.

“This is school, Mr. Potter, not the real world,” she said softly.

“So we’re not supposed to be prepared for what’s waiting out there?”

“There is nothing waiting out there, Mr. Potter.”

“Oh yeah?” Harry said. His temper, which seemed to have been bubbling just beneath the surface all day, was reaching boiling point. He had to force himself to remember who he needed to pretend to be. He needed to pretend to be Harry Potter: Golden Boy of Gryffindor. Not Harry Potter: The Dark Prince, lover to the Dark Lord.

“Who do you imagine wants to attack children like yourselves?” Professor Umbridge inquired in a horribly honeyed voice.

“Let me think… oh I don’t know, maybe Lord Voldemort?” Harry said in a mock thoughtful voice.

Ron gasped; Lavender Brown uttered a little scream; Neville slipped sideways off his stool. Professor Umbridge, however, did not flinch. She was staring at Harry with a grimly satisfied expression on her face.

“Now, let me make a few things quite plain. You have been told that a certain Dark wizard has returned from the dead. This is a lie.”

“It is NOT a lie! I saw him! I fought him!” Harry yelled.

“Detention, Mr. Potter!” Professor Umbridge said triumphantly. “Tomorrow evening. Five o’clock. My office. I repeat, this is a lie. The Ministry of Magic guarantees that you are not in danger from any Dark wizard. If you are still worried, by all means come and see me outside class hours. If someone is alarming you with fibs about reborn Dark wizards, I would like to hear about it. I am here to help. I am your friend. And now, you will kindly continue your reading. Page five, ‘Basics
Harry sat down triumphant. Tom was right, she really was quick to anger. Hoping the same trick would work for him, Harry wrote a note on a small ripped piece of parchment that read:

*It worked. I got detention tomorrow at five.*

He rolled the piece of parchment up and left it on the palm of his hand. He let his hand drop to below his lap under the desk and waited. He continued to wait until finally he felt a small peck at his thumb, followed by another peck, and another. His hand had a strange tingling, pecking sensation like a thousand needles poking in, the same sensation that was blood rushing to a body part that was resting and the nerves all reactivating at once. Finally, he felt the piece of parchment being lifted off of his open palm, and then nothing. He spent the rest of the class glaring at Umbridge, working his hardest to hide his true self under his golden façade.

Harry was not to be found during dinner time. When the bell rang for dinner, and the other Gryffindors left the common room to go down to the Great Hall, Harry stayed. He faked needing to tie his shoe until everyone was gone. Then he ran up to his dormitory and changed his clothes. It felt refreshing to wear his pure-black robes, and it felt like coming home when he tapped his glasses with his wand and his black mask covered his face, its snakes with emerald eyes staring menacing out into the distance, and his mouth and chin completely free. Yes, truly the mask and his suit was where the Dark Prince felt in home, felt himself. He shed the mantle and responsibility of Harry Potter, and became something more, something real. A terror that lived to serve his loved one: The Dark Lord.

With a wave of his wand, the oil lamps on the sides of the room dimmed out before extinguishing completely, leaving the room in a shadowy darkness. “Take me to where the head of the Nott family is,” Harry said to the darkness. There was a silence where nothing moved, and then two red eyes appeared in the distance. Harry followed the eyes, and disappeared in the darkness.

He couldn’t help but smile to himself. It’s been too long since he’d been himself, since he wore his mask. He felt another crow by his hand, and a wand being placed into it. The Dark Prince tightened his grasp over his Lord’s wand and continued walking. The crow took him to a sizable room where Mr. Nott was sitting in. He was tall with thinning hair, and a slightly long nose, rather rabbit-like. The room they were in looked like a normal sitting room, with the main focus being a marble fireplace with columns depicting wizards standing on a pedestal held by house-elves. By one column which held up the mantle above the fireplace was a metal bin holding fire-pokers. Mr. Nott was staring into the fire as he drank.

The Dark Prince walked out of the shadows. The Prince waved his wand and the armchair Mr. Nott was sitting in shattered, causing the adult to fall in surprise. “What the—”

“Mr. Nott, hello,” The Prince purred. “I’ve heard that you’ve done some very terrible things…”

“Who do you think you are!” the man said as he got to his feet and turning towards the Dark Prince. He gave a small gasp. “You’re the Dark Prince,” he said angrily.

“Yes, and you cause our Lord’s ire,” The Dark Prince said. “Such a mistake.”

“I cause our Lord ire? What about you!” The man challenged. “You spoiled brat ruined my Lord and his purpose!”
The Prince laughed. It was cold and high-pitched. “Change the Dark Lord’s purpose? You stupid pure-blooded fool. Our Lord’s purpose was always the same. Your lot decided to just tack on your supremacy issues along with it.”

“You filthy half-blood! You—”

The Dark Prince swiped his wand in the air and muttered, “Expelliarmus.” Mr. Nott’s wand flew off of the man’s weedy body before he could reach for it. The Prince moved his wand again, and the man found himself pressed against the floor.

“Oh how I long for the day where your stupid blood purity and Lordships become a thing of the past,” The Dark Prince said. “Which by the will be coming closer than expected if your son and others like him follow Draco Malfoy and reject their Lordships.”

“My son would never do that!” Mr. Nott struggled against the wall.

“Are you sure?” The Dark Prince asked, a sly smile coming out. “Speaking of Draco Malfoy… would you like to know where he was during the summer? I know your insurgence was looking for him.” Mr. Nott’s eyes went wide. “He was with me, and the Dark Lord. So you see, really, Draco Malfoy is being a more faithful follower than you or any other of our Death Eaters. But we’re not here to discuss our friend Draco, oh no! We’re here about the crime that you committed.”

“Crime? I’ve done no crime boy! Now let me down before I wring my hands around your—ARGH!” Harry slashed his wand and the fire-pokers from the fireplace sprung into the air and flew straight towards Mr. Nott, impaling him on his arms and legs, sticking him to the wall. Blood started to spurt out, staining his clothes and sticking to the wall.

“Yes you did,” The Dark Prince said. “You’ve committed a crime that even our Lord has no mercy for: You had Theodore Nott, your own son, raped! You had a woman rape him in his bed. Now, what our Lords wants to know is who the woman is. But what I want to know is why. Why did you have your son raped?”

The Dark Prince ran towards the man hanging a few inches off of the floor, being suspended against the wall, and twisted one of the fire-poker causing the man to groan in agony.

“That the best you got boy?” Mr. Nott spat.

“No, I just wanted to see if you would answer voluntarily,” The Dark Prince said. He pointed his Lord’s wand at the man and snarled, “Crucio.”

The man’s screams filled the room as the body twisted and turn against the fire-pokers that stayed impaled through his skin, keeping the man from curling together or writhing in pain. Instead he just vibrated against the wall and pokers, blood gushing against the wall staining it as it started to leak downwards, trails making it look as if the man had spread out dark-red wings resting on the wall. He frothed at the mouth, screaming and choking in pain as the Dark Prince kept the spell on. The man’s arms seemed to sag, and with each movement his arm moved further away from the poker, which only caused the hole to enlarge gradually. The Prince stopped the Unforgivable Curse and waited. “Well Mr. Nott? Who did you rape your son with, and why?” The Dark Prince asked.

“Fuckin’ poof,” the man spat, spitting a mixture of blood and spit at the Dark Prince’s shoe, the mixture landing directly to the side of it instead. “You want to know why I did it?” he asked, his voice gargled and hoarse. “It was to keep my son from being a poof like you! He needed to learn how to treat a woman, and that’s what I did. I hired a prostitute and paid her good. Told her to keep going no matter what my boy says. And you know what? My son became a man. He got hard and
she fucked herself on his erection. He—” The Dark Prince punched him. His knuckles hurt, but he was satisfied to see Mr. Nott’s slackened and fell.

The Prince had to control his temper. He wanted so desperately to harm the man more, to strip him of his skin and muscle and blood vessel until he was nothing but bones. How could that man be so monstrous? How could he be so… so cruel? To hire a woman to rape his own son and watch them?

The thought enraged The Dark Prince more than anything Umbridge could do. The Prince had to shut his eyes tightly and force himself to breathe. He felt the strange sensation slowly prod him just on the outside of his mind. A calm, unemotional sensation that took over the Dark Prince once when he killed the Malfoys. The Prince focused on this sensation, this energy and power that came from the Horcrux inside him. The Dark Lord told him he needed to use the power, to take control of the power and not have the Horcrux take control of him.

The Dark Prince breathed again and felt the unnatural calmness invade his mind, whispering for control, whispering for temptation. The Prince opened his eyes, which turned red only for a moment, and with his wand he pressed the tip against the man’s chest, carving the word ‘MONSTER’ into it.

Raw, bloodied, and bleeding the word reflected in the firelight and the Prince smiled at his work.

“I knew that you would show up in my home one day, Dark Prince,” a voice said.

The Prince turned and whipped his wand, the new intruder’s wand flying into the air. It was Yaxley. “However, I did not think that it would be carving a word into my friend’s body. Why are you here?”

“He had his son raped,” The Dark Prince said. “There are crimes that even our Lord wouldn’t commit.”

“A sign of weakness, which he must have taken from you,” Yaxley said. He sighed and shook his head. “He’s still alive.”

“The Dark Lord wants him alive.”

“Pity. If he was to his true power, he would have killed Nott after this,” Yaxley sighed.

“Isn’t it better for the man to live in shame, for a reminder of his crime to be forever carved into him?” The Dark Prince asked.

“No, it is a sign of weakness. I can guarantee you that Mr. Nott will learn nothing from this… experiment,” Yaxley said. “Nor will I. For being a supposed ‘Dark Prince’ you are not a very intelligent one, are you? Otherwise you would have killed Mr. Nott.”

“Funny that you speak of intelligence, Yaxley,” The Dark Prince said. “For only those who lack intelligence mocks others.”

“A nice quip, who did you steal it from?” Yaxley asked.

The Dark Prince just smiled. “You wear the murmurs motley, Yaxley. Though, I must admit that no matter what you or your insurgency does, there is no replacing the Dark Lord. Just as there is no replacing Mr. Malfoy, for that matter. I wonder if that is what you are doing sometimes, trying to replace Mr. Malfoy. You may speak his lines, but in the end you are just reading from his script.”

“And what do you know of scripts, Prince?” Yaxley said.
“I know that if you want to be Lucius Malfoy, you’ll need more than just reading scripts,” the Dark Prince said. “You need his family, which we have. Draco has been spending the summer with me while your insurgency ran and met like frighten hens. It is really amusing watching you plan, listen to your little speeches. Do you think they actually work? Or maybe the more you talk, the more you feel like a real man of worth?”

Yaxley just scowled at The Dark Prince, which made the teen laugh. “Or maybe, you just realized that the Dark Lord trusts me, a teenage boy, more than he does you and the rest of his followers. I mean, it is understandable… but that is the natural result after being under his tutelage since I was twelve.”

“Excuse me?”

“Hmm? Haven’t you heard? The Dark Lord has been teaching me since I was twelve, and still teaches me to this day. It is because he is my mentor that I hold him in such high esteem… and he for me. Why else would he call me his Prince, or fashion a mask to protect me?” The Dark Prince smirked.

“You… you’re just a boy… still at Hogwarts,” Yaxley said.

“Maybe, but I’ve done enough tonight. My mission is complete, and I wish you a good night, sir,” The Dark Prince faked a bow and turned to leave, walking into the shadows and disappearing.

Yaxley stood in his spot, anger and rage boiling inside him. “A child! You’ve been bested by a child!” he yelled. He looked at Nott and snapped his fingers. Several house-elves appeared. “Assist Mr. Nott off of my wall,” he commanded. He turned and left, his anger steering him into his office. “How could a child be so—” He stopped, and replayed their conversation in his head. Something seemed familiar. Something that itched on the outside of his mind that he couldn’t remember.

It was late at night when he did. Rage filled him even more, his entire body trembled with it. He yelled at the top of his voice, his scream filling his manor and echoing into his garden, “POTTER!”
The next morning Tom sat down for breakfast in the Great Hall. The crows told him about Harry’s job last night and he couldn’t be prouder. Breaking a hard-boiled egg rather happily, the owls came in with the morning mail. Two owls landed in front of Tom, one holding his copy of the Daily Prophet, and another a small hand-written note. Tom recognized the handwriting immediately as Yaxley’s. Confused, he unrolled the small piece of parchment.

*How is Potter? He left my home abruptly last night.*

Tom’s attitude changed immediately. Anger swept inside him boiling angrily as his fists immediately tightened, his teeth gnashed together, and his eyes were turning red. He stood up abruptly, turned towards the Gryffindor Table to see Harry wasn’t there. He left the Great Hall and started his way towards Gryffindor Tower. He found Harry walking down the marble staircase on the fourth floor looking tired with Ron and Hermione. He did not give the other two any acknowledgements as he grabbed Harry’s arm roughly and pulled him aside. “To—”

“Shut up and follow me,” Tom growled, doing his best to keep his voice low. He dragged Harry into a random corridor and the nearest classroom. He slammed the door behind them and glared at Harry. “What did you do?” He demanded.

“What—”

“What did you do Harry!” Tom demanded again. He threw the piece of parchment at Harry, who caught it. “Yaxley knows,” he said.

Harry read the note and frowned. “I… I don’t know,” he said. “I didn’t say my name or anything!”

“I know that, but you did something that made the man realize who you are,” Tom said.

“I did nothing that I would normally do!” Harry yelled. “I had the mask on, I used your wand… I don’t know how he could have learned that it was me.”

Tom frowned. “Fine… still, we need to figure out what to do now.”

Harry thought for a moment. “Does he have a family?”

“Yaxley? No.”

“No children he’ll leave behind? No wife or anything?” Harry asked.

“No, he is the last of his family,” Tom said. “When he dies, the name Yaxley dies with him.”

Harry nodded and look at Tom. “It’s obvious, isn’t it?”

Tom stared at Harry, shocked. “You are suggesting murder?”

Harry nodded. “He’s not going to leave any children behind, nor a spouse or really any family,” he said slowly. “If he dies, that’s it, he dies. No consequences.”

“Harry… I am usually the first to suggest murder, but may I offer another suggestion?” Tom asked.
“What is it?”

“The Malfoys,” Tom said. “Lucius and Narcissa. Their killer has not been caught.”

Harry gasped, his eyes wide. “I remember! I said something to Yaxley! Both last night and months ago! I can’t believe that I’m remembering this, or even how I managed to say the same thing… I insulted Yaxley, claiming that he was trying to be exactly like Lucius Malfoy!”

“Harry!” Tom yelled. “That is genius, we now have a killer and a motive! Now all we need is evidence.”

“But how? Mrs. Malfoy died by poisoning while Mr. Malfoy was killed with the Killing Curse,” Harry said. “And it would be doubtless that Yaxley would have performed a multitude of spells between then and now.”

“Which is why, my prince, we need to catch him with the poison,” Tom said. “A vial that contains only a small trace of it, left in a place to be deposed but ultimately forgotten. He is an old man, it is natural that he would forget such an important part.”

Harry nodded, a thoughtful expression on his face. “What about Draco, though? We will need to tell him about this,” he said looking at Tom.

“Naturally, which is why you will do such a thing while I get the poison ready,” Tom said. “I have potions today, it will be a simple matter of stealing from Severus’s stock.”

“Okay,” Harry nodded. “So we get the poison ready and plant it in his house—I can do that easily with the Invisibility Cloak, what then?”

“Then, we simply alert the authorities. Yaxley is an influential member of the Ministry of Magic, he is seen countless times in the presence of the Minister of Magic himself. As a previously suspected Death Eater, it would not be outrageous to think that he would try to poison the Minister himself,” Tom said.

“So we spread a rumor that he is trying to kill Fudge?” Harry asked. “But then he would just be thrown into Azkaban for attempted murder, not actual.”

“Yes, which is why we need to plant some more… evidence,” Tom said.

“Like what?”

“Letters, journal entries, paper that would show Yaxley’s jealousy of the Malfoys and his planning and then acting out their murders,” Tom said.

“And that will do it?” Harry asked.

“Of course, but we will need time, a week at most,” Tom said. “I have the poison to recreate as well as creating many incriminating evidences. Meanwhile, I will have the crows watch Yaxley, listen to his every word. They will make sure that he doesn’t do anything rash with this information.”

“Will he?” Harry asked.

“I don’t think so, no,” Tom said. “Remember, the Ministry of Magic denies my return Harry. He cannot simply go to the Minister and tell him that Harry Potter is the Dark Prince, heir and apprentice to the Dark Lord. No… this is meant to scare us, to have us bickering at each other or
cast doubt on your usefulness.”

“Which it didn’t.”

“You’re bloody right it didn’t,” Tom said. He took a breath and continued. “Harry, for your part, continue your life as normal. Attend classes, do homework, fall asleep during History of Magic, and show your boyfriend the proper attention he deserves,” Tom smirked at this part, “I will tell you when I have everything in place; the crows will plant the evidence we need.”

“Then how are we going to tell the Aurors when the time comes?” Harry asked.

“We are not going to tell the Aurors anything directly… we will let the Ministry’s own paranoia let the news travel to the proper authorities,” Tom said. “Whisper the right words to the right people.”

“Please tell me you’re not thinking of Umbridge,” Harry grimaced.

“Of course not,” Tom said. “I wouldn’t trust that woman to hold a vial of troll snot. No, again we will use the crows.”

“But how? They’re birds! They don’t speak?” Harry said.

Tom chuckled and smirked. “You mean to tell me, you haven’t tried to ask the crows something that would require an answer? Harry love, I’m disappointed.”

“You mean those ruddy birds can talk?” Harry gasped.

“More likely they repeat what we tell them to repeat,” Tom said. “Do not worry about the finer details, my love. Go and be the student you normally are, and let your Lord deal with our enemy.”

“Yes T… yes my Lord,” Harry said.

“Good,” Tom said. He pulled Harry into a quick kiss. “Everything will work out Harry, don’t worry about it,” he whispered. Harry nodded and the two walked out of the classroom and back to the Great Hall.

Harry found that he didn’t have time to worry about Yaxley. Double Charms was succeeded by Double Transfiguration. Professor Flitwick and Professor McGonagall both spent the first fifteen minutes of their lessons lecturing the class on the importance of O.W.L.s.

“What you must remember,” Professor Flitwick said, “is that these examinations may influence your future for many years to come! If you have not already given serious thought to your careers, now is the time to do so. And in the meantime, I’m afraid we shall be working harder than ever to ensure that you all do yourselves justice!”

They then spent more than an hour reviewing Summing Charms, which according to Professor Flitwick were bound to come up in their O.W.L., and he rounded off the lesson by setting them their largest amount of Charms homework ever.

“It was the same, if not worse, in Transfiguration.

“You cannot pass an O.W.L.,” Professor McGonagall said grimly, “without serious application, practice, and study. I see no reason why everybody in this class should not achieve an O.W.L. in Transfiguration as long as they put in the work. So… today we are starting Vanishing Spells. These are easier than Conjuring Spells, which you would not usually attempt until N.E.W.T. level, but they are still among the most difficult magic you will be tested on in your O.W.L.”
She was quite right; Harry found the Vanishing Spell horribly difficult. By the end of a double period, neither he nor Ron had managed to vanish the snails on which they were practicing, the best he was able to do was make the shell look a little transparent. Hermione, on the other hand, successfully vanished her snail on the third attempt, earning her a ten-point bonus for Gryffindor from Professor McGonagall. She was the only person not given homework; everybody else was told to practice the spell overnight, ready for a fresh attempt on their snails the following afternoon.

Now panicking slightly about the amount of homework they had to do, Harry and Ron spent their lunch hour in the library looking up the uses of moonstones in potion-making. Draco joined them, though he wasn’t very helpful as he just refused to tell them outright the uses. Harry used this time to talk with Draco one-on-one.

“I told you Harry, I will not tell you what the bloody moonstones are for,” Draco sighed.

“It’s not that… umm,” Harry said, glancing over at Ron who was tearing his hair hunched over a book. Harry leaned closer and whispered, “it’s about your parents.”

Draco’s face went stone-faced. His gaze seemed to sharpen. “What about them?” he asked emotionlessly.

“Tom… we’re planning on pinning the blame on Yaxley. You know what’s he’s doing, the problems he’s causing… We’re going to pin the murders on him and make it look like he is planning on killing the Minister as well.”

“And you are asking my permission—”

“No… Tom is going to do this with or without your permission,” Harry said. “I just thought… I just thought that it would be better if I tell you… about… it.” Harry’s voice died off under Draco’s gaze.

“Harry, I am serious when I say this: I don’t want to think about my parents anymore. I don’t want to think about what you’ve done. I’ve accepted that our Lord took over your body during that time but… I’m trying to move past it, I want to move past it. Whatever you and Tom do… if it involves my father or my mother… I don’t want any part of it, understand?” Draco asked.

“Yes, I do,” Harry frowned.

“Good. Now go sit down next to the idiot and figure out how to use moonstones before I beat you both over with a book!” Draco threatened, speaking louder than before.

“Hey! I’m not an idiot!” Ron called out looking up at Draco.

“You are at potions, now hush up and continue working,” Draco called out.


“I can call you names too you know,” Draco said sitting down. “Or did you forget that it was your House’s fault that Snape gave us an essay on the properties of moonstones?”

“Don’t bring Neville—”

“Then shut it and get to work,” Draco said. “The sooner you’re done the sooner I can do something remotely useful.” Ron shot him a glare but continued working. Harry just stared at the two of them for a moment before sitting down himself.
To nobody’s surprise, Professor Sprout started their lesson that afternoon by lecturing them about the importance of O.W.L.s. Harry wished all the teachers would stop doing this; he was starting to get an anxious, twisting feeling in his stomach every time he remembered how much homework he had to do, a feeling that worsened dramatically when Professor Sprout gave them yet another essay at the end of class; it twisted and meld with his sense of dread with the situation that Yaxley created, causing the teenager to barely eat during dinner even though he was starving.

He had detention with Umbridge at five o’clock. At five to five Harry bade Ron and Hermione good-bye and set off for Umbridge’s office on the third floor. Tom was waiting for him just outside. “Do you remember why we are here Harry?” he asked.

“Because we both have big mouths,” Harry said cheekily. Tom stared at him and he sighed. “We have to see if Umbridge is a threat or not.”

“Correct, which means that while we are in that office we are just two students, nothing more nothing less,” Tom said.

“Okay… can you give me a kiss first though?” Harry asked.

“Of course,” Tom smiled, and in one graceful move pulled Harry against his chest and kissed him. Tom kept his arm around Harry’s waist as they knocked on the door. They entered cautiously, looking around.

Harry had known this office under three of its previous occupants. But now, it looked completely unrecognizable. The surfaces had all been draped in lacy covers and cloths. There were several vases full of dried flowers, each residing on its own doily, and on one of the walls was a collection of ornamental plates, each decorated with a large Technicolored kitten wearing a different bow around its neck. These were so foul that Harry stared at them, transfixed, until Professor Umbridge spoke.

“Good evening, Mr. Potter, Mr. Riddle.” Her eyes were glancing at Tom’s arm which was still around Harry’s waist in disgust.

“Evening,” Harry said stiffly.

“Well, sit down,” she said, pointing toward a small table draped in lace beside which she had drawn up two straight-backed chairs. Two pieces of black parchment lay on the table, apparently waiting for them.

They did. “Now you both will be writing lines for me, Mr. Potter, Mr. Riddle. No, not with your quills,” she added as Harry bent down to open his bag. “You’re going to be using a rather special one of mine. Here you are.”

She handed them two long, think black quills with an unusually sharp point. Tom examined the quill carefully.

“Is there a problem, Mr. Riddle?” Umbridge smiled politely.

“Not at all Professor,” Tom said. “It is just that I haven’t seen a pen like this.”

“Of course not. It is a very special pen—no need for ink,” she said softly with a hint of a laugh. “Mr. Potter, I want you to write ‘I must not tell lies’ while Mr. Riddle… I would like for you to write ‘I must respect authority.’”

“How many times?” Harry asked, with a creditable imitation of politeness.
“Oh, as long as it takes for the message to sink in,” Umbridge said sweetly. “Off you go.”

Harry placed the point of the quill on the paper and wrote: *I must not tell lies.*

He let out a gasp of pain. The words had appeared on the parchment in what appeared to be shining red ink. At the same time, the words had appeared on the back of Harry’s right hand, cut into his shin as though traced there by a scalpel—yet even as he stared at the shining cut, the skin healed over again, leaving the place where it had been slightly redder than before but quite smooth. He looked around at Tom, he seemed to have notice it too but nevertheless continued writing as if it wasn’t hurting him. Harry turned to look at Umbridge. She was watching them, her wide, toadlike mouth stretched in a smile.

“Yes?”

“Nothing,” Harry said quietly.

He looked back at the parchment, placed the quill upon it once more, wrote *I must not tell lies,* and felt the searing pain on the back of his hand for a second time; once again the words had been cut into his skin, once again they healed over seconds later.

And on it went. Again and again Harry wrote the words on the parchment in what he soon came to realize was not ink, but his own blood. And again and again the words were cut into the back of his hand, healed, and then reappeared the next time he set quill to parchment.

Tom did not stop writing, his face emotionless, but Harry could see past his Lord’s mask, he could see the cogs moving in his head, he could see the hatred fuming behind his eyes. Yet he did nothing! Why did Tom not act? Why is the Dark Lord sitting there, taking this torture?

Darkness fell outside Umbridge’s window. Harry did not ask when they would be allowed to stop. He did not even check his watch. He knew Umbridge was watching them for signs of weakness and he was not going to show any, not even if he had to sit here all night, cutting open his own hand with this quill.

“Come here,” she said, after what seemed hours.

They stood. Harry’s hand was stinging painfully. When he looked down at it he saw that the cut had healed, but that the skin there was red raw. The same was with Tom’s hand.

“Hand,” she said.

He extended it. She took it in her own. Harry repressed a shudder as she touched him with her thick, stubby fingers on which she wore a number of ugly old rings.

“Tut, tut. I don’t seem to have made much of an impression yet,” she said, smiling. “Well, we’ll just have to try again tomorrow evening, won’t we? And mayhap the rest of the week as well.”

Tom glared at her. “The detention you gave us—”

“Will go on until you two naughty boys learn your lessons,” Umbridge said. “You may go.”

The two left. The school was quite deserted. It was surely past midnight. They walked slowly up the corridor. Tom stopped suddenly and turned to Harry. He grabbed both of Harry’s hands and looked down at them, frowning. “Harry, where is your ring?”

“My what—how can you be thinking about that—”
“Harry, look at your hands,” Tom said. Harry looked down. The only thing he noticed was the red rawness of his right hand. He looked at his ring finger, where he always wore the ring on his right hand, it just felt most comfortable there, so much so that he forgets about it most of the time. He stared in shock to see that it was missing. He looked up at Tom. “I always wear it,” he said.

“I know you do… never mind, it will show up,” Tom said after a moment’s thoughts. “Now, I’m going to escort you back to Gryffindor Tower, we will speak about what just happened during that time.”

“Like why you didn’t do anything?” Harry demanded. “She was making us carve into our skins! She has to be a threat!”

“I know, and she is a threat, but Yaxley is a bigger one Harry,” Tom said. “You cannot simply go around killing whoever stands in front of you and expect things to turn your way. There are situations where it is acceptable and situations where it’s not—”

“Funny coming from the Dark Lord,” Harry said.

Tom grabbed Harry’s body and pushed him against the stone walls. “Look at me,” Tom seethed, his eyes red and voice high. “Look at me! I’ve already tried that method Harry. I already tried killing everyone who stands in my way and do you know what happened? I lost. I lost the first war Potter. But I will not lose this one. No, I will be smarter, more cunning, cleverer. There is nothing I would most rather do than to take Umbridge and dissect her layer by layer until she is barely a corpse for what she had done to you, but I cannot. People will ask questions, people will be suspicious. The Ministry will believe that it was you who have done it. We need to be smart about this Harry. Smart.”

“So what? I just grit through her tortures?” Harry yelled.

“Yes. And the anger you develop, the anger that you want to unleash on her, you bottle that Harry. You store your anger, let it grow and become more powerful. Let it develop into hate, into suffering. Her suffering and the suffering of all your enemies. Look at me now. You are a Dark Wizard Harry, understand? Do you know what that means?”

“I have not problems casting the Dark Arts,” Harry said.

“More importantly, Harry, is that your hatred will fuel your spells,” Tom said. “Let your hate overwhelm you when the timing is right and watch as your enemies fall before your will.”

“I want her to die,” Harry said. “I want her and Yaxley both to die…” he looked at Tom, his eyes seemingly glowing violently green as he said, “And I want to be the one who kills them.”

Tom smiled, pride swelling in his chest. “Then let your anger grow, my Dark Prince, and your time will come. Let it grow, and soon you will kill your enemies without my aid.”

Harry nodded and rested his head on Tom’s chest. The Dark Lord wrapped his arms around his little Prince and kissed the top of his head. “Come my love, it is time for us both to sleep.”

Harry made a small groan. “Angelina’s going to hate that I have detention the rest of the week,” he said. “Tryout’s are on Friday.”

Tom chuckled. “Yeah, worry about those things Harry. I’ll take care of the rest. Come on, time to sleep.” And they both made their way to the Gryffindor Tower.

Harry had not had time to practice Vanishing Spells, had not written a single dream for the dream
journal that Professor Trelawney assigned him, and had not finished the drawing Professor Grubbly-Plank assigned, or any of his essays. He skipped breakfast next morning to scribble down a couple of made-up dreams for Divination. He told Ron about the extra detentions during that class.

“That’s awful! And she just sprung it on you?”

“Yeah.”

“But what about the tryouts on Friday?” Ron asked.

“I don’t know… I didn’t tell Angelina yet,” Harry said. “She’s going to be angry, I just know it.” She was. She tracked Harry down at dinner and, on learning that he would not be able to attend Friday’s Keeper tryouts, told him she was not at all impressed by his attitude and that she expected players who wished to remain on the team to put training before their other commitments.

“I’m in detention!” Harry yelled after her as she stalked away. “D’you think I’d rather be stuck in a room with that old toad or playing Quidditch?”

“At least it’s only lines,” Hermione said consolingly, as Harry sank back onto his bench and looked down at his steak-and-kidney pie, which he no longer fancied very much. “It’s not as if it’s a dreadful punishment, really. …”

Harry opened his mouth, closed it again, and nodded. He was not really sure why he was not telling Ron and Hermione exactly what was happening in Umbridge’s room: He only knew that he did not want to see their looks of horror; that would make the whole thing seem worse and therefore more difficult to face.

“I can’t believe how much homework we’ve got,” Ron said miserably.

“Why, why didn’t you do any last night?” Hermione asked him. “Where were you anyway?”

“I was… I fancied a walk,” Ron said shiftily.

“What did you and Draco do,” Hermione sighed.


The detentions continued unrelenting. Harry and Tom showed up to Umbridge’s office; the skin on the back of their hands becoming irritated more and more quickly now; red and inflamed, Harry was sure they weren’t healing as effectively for long. They both knew that the cuts were stay in their hands, but for some reason whenever Harry looked at Tom’s, his cut did not seem as bad as Harry’s. “What are you doing?” he whispered on Thursday night.

“Transferring the pain to someone else naturally,” Tom said. “Then, when she is done having her fun with us…” Tom pulled out his wand and wiped it across his hand, the scar disappearing.

“Why didn’t you tell me about this?” Harry asked.

Tom just shrugged. “The scar doesn’t go away all together, it needs time to heal still, and the multiple detentions aren’t allowing it. But with time and enough uses of the spell, it will disappear. Once she is done I will teach the spell to you.”

Harry glared at him but didn’t bother arguing. “I have good news, however,” Tom said. “The
poison is complete, I’ve made a few vials and are having the crows hide them away in Yaxley’s home. I will not risk you going in there even with the Invisibility Cloak. Besides, we both are too busy with schoolwork.”

“I’m not—”

“You are behind already, I see it in your eyes Harry, you’re not sleeping,” Tom said. It’s true. To even attempt to stay above the massive amount of workload he was being assigned, Harry had decided against sleeping, instead staying in the common room and trying to get as much work done possible before collapsing. “You have to take care of yourself, my love,” Tom cooed.

“I know but… it’s hard,” Harry frowned. “How do you do this?”

Tom laughed. “Harry, despite my looks and I still technically in my sixties. I’ve gone through this stuff and more.”

“Oh… I forgot about that,” Harry blushed.

“It’s okay, but it is obvious that our lessons need to continue,” Tom sighed. “We’ve been lax lately about them. I think we should start by getting you ahead of your assignments, agreed?”

“Yeah… thank you,” Harry said.

“You should have come to me the moment you started falling behind, my prince,” Tom sighed. “But what’s done is done.”

Harry nodded and looked up at Tom, “What about the rumors?”

“We will do that tomorrow night,” Tom said. “All we have to do is summon a few crows and tell them what we need them to say.”

“That’s it?”

“Simply put, yes,” Tom said.

“How did you even get the crows to begin with?”

“You will find that I’ve done a lot of work behind your back Harry,” Tom said. “All to relieve the pressure on your shoulders.”

“Okay,” Harry nodded, leaning on Tom and accepting his explanation. Tom wrapped his arm around Harry’s shoulders and kissed the top of his head. They headed together towards the Gryffindor Common room, where they ran into Ron.

“Ronald, what are you doing out so late?” Tom asked.

Ron was lurking behind a statue of Lachlan the Lanky, clutching his broomstick. He gave a great leap of surprise when he saw Harry and Tom and attempted to hide his new Cleansweep Eleven behind his back.

“What are you doing?”

“Er—nothing. What are you doing?”

“Ronald, why do you have your broomstick hiding behind your back like a guilty child who stole sweets,” Tom sighed.
“I’m—I’m hiding from Fred and George, if you must know,” Ron said. “They just went past with a bunch of first years, I bet they’re testing stuff on them, I mean, they can’t do it in the common room now, can they?”

He was talking in a very fast, feverish voice.

“Leave lying to your boyfriend, you are not skilled in it,” Tom sighed.


“Where’s the humor?”

“I don’t know. Look Ron, it’s a brilliant idea! It’d be really cool if you got on the team! I’ve never seen you play Keeper, are you good?”

“I’m not bad,” Ron said, who looked immensely relieved at Tom’s and Harry’s reactions. “Charlie, Fred, and George always made me Keep for them when they were training during the holidays.”

“So you’ve been practicing tonight?”

“Every evening since Tuesday… Draco’s been helping me, throwing Quaffles at me. Sometimes I think he was intentionally aiming for my face,” Ron said. “Fred and George are going to laugh themselves stupid when I turn up for the tryouts. They haven’t stopped taking the mickey out of me since I got made a prefect.”

“I wish I was going to be there,” Harry said bitterly, as they set off together toward the common room. Tom walked away, telling the boys good-night.

“Yeah, so do—Harry, what’s that on the back of your hand?”

Harry, who had just scratched his nose with his free right hand, tried to hide it, but Ron grabbed his forearm and pulled the back of Harry’s hand up level with his eyes. There was a pause, during which he stared at the words carved into the skin during which Harry cursed Tom for not performing the spell on him, then he released Harry, looking sick.

“I thought you said she was giving you two lines!”

Harry hesitated, but after all, Ron had been honest with him, so he told Ron the truth about the hours he and Tom had been spending in Umbridge’s office.

“The old hag!” Ron said in a revolted whisper as they came to a halt in front of the Fat Lady. “She’s sick! Go to McGonagall, say something! Why didn’t Tom do anything—”

“No,” Harry said at once. “I’m not giving her the satisfaction of knowing she’s got to me.”

“Got to you? You can’t let her get away with this! Neither of you!”

“I don’t know how much power McGonagall’s got over her,” Harry said. “Or Flitwick.”

“Then go to Dumbledore! Tell Dumbledore!”

“No.”

“Why not?”
“He’s got enough on his mind,” Harry said, lying. There was no way he was going to go near Dumbledore. He could see Harry’s Aura, the invisible outline that shows a wizard’s magical affinities to the Dark or Light Arts.

“Well, I reckon you should—” Ron began, but he was interrupted by the Fat Lady, who had been watching them sleepily and now burst out. “Are you going to give me the password or will I have to stay awake all night waiting for you to finish your conversation?”

Harry and Tom both refused to talk in Umbridge’s office on Friday. They sat down, did their lines, and ignored the pain that the black quill caused. Umbridge examined them, and when she grabbed Harry pain seared, not across the back of his hand, but across the scar on his forehead. He stared at Tom, confused but Tom did not react or notice. When they were done for the night, Tom turned to Harry. “Come with me,” he said. He grabbed Harry’s hand gently and pulled him into a classroom. With no lights, it was heavily shadowed, only the moonlight in the windows illuminating the room. They sat down and looked around. “Come out,” Tom called to the darkness.

Slowly red eyes appeared before black figures jumped out, flying towards Harry and Tom before settling right before them, staring at them, waiting for a demand. Tom smiled at Harry and looked at the crows. “Repeat after me,” he said. “‘I saw a strange potion in Yaxley’s home.”

A crow stared at Tom, cocked it’s head, and repeated in a convincing female voice, “I saw a strange potion in Yaxley’s home.”

Harry stared at the crow amazed. “Woah!”

“You try,” Tom said.

Harry nodded and looked at the nearest crow. He thought for a moment and said, “Say ‘I heard Yaxley muttering about the Minister. He looked pretty angry.’”

The crow cocked his head and said, “I heard Yaxley muttering about the Minister. He looked pretty angry.”

“Wicked,” Harry grinned.

Tom chuckled and looked at another crow. “Repeat after me, ‘Yaxley has been staring at the Minister quite strangely lately.”

“Say, ‘I know, I think he might want his job or something,’” Harry said. The crows repeated after them. Harry couldn’t stop grinning as he and Tom spoke to the crows, continuing to tell them phrases and bits of conversations.

“Say, ‘I honestly think Yaxley is not good for Fudge, have you seen him glaring at him?’”

“Repeat after me, ‘I truly believe he might be planning something, but I’m too afraid to tell anyone, you know?’”

The crows all started chanting their phrases over and over again.

“Go to the Ministry and tell them our words,” Tom said. “Let everyone know them until the workers start repeating themselves.” With a flash of black wings, the crows flew back into the shadows and disappeared. One crow was left and Tom looked at Harry. “He is yours,” he said.

Harry looked at the crow and said, “Say, ‘I think Yaxley is going to kill Fudge.’”
“I think Yaxley is going to kill Fudge,” said the crow in a high female voice.

“Go tell that to the Aurors,” Harry commanded and the crow flew into darkness.


“Now all we have to do is wait, right?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Tom said. “We wait until Yaxley is arrested and sent to Azkaban. Any blathering he might make will be seen as insane gibberish from the killer of the Malfoys and attempted murderer of Fudge himself.” He kissed Harry’s forehead, “Come on, it’s time to send you back to your dormitory.”

The two returned to Gryffindor Tower and Harry said the password. The Fat Lady’s portrait swung open and a roar of sound greeted them. Ron came running towards them, beaming all over his face and slopping butterbeer down his front from the goblet he was clutching.

“Harry, I did it, I’m in, I’m Keeper!”


“Have a butterbeer, you too Tom!” Ron said pressing bottles onto them. “Come in Tom! Come in!”

Tom gave a polite smile and said, “As much as I would love to, I need to go back to my own common room.”

“What? Fine! Just keep the butterbeer,” Ron said giving Tom a goofy smile. Tom chuckled and held it up slightly in thanks.

“I will see you tomorrow, my prince,” Tom said kissing Harry good-bye.

“Goodbye, my lord,” Harry smiled. The two watched as Tom walked away and then Ron pulled Harry inside. They found Hermione sitting in an armchair.

“Harry, there you are,” she yawned.

“I need to tell you guys something,” Harry said sitting down. “Something I didn’t tell Tom.”

“What is it?”

He told them about his scar hurting in Umbridge’s office. “You’re worried that You-Know-Who’s controlling her like he controlled Quirrell?”

“Well,” Harry said, dropping his voice. “I don’t know.” He was really confused on why his scar was hurting at all. It didn’t hurt even a fraction when Tom was with him as a spirit, sometimes when the Husk made him hurt but with Tom, never. And with the Husk dead…

“You should tell Dumbledore,” Hermione said. “He would want to know.”

It was the second time in two days he had been advised to go to Dumbledore and his answer to Hermione was just the same as his answer to Ron.

“No, I’m not bothering him with this. It’s been hurting on and off all summer—it was just a bit
worse tonight, that’s all—"

“Harry, I’m sure Dumbledore would want to be bothered by this—”

“Yeah,” Harry said, “that’s the only bit of me Dumbledore cares about, isn’t it, my scar?”

“Don’t say that, it’s not true!”

“I’ll write to Sirius, see what he thinks,” Harry said.

“Harry, you can’t put something like that in a letter!” Hermione said, looking alarmed.

Harry just stood up and walked away irritated. Too much was going on around him, he needed a break from everything, even if it means sleeping off the responsibility. He violently threw his clothes off and got into his bed, falling asleep before his head hit the pillow.

He dreamt of walking down a corridor ending in a locked door, and awoke abruptly to his scar prickling.
The next day Harry sent his letter to Sirius, and saw a very small, and very odd article in the Daily Prophet that Hermione showed him. It was headlined:

TRESPASS AT MINISTRY

Sturgis Podmore, 38, of number two, Laburnum Gardens, Clapham, has appeared in front of the Wizengamot charged with trespass and attempted robbery at the Ministry of Magic on 31st August. Podmore was arrested by Ministry of Magic watch-wizard Eric Munch, who found him attempting to force his way through a top-security door at one o’clock in the morning. Podmore, who refused to speak in his own defense, was convicted on both charges and sentenced to six months in Azkaban.

Harry frowned at the article. Wasn’t Podmore a member of the Order of the Phoenix? What was he doing at the Ministry of Magic? And why was he charged six months for trying to get through a door? He remembered that Sturgis was supposed to come and see Harry and the others off to Hogwarts, but he never showed up. It didn’t seem like Dumbledore would have sent him on another job when he was supposed to be on guard duty for the Order. Unless he wasn’t doing it for Dumbledore. Harry looked up to stare at the Ravenclaw table where Tom was sitting, reading his copy of the Daily Prophet. He couldn’t be hiding plans from Harry could he?

Harry had to push his thoughts out of his mind as the weekend called for his attention. He had a mountain of homework to do, as well as Quidditch Practice. He had no time to suspect his boyfriend of foul play.

Hermione made Harry and Ron complete at least one essay before they made their way to the Quidditch Pitch. Harry kept an eye open for Tom, hoping that he would watch him practice, he needed any excuse to talk with him. Unfortunately, he wasn’t there to watch Harry practice. It was just the Gryffindor Team.

Practice seemed to go well in Harry’s own opinion. Though he was distracted with his thoughts about Tom and the possibility he was hiding something, he was somehow able to follow all the commands Angelina gave him and the rest of the team. Ron, who looked very nervous on his broom, only did alright, saving about half of the goals sent his way. Angelina Johnson kept them at the Quidditch Pitch for most of the day, causing Harry and Ron to be dreadfully tired afterwards.

“It was lousy!” Ron said in a hollowed voice when they returned to the Gryffindor common room. “Completely lousy!”

“It was your first practice, you were nervous—”

“Nervous? I think I broke Katie’s nose when I threw that Quaffle at her!” Ron said.

“She’s fine,” Harry said. “You were just distracted, you’ll do better with practice.”

“Easy for you to say,” Ron grumbled. “You were distracted the entire practice and you did everything good.”

“No I wasn’t,” Harry scoffed.
“Please, you were,” Ron said. He turned to Hermione and said, “He’s staring into space for five minutes before snapping to catch the Snitch in one!”

“Well, it was only your first one,” Hermione said consolingly, “it’s bound to take time to—”

“Who said it was me who made it lousy?” Ron snapped.

“No one,” Hermione said, taken aback, “I thought—”

“You thought I was bound to be rubbish?”

“No, of course I didn’t! Look, you said it was lousy so I just—”

“I’m going to get started on some homework,” Ron said angrily and stomped off to the staircase to the boys’ dormitories and vanished from sight. Hermione turned to Harry.

“Was he lousy?”

“No,” Harry said loyally. “Just nerves.”

Hermione raised her eyebrows. “And why were you distracted?”

“It’s nothing, just some stuff between me and Tom,” Harry said. Hermione did not seem convinced.

Neither Harry nor Ron seemed to make much headway with their homework that night. Harry’s mind kept going back towards Tom and whether or not he was planning things behind his back, and he knew that Ron was too preoccupied with his awful first Quidditch practice. Before he went to bed, he wrote a small note for Tom that read: *My scar hurt last night, what are you planning?* And gave it to a crow.

They spent the whole of Sunday in the common room, buried in their books while the room around them filled up, then emptied; it was a clear, fine day and most of their fellow Gryffindors spent the day out in the grounds, enjoying what might well be some of the last sunshine that year. Harry kept an eye out for any crows, but due to the sunlight, shadows were a rarity. By the evening Harry felt as though somebody had been beating his brain against the inside of his skull.

“You know… it might not be a bad idea to get more of the homework done during the weak,” Harry muttered to Ron as they finally laid aside Professor McGonagall’s long essay on the Inanimatus Conjure spell and turned miserably to Professor Sinistra’s equally long and difficult essay about Jupiter’s moons.

“Yeah,” Ron said, rubbing slightly bloodshot eyes and throwing his fifth spoiled bit of parchment into the fire beside them. “We might be able to use Draco’s help… and Tom’s. …Think we can ask Hermione to show us what she did for this one?”

Harry glanced over at Hermione; she was sitting with Crookshanks in her lap happily talking with Ginny. “No,” he said heavily, “you know she won’t let us.”

And so they worked on while the sky outside the windows became steadily darker; slowly the crowd in the common room thinned and Harry finally felt a pecking at his ankles. He let his hand drop automatically and felt a scrap of paper fall into it from a crow’s mouth. He unrolled it and read Tom’s response.

*Of course I am. I do not tell you my full plans for your safety. Focus on your studies, and don’t you
dare leave all your homework for the weekend again.

“Jerk,” Harry muttered under his breath before continuing his work.

At half-eleven, Hermione wandered over to them, yawning.

“Nearly done?”

“No,” Ron said shortly.

“Jupiter’s biggest moon is Ganymede, not Callisto,” she said, pointing over Ron’s shoulder at a line in his Astronomy essay, “and it’s Io that’s got the volcano.”

“Thanks,” Ron snarled, scratching out the offending sentences.

“Sorry, I only—”

“Yeah, well, if you’ve just come over here to criticize—”

“Ron, look,” Hermione said pointing to a window. They turned to see a handsome owl standing on the windowsill, gazing into the room at Ron.

“Hermes? What is Percy’s owl doing here?” Hermione asked.

“I dunno,” Ron said throwing his quill down and getting to his feet. He opened the window; Hermes flew inside, landed upon Ron’s essay, and held out a leg to which a letter was attached. Ron took it off and the owl departed at once, leaving inky footprints across Ron’s drawing of the moon Io. He opened the letter and started reading. The farther down the letter his eyes traveled, the more pronounced became his sneer. When he had finished reading, he looked disgusted, thrusting the letter at Harry and Hermione, who leaned towards each other to read it.

Dear Ron,

I have only just heard (from no less a person than the Minister for Magic himself, who has it from your new teacher, Professor Umbridge) that you have become a Hogwarts prefect.

I was most pleasantly surprised when I heard this news and must firstly offer my congratulations. I must admit that I have always been afraid that you would take what we might call the "Fred and George" route, rather than following in my footsteps, so you can imagine my feelings on hearing you have stopped flouting authority and have decided to shoulder some real responsibility.

But I want to give you more than congratulations, Ron. I want to give you some advice, which is why I am sending this at night rather than by the usual morning post. Hopefully you will be able to read this away from prying eyes and avoid awkward questions.

From something the Minister let slip when telling me you are now a prefect, I gather that you are still seeing a lot of Harry Potter. I must tell you, Ron, that nothing could put you in danger of losing your badge more than continued fraternisation with that boy. Yes, I am sure you are surprised to hear this - no doubt you will say that Potter has always been Dumbledore's favourite - but I feel bound to tell you that Dumbledore may not be in charge at Hogwarts much longer and the people who count have a very different - and probably more accurate - view of Potter's behaviour. I shall say no more here, but if you look at the Daily Prophet tomorrow you will get a good idea of the way the wind is blowing - and see if you can spot yours truly!
Seriously, Ron, you do not want to be tarred with the same brush as Potter, it could be very damaging to your future prospects, and I am talking here about life after school too. As you must be aware, given that our father escorted him to court, Potter had a disciplinary hearing this summer in front of the whole Wizengamot and he did not come out of it looking too good. He got off on a mere technicality if you ask me and many of the people I've spoken to remain convinced of his guilt.

It may be that you are afraid to sever ties with Potter - I know that he can be unbalanced and, for all I know violent - but if you have any worries about this, or have spotted anything else in Potter's behaviour that is troubling you, I urge you to speak to Dolores Umbridge, a really delightful woman, who I know will be only too happy to advise you.

This leaves me to my other bit of advice. As I have hinted above, Dumbledore's regime at Hogwarts may soon be over. Your loyalty, Ron, should be not to him, but to the school and the Ministry. I am very sorry to hear that so far Professor Umbridge is encountering very little cooperation from staff as she strives to make those necessary changes within Hogwarts that the Ministry so ardently desires (although she should find this easier from next week - again, see the Prophet tomorrow!). I shall say only this - a student who shows himself willing to help Professor Umbridge now may be very well placed for Head Boyship in a couple of years!

I am sorry that I was unable to see more of you over the summer. It pains me to criticize our parents, but I am afraid I can no longer live under their roof while they remain mixed up with the dangerous crowd around Dumbledore (if you are writing to Mother at any point, you might tell her that a certain Sturgis Podmore, who is a great friend of Dumbledore's, has recently been sent to Azkaban for trespass at the Ministry. Perhaps that will open their eyes to the kind of petty criminals with whom they are currently rubbing shoulders). I count myself very lucky to have escaped the stigma of association with such people - the Minister really could not be more gracious to me - and I do hope, Ron, that you will not allow family ties to blind you to the misguided nature of our parents' beliefs and actions either. I sincerely hope that, in time, they will realize how mistaken they were and I shall, of course, be ready to accept a full apology when that day comes.

Before I end this, however, I must admit that there has been a troublesome rumor floating around about your dating life that involves Draco Malfoy. To be frank, the rumor is mostly focused on him, but nevertheless it involves you as well. The Malfoy Family, while a bit troublesome, has been in the limelight most recently for the tragic deaths of Draco Malfoy’s parents, of whom the Ministry has a suspect for. That said, it is very troublesome to hear that you are actively seeking out homosexual behaviors with Draco Malfoy. I fear that your drawn towards the offending activities might be sourced at your friendship with Harry Potter, a known homosexual, and I must plead that both you and Draco Malfoy stop. It is very indecent and will forever be a tarnished spot on your record if you continue this behavior that, while decriminalized recently, is still frowned upon. I am, of course, forever glad that you are taking it upon yourself to make influential friends that will inevitably help further your career, but I am both troubled and disturbed by the lengths you seemed to have gone to make said friends.

Please think over what I have said most carefully, particularly the bit about Harry Potter, and congratulations again on becoming prefect.

Your brother,

Percy

Harry looked at Ron. “Well… if you want to, what was it, ‘sever ties’ with me, I swear I won’t get
violent or make you do more ‘homosexual activities.’”

“Give it back,” Ron said, holding out his hand. “He is—” Ron said jerkily, tearing Percy’s letter in half, “the world’s”—he tore it into quarters—“biggest”—eighths—“git!” He threw the pieces into the fire. “Daring to—Draco and I would never—argh!” He turned to Harry and said, “We have an essay to finish. Harry just nodded.

Hermione was looking at Ron with an odd expression on her face. “Oh give them here,” she said abruptly.

“What?”

“Give them to me. I’ll look through them and correct them,” she said.

“Are you serious? You’re a lifesaver, how can I—”

“What you can say is ‘We promise we’ll never leave our homework this late again,’” she said.

“Thanks a million Hermione,” Harry said handing her his essay. Ron leaned back in his armchair and started muttering to himself, thinking of cruder and ruder things to call Percy other than git. Harry pulled out Tom’s note and gave it a light scowl.

“What’s that?” Ron asked, looking desperately for a distraction.

“Note from Tom,” Harry said.

“What’s it say?”

“That he’s planning something behind my back and isn’t telling me,” Harry said casually.

“Well, it can’t be all bad yeah?” Ron asked. “He’s probably planning like a celebration or something nice?”

“No, that’s not how Tom works,” Harry said.

“What? You thinking he’s planning something else?” Ron asked.

“He’s a real secretive guy, isn’t he?” Hermione asked as she corrected their essays. “Tom, I mean. I know he’s introverted but still even talking to him, it’s like he’s hiding something.”

“That’s how he is,” Harry said. “But he always tells me everything.” He gave small frown and muttered, “Whatever he’s planning, I wish he’d tell me. I hate being left in the dark.”

The next morning Harry, Ron, and Hermione expected to have to comb through Hermione’s Daily Prophet carefully to find the article Percy had mentioned in his letter. However, when they looked at the newspaper, they’ve found a large photograph of Dolores Umbridge, smiling widely and blinking slowly at them from beneath the headline:

**MINISTRY SEEKS EDUCATIONAL REFORM**

**DOLORES UMBRIDGE APPOINTED FIRST-EVER “HIGH INQUISITOR”**

Hermione began reading it immediately. “In a surprise move last night the Ministry of Magic passed new legislation giving itself an unprecedented level of control at Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry. ‘The Minister has been growing uneasy about goings-on at Hogwarts for some time’ said Junior Assistant to the Minister, Percy Weasley. ‘He is now responding to
concerns voiced by anxious parents, who feel the school may be moving in a direction they do not approve.

“This is not the first time in recent weeks Fudge has used new laws to effect improvements at the Wizarding school. As recently as August 30th Educational Decree Twenty-two was passed, to ensure that, in the event of the current headmaster being unable to provide a candidate for a teaching post, the Ministry should select an appropriate person.”

“So that’s how we got stuck with Umbridge,” Harry grumbled.

“It is in this function that the Ministry has now formalized with the passing of Educational Decree of Twenty-three, which creates the new position of ‘Hogwarts High Inquisitor.’

‘This is an exciting new phase in the Ministry’s plan to get to grips with what some are calling the ‘falling standards’ at Hogwarts,’ said Weasley. ‘The Inquisitor will have powers to inspect her fellow educations and make sure that they are coming up to scratch. Professor Umbridge has been offered this position in addition to her own teaching post, and we are delighted to say that she has accepted.’

‘I think the appointment of the Inquisitor is a first step toward ensuring that Hogwarts has a headmaster in whom we can all repose confidence,’ said a Ministry insider last night.”

Hermione stopped reading and looked at the other two. “Like you said, this is how we got stuck with Umbridge,” she said. “I can’t believe this, it’s outrageous!”

“I know it is,” Harry said.

“What is Tom doing?” Hermione asked pointing to the Ravenclaw table. Harry turned around to see Tom standing up, holding both his copy of the newspaper and another piece of parchment. He walked directly up to the staff table, catching the attention of some people as they stopped to stare at him.

Tom simply smiled politely as he stepped up to Professor Flitwick, who was unfortunate to sit next to Professor Umbridge, and began talking to him. Umbridge looked at the two with interest, her toad-like face seemingly pushed against the collar of her shirt as if she saw a very tasty fly.

Harry felt a peck at his ankle and looked down to see a crow holding a piece of flesh-colored string. He pulled it up and motioned for Ron and Hermione to lean in, Tom’s voice speaking clearly from it.

“…I would simply like to ask you about the authority of the source I’ve used, Professor,” Tom’s voice said. “This is not for charms, but I am hoping that you can help me.”

“Of course, Tom, what about it?” Professor Flitwick’s voice asked happily. “I am always happy to help my students.”

“Thank you, this is actually for an essay I am writing for Professor Binns, about the Wizards Usurpation of 1276. Do you remember that?”

“Ah yes I do,” the tiny professor squeaked. “If memory serves correctly, the wizard Robert Vullan has tried to unsuccessfully take over a small town in the outskirts of England.”

“That is correct sir, the wizard Vullan was a plain villager with lofty ideals. He tried to take over the town, one of the few wizarding towns, claiming that he had a right to it by both birth and skill. He even written up a small piece of legislation supporting his claim. However, while I was
researching to comment and argue against his legislation, I have found a very old book that claims to have supporting evidence to his claims. I’ve copied down the entry I wish for you to look at, if you would…”

Harry watched as Tom handed Professor Flitwick the piece of parchment. “This was one of the first inter-wizards rebellion of the Middle Ages, and I wish to give it some justice that it deserves,” Tom smiled.

“Can I hear your argument?” Professor Flitwick asked.

“Yes sir, to not go into too much details, it is basically that the man had no right or claim to his title. Even if the law he had written himself was true, he would have no legal rights or power to change the traditions of the town,” Tom said. “If he would try to evoke changes, it would be strictly illegal, as well as an obvious example to his short-sightedness.”

“I see… well this piece you’ve showed me seems to support that entirely,” Professor Flitwick said nodding. “Although I would suggest looking for a second source to back it up.”

“Of course, thank you Professor,” Tom smiled He turned and left the staff table, returning to his seat.

Ron looked at Hermione and Harry and said, “What was the point of that?”

Hermione frowned. “How did he even…”

Harry looked at Tom. “He wanted me to think of something,” he said vaguely. “He wanted me to listen to this for a reason.”

“That being?”

Hermione frowned. Harry, surprisingly, was the one to answer. “He wanted me to know hear him provoking Umbridge.”

“Umbridge?” Ron asked.

“Of course! Why else would he bring up that tiny event,” Hermione said. “But how did he get an Extendable Ear over here? Let alone under the staff table?”

“Don’t worry about that,” Harry said as he took the Extendable Ear and dropped it to the crows waiting underneath. “More importantly, it looks like the other staff are going to be inspected. I bet Umbridge isn’t going to like when she gets to McGonagall.”

“Hopefully she won’t be in Binns’, I’ll never get any sleep if she is,” Ron groaned.

But Professor Umbridge was not inspecting their History of Magic lesson, nor was she in Snape’s dungeon when they arrived for double Potions, where Harry’s moonstone essay was handed back to him with a large, spiky black A scrawled in an upper corner.

“I have awarded you the grades you would have received if you presented this work in your O.W.L.,” Snape said with a smirk, as he swept among them, passing back their homework. “This should give you a realistic idea of what to expect in your examinations…”

Tom walked into the charms classroom to see Professor Umbridge sitting in the back corner, a
clipboard and quill in her hands. Tom barely paid her any notice as Fred and George pulled him to their seat in the back. “So Tommy boy, what was with your stunt this morning?” Fred asked.

“Stunt? I was simply asking my Head of House a question,” Tom smiled. “I was having trouble with a History of Magic—”

“But you don’t take History of Magic,” George interrupted. Tom raised an eyebrow and asked, “And how would you know which classes I take, George?”

“Easy, we nicked your schedule when you weren’t looking,” George said with an innocent smile. “We had a look and saw all the classes you’re taking.”

“And History of Magic is not one of them,” Fred nodded.

Tom chuckled and shook his head. “You twins have big imaginations.”

The rest of the class started to filter in. Once they were all accounted for, Professor Flitwick started. “Good morning everyone! If you would pull out your essays on the properties of changing liquids,” he said. The class did so and Professor Flitwick collected them with a wave of his wand. “Excellent, excellent, now Tom, if you would hand out the glasses?” He waved his wand again and a box of clear wine glasses appeared.

Tom stood up and walked towards it, picking the box up and started to hand them out to the class.

“Hem. Hem.” Professor Umbridge said in her highly sweet voice. “Professor Flitwick, I was wondering if you’ve received my note.”

“Yes yes, I did—George do not fill it with wine yet!” Professor Flitwick said. Umbridge stayed in her corner and wrote something in her clipboard. “Thank you Tom, now just for a refresher I want us all to fill our cups halfway with water, water boys, Tom please make sure that it is water that are in the twins’ cups, thank you.”

The class went on. Umbridge stayed in her corner, lurking behind everyone, staring down their necks, over their shoulders, as she wrote in her notepad. Tom found it very disturbing and distracting. She asked Professor Flitwick a few questions, along with a few of the students, avoiding Tom seemingly on purpose. Tom ignored her, his mind preoccupied on other manners including a small news article he needed to show Harry.

He had the chance during lunch when he went to the Gryffindor Table with Fred and George. “Harry, I want to show you something,” Tom said after he kissed his Gryffindor.

“What is it?” Harry asked. Tom pulled out his copy of the Daily Prophet and looked at Ron as well. “You might be interested in this as well, make sure Draco doesn’t do anything drastic.”

He opened the newspaper and placed it in front of the two, who leaned to read.

CORBAN YAXLEY ARRESTED FOR ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION

In a shocking turn of events, Corban Yaxley, 54, was arrested yesterday after various rumors about an assassination plot against the Minister filled the Ministry. Yaxley was arrested shortly afterwards and his manor searched where Aurors found various poisons and diary entries that planned out Yaxley’s plan. What surprised the aurors most, however, is that in the diary entries Yaxley have written, in gruesome details, of the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Malfoy, who were both murdered in their country home last year. Though Aurors refused to comment at this time, it appears that they have finally caught the killer to two productive and well-liked members of the
“This is such a small article,” Harry said.

“Were you expecting something more?” Tom asked. He looked at Ron and said, “It’s not much, but at least Draco can have a closed mind to this tragedy.”

“Yeah...” Ron said, nodding, turning his head towards the Slytherin Table where Draco was talking with Blaise and Theo.

Tom leaned against Harry and whispered in his ear, “Meet up with me after classes, alright? We have business.”

Harry blushed as Tom walked away, his hand brushing across the back of Harry’s neck and shoulders.

Harry found that he didn’t have to wait until Defense Against the Dark Arts that afternoon to see Umbridge. He was pulling out his dream diary in a seat at the very back of the shadowy Divination room when Ron elbowed him in the ribs and, looking around, he saw Professor Umbridge emerging through the trapdoor in the floor.

“Good afternoon, Professor Trelawney,” Professor Umbridge said with a wide smile. “You received my note, I trust? Giving the time and date of your inspection?”

Professor Trelawney nodded curtly and, looking very disgruntled, turned her back on Professor Umbridge and continued to hand out copies of *Dream Oracles*. Still smiling, Professor Umbridge grasped the back of the nearest armchair and pulled it to the front of the class so that it was a few inches behind Professor Trelawney’s seat. She then sat down, took her clipboard from her flowery bag, and looked up expectantly, waiting for the class to begin.

“We shall be continuing our study of prophetic dreams today,” Professor Trelawney said in a brave attempt at her usual mystic tones, though her voice shook slightly. “Divide into pairs, please, and interpret each other’s latest nighttime visions with the aid of the *Oracle*.”

Harry opened his copy of the textbook and watched Umbridge covertly. She was making notes on her clipboard now. After a few minutes she got to her feet and began to pace the room in Trelawney’s wake, listening to her conversations with students and posing questions here and there. “Now... you’ve been in this pose how long, exactly?” she asked Trelawney.

“Nearly sixteen years.”

“Quite a period,” Professor Umbridge said. “So it was Professor Dumbledore who appointed you?”

“That’s right.”

“I see... well give me a prediction, please,” Professor Umbridge smiled sweetly.

“I don’t understand you,” Professor Trelawney said, clutching convulsively at the shawl around her scrawny neck.

“I’d like you to make a prediction for me,” Professor Umbridge said clearly.

“The Inner Eye does not See upon command!” Professor Trelawney said in scandalized tones.

“I see... pity,” Professor Umbridge said. “You will receive my results in ten days then, good day.”
I—but—but—wait! I think I do see something… something that concerns you… Why I sense something, something dark… some grave peril …”

“Is that so?” Professor Umbridge smiled. She wrote in her clipboard and left.

Professor Trelawney’s mood was horrible for the rest of the class. She snapped at everyone, and interpreted Harry’s dreams in a very loud voice, all of them leading to a disastrous and gruesome death, which only served to make Harry feel less sympathetic towards her.

Harry’s mood fell even deeper as he and Ron made their way to Defense Against the Dark Arts where Professor Umbridge was waiting, smiling and humming to herself. She again assigned the class to read her textbook. The class gave an audible sigh as it turned, as one, to page nineteen where chapter two began. Harry wondered dully whether there were enough chapters in the book to keep them reading through all this year’s lessons and was on the point of checking the contents when he noticed that Hermione had her hand in the air again.

Professor Umbridge had noticed too, and what was more, she seemed to have worked out a strategy for just such an eventuality. Instead of trying to ignore her, she got to her feet and walked around the front row of desks until they were face-to-face, then she bent down and whispered, so that the rest of the class could not hear, “What is it this time, Miss Granger?”

“I’ve already read chapter two.”

“Well then, proceed to chapter three.”

“I’ve read that too. I’ve read the whole book.”

“Well then, you should be able to tell me what Slinkhard says about counterjinxes in chapter fifteen.”

“He says that counterjinxes are improperly named,” Hermione said promptly. He says ‘counterjinix’ is just a name people give their jinxes when they want to make them sound more acceptable. But I disagree.”

“You disagree?” Professor Umbridge asked, her gaze becoming colder.

“Yes, I do,” Hermione said, who, unlike Umbridge, was not whispering, but speaking in a clear, carrying voice that had by now attracted the rest of the class’s attention. “Mr. Slinkhard doesn’t like jinxes, does he? But I think they can be very useful when they’re used defensively.”

“Oh, you do, do you?” Professor Umbridge said. “Well unfortunately it is not your opinion that matters, does it Miss Granger?”

“But—”

“That’s enough. Five points from Gryffindor.”

There was an outbreak of muttering at this.

“What for?” Harry demanded.

“Don’t you get involved!” Hermione whispered urgently to him.

“For disrupting my class with pointless interruption—”

“Your life is a pointless interruption you miserable hag!” Harry snarled before he could help
himself. He could feel his anger growing inside him, his hand clenched and unclenched into a tight fist.

“Is that so? Perhaps another week of detention will help your attitude, Mr. Potter,” Professor Umbridge said. “I am here to teach you using a Ministry approved method that does not including inviting students to give their opinions on matters about which they understand very little. Your previous teachers in this subject may have allowed you more license, but as none of them—with the possible exception of Professor Quirrell, who did at least appear to have restricted himself to age-appropriate subjects—”

Yeah, he was a great teacher having Voldemort on the back of his head,” Harry said loudly before he could help himself.

This pronouncement was followed by one of the loudest silences Harry had ever heard. Then—

“Another week of detention will be added, Mr. Potter,” Umbridge said sleekly.

“Why? He’s right,” Draco said standing up. “You-Know-Who was on the back of Quirrell’s head!”

The class seemed to all turn to stare at Draco, dumbfounded. Umbridge stared at him and said, “In respects to tragic events, I will not discipline you Mr. Malfoy for your interruption, however, I will suggest that—”

“I suggest that you at least learn to lie better when talking about that crazy loon Quirrell. He did have Voldemort on the back of his head,” Draco interrupted.

“Your father would never have allowed this behavior, Mr. Malfoy,” Professor Umbridge said.

“Good thing I hated my father,” Draco said.

“A point from Slytherin!” Professor Umbridge cried out before sitting down.

Harry hid his hand from Tom when he walked into him after his detention that night. Tom looked absolutely gleeful as he grabbed Harry’s arm and pulled him into a classroom. “Tonight’s the night we’re going to end this little insurgence my love!” he said. “With Yaxley gone the rest will be lost and cowardly. We will take their fear and turn it into our control.”

“Okay, but Tom, I need to know something,” Harry said. “What is it you’re planning behind my back? My scar hurts again. I know it can only be because of you—what are you doing?”

“All in good time, my love,” Tom whispered, pulling Harry close. “Though I delay slightly, I always tell you everything that is going on. Am I lying?”

“No, you’re not, but Tom… if you’re doing something to agitate the piece of soul inside me—”

“Shhhh…” Tom whispered, he stroke his thumb across Harry’s cheek and hissed out, “Do not worry my little prince, your pains will be a thing of the past. Trust me as I trust you.”

It took Harry a moment to realize that he was speaking parseltongue. Tom smirked and said, “From now on, I want you to speak in Parseltongue when you have your mask on. Let everyone know that you are my heir.”

“Yes my Lord,” Harry hissed lovingly. The Dark Lord smiled and kissed Harry deeply. He felt his
glasses morph into his mask and smile. The Dark Prince looked up at his Lord to see that his appearance has changed.

His skin seemed to grow paler, his eyes turning fully red. He looked older now, so older, and yet still incredibly handsome and powerful. “It is time to hold a proper meeting,” Lord Voldemort said.

The Dark Prince nodded and held his Lord’s hand as they walked into the darkness. They walked into what appeared to be an empty room. Voldemort waved his wand and two throne-like chairs appeared, one large and grandiose and the other smaller, humbler but still magnificent. The two chairs were the only furniture in the room, and Voldemort motioned for the Dark Prince to sit in the smaller of the two chairs, which he did. The Dark Prince looked around and saw a pair of wooden doors opened, leading to a hallway. “Where are we?” he asked.

“The house of the Nott Family,” Lord Voldemort said. “This is where we shall have the meeting, and an example will be made. Ahh, he comes.” Voldemort gave a cold smirk as Nott Snr. was forced into the room, followed by a very large snake whose body was thicker than the Dark Prince’s arm. He did not question it as Voldemort turned to the Death Eater. “Nott… you have recovered from your last encounter, I see,” he said.

“M-My Lord,” the man said. His skin was deathly pale and looked completely terrified.

“Your arm,” Voldemort simply commanded. Nott presented his arm and Voldemort took it in his hand, roughly pushing up the sleeve of his robe and revealing his Dark Mark. Voldemort pressed his wand against the Dark Mark. Nott whimpered in pain before Voldemort pulled his wand away, returning to his throne. Nott was left to himself, and Harry noticed that the man seemed to have trouble standing, bandages wrapped around his arms and presumably his legs.

They waited.

Then, one by one, figures in black appeared before Voldemort, taking their place in a half-circle around the two thrones. Harry looked around and recognized many of the faces including the oily, scowling face of Severus Snape. Voldemort smirked from his seat and said, “It has been too long since we’ve all met face to face… Unfortunately… I wish this meeting can be under more… enjoyable circumstances. Many of you have chosen to follow Yaxley in his little insurgence, but I am a forgiving Lord. Yaxley has begun to pay his price, but for the rest of you I will give a choice: Show me your allegiance or be dealt with.”

“You are ready to kill them all, aren’t you?” The Dark Prince asked, his voice and Parseltongue drawing strange looks from the Death Eaters.

“Yes, I am,” Voldemort said.

The Prince turned and looked at them all. “How many of them have children?” he asked.

“I do not know,” Voldemort answered. He turned to the group and said, “The Prince requires those with children to step up.” There were some who were hesitant, eyeing the Prince either with distain or reluctance, but a few of the Death Eaters took a step, including Flint, Parkinson, Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott himself.

“They do not die,” The Dark Prince said. “I will not take their parents away from the children.”

“And the rest?”

“Up to you, my Lord,” The Dark Prince hissed.
“My Lord, if I may,” Snape said taking a step forward. Voldemort’s and the Prince’s attention turned to the man as he knelt in front of him.

“What is it, Severus?”

“I would like to question the... thoughtfulness of letting the child be here,” Severus said, his eyes looking between Voldemort and the Dark Prince.

“He is here because I deemed it so. That should be enough,” Voldemort said.

“Yes my lord, forgive me for questioning your decisions,” Snape said. Voldemort just nodded and dismissed him. The Prince felt something move around him and glanced to see the thick snake slithering towards his body, moving up the chair before coiling around his shoulders and arm.

Voldemort turned to the men still standing forward. "You have shown disloyalty, but there is a way for all of you return to my good graces," he said. "Take out your wands." The men did. "Torture each other. I want this room to be filled with your screams." The Death Eaters looked at Voldemort for a second, shocked at what he commanded.

Voldemort pointed his wand at Flint and said, "Imperio!" A dull look filled the man’s eyes as he pulled out his own wand and aimed it at Nott. "Crucio!" the man said, the hall filling with Nott’s screams. Soon the room was filled with the screams of the men as Voldemort made them torture and maim each other, the Dark Lord making explicit commands to hurt Nott the most. The Dark Prince sat in his chair watching it all, staying silent as he did his best to keep a calm expression on his face. The screams were ringing in his ears, burrowing into his brain as the screams started high, painful and full but soon turned hoarse until there was only whimpering.

Voldemort held his hand up to signal them to stop and return to the others. His eyes slowly moved over the rest of the Death Eaters, the men and women wincing under his red sadistic gaze. "Are there those who still have doubt in their hearts about our cause and my leadership," he said slowly, his voice frighteningly cold, The Prince could practically see icicles piercing into the crowd before them, "pray speak now."

There was silence.

"Then, you will all pledge your loyalty? To both your Lord and Prince?"

"Wait, that can’t be it," The Prince said. "What about those without children? You simply cannot let them go free?"

"What would you have me do, my heir? Speak and I shall listen," Voldemort said.

"Speak child, your father will hear your cold desires," the snake hissed in The Prince’s ear. He didn’t think to correct it.

"Kill," The Prince said.

"Are you sure you can watch it?"

"No, but it needs to be done. They would have killed us otherwise. How can we trust their loyalty if they were going to kill us yesterday?" The Prince asked. "They need to die."

"Then give the order."

Harry looked out at the crowd, his eyes meeting each one of the group of Death Eaters cowering
before them, their faces paled simply by hearing the language of snakes. The Prince fought against a sudden need to bite his lip as he looked at the crowd. What was he thinking? There is no way he could single a person out to kill! “I can’t,” he hissed softly.

“Then say no more,” Voldemort commanded. He turned his attention to the Death Eaters in front of him. “Bend the knee,” he said.

Slowly the Death Eaters obeyed, taking to one knee in front of both Voldemort and the Prince, silently pledging their allegiance to them. Voldemort gave a cold smirk as he looked around the room. “Good… Now that your little insulation is over, we may turn our full focus the tasks ahead. You all know what you need to do, get it done.”

The Death Eaters silently nodded and disappeared one after another until it was only Voldemort, the Dark Prince, and Nott, who now had several deep lashes from his other Death Eaters. Voldemort stood, and motioned for the Prince to follow him. The snake slunk off of his shoulders, and followed on the ground as they moved towards Nott. “You will look after this snake as part of your penance,” Voldemort ordered.

“Yes, my lord,” the man muttered. The snake moved towards him and coiled at his feet and Voldemort escorted the Prince away from them.

“I will see you in the morning, my love,” Voldemort said. “I have one loose tie that I must get rid of before I can sleep tonight.”

“Okay… I love you,” The Prince said.

“I love you too. Now follow the crows.” Voldemort said.

The two walked into the darkness, quickly losing each other. Voldemort continued to walk straight until he could barely see an inch in front of him. He continued walking after that, and found himself in a small dark cell with only a bed on which an old gentleman sat. The walls were old stone, with only a single window high in the wall, blocked by three iron poles. He did not look up at Voldemort as he said, “I knew you would show up, my Lord.”

“Yaxley… you should have known that your act was pointless,” Voldemort said. “This rebellion you’ve pulled together. It was going to end in one way.”

“My Lord, we are all still alive… unless you are here to kill me personally,” Yaxley said, looking up at Voldemort.

The Dark Lord shook his head. “No, I will not kill you,” he said. “First, I wish to know some certain things.”

“Such as?”

“How did you figure out that the Dark Prince is Harry Potter?” Voldemort asked.

Yaxley smirked. “Simple. He tried to be clever. He has spoken a phrase comparing me to Lucius that he had said to me only a month earlier in front of the Minister himself.”

“I see… that will be rectified,” Voldemort said.

“It’s amazing really, you and that boy framing me for Lucius’s and Narcissa’s deaths. The poisons you’ve placed in my home were fast acting… who made them?” Yaxley asked.
“On the day the Malfoys died? Harry made the poison. He committed the murders by himself,” Voldemort said.

“I see,” Yaxley said, looking slightly impressed. “I must say, I did not think Potter would have the requirements to successfully cast the Killing Curse, let alone kill personally.”

Voldemort smirked. “I have been with the boy since he was twelve,” he said. “He was such an innocent boy when we started. But I’ve slowly molded him into a Dark Wizard I can be proud of.”

“Hmm, I am surprise though, that in all this time you did not reveal this to Dumbledore,” Yaxley said.

“In good time. Harry has to develop more until he is ready,” Voldemort said. “But it will be a fine day… Until then, however, my plans will continue. Your insurgence failed completely, all men who allied with you are mine again with some… minor modifications.”

“You’ve punished them.”

“No, I did nothing, they have maimed and tortured themselves,” Voldemort said. “The same as how I will not be the one who will kill you.”

Yaxley looked up at Voldemort and saw the cold ruthlessness hiding behind his red eyes. “I was wrong,” he said. “The Dark Prince did not pacify you. He seemed to have made you even more ruthless than before.”

“It is nice to see your realization before your end,” Voldemort said. He pulled out his wand. The sheets on the bed Yaxley was sitting on moved by themselves and floated towards the iron bars that stood in the window. One end tied itself around the middle bar tightly, the rest of the sheet dangling loosely against the wall. Voldemort conjured up a simple chair and sat in it, pocketing his wand and watched with an indifference.

“You want me to kill myself,” Yaxley said.

“I want you to prove your loyalty,” Voldemort said. “You have fought, lost, and figured out the futility of your actions. I am a forgiving Lord. Prove your loyalty, and you have my forgiveness.”

Yaxley stared at Voldemort, his eyes moving nervously, from the sitting Lord to the dangling piece of cloth. Voldemort just sat in his chair, watching Yaxley with the same indifference a person would look at a fly. Yaxley stood up after a few minutes and walked towards the sheet. Yaxley moved a small wooden stool that was sitting in a corner directly underneath the sheet. He stepped on it, and looked at Voldemort, who continued to watch unemotionally.

Fear shown in Yaxley’s eyes only for a moment as, standing on the stool, he reached for the sheet and tied a noose on his neck, the cloth pushing against his throat already. He looked up at Voldemort and waited for any indication or command. Voldemort gave none, he just continued watching.

Swallowing heavily, his breath growing rapid, Yaxley gritted his teeth, closed his eyes, and rocked the stool underneath him. It fell to the side and his body fell, the noose keeping him only a few inches above the ground, gravity now pushing Yaxley’s neck fully against the rope, closing his airways. The old man gagged and reached for the sheet, trying to claw at it denied oxygen to enter his body. His eyes bulged, tears straining his face as he looked at Voldemort, who only continued to watch. He gagged and choked, spittle hanging from the sides of his lips as he forced himself to
speak, “M-my L-Lord!” he coughed.

Voldemort continued to watch with the same dull, indifferent expression on his face. Yaxley continued to struggle, his vision beginning to blur and ears popping violently. Voldemort finally stood. Relief came across Yaxley’s dying face until Voldemort spoke, “I am forgiving… but the Dark Prince is not. Goodbye, Corban Yaxley.”
Chapter 12

Chapter XII

It was nearly midnight when Harry left his second detention with Umbridge that week, his hand now bleeding so severely that it was staining the scarf he had wrapped around it. He expected the common room to be empty on his return, but Ron and Hermione had sat up waiting for him. He was pleased to see them, especially as Hermione was disposed to be sympathetic rather than critical.

“Here,” she said anxiously, pushing a small bowl of yellow liquid toward him, “soak your hand in that, it’s a solution of strained and pickled murtlap tentacles, it should help.”

Harry placed his bleeding, aching hand into the bowl and experienced a wonderful feeling of relief. “Thanks,” he said gratefully, “I’ll have to see Tom tomorrow about healing it fully.”

“I still reckon you should complain about this,” Ron said in a low voice.

“No.”

“McGonagall would go nuts if she knew—”

“Yeah, she probably would,” Harry said. “And how long d’you reckon it’d take Umbridge to pass another Decree saying anyone who complains about the High Inquisitor gets sacked immediately?”

Ron opened his mouth to retort but nothing came out and after a moment he closed it again in a defeated sort of way.

“She’s an awful woman,” Hermione said in a small voice. “Awful. You know, I was just saying to Ron when you came in … we’ve got to do something about her.”

“I suggested poison,” Ron said grimly.

“No … I mean, something about what a dreadful teacher she is, and how we’re not going to learn any defense from her at all,” Hermione said.

“Bit late, though isn’t it? What are we going to do,” Ron yawned. “She got the job, she’s here to stay. Fudge’ll make sure of it.”

“Poison…” Harry repeated, his eyes shifting. Hermione scoffed at him. “Harry! You can’t be serious!” she said.

“Syrup of hellebore, powdered moonstone, Asphodel, and baneberries,” Harry said. “You can make one in ten minutes.”

“I can’t believe you’re… Harry, Ron, we are not going to poison Umbridge,” Hermione said firmly. “I don’t even want to know where you’ve learned that from.”

“Tom.”

“Then what else are we going to do?” Ron asked.

“Well,” Hermione said tentatively. “You know, I was thinking today. …” She shot a slightly nervous look at Harry and then plunged on, “I was thinking that—maybe the time’s come when we
should just—just do it ourselves.”

“You mean just learn Defense Against the Dark Arts ourselves?” Harry asked.

“Yes.”

“Come off it,” Ron groaned. “You want us to do extra work? D’you realize Harry and I are behind on homework again and it’s only the second week?”

“But this is much more important than homework!” Hermione said. Harry and Ron goggled at her.

“I didn’t think there was anything in the universe more important than homework,” Ron said.

“Don’t be silly, of course there is,” Hermione said. “It’s about preparing ourselves, like Harry said in Umbridge’s first lesson, for what’s waiting out there. It’s about making sure we really can defend ourselves. If we don’t learn anything for a whole year—”

“We can’t do much by ourselves,” Ron said in a defeated voice. “I mean, all right, we can go and look jinxes up in the library and try and practice them, I suppose—”

“No, I agree, we’ve past the stage where we can just learn things out of books,” Hermione said. “We need a teacher, a proper one, who can show us how to use spells and correct us if we’re going wrong.”

Harry frowned, for some reason he has a distinct feeling she was talking about him. “You’re thinking of me teaching, aren’t you?” he asked.

Hermione’s cheeks went pink. “Well… it would be the obvious choice, wouldn’t it? I mean you have the most experience, you’re the best in the year at Defense Against the Dark Arts! I mean look at what you’ve done!”

“How d’you mean?” Harry asked.

“Let me think,” Ron said, pulling a face like Goyle concentrating. “Uh… first year—you saved the Stone from You-Know-Who.”

“That was just luck!”

“Second year,” Ron interrupted, “you killed the basilisk and destroyed Riddle! The bad one, not your boyfriend.”

Harry bit his lip and chocked back his words as he remembered that the basilisk is still living under the castle, asleep in the Chamber of Secrets. As for Riddle…

“Third year,” Ron said, louder still, “you fought off about a hundred dementors at once—”

“You know that was a fluke, if the Time-Turner hadn’t—”

“Last year,” Ron said, almost shouting now, “you fought off You-Know-Who again—”

“Listen to me!” Harry said, almost angrily, because Ron and Hermione were both smirking now. “Just listen to me, all right? It sounds great when you say it like that, but all that stuff was just luck—I didn’t know what I was doing half the time, I didn’t plan any of it, I just did whatever I could think of, and I nearly always had help—”

Ron and Hermione were still smirking and Harry felt his temper rise; he wasn’t even sure why he
was feeling so angry. “Don’t sit there grinning like you know better than I do, I was there, wasn’t I?” he said heatedly. “I know what went on, all right? And I didn’t get through any of that because I was brilliant at a damn class! I got through it all because—because help always came at the right time, or because I guessed right—but I just blundered through it all, I didn’t have clue what I was doing—STOP LAUGHING!”

The bowl of murtlap essence fell to the floor and smashed. He became aware that he was on his feet, though he couldn’t remember standing up. Ron and Hermione’s smiles had vanished.

“You on’t know what it’s like! You—neither of you—you’ve never had to face him, have you? You think it’s just memorizing a bunch of spells and throwing them at him, like you’re in class or something? The whole time you know there’s nothing between you and dying except your own—your own brain or guys or whatever—like you can think straight when you know you’re about a second from being murdered, or tortured, or watching your friends die—they’ve never taught us that in their classes, what’s like to deal with things like that—and you two sit there acting like I’m clever for being alive and Cedric’s dumb for dying! Yeah! Cedric died and if it wasn’t for Tom he still would be! You just don’t get it! It could have easily been me who died, it would have been if Voldemort didn’t need me—”

“We weren’t saying anything like that, mate,” Ron said, looking aghast. “We weren’t having a go at Diggory, we didn’t—you’ve got the wrong end of the –”

He looked helplessly at Hermione, whose face was stricken. “Harry,” she said timidly, “don’t you see? This… this is exactly why we need you. …We need to know what it’s really like… facing him… facing V-Voldemort.”

It was the first time she had ever said Voldemort’s name, and it was this, more than anything else, that calmed Harry. Still breathing hard, he sank back into his chair, becoming aware as he did so that his hand was throbbing horribly again. He reached for his ring-finger and, feeling nothing but his skin, frowned.

“Well… think about it,” Hermione said quietly. “Please?”

Harry could not think of anything to say. He was feeling ashamed of his outburst already. He nodded, hardly aware of what he was agreeing to.

Hermione stood up.

“Well, I’m off to bed,” she said in a voice that was clearly as natural as she could make it. “Erm … ’night.”

Ron had gotten to his feet too.

“Coming?” he said awkwardly to Harry.

“In a minute, I’m going to look at for my ring,” Harry said. He fixed the bowl as Ron nodded and left. He took the time to calm down, knowing that there was no way he would find Tom’s ring in the common room. He went upstairs and had another restless night filled with dreams of long corridors and locked doors, and he awoke next day with his scar prickling again.

He went to Tom that morning, and asked him to follow Harry out of the Great Hall. Harry led Tom to a small bench outside in the courtyard and told him everything that happened last night. When he was done, he looked up at his boyfriend and asked, “Well… what do you think I should do?”
“Besides being punished for not telling me about the two weeks of detention you have?” Tom asked, causing Harry to flinch. “It is an interesting proposal, and they had a sound logic proposing you.”

“But I only did half the stuff they talked about,” Harry said. “I didn’t kill the basilisk—it’s still sleeping underneath us—and I definitely did not fight you last year!”

“No, but you were trained by me,” Tom said. He thought for a moment and stood up. “Follow me, and ask no questions,” he said. Harry nodded and the two walked back into the entrance hall. They turned away from the Great Hall and towards the marble staircase. They climbed up to the second floor and turned into the left-hand corridor where the girls’ bathroom is. They entered it, and Harry was relieved to see that Moaning Myrtle wasn’t there. Or, at least she wasn’t visible. Tom and Harry stopped in front of the sink with the snake engraved into the faucet. “Open it,” Tom said.

Harry looked at the sink and hissed, “Open.”

The sink sank out of sight, revealing a large pipe that was big enough for a man to slide in it. Harry turned to Tom, who just nodded. Harry jumped into the pipe without any hesitations, Tom following him. The fall was shorter than he remembered as soon he and Tom were standing at the bottom of the pipe, the floor was still littered with small animal bones.

“This way,” Tom said simply. He walked through the piles of animal bones and towards the gigantic snake skin, which was still a vivid, poisonous green. Harry looked around and frowned, “Where did the rocks go?”

“Dumbledore must have had them removed,” Tom said. “Doesn’t matter.” He continued to walk down the twisting tunnel, Harry following him. They did not light their wands, there was no need to. Harry felt comfortable in the darkness, and somehow he just knew where exactly to go, following Tom as they turned and twisted with the long tunnel that ended at the solid wall with two entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great, glinting emeralds.

“Open,” Tom hissed in a bored manner. The serpents parted as the wall cracked open, the halves slid smoothly out of sight, and the two walked inside.

Again Harry was greeted with a very long, dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars entwined with more carved serpents rose to support the ceiling lost in darkness, casting long, black shadows through the odd, greenish gloom that filled the place. Tom took out his wand and with a small flick lights appeared in the hollow eye sockets of the stone snakes, lighting the pathway towards the statue of Salazar Slytherin.

“Why are we here?” Harry asked, his voice echoing in the Chamber.

“To correct a wrong,” Tom said as he walked down the chamber towards the statue. Harry followed as Tom continued to talk, “Hermione Granger was correct. You would be an excellent teacher, especially compared to Umbridge. They would learn much from you about Defense Against the Dark Arts. After all, my love, I have taught you much of what I know.”

“But—”

“Do not argue,” Tom said. “You are not giving yourself enough credit. You are my boyfriend, Harry Potter, you are the Heir to Lord Voldemort, The Dark Prince. If you do not believe that you can teach a group of students Defense Against the Dark Arts, then you are unworthy of all.” They stopped in front of the statue of Salazar Slytherin. Tom looked up at the statue. “You can do more good than you know Harry,” he said. “This can be our chance to do so. You are more powerful
than you’ll ever know.”

Harry looked at the statue and frowned. “Tom…”

“Summon the basilisk,” Tom ordered.

“Huh?”

“Summon the basilisk,” Tom said. Harry frowned and looked at the statue. He turned to look at Tom, who just stared at him with a neutral expression. Harry turned back to the statue and said, “I don’t know what to say…”

“In Parseltongue, say ‘Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four,’” Tom said. Harry nodded and looked at the statue.

“I don’t know what this will prove but…” Harry hesitated before hissing, “Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four.”

Slytherin’s gigantic stone face was moving, his mouth opening wider and wider to make a huge black hole. Something was stirring inside the stone mouth; something was slithering up from its depths. The giant serpent uncoiled itself from Slytherin’s mouth, its body hitting the floor. It was a violent, terrifying titanic creature with green scales. “Stare at its body, but avoid the eyes,” Tom said, looking at the snake. Harry did and stared at it.

Harry didn’t know why it wasn’t attacking them on sight. “The Snake only obeys the Heir of Slytherin,” Tom said.

“But that would be you,” Harry said.

“Exactly, she remembers me,” Tom smirked. He walked towards Harry and wrapped his arm around Harry’s waist. “Look at her: magnificent power, an unstoppable creature that can kill with just a stare… unimaginable power under our control… She reminds me a lot, actually, of you.”

“Why because you technically own me and my soul,” Harry asked.

“That, but more importantly, my love, because you are a wizard of full potential, a wizard who can easily surpass Dumbledore, Grindelwald… maybe even me as the most powerful wizard of all time. Together, we can do tremendous things Harry, we have done tremendous things. And it all started here in these very halls when you gave me your heart and soul.”

“Two things you still own,” Harry blushed.

“And will not be giving up any time soon,” Tom chuckled. He turned back to the basilisk and said, “Give her a command. Any command.”

“Oh umm… Rest.” Harry said and watched in amazement as the large basilisk started to coil onto itself, its eyes closing until laid in front of them in a perfectly smooth coil, the snake’s outline almost blurred together.

“Do you see what you can do with a simple command?” Tom asked. “Teaching would be simple.”

“But, I can only do these things because I have you, Tom. You taught me everything I know, you made me into the boy I am today. Without you… I would be nothing,” Harry said. “Which is why… which is why… if I agree to Hermione and Ron about teaching them Defense Against the Dark Arts… I want you with me. I want you to teach them with me.”
Me?"

“Yes,” Harry nodded. “Teach them the spells you’ve taught me, show them the tings you’ve shown me. Open their eyes like you have opened mine… take them away from Dumbledore, and make them yours.”

Tom looked at Harry and saw an interesting glint in eyes. Pride filled his boy as he turned to Harry and said, “My Dark Prince, my beautiful, handsome Prince… look at how much you’ve grown.”

“Only because I have you, my Lord,” Harry said. “Together we can open their eyes, reveal to them the truths you’ve revealed to me. Take them away from Dumbledore’s influence, away from the Ministry’s influence, and instead put them under yours. You told me you wanted a new start, let them be that start.”

Tom smirked, his hands moved from Harry’s waist to his shoulders. He squeezed them pridefully and moved to hold Harry’s face. “You’ve developed into a fine heir Harry,” he said. “I’m so proud of you.”

“Tom…” Harry said. He stared at his boyfriend and smacked his hands off of his face. He lunged for a kiss and was on his knees before Tom knew it. “I’ve missed you,” Harry breathed, reaching for Tom’s pants. “It’s been forever since we’ve touched…” He unzipped the fly of Tom’s pants and reached in, pulling out Tom’s flaccid cock.

Tom watched amused. “Did you?” he said.

“Yeah… I did,” Harry said. He held the cock in one hand and stretched it out, giving it a long, single lick from balls to cockhead. It was just as big as Harry remembered. Blood started to fill it out as Harry continued to kiss and lick Tom’s cock, leaving little nibbles here and there that made Tom’s breath hitched. Tom tried to grab Harry’s head, but the boy slapped Tom’s hands away whenever he tried. This was something only for Harry to do. He grabbed the base of the three-inch-thick cock and gave a playful tug, squeezing lightly as his hand moved up and down the full nine inches. Harry moaned when he felt the full weight of Tom’s cock in his hands. He opened his jaw as wide as he could and swallowed as slowly Tom’s cock sank into Harry’s mouth inch by inch. His nose pushed against Tom’s pants, his chin touching Tom’s balls. He dragged his tongue on the underside of Tom’s cock as he pulled away ever so slowly, enjoying the taste, feel, and weight of Tom’s cock instead of him. Harry stopped when only the head of Tom’s cock was in his mouth. He lapped his tongue all around the cockhead, thrusting the tip into the hole of Tom’s cock before swallowing it again.

He began to bob his head, keeping most of Tom’s cock in his mouth, the thick, hot piece hitting the back of Harry’s mouth, pre-cum dripping down his throat. Harry hummed and quickly began to increase his pace, his head moving quickly up and down Tom’s cock. Tom groan and moaned but every time he reached to hold Harry, to grab onto his hair so he can fuck Harry’s pretty lips, Harry slapped them away. He held onto Tom’s hips and forced them to stay still as he moved up and down, up and down, slicking up Tom’s cock as it moved in and out of his hot, wet mouth.

Tom did not last long with Harry’s skilled mouth. The boy set off with making Tom cum quick and hard, which is just what he did. With a scream he filled Harry’s mouth with his seed, and much to his surprise Harry began to swallow, moaning as the perverted elixir went down his throat, it’s sweet, hot taste remaining in Harry’s mouth long after Tom came. Harry licked and sucked the deflating cock, cleaning it perfectly clean before getting to his feet again and kissing Tom. “I missed your taste,” he breathed in a slutty voice.

“I missed your mouth, my little prince,” Tom smirked. “Your body was made just for me.”

Harry did not give Hermione the answer until two weeks later. Ron had four more Quidditch practices and not been shouted at during the last two; and all three of them had managed to vanish their mice in Transfiguration (Hermione had actually moved on to vanishing kittens), before the subject was broadcast again, on a wild, blistery evening at the end of September, when the three of them were sitting in the library with Draco, looking up potion ingredients for Snape.

Draco was having a silent argument with Ron, (“No I’m not simply going to tell you the answers Ron! How else are you going to learn?”) When Hermione said suddenly, “I was wondering whether you’d thought any more about Defense Against the Dark Arts, Harry?”

“’Course I have,” Harry said grumpily. “Can’t forget it, can we, with that hag teaching us—”

“I meant the idea Ron and I had”—Ron cast her an alarmed, threatening kind of look’ she frowned at him— “oh, all right, the idea I had then—about you teaching us.”


“And?”

“I’ll do it… only if Tom does most of the teaching,” Harry said. “It makes sense, he was the one who taught me. So it should be him teaching you guys. It is just you guys right?”

“Well,” Hermione said, now looking a mite anxious again. “Well … now, don’t fly off the handle again, Harry, please. …But I really think you ought to teach anyone who wants to learn. I mean, we’re talking about defending ourselves against V-Voldemort—oh don’t be pathetic, you two—it doesn’t seem fair if we don’t offer the chance to other people.”

“I doubt anyone except you three would want to be taught by me, I’m a nutter, remember? But ask Tom, he’s the permission you’ll need,” Harry said.

“Where is he?”

“Somewhere around here,” Harry shrugged. “Probably working on something I don’t understand or he’ll won’t tell me.” He looked around and saw his Lord in the corner of the library, hunched over a book and essay. “He’s over there.”

Hermione rose with a purpose and made her way straight towards Tom. “Tom,” he said.

“Busy. Be quick,” Tom said.

“Harry told us that you guys—”

“I know about the teaching proposal, we have agreed,” Tom said. “We will teach you my way.”

“I-I know,” Hermione said, not deterred by Tom’s attitude. “I’m just asking you if you’ll be fine if we spread the opportunity to others?”

Tom stopped for a moment. “There is a pub in Hogsmeade called the Hog’s Head,” he said. “It is off the main road, private, the owner is a man Dumbledore knows very well. Tell anyone who wishes to be taught by Harry Potter to meet us there on the first weekend in October. I have
searched the castle and found ourselves a perfect practice room for us to use. Don’t worry, Umbridge knows not of either places. Now, if you excuse me, I need to finish this essay.” Tom returned to his essay.

Hermione frowned and went back to her seat. “Tom is a bit hard to talk to,” she told Harry. “I don’t know how you do it.”

“You just have to keep trying,” Harry shrugged. “What did he say?”

“He already has a meeting place for us at Hogsmeade, which is great because Ron and I have been going around telling some potential others the same thing, and he somehow found a place for us to practice without Umbridge knowing,” Hermione said, sounding both impressed and confused.

“That’s Tom,” Harry sighed. “Always two steps ahead of everyone else.”

“Arguments must be awful with him,” Ron said.

“Not really, we both just blow up against each other,” Harry said, feeling immensely relieved. They were going to do this! They were actually going to steal Dumbledore’s students. And it was his plan! He couldn’t wait to see it pay off.

The day of the Hogsmeade trip found Harry, Ron, and Hermione walking down the main street of Hogsmeade and turning up a side street at the top of which stood a small inn. A battered wooden sign hung from a rusty bracket over the door, with a picture upon it of a wild boar’s severed head leaking blood onto the white cloth around it.

“Well, come on,” Hermione said slightly nervously. Harry led the way inside.

It was not at all like the Three Broomsticks, whose large bar gave an impression of gleaming warmth and cleanliness. The Hog’s Head bar comprised one small, dingy, and very dirty room that smelled strongly of something that might have been goats. The bay windows were so encrusted with grime that very little daylight could permeate the room, which was lit instead with the stubs of candles sitting on rough wooden tables. The floor seemed at first glance to be earthy, though as Harry stepped onto it he realized that there was stone beneath what seemed to be the accumulated filth of centuries.

Tom was already sitting in a back table with Cedric Diggory, whose cane was leaning on the table, both had a firewhiskey in front of them. For some reason Harry thought that Tom blended in with the seediness of the bar.

The barman sidled toward them out of a back room. He was a grumpy-looking old man with a great deal of long gray hair and beard. He was tall and thin and looked vaguely familiar to Harry.

“What?” he grunted.

“Three butterbeers, please,” Hermione said.

The man reached beneath the counter and pulled up three very dusty, very dirty bottles, which he slammed on the bar. “Six Sickles.”

“I’ll get them,” Harry said quickly, passing over the silver. The barman’s eyes traveled over Harry, resting for a fraction of a second on his scar. Then he turned away and deposited Harry’s money in an ancient wooden till. Harry, Ron, and Hermione retreated to the furthest table from the bar and
sat down, Harry sitting next to Tom.

“I am glad you’ve found this place,” Tom smiled. “Cedric and I have been here for about ten minutes.”

“We have, how’s your leg Cedric?” Hermione asked.

“Getting better every day,” Diggory smiled. “Madam Pomfrey believes I won’t need my cane soon.”

“That’s great news,” Hermione said.

“I didn’t know you were going to be here,” Ron said.

“I go where Tom goes,” Cedric smiled. “He told me about this and said that it would be a great thing for me.”

“Indeed,” Tom said. “Anyway, how many people have you told about this meeting, Hermione?” he asked.

“Just a couple,” Hermione said, taking a sip from her butterbeer. The door to the pub had opened. A thick band of dusty sunlight split the room in two for a moment and then vanished, blocked by the incoming rush of a crowd of people.

First came Neville with Dean, Seamus, and Lavender, who were closely followed by Parvati and Padma Patil with Cho and one of her usually giggling girlfriends, then (on her own and looking so dreamy that she might have walked in by accident) Luna Lovegood; then Katie Bell, Alicia Spinner, and Angelina Johnson, Colin and Dennis Creevey, Ernie Macmillan, Justin Flinch-Fletchley, Hannah Abbott, and a Hufflepuff girl with a long plait down her back who Harry didn’t know; three Ravenclaw boys he was sure were Anthony Goldstein, Michael Corner, and Terry Boot; Ginny followed by a tall skinny blond boy with an upturned nose whom Harry recognized vaguely as being a member of the Hufflepuff Quidditch team, the Weasley twins Fred and George with their friend Lee Jordan, and lastly Draco Malfoy followed by a confident-looking Blaise Zabini and a very skinny, and very pale, Theo Nott.

“A couple of people?” Harry said hoarsely to Hermione. “A couple of people?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Tom shrugged. “We’ll teach them all the same. Hello Twins.”

The barman had frozen in the act of wiping out a glass with a rag so filthy it looked as though it had never been washed. Possibly he had never seen his pub so full.

“Hi,” Fred said, reaching the bar first and counting his companions quickly. “Could we have … twenty-eight butterbeers, please?”

The barman glared at him for a moment, then, throwing down his ray irritably as though he had been interrupted from something important, he started passing up dusty butterbeers from under the bar.

“Cheers,” Fred said, handing them out. “Cough up, everyone, I haven’t got enough gold for all of these—Malfoy put that money away and make Ron pay for it!”

Draco palmed Ron two Sickles as the large chattering group took their beers and rummaged in their robes to find coins. Harry could not imagine what all these people had turned up for until the horrible thought occurred to him that they might be expecting some kind of speech, at which he
“What have you been telling people?” he said in a low voice. “What are they expecting?”

“I’ve told you, they just want to hear what you’ve got to say,” Hermione said soothingly; but Harry continued to look at her so furiously that she added quickly, “You don’t have to do anything yet, I’ll speak to them first.”

“Very well,” Tom said. “Harry love, do not worry about anything.” He took a sip of his fire whiskey, drawing a jealous look from Fred and George.

“Why he’s got fire whisky?” George demanded. “And Diggory too!”

“We got here first,” Tom shrugged. Cedric nodding in agreement.

“Um… hi… Cedric, “Cho Chang said hesitantly.

“Hello.”

Harry noticed an awkwardness between the two and looked at them curiously as the others settled in around Harry and Tom, some looking rather excited, others curious. Tom did not say a word. He just looked around at them, and suddenly a silence fell on the crowd as they stared at him and Harry. “You may begin,” he said softly to Hermione.

“Right…Well—er—hi,” Hermione said. The group focused on her instead. “Well… well you all know why you’re here. Erm … well, Harry here had the idea—I mean”—Harry had thrown her a sharp look—“I had the idea—that it might be good if people who wanted to study Defense Against the Dark Arts—and I mean, really study it, you know, not the rubbish that Umbridge is doing with us because nobody could call that Defense Against the Dark Arts”—“Hear, hear,” Anthony Goldstein said, and Hermione looked heartened—”well, I thought it would be good if we, well, took matters into our own hands. And by that I mean learning how to defend ourselves properly, not just theory but the real spells… because Lord Voldemort is back.”

The reaction was immediate and predictable. Cho’s friend shrieked and slopped butterbeer down herself. Terry Boot gave a kind of involuntary twitch, Padma Patil shuddered, and Neville gave an odd yelp. All of them, however, looked fixedly, even eagerly, at Harry.

“Well… that’s the plan, anyway,” Hermione said. “if you want to join us, we need to decide how —”

“Where’s the proof You-Know-Who’s back?” said the blond Hufflepuff.

“Well—”

“Don’t worry about this Hermione,” Tom said. Staying in his seat, he looked at the blond Hufflepuff. “Cedric, who is this?” he asked.

“That’s Zacharias Smith,” Cedric said. Tom nodded and said, “Zacharias Smith… if you wish to know the believability of both my boyfriend Harry, and friend Cedric, you would be kind to ask them in a polite tone directly instead of trying to jump down Hermione’s throat. With your rudeness, however, I believe you do not even earn that right. So I will answer instead. Lord Voldemort killed Cedric. Or else, he would have if it had not been for both my and Harry’s quick thinking. Isn’t that right, Cedric?”

“IT is,” Cedric nodded.
“If all you came here for was to talk about slander and accusations against Harry, then please leave. Now.”

Nobody moved. Then, the girl with the long plait down her back, looked at Harry and said, “Is it true you can produce a Patronus?”

“Yeah,” Harry said slightly defensively.

“A corporeal Patronus?”

The phrase stirred something in Harry’s memory.

“Er—you don’t know Madam Bones, do you?” he asked.

The girl smiled.

“She’s my auntie,” she said. “I’m Susan Bones. She told me about the trial, so is it true? You make a snake Patronus?”

“Yes,” Harry said.

“Blimey, Harry! I never knew that,” Lee Jordan said, looking impressive.

“Mum told Ron not to spread it around,” Fred said, grinning at Harry. “She said you got enough attention as it was.”

“Funny, Ron told me that she told you guys that,” Draco drawled, earning fake glares from the twins.

“You watch it Draco Weasley—”

“Weasley? What makes you think I’ll take your last name?” Draco chuckle, interrupting George. “Ron’s going to become a Malfoy, right Ron?” He looked at his boyfriend, a huge smirk playing his lips.

“Uhh—”

“Can we move back on track please?” Hermione asked, looking between the twins and Draco.

“And did you kill a basilisk with that sword in Dumbledore’s office?” Terry Boot demanded. “That’s what one of the portraits on the wall told me when I was in there last year…”

“Yeah, I did,” Harry said.

Justin Finch-Fletchley whistled, the Creevey brothers exchanged awestruck looks, and Lavender Brown said “wow” softly. Harry was feeling slightly hot around the collar now; Tom’s hand on his thigh kept him from bouncing it.

“And in our first year,” Neville said to the group at large, “he saved the Sorcerer—”

“Philosopher’s Stone,” Tom corrected.

“Yeah that from You-Know-Who,” Neville finished.

“Not to mention the tasks that my Harry had to pass last year,” Tom chuckled.
“Only with your help,” Harry muttered. He turned to the group and said, “Look, I don’t want to sound like I’m trying to be modest or anything, but I had a lot of help with all that stuff—I would be dead twice over if it wasn’t for Tom. Everything that I’ve done, I’ve learned from him.”

“Not the Patronus, Harry love, I cannot produce a Patronus, let alone a fully corporeal one,” Tom said. “But yes, I will admit having a helping hand in your education.” He turned to the rest of the group. “You do not know me, which I am fine. My name is Thomas Edward Riddle. You will refer to me as Tom. I have been with Harry since his second year, my fourth, and since our meeting I have been his mentor, friend, and eventual boyfriend. Our proposal is simple: You will learn from us. We will be sticking to Defense Against the Dark Arts, but I will occasionally be peppering in extra spells that Harry and I will deem useful for both your safety in the coming battles, as well as your general education here at Hogwarts. We will be your teachers, but more importantly, we will be your comrades in this confusing, ever-changing time. Please, answer me, but can I be under the generalization that you all wish to learn from Harry and myself?” Tom paused. There was a murmur of agreement. Tom continued. “Good. With that matter taken care of, the next will be of how often we shall meet. Now, before you interrupt, I know that many of you have other duties such as to Quidditch and clubs. And while I will not begin to understand them, I can promise you that we will respect all prior engagements and promises equally. However, I would like to remind you all the importance of this: This is more than test grades and O.W.L.s which a good chunk of you are taking this year, including Harry. This is about preparing ourselves for the future, this is preparing ourselves for the inevitable war and battles to come.

“Lord Voldemort is here,” Tom declared, spreading his arms out widely. “He is here, and we must be ready for him! The Ministry has left us with a useless teacher, a miserable woman who would rather see us turn dim-witted rather than allow us to grow and develop! The Ministry and Dolores Umbridge are both under the assumption that we are mobilizing a force against them. I say we let them continue their fantasies, let those who refuse to see the truth of change remain in their delusions. Meanwhile, you and I will strive forward, developing for both ourselves and a better tomorrow. Under Harry and my care, I promise you all will grow, you all will become to the best of your potential and we will mobilize! Not against the Ministry, but against the true enemy! This is the beginning of a new day, a new Hogwarts, a new Wizarding Community! And it begins not with Dumbledore, not with Fudge, not with Umbridge; but with Zacharias Smith, with Cho Chang, with Neville Longbottom, with all of you! Follow Harry and myself. Learn all that we teach you, and I promise that you will be prepared for what lies ahead.”

Tom sat down. The group him stared at Tom before applauding. The barkeep and his few patrons turned to look at him. Harry for the first time that they weren’t the only ones there, there was also two figures sitting in the corner, one of them was a witch with a thick black veil that fell to her toes. He ignored them as the applause died out.

Tom looked at Harry and Hermione. Hermione cleared her throat, and said, “Right well… we’ll work out how often we’ll meet… and Tom has told us that he had already found a place that we can practice. We’ll send a message round to everybody when we’ve got a time and place for the first meeting.”

She rummaged in her bag and produced parchment and a quill, then hesitated, rather as though she was steeling herself to say something.

“I-I think everybody should write their name down, just so we know who was here. But I also think,” she took a deep breath, “that we all ought to agree not to shout about what we’re doing. So if you sign, you’re agreeing not to tell Umbridge—or anyone else—what we’re up to.”

Fred reached out for the parchment and cheerfully put down his signature, but Harry noticed at
once that several people looked less than happy at the prospect of putting their names on the list, but in the end everyone did so. George leaned over Draco’s shoulder as he signed it, he was one of the last ones to do so, and said, “You spelt ‘Weasley’ wrong,” only to get an elbow in the gut.

“Blimey! Not all graceful and snobby, huh Draco?” George coughed with a laugh. “Maybe you really are turning into a Weasley! We should change your hair red for you.”

“Do that and I’ll not only hex you two, but take away every point I can from Gryffindor,” Draco said, giving the parchment to Blaise, who signed it followed by Theo, who gave a weak smile.

“So violent Draco… such a bad influence on our innocent brother,” Fred said, shaking his head.

“Innocent? Who do you think I learned my curses from?” Draco said, causing both the twins to laugh. Draco turned and winked at Ron.

Hermione took the parchment back from Blaise and slipped it carefully into her bag. There was an odd feeling in the group now. It was as though they had just signed some sort of contract.

“Well, time’s ticking,” Fred said briskly, getting to his feet. “George, Lee, and I have got items of a sensitive nature to purchase, we’ll be seeing you all later. Draco, be prepared for red hair.”

In twos and threes the rest of the group took their leave too. Cho hesitated and looked at Cedric, who turned to talk to Tom animatedly.

“Well, I think that went well,” Hermione said happily when it was just the six of them walking out of the Hog’s Head. Blaise of and Theo were the last to leave, Draco deciding to stay with Ron.

“Indeed,” Tom said. “Now, the only thing left is for me to finalize our meeting place. It’s a sort of sensitive room you see.”

“I swear, if they think of changing my hair color,” Draco growled to Ron. He turned to Ron and said, “If we have kids, I don’t want the twins a mile near them, you hear me? My hair is going to stay blonde until the day I die.”

“I hear you,” Ron chuckled, squeezing Draco’s hand and kissing his cheek. “Though it was funny the way you’ve put them in their place.” Draco sighed and shook his head. “But that Zacharias bloke was a wart,” Ron said.

“I don’t like him much either,” Hermione admitted, “but he overheard me talking to Ernie and Hannah at the Hufflepuff table and he seemed really interested in coming, so what could I say? But the more people the better really—I mean, Michael Corner and his friends wouldn’t have come if he hadn’t been going out with Ginny—”

“What!” Ron said outraged. “She’s going out with—my sister’s going—what d’you mean, Michael Corner?”

“Well, that’s why he and his friends came, I think—well, they’re obviously interesting in learning Defense, but if Ginny hadn’t told Michael what was going on—”

“When did this—when did she—?”

“They met at the Yule Ball,” Draco said, “and they got together at the end of last year. You didn’t know Ron?

“How—you—”
“The twins told me,” Draco shrugged.

“Which one is Michael Corner?” Ron demanded furiously.

“The dark one.”

“I didn’t like him,” Ron said at once.

“Huge surprise,” Draco sighed. He tugged Ron’s arm and said, “Come on, I need to get your mum something. Coming Granger?” he asked.

“Sure,” Hermione said, and the three departed into the nearest shop.

Cedric, hobbling on his cane, looked at Honeydukes and back at Tom, “I’ll be in there if you need me,” he said.

“Alright, see you Cedric,” Tom said as Cedric hobbled away from the group, which instantly became two. Tom smiled at Harry and wrapped his arm around his waist. “We did it my Prince,” he whispered.

“It’s all because that speech you made,” Harry said.

“No, no you did more than I could ever have done,” Tom said. “You brought them together. People are naturally drawn to you Harry, we can use that to our advantage. Besides my love, this was all your plan. I am simply playing along with it.”

Harry smiled and relaxed against Tom’s body as the couple walked down the main street of Hogsmeade. He had never before realized just how beautiful the small town was.
Harry and Ron spent the rest of the weekend catching up on homework again. The knowledge that they were doing something to resist Umbridge and the Ministry, and that he was a key part of the rebellion, gave Harry a feeling of immense satisfaction and kept him going through his homework. He kept reliving Saturday’s meeting in his mind: all those people, coming to him to learn Defense Against the Dark Arts …and the looks on their faces as they had heard some of the things he had done… and Tom’s speech at the end… The knowledge that all those people did not think him a lying weirdo, but someone to be admired, buoyed him up so much that he was still cheerful on Monday morning, despite the imminent prospect of all his least favorite classes.

A new sign had been affixed to the Gryffindor notice board, so large that it covered everything on there. It was printed in large black letters and there was a highly official-looking seal at the bottom beside a neat and curly signature.

By order of

THE HIGH INSQUISITOR OF HOGWARTS

All Student Organizations, Societies, Teams, Groups, and Clubs are henceforth disbanded.

An Organization, Society, Team, Group, or Club is hereby defined as a regular meeting of three or more students.

Permission to re-form may be sought from the High Inquisitor (Professor Umbridge).

No Student Organizations, Societies, Teams, Groups, or Club may exist without the knowledge and approval of the High Inquisitor.

Any student found to have formed, or to belong to, an Organization, Society, Team, Group, or Club that has not been approved by the High Inquisitor will be expelled.

The above is in accordance with Educational Decree Number Twenty-Four.

Signed,

Dolores Jane Umbridge

High Inquisitor

Harry and Ron read the notice over the heads of some anxious looking second years. “Does this mean they’re going to shut down the Gobstones Club?” one of them asked his friend.

“I reckon you’ll be okay with Gobstones,” Ron said darkly, making the second year jump. “I don’t think we’re going to be as lucky, though, do you?” he asked Harry as the second year hurried away.

Harry was reading the notice through again. The happiness that had filled him since Saturday was gone. His insides were pulsing with rage. “This isn’t a coincidence,” he said. “She knows.”

“She can’t,” Ron said at once.
“There were people listening in the pub, and let’s face it, we don’t know how many of the people who turned up we can trust, any of them could have run off and told the dirty ring stealer,” Harry said.

“What?”

“Never mind,” Harry said. “Who could have told on us?”

“Dunno,” Ron shrugged. “Think Hermione’s seen this yet?”

“I don’t see her,” Harry said. “Let’s go tell her.” Ron reached the door to the girl’s dormitory first and opened the door only for Hermione to walk down the spiral staircase. “Did you see this?” Ron said at once, pointing to the notice board.

Hermione’s eyes slid rapidly down the notice. Her expression became stony.

“Someone must have blabbed to her!” Ron said angrily.

“They can’t have done,” Hermione said in a low voice. “I put a jinx on the piece of parchment we all signed. Believe me, if any one’s run off and told Umbridge, we’ll know exactly who they are and they will really regret it.”

“What’ll happen to them?” Ron asked eagerly.

“Well, put it this way,” Hermione said, “it’ll make Eloise Midgen’s acne look like a couple of cute freckles. Come on, let’s get down to breakfast and see what the others think. …I wonder whether this has been put up in all the Houses?”

It was immediately apparent on entering the Great Hall that Umbridge’s sign has not only appeared in Gryffindor Tower. There was a peculiar intensity about the chatter and an extra measure of movement in the Hall as people scurried up and down their tables conferring on what they had read. The three had taken their seats when Neville, Dean, Fred, George, and Ginny descended upon them.

“Did you see it?”

“D’you reckon she knows?”

“What are we going to do?”

“Nothing,” Tom’s voice interrupted them all. They all turned to see him. “We are to resume as normal. Now, I suggest you all disperse. It would be bad for all of us to gather, it is quite unusual.”

“Then why are you here then?” Ginny asked. Tom chuckled. “I’m just wishing my boyfriend ‘good morning’ like I do daily.” He bent down and kissed Harry’s cheek. “Expect the crows,” he whispered in Harry’s ear before straightening himself.

He left, the others following his lead. The three stood up fifteen minutes later to leave the Great Hall for History of Magic.

“Harry! Ron!”

It was Angelina Johnson and she was hurrying toward them looking perfectly desperate.

“It’s okay,” Harry said quietly, when she was near enough to hear him. “We’re still going to——”
“You realize she’s including Quidditch in this?” Angelina said over him. “We have to go and ask permission to re-form the Gryffindor team!”

“What!” Ron yelled.

“You read the sign, it mentions teams too! So listen, Harry … I am saying this for the last time … Please, please don’t lose your temper with Umbridge again or she might not let us play anymore!”

“Okay, okay,” Harry said, for Angelina looked as though she was on the verge of tears. “Don’t worry, I’ll behave myself…”

“Bet Umbridge is in History of Magic,” Ron grumbled grimly as they set off for Binn’s lesson. But she was not. No, she was waiting for them in Potions with Professor Snape.

Draco ran into them outside the dungeon door and, after greeting his boyfriend with a kiss, said, “I can’t believe she would stoop this low.”

“Did your team get permission?” Ron asked, looking hopeful for a negative answer.

Draco chuckled, “Don’t look so desperate Weasley, of course we did. She gave it right away actually, she still holds my father in a high opinion.”

“Ohh…”

“Don’t,” Draco threatened, turning to Harry. Harry just shrugged and shook his head. Zabini ran up to them and wrapped his arm around Draco’s neck. “Come on, let’s get inside before she comes and try to grab you—oh hi Granger.”

“Umm… hi?” Hermione said as Blaise Zabini started to pull Draco into the classroom. Ron turned to her and said, “What was that about?”

“I have no idea… come on, Snape’ll get mad if we’re a second late. They took their usual seats at the back of the class and pulled out parchment, quills, and their copies of One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi. The door closed behind them with an echoing bang that silenced the whispering class.

“You will notice,” he said in his low, sneering voice, “that we have a guest with us today.”

He gestured toward the dim corner of the dungeon, and Harry saw Professor Umbridge sitting there, clipboard on her knee. He glanced sideways at Ron and Hermione, his eyebrows raised. Snape and Umbridge, the two teachers he hated most … it was hard to decided which he wanted to triumph over the other.

“We are continuing with our Strengthening Solutions today, you will find your mixtures as you left them last lesson, if correctly made they should have matured well over the weekend— instructions”—he waved his wand— “on the board. Carry on.”

Professor Umbridge spent the first half hour of the lesson making notes in her corner. Harry was very interested in hearing her question Snape, so interested, that he was becoming a little careless with his potion.

“Not that Harry,” Hermione moaned, grabbing his wrist to prevent him adding the wrong ingredient. “You need Salamander blood, not pomegranate juice!”

“Right,” Harry said vaguely, putting down the bottle and picking up the blood. Umbridge got to her
feet and strode between two lines of desks toward Snape, who was bending over Dean Thomas’s cauldron.

“Well, the class seems fairly advanced for their level,” she said briskly to Snape’s back. “Though I would question whether it is advisable to teach them a potion like the Strengthening Solution. I think the Ministry would prefer if it was removed from the syllabus.”

Snape straightened up slowly and turned to look at her. “Oh…really?” he said in his bored, sneering voice.

“Yes… now… how long have you been teaching at Hogwarts?” She asked, her quill poised over her clipboard.

“Fourteen years,” Snape replied.

“You applied first to Defense Against the Dark Arts, I believe?” Professor Umbridge asked Snape.

“Yes,” he said quietly.

“But you were unsuccessful?”

Snape’s lip curled. “Obviously.”

Professor Umbridge scribbled on her clipboard. “And you have applied for the Defense Against the Dark Arts post since you first joined the school, I believe?”

“Yes,” Snape said quietly, barely moving his lips. He looked very angry.

“Do you have any idea why Dumbledore has consistently refused to appoint you?” Umbridge asked.

“I suggest you ask him,” Snape said jerkily.

“Oh I shall,” Professor Umbridge said with a sweet smile.

“I suppose this is relevant?” Snake asked, his black eyes narrowed.

“Oh yes,” Professor Umbridge said. “Yes, the Ministry wants a thorough understanding of teachers’—er—backgrounds…”

She turned away, walked over to Pansy Parkinson and began questioning her about the lessons. Snape looked around at Harry and their eyes met for a second. Harry hastily dropped his gaze to his potion.

Snape just sneered and walked away.

Harry was in a foul mood as he and Ron left the dungeons to go to Divinations. He took his seat in the hot, over-perfumed atmosphere of the Divination classroom feeling angry at everybody. However, it seemed that he wasn’t the only one who was in a temper. Professor Trelawney slammed a copy of the Oracle down on the table between Harry and Ron and swept away, her lips pursed; she threw the next copy at Seamus and Dean, narrowly avoiding Seamus’s head, and thrust the final one into Neville’s chest with such force that he slipped off his pouf.

“Well, carry on!” she said loudly, her voice high-pitched and somewhat hysterical. “You know what to do! Or am I such a substandard teacher that you have never learned how to open a book?”
The class stared perplexedly at her and then at each other. Harry, however, thought he knew what was the matter. As Professor Trelawney flounced back to the high-backed teacher’s chair, her magnified eyes full of angry tears, he leaned his head closer to Ron’s and muttered, “I think she’s got the results from her inspection back.”

“Professor?” Parvati Patil said in a hushed voice, “is there anything—er—wrong?”

“Wrong!” Professor Trelawney cried in a voice throbbing with emotion. Just as she began her outburst, Harry felt a now all too familiar pecking at his ankle. H dropped his hand and received the note from the crow.

*After classes bring Granger, Weasley, and Draco to the seventh floor left corridor. Look for the ghastly tapestry of an idiot teaching trolls ballet. Also, Harry, do not get any more detentions with Umbridge. Or else.*

Harry sighed and shook his head. *Glad to see he loves me,* he thought to himself as he pocketed the note. He’ll show it to Ron and Hermione later. Harry wondered if he should write back a reply when Professor Trelawney’s screech shocked him, “The establishment! Yes, those with eyes too clouded by the Mundane to See as I See, to Know as I Know… Of course, we Seers have always been feared, always persecuted. …It is—alarso out fate. …”

She gulped, dapped at her wet cheeks with the end of her shawl, and then pulled a small, embroidered handkerchief from her sleeve, into which she blew her nose very hard with a sound like Peeves blowing a raspberry. Ron sniggered as Harry felt another pecking at his ankle.

Confused he reached down to receive another letter.

*Another thing, I would very much like it if you would receive your ring back, Harry. How else can you show that you are my lover and heir without me kissing you every moment? Besides, there is something very important in the ring’s stone. What it is, I cannot say because I don’t know. But whatever it is, it must be important. Rings with unusual stones usually end up that way.*

This, Harry decided, requires a reply. He grabbed his quill and wrote on the back of the parchment: *Umbridge has my ring. It’s probably stuck on one of her sausage fingers, how am I going to get it?*

He let his hand fall beneath the table and felt a crow pecking at it, taking his note. A moment later he felt the pecking again and another piece of paper falling into his hand.

*Must I tell you everything?*

Harry smiled. He could practically see Tom’s smirking face and rolled eyes as he wrote it.

*Yes, Harry replied.*

Again he let his hand drop and felt two crows pecking at it, one taking his message away and the other, a moment later, giving him Tom’s reply which was simply:

*Be creative, my love.*

Harry smiled and this. Somehow Tom’s notes were able to lift Harry’s mood enough to survive the rest of Divination. When the two met Hermione in Defense Against the Dark Arts, Harry showed her and Ron the first note.

“He already found a place? That was fast,” Ron whispered.
“He always knew where we were going to have it,” Hermione whispered, “But that’s strange… I don’t remember seeing any classrooms in that corridor.”

Umbridge entered the room as Hermione spoke, wearing her black velvet bow and an expression of great smugness. “Good afternoon, class.”

“Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge,” they chanted drearily.

“Wands away, please…”

But there was no answering flurry of movement this time; nobody had bothered to take out their wands.

“Please turn to page thirty-four of *Defensive Magical Theory* and read the third chapter entitled, ‘The Case of Non-Offensive Responses to Magical Attack.’ There will be—”

“—no need to talk,” Harry, Ron, and Hermione said together under their breaths.

After classes were done, Harry and Hermione made their way for the left hand seventh floor while Ron went to find his boyfriend. They found Tom waiting for them in the corridor, sneering at the tapestry. “It’s rather ugly, isn’t it?” he asked Harry as the two walked up to him.

Harry turned to look at the tapestry and shrugged, “I guess,” he said.

“Where is Weasley and Draco?” Tom asked.

“Ron went to get him,” Hermione said. She looked around and said, “I don’t see any classroom at all, let alone any doors!”

Tom turned to Hermione and gave her a smirk, “That, Hermione, is because we did not summon it yet.”

“Summon?” Hermione asked.

“You’ll see… but first we wait for Ron and Draco,” Tom said. He leaned against the wall “Harry, come here for a second?”

Harry walked over towards Tom and asked, “What is it?”

“I just want to know if Umbridge gave you any more detentions,” Tom said.

“No, she didn’t,” Harry said. “I’ve been a good boy and kept my head down.”

Tom snickered and smiled. “Good job. I knew I must have forced some common sense into you after all these years,” Tom said. Harry just rolled his eyes and leaned against the wall next to Tom.

A moment later, Ron and Draco walked into the hallway, followed by, surprisingly, Blaise Zabini. “He insisted that we bring him along,” Draco sighed. “He wouldn’t let me leave the common room without him.”

“Just wanted to see some people again,” Blaise shrugged. Harry could have sworn the Slytherin’s eyes shifted towards Hermione.

“No matter, we’re all here now,” Tom said. He pushed against the wall and stood fully. “Here is where we will have our meetings.”
“In the hallway?” Ron asked.

“No,” Tom said. “There is a Room here that comes and goes as its needed. We will simply walk past the wall Harry and I were leaning on three times, concentrating hard on what we need. Which is what, Harry?” He turned to Harry, who jumped.

“Uh, a place to learn how to fight,” Harry said, surprised at the sudden shift of tone from Tom.

“Correct,” Tom hissed softly. He turned to the others. “We need a place to learn how to fight, but also a place that cannot be found by Umbridge or anyone else we do not wish to find us. We must be specific in our need.”

“Alright,” Harry said. And they did so, turning sharply at the window just beyond the blank stretch of wall, then at the man-size vase on its other side. Ron had screwed up his eyes in concentration, Hermione was whispering something under her breath, Draco was biting his lip as Zabini squinted his eyes. Tom’s face remained neutral and calm as Harry’s fists were clenched as he stared ahead of him.

*We need somewhere to learn to fight. Just give us a place to practice, somewhere they can’t find us…*

“Stop,” Tom said sharply as they wheeled around after their third walk past. A highly polished door had appeared in the wall. Ron and Draco were staring at it, slightly wary. Harry reached out, seized the brass handle, pulled open the door, and led the way into a spacious room lit with flickering torches like those that illuminated the dungeons eight floors below.

The walls were lined with wooden bookcases, and instead of chairs there were large silk cushions on the floor. A set of shelves at the far end of the room carried a range of instruments such as Sneakoscopes, Secrecy Sensors, and a large, cracked Foe-Glass that Harry was sure hand hung, the previous year, in the fake Moody’s office.”

“Welcome,” Tom said with a flourish, “to the Room of Requirement.”

“These will be good when we’re practicing Stunning,” Ron said enthusiastically, prodding one of the cushions with his foot. “Draco! Come feel how soft it is!”

“God can you not say anything that isn’t dirty,” Draco chuckled as he fell on the cushion Ron was feeling.

“And just look at these books!” Hermione said excitedly, running a finger along the spines of the large leather-bound tomes. “*A Compendium of Common Curses and Their Counter-Actions …The Dark Arts Outsmar ted …Self-Defenseive Spellwork …w ow…” She looked around at harry, her face glowing, and he saw that the presence of hundreds of books had finally convinced Hermione of what they were doing was right. “Harry, this is wonderful, there’s everything we need here!”

And without further ado she slid *Jinxes for the Jinxed* from its shelf, sank onto the nearest cushion, and began to read. Blaise, seeing a chance, pulled a cushion next to Hermione and sat down.

“Harry, come over here,” Tom whispered. He took Harry’s hand and pulled him deeper into the room. Near the back in a corner Harry saw what looked like a small section of the wall popping out like a seat, a carving of a snake on the top. “Open it,” Tom whispered.

“Open,” Harry hissed softly, getting a rushing feeling as he spoke Parseltongue in front of his friends, none of which heard him. The top of the wall slid open, revealing a small stack of books. Harry pulled one out and read the title to himself. *Magick Moste Evil, Dark Spells for Light*
Harry looked up at Tom, who chuckled. He wrapped his arms around Harry’s waist and relaxed his head on Harry’s shoulder, turning his lips to Harry’s ear and hissed, “Your lessons are not done, my Prince.”

Harry gave a soft moan, “I can’t wait for you to teach me everything you know, my Lord.”

“I will... believe me,” Tom hissed as he began to nibble on Harry’s ear. Harry gave another moan as he dropped the books back into their hiding hole. “Close.” Tom hissed and the stone top slid back into place.

“Come on,” Tom whispered in English, “we should return to the others.” Harry nodded and allowed Tom to lower his hands down to his waist, and guide the small boy towards the others.

“Well,” Tom said out loud, “Does this get your approvals?”

The four young witches and wizards looked at him. “Yeah, this is perfect,” Hermione said.

“It is,” Blaise agreed.

“Good,” Tom said. “Then, if there are no objections, we will have our first lesson tomorrow. At eight.”

“Sounds good to me,” Hermione said, the others muttering in agreement.

“Good,” Tom said. “Then I will leave you telling the others to you. There are a few things that I will need to prepare, and Harry, I will need your help.”

“Okay,” Harry said. Tom smiled and looked at the rest of them. “I suggest we all return to our dorms now, before curfew begins. Harry, come here.”

Harry stayed behind as the four left. When the door closed behind Ron, Tom turned to Harry and asked, “How competent do you believe the others are?”

“What do you mean?”

“For from my experience, the group of kids that managed to form around you seem to range from barely to far below,” Tom continued. “If we are to sway them to our side, we will need to work slowly, introduce our ideals gradually, let it sink into their minds and take root as if it were already there. So far Cedric Diggory is taking to our words naturally, the boy is eager to learn as well as serve.”

“I was going to ask you about him,” Harry frowned. “Remember at the Hog’s Head when Cho Chang tried to get his attention, but he kept pushing her off? What was that about?”

“Yes that,” Tom said, looking a little bashful. “That, Harry, seemed to be part of... an after effect of what I had to do to save Tom. My body was still forming, my magic still developing fully as my soul was repairing itself. I had to momentarily give Cedric some of my magic... a piece of my soul to heal him and—”

“You turned Cedric in a Horcrux! Are you insane!” Harry yelled. “I’m okay with me holding your soul, but Cedric—”

“Listen to me!” Tom yelled over Harry. “I had to save him—you told me to save him! It was either
give him a small sliver of my soul and magic or let the boy die! He’s not a full Horcrux! I didn’t put half my soul into him, just a little.”

“And that makes it okay?”

“To me it does,” Tom said. “What is the matter Harry? Horcruxes are near invincible anyway. In the long run, I am doing him a favor! Even if he holds only a percent of my soul—”

“You will never be whole,” Harry argued.

“Whole?” Tom scoffed. “Who talked about myself being whole? We both know that my piece of soul is staying in you.”

Harry frowned. “Tom,” he said carefully. “Please, listen to yourself… you just admitted to turn Cedric into a Horcrux and are completely fine with it! Doesn’t that sound at least crazy to you?”

“No, it does not,” Tom said. “In fact since we are talking about this now, I might as well tell you that I was planning of convincing you to make a Horcrux of your—”

“No! No! Hell no,” Harry yelled. “Tom! There is no way I’m going to kill just to make a Horcrux! That’s sick, disgusting and—”

“The way I am standing here before you,” Tom said. “Do not call Horcruxes disgusting when we both know that without them, we would not be who we are right now.”

Harry sighed and took a step back. He rubbed his eyes under his glasses and shook his head. “Fine,” he spat. “Fine, fine. Your Horcruxes served their purpose, and that was it. Your soul is mostly complete except for the pieces in me and Cedric. Fine, no more, be a damn incomplete human!”

“And the snake,” Tom said indifferently. “The only Horcruxes I have now, are only you, Cedric, and the snake who is now under Nott’s care.”

“The snake… Tom!” Harry screamed, his fists flexing in frustration. “Are you serious—God!”

“Stop gesturing and listen to me,” Tom said. He took a step forward and grabbed Harry’s hands, forcing the boy to look at him. “I need my Horcruxes now. Until I can know without a doubt that we have succeeded, I will keep my Horcruxes. There is nothing you, or anyone else can do. Understand?”

Harry glared at Tom “Half my soul, which you returned… half of Ginny’s life… and now Cedric… Tom, when will it be enough?”

“When we stand victorious,” Tom said. “Until then, You, Cedric, and the snake are my top priorities. Nothing in your lives changed, my love. My feelings for you are still consistent, you know that I love you, that I adore you.”

“Prove it,” Harry said.

“Simply speak and I will do whatever you require Harry,” Tom said. “I may have your soul… but you have my heart.”

Harry stared up at Tom. “Remove your soul from Cedric,” he said.

Tom frowned. “If that is what you want, then fine,” he said. “Once I am sure that Cedric is back to
full health, when he can fly his broomstick without crashing and walk without that cane, I will remove my soul.”

“Thank you,” Harry said. “You don’t need multiple Horcruxes Tom, I’m enough. I’m more than willing to protect the piece of you inside of me.”

Tom smiled. “Harry… you’re too kind to me,” he said. “I wish that I can repay you for everything you’ve done for me, but nothing will be good enough.”

“Just promise me Tom,” Harry said. “Promise me that you’ll remove your soul from Cedric. Please?”

“I will Harry,” Tom said. He took Harry’s hands and kissed them both before releasing one of them. “I love you Harry Potter,” he said.

“I love you Tom Riddle,” Harry smiled.

Tom chuckled and looked down at Harry. “Mrs. Weasley might be mad at us, and I have no ring to present you… but still I feel a great need to ask.” Still holding one of Harry’s hand, Tom got down to one knee and looked up at Harry. “Harry James Potter… we’ve been through a lot, and will go through more in the coming years. You are my priority, you are always in my thoughts and body… literally for a time. Which is why, when all of this is over, when we stand victorious before the world, will you do me the honor of marrying me, and becoming Harry Riddle?”

Harry smiled and nodded. “Yes,” he said. “Did you even need to ask?”

“You know me, my love,” Tom said standing up and pulling Harry towards him. “I have to have everything planned.”

“Speaking of plans,” Harry said softly. “What are you doing behind my back?”

Tom chuckled. “Recruiting allies, my love. I will not tell you more, but I can tell you that it involves giants. With the insurgence done and the Death Eaters under our control, we can finally focus on building our forces up again.”

Harry just nodded. “Giants?” he asked looking up at Tom.

“And werewolves, vampires, and other so called ‘dark creatures’ that the Ministry deem too dangerous for human society,” Tom chuckled. “But you don’t need to worry about any of that, Harry.”

“You keep telling me that—”

‘And I am correct,” Tom said. “The more you worry, the more you tend to let things slip. I am keeping my secrets to protect you, Harry. You have too much to handle now, anyways.”

“I guess…”

“Come on,” Tom smiled. “Let’s head back to our dorms. Would you allow me to wait until after Hufflepuff has their first match before I deal with Cedric? Just to make sure?”

“Yeah… okay,” Harry nodded. Tom hugged Harry, and the boy leaned his head on Tom’s body as the older boy wrapped his arm around Harry.
Just as Tom said, he and Harry were in the Room of Requirement five to eight with Hermione and Ron. Hermione was again reading from *Jinxes for the Jinxed* when there was a gentle knock on the door. Ginny, Neville, Lavender, Parvati, Dean, and Seamus has arrived.

“Whoa,” Dean said, looking impressed. “What is this place?”

Harry tried to explain, but before he had finished more people had arrived, and he had to start all over again. By the time eight o’clock arrived, every cushion was occupied. Tom moved across to the door and turned the key protruding from the lock; it clicked in a satisfyingly loud way and everybody fell silent, looking at him. Hermione carefully marked her page and set the book aside.

“I am glad to see that you all have found your way here,” Tom said. “This is where we will hold our practices.”

“It’s amazing!” Cho said, and several people murmured their agreement.

“It’s bizarre,” Fred said, frowning around it. “We once hid from Filch in here, remember, George? But it was just a broom cupboard then…”

“That is because this room holds special properties, which is why I have decided for—what is it Hermione?” Tom asked when he saw that Hermione has raised her hand.

“I think we ought to elect a leader,” Hermione said.

“Harry’s leader,” Cho said at once, looking at Cedric as though she was mad.

“Yes, but I think we ought to vote on it properly,” Hermione said, unperturbed. “It makes it formal and it gives him authority—”

“But what about Tom?” Harry asked. “I’m teaching you guys most of the stuff that he taught me.”

“Then it is simple, my love,” Tom said openly. “You will be the leader, and I your humble teacher. Does everyone agree?” Everybody put up their hands, even Cho Chang, though she did it very halfheartedly.

“Then it is decided,” Tom smirked.

“Right, thanks…” Harry said, his face burning. “And—*what*, Hermione?”

“I also think we ought to have a name,” she said brightly, her hand still in the air. “It would promote a feeling of team spirit and unity, don’t you think?”

“Can we be the Anti-Umbridge League?” Angelina said hopefully.

“Or the Ministry of Magic Are Morons Group?” Fred suggested.

“I was thinking,” Hermione said, frowning at Fred, “more of a name that didn’t tell everyone what we were up to, so we can refer to it safely outside meetings.”

“The Defense Association?” Cho said. “The D.A. for short, so nobody knows what we’re talking about?”

“Yeah, the D.A.’s good,” Ginny said. “Only let’s make it stand for Dumbledore’s Army because that’s the Ministry’s worst fear, isn’t it?”

There was a good deal of appreciative murmuring and laughter at this. Tom walked through them,
seeing Harry’s slight fright, and said, “Before we begin to vote, I believe your leader and I need to have a word in private.” He grabbed Harry’s shoulder and pulled him away from the group.

“Dumbledore’s Army,” he whispered. “It sounds promising.”

“But it makes it sound like we’re supporting the old man,” Harry whispered back. “We don’t do that! We’re not—”

“I know we’re not light wizards, my prince, but only us and a small handful knows that,” Tom said. “But let us forget about that and take a step back, alright? Let us suppose two possibilities. The first, is that the group is called Dumbledore’s Army. The second, something else like…”

“My Lord’s Army,” Harry whispered. Tom chuckled. “Riddle’s Army,” he said.

“We have Dumbledore’s Army and Riddle’s Army. The first is what the Ministry fears most, the second what Dumbledore fears. For the time being, let us focus on the second name. How will the others react to the name?”

“They’ll respect it?” Harry said hopefully.

“No Harry,” Tom said. “That is one spank when we are alone. How will the others react to the name Riddle’s Army compared to Dumbledore’s Army or even Potter’s Army?”

Harry bit his lip as he thought. “They’ll think it’s egotistic… even if I suggest it?”

“Exactly, and it will make it harder to teach and earn their trust,” Tom said. “Even though you are the leader, it will be seen as though I am controlling your actions.”

“But you are.”

“Yes, but we don’t want them to know that, do we?” Tom chuckled. “But let us suppose, for argument’s sake, that they get used to Riddle’s Army, Progress is going well, we’ve covered the spells they would expect, even some high-level defensive spells, everything is going well. Too well. We get lax and—”

“Someone decides to snitch,” Harry said. “Either to Dumbledore or to Umbridge.”

“Exactly,” Tom nodded. “Remember, I did not alter Dumbledore’s memories. He knows who I am.”

“Why did you do that again?” Harry asked.

“Two spans. I’ve done it to torture the man,” Tom said casually. “The fact that his enemy is freely walking his castle, and that there is nothing he can do, it must be maddening. Now, if Dumbledore finds out, and we use my name, he will have evidence of my true identity. It would not be hard for Dumbledore to connect Lord Voldemort to Tom Edward Riddle, and thus The Dark Prince to you. This will lead to my death and your… well Dumbledore will try to “correct” your alignment. If Umbridge finds out—”

“She’ll just throw us into Azkaban,” Harry finished.

“Exactly. Either way, the risk would be too much. Now, let us use these events and apply them to Dumbledore’s Army,” Tom said.

Harry thought for a while. Then he said, “It will be easier for us to teach them, easier for them to
listen if they think they’re doing something for Dumbledore, or showing their support for Dumbledore and the school. If we’re found out, the blame will be on Dumbledore, not us.”

“Exactly!” Tom cheered silently. “Such a good prince.”

“Does that mean you’re taking away my spanking?” Harry asked cheekily.

“No, because of that I’m adding ten,” Tom said.

Harry cursed under his breath.

“Eleven,” Tom said casually. He took Harry’s hand and they turned to face the others. “I’m sorry, we were just talking alternatives and discuss what would happen in any possible future events,” he said to them. “In the end, we both agree that Dumbledore’s Army is an excellent idea, right Harry?”

“Yeah, it is,” Harry nodded. He looked around at them. “All for the D.A.?” He counted. “That’s a majority.”

Hermione stood up and quickly pinned the piece of paper with all of their names on it on the wall and wrote DUMBLEDORE’S ARMY across the top in large letters. Harry turned to look at Tom, who did his best to hide a gleeful, sadistic smile.

“Right,” Harry said, when Hermione had sat down again, “shall we get practicing then? We were thinking the first thing we should do is Expelliarmus, the Disarming Charm. It is basic, very basic, but also useful as well—”

“Oh please,” Zacharias Smith said, rolling his eyes and folding his arms. “I don’t think Expelliarmus is exactly going to help us against You-Know-Who, do you?”

“I used it against him,” Harry said quietly. “It saved my life last June.”

Smith opened his mouth stupidly. The rest of the room was very quiet.

“But if you think it’s beneath you, you can leave,” Harry said.

Smith did not move. Nor did anybody else.

“Now then,” Tom said. “Split into pairs and practice.”

It felt very odd watching them follow Tom’s orders. Everybody got to their feet and divided up. Predictably, Neville was left partnerless.

“You can practice with me,” Harry told him.

Tom looked around. “On the count of three! One, two…three!”

The room was suddenly full of shouts of “Expelliarmus!” Wands flew in all directions, missed spells hit books on shelves and sent them flying into the air. Harry was too quick for Neville, whose wand went spinning out of his hand, hit the ceiling in a shower of sparks, and landed with a clatter on top of a bookshelf, from which Harry retrieved it with a Summoning Charm. Glancing around, he thought he had been right to suggest that they practice the basics first; there were a lot of shoddy spellwork going on; many people were not succeeding in disarming their opponents at all, but merely causing them to jump backward a few paces or wince as the feeble spell whooshed over them.
Tom looked around and scowled. “STOP!” he yelled. Everyone did and looked at him. Tom turned around slowly, his eyes screaming of disappointment. “Mediocre,” Tom said. “Horrible. Awful. If this was a real fight, most of you would be dead.” His eyes stopped on Zacharias Smith. “It is good that Harry suggested we do this spell first, for it seems that not one of you can cast it correctly.”

“Oh yeah? We don’t see you doing it!” Smith argued. Tom turned to him, and in a quick moment, the others watched as Smith’s wand went flying into the air, landing nearly in front of Tom’s feet. Tom just flicked his wand and Smith’s wand flew from the floor back into Zacharias Smith’s wand.

“Your movement is wrong,” Tom said. “It is not a simple jab, it is a flourish of your wrist. Watch carefully.” He lowered his wrist before rotating it into a small swirl. He did it again and said calmly, “Expelliarmus.” A jet of red light erupted from Tom’s wand and hit Zacharias Smith again, his wand flying into the air for a second time. Again, Tom returned it to him with a spell. “Did everyone see that?” he asked. “Does everyone understand? Yes? Good. Continue.”

Tom walked around as the others continued practicing. He was momentarily distracted when he heard Neville’s voice yelling “I DID IT! I DID IT!” and turned to see a distracted Harry getting disarmed. Ignoring that, Tom went around and corrected the people who were doing the spells wrong. Ginny was teamed with Michael Corner; she was doing very well, whereas Michael was either very bad or unwilling to jinx her. Ernie Macmillan was flourishing his wand unnecessarily, giving his partner time to get in under his guard; the Weasley twins were too busy annoying Draco (who was paired with Ron) to practice on each other.

“So Draco,” Fred said with a huge smirk. “George and I were thinking about your and Ron’s wedding and—”

“We want to know if you want to put your name or Ron’s before ‘Weasley,’” George sniggered. “Alphabetically, it would be Draco and Ron Weasley, but normally the person getting married into the family goes second and—”

George found himself falling to the floor due to Draco’s Knockback Jinx. “Come on, we’re only joking,” Fred laughed, smiling at Draco and Ron.

“Idiots,” Draco muttered.

“Gits,” Ron said.

Tom moved past them. There was a steady improvement as they continued to work on the spell. Cho Chang was working with her friend, whose name Tom didn’t put into any effort into remembering. The friend had a sour expression on her face as they practiced, as if she did not want to be here. Tom moved around the room twice, smiling at Cedric and Theo who were practicing together and stopped at them for a moment. “Theo, how are you feeling?” he asked the small pale boy.

“A little better,” he mumbled. Tom nodded, “That is still an improvement from feeling horrible,” he said. “No, don’t give me that,” Tom said as Theo was frowning, he leaned towards the pair and said, “Harry and I promised to take care of you, and we are. We always look after those who are loyal to us, isn’t that right, Cedric?” Tom turned to Cedric.

“Yes my Lord,” Cedric said softly, causing Theo to gasp. Tom chuckled. “If you ever need help, of any kind, run to myself or Harry. And if you can’t reach any of us, Cedric will always help you. Along with Draco Malfoy and Blaise Zabini. Understand?”
“Yes milord,” Theo muttered softly. Tom placed his hand on Theo’s shoulder and gave him a reassuring squeeze, “We’ll look after you Theo, I promise you that, but I need you to *never* doubt either myself or yourself. Understand?” Theo nodded. “Say it with pride then,” Tom ordered.

“Yes, my Lord,” Theo said quietly, his eyes meeting Tom’s.

“Good. Now carry on,” Tom said. He returned to Harry and checked his watch. It was ten past nine, which meant they needed to get back to their common rooms immediately or risk being caught and punished by Filch for being out-of-bounds. “Stop!” Tom commanded. He wasn’t screaming, his voice barely raised his normal volume, but it was enough as everyone stopped shouting and turned to him.

Harry looked at Tom, impressed. It seemed that he, like Professor McGonagall and Professor Snape, was just a person to demand attention without raising his voice at all.

“You have all done a modest job,” Tom said. “There was a definite improvement over the hour, however it seems that we have went over time. It is time to leave, we shall come back the same time next week.”

“Soon!” Dean Thomas said eagerly, and many people nodded in agreement.

Angelina, however, said quickly, “The Quidditch season’s about to start, we need team practices too! We just got permission again after begging Professor McGonagall to talk to her!”

“Then let us begin next Wednesday night,” Tom said. “At that time, we will talk about additional meetings. Until then, it is time to go. Harry, if you would,” he looked at his boyfriend.

Harry looked at him confused for a moment before pulling out the Marauder’s Map and checked it carefully for signs of teachers on the seventh floor. He let them all leave in threes and fours, watching their tiny dots anxiously to see that they returned safely to their dormitories: the Hufflepuffs to the basement corridor that led to the kitchens, the Ravenclaws to a tower on the west side of the castle, the three Slytherins down to the left-side corridor in the dungeons, and the Gryffindors along the corridor to the seventh floor and the Fat Lady’s portrait.

Tom stopped Fred and George from leaving. “A moment, if you would,” he said. “There is a spell that I want you both to practice. It suits your… needs,” he said vaguely before pulling them into a corner. The two redheaded boys left with huge grins on their faces.

“That was really, really good Harry, and Tom,” Hermione said, when finally, it was just her, Harry, Ron, and Tom left.

“Yeah, it was!” Ron said enthusiastically, as they slid out of the door and watched it melt back into stone behind them. “Did you see me disarm Draco, Harry? It got him three times!”

“Mostly because he was distracted by your brothers talking about your wedding,” Tom said.

“They’re still on that?” Hermione asked.

“Yes, not that you would have notice being completely smitten with Zabini,” Ron said.

“I am not—just because we were partnered together does not mean that we’re smitten,” Hermione said. “He just approached me and I said yes. That’s all.”

“Sure,” Ron said.
Harry didn’t notice when Tom left the group as Ron and Hermione argued all the way back to the common room. He kept an eye on the Marauder’s Map to watch Tom’s name going down a corridor before disappearing entirely.

Later that night Harry was in bed when he felt a stinging pain on his backside. He bit his lip shut several more blows came to his butt. Harry winced and groan with each spank, cursing body for reacting pleasurably towards them, his cock hardening. The spanking stopped at thirteen hits, leaving Harry in searing pain, but also extremely turned on. Groaning to himself, he turned on his side, cursing his boyfriend silently before falling asleep.
The sound of wet flesh pounding against each other filled the small room, mixing with high, needy groans and moans from both occupants as they continued their intercourse. There were two bodies, one laying on the ground while the other bounced on their waist; both were naked, their clothes sprawled around them. Laying on the ground was Ron, his face sweaty and red, his hands on the pale waist of Draco as the Slytherin continued to impale himself on Ron’s thick, long cock, his own sizable cock flaying in the air with each bounce Draco did on Ron’s cock. “Ahh! Ahh! Fuck me, Ron!” Draco moaned, one hand rubbing his chest while the other pushed against Ron’s for support.

“Yeah—yeah ride my dick Malfoy,” Ron grunted. “You love my Weasley cock!”

“Fuck yeah,” Draco moaned. His mouth open in pure bliss. “Fuck me harder!”

Ron’s grip on Draco’s waist tightened as he started to push his hips up as Draco forced himself down on Ron’s cock, getting it deeper into him. With each push from Ron’s hips, Draco’s voice seemed to go higher and higher until he was screaming in joy with how deep Ron was fucking him. “Yes! Yes! More! Need it!” the blonde weep as Ron’s thrusts started to become animalistic.

“Fuck fox, you’re so fucking tight,” Ron cursed. “I’m gonna cum soon!”

“Cum!” Draco commanded and Ron did, spilling his seed deep into Draco’s hole as Draco came simultaneously, coating Ron’s chest with his cum. He felt the hotness of Ron’s cum start to leak out of him. Ron reached for his wand and pointed it at Draco’s hole. He slipped it in as his cock slipped out and muttered a spell.

Draco gave a shiver as he felt something cold pass over his butt. He still felt the hotness of Ron’s cum inside him and glared at the cheeky redhead. Ron chuckled and winked, “I wanted you to see you hold it in for me.”

“Kinky bastard,” Draco grumbled, his voice returning to normal. He fell into Ron’s arm and laid on his chest. “Should have warned me about it first,” he said.

“Wouldn’t be a surprise if I didn’t,” Ron said. Draco sighed and said, “God I’m happy I didn’t teach you that pregnancy spell yet… I would have killed you, then your Mum would have killed us both.”

“Yeah,” Ron chuckled. “That would have been horrible. …Draco? Can I ask you something?”

“You just did Weasley,” Draco drawled. “But you can ask me another question.”

“It’s… I want to ask about your parents,” Ron blushed.

“What about them?” Draco asked, his voice growing slightly cold.

“I know that they didn’t really have the best relationship with you… but I was just wondering… how did they meet?” Ron asked.

“That…” Draco said. “Just that?”
“Yeah, just that,” Ron said. “Every kid should know the embarrassing stories of how their parents met, yeah?”

“I guess,” Draco said, though there was a slight frown on his face. He moved up Ron’s body so that they could be face-to-face when the talk. Ron wrapped his arms around Draco and turned them so they were lying on their sides. “There’s not much to it, really,” Draco shrugged. “They were matched when they were young. They learned to love each other and married each other only after a few months of dating.”

“That was…”

“It’s the pureblood etiquette,” Draco said. “You should know, match people together not on feelings, but on blood purity.”

“Yeah… I remember,” Ron said. “No offense to your parents, but that’s stupid.”

“Believe me, I know,” Draco said. He noticed that there was some hair blocking Ron’s eye and moved his hand to fix it. Ron took Draco’s hand and examined it closely.

Pale, beautiful skin untouched and unblemished by any imperfections. It looked like priceless marble compared to Ron’s freckled skin. Ron stared at Draco’s long slender fingers and said with a chuckle, “You know, for being such a pompous ass… you really don’t wear any jewelry, don’t you?”

Draco chuckled and looked at his fingers. “I’ll let you know, I do look for jewelry, thank you very much. It’s just that I haven’t found anything particularly to my liking.”

“Oh really?” Ron said, smirking playfully as he brought Draco’s fingers closer to his mouth. “So you know everything about that stuff?”

“Of course I do,” Draco said. “What sort of man do you take me for?”

“A guy who loves it when I fuck him roughly and suck everywhere,” Ron said grinning, licking very slowly and teasingly one of his fingers. Draco immediately pushed the finger into Ron’s mouth.

“Seems we’ve taught each other a lot Weasley,” Draco chuckled. “Who knew you could be so perverted?”

Ron pulled Draco’s finger out of his mouth and said, “Admit it Draco, you love it.”

“I know I love you Ron,” Draco said.

“I love you too, Draco,” Ron said. He looked around the room and smiled, “Brilliant thing this room is, huh? Too bad we can’t get here more often because of Quidditch practices.”

“Yeah, must be hard for Harry and Tom to think of schedules with our four teams,” Draco said. “Don’t think that I’ll go easy on you on the field.”

“Draco, baby, when do you ever go easy on me,” Ron smirked.

Draco laughed and shook his head. He kissed Ron and checked the time. “Come on, the D.A. meeting’s in an hour and I’m sure the others don’t want to see us post-sex.”

“You sure? Cause I think you’ll look great drenched in my cum,” Ron smirked. Draco just rolled
his eyes and went to get dress. “Come on! I was joking! Unless you really want to—Ow!” Draco sent a stinging jinx his way.

“Git,” Draco sighed as he got dress. Ron grumbled as he got to his feet and moved to his clothes, giving Draco a spank. They just grinned at each other and kissed before finishing getting dressed and leaving the Room of Requirement.

Ron made his way back to the Gryffindor common room. Fred and George were selling their wares to a group of second-years while Harry and Hermione sat in a corner, hunched towards each other and whispering, Hermione giving the twins an angry look every now and then. Ron guessed that Harry was telling Hermione something about later tonight and went over Fred and George first.

“We have your Dungbombs for all your dung throwing needs! Fanged Frisbees to bite your friends and the ever popular Skiving Snackbox!” George yelled out to the small crowd of Gryffindors.
“Try the Nosebleed Nougat, the Fever Fudge or the Puking Pastries! One sickness to get out of any Snape-related class!”

“Only a Knut for a single candy, and a Sickle for the entire box!” Fred yelled out.

“I want one!”

“Me too!”

“Fanged Frisbee! Fanged Frisbee!”

“Fred! George!” Ron yelled.

“Looky here! It's out Prefect brother coming to ruin the fun,” George laughed.

“We have to feel worthy to be blessed by his presence,” Fred said.

“Guys, please… this is serious,” Ron mumbled, his cheeks flaring.

“Ohhh serious…” Fred and George said together. They looked at the second years and Fred said, “Run away children, we’ll take your money later.”

“But—”

“No buts or we’ll double the prices! Now on you go,” George said. Groaning and complaining, the small crowd dispersed, leaving only the three Weasley males. “Now, what is so important that we needed to disappoint the whole second year of Gryffindors?” George asked.

Ron shuffled on his feet and looked at the twins. “It's umm… It’s about Draco… I want to get him a gift and—”

“Say no more brother, say no more,” Fred said. The twins moved and each took one of Ron’s arm. “Step into our office, and we’ll discuss the finer details, won’t we George?”

“Of course, Fred, including a payment plan,” George nodded. “We’re not going to give money away, now are we?”

“No sir, that is bad for business, George,” Fred said and the two escorted Ron out of the common room and towards the boys’ dormitory.
At the end of the meeting that night (their fourth), Hermione handed out a very clever method of communicating the time and date of the next meeting to all the members in case they needed to change it at short notice, because it would look so suspicious if people from different Houses were seen crossing the Great Hall to talk to each other so often; especially if one of them went to the Slytherin table. She gave each of the members of the D.A. a fake Galleon (Ron became very excited when he saw the basket at first, convinced that she was actually giving out gold).

“You see the numerals around the edge of the coins?” Hermione said, holding one up for examination. “On real Galleons that’s just a serial number referring to the goblin who cast the coin. On these fake coins, though, the numbers will change to reflect the time and date of the next meeting. The coins will grow hot when the time and date changes, so if you’re carrying them in a pocket you’ll be able to feel them. We take one each, and when Harry and Tom sets the date of the next meeting they’ll change the numbers on their coins, and because I’ve put a Protean Charm on them, they’ll all change to mimic theirs.”

A blank silence greeted Hermione’s words. Tom looked at her impressed, and Blaise wistful as she looked at all the faces upturned to her, rather disconcerted.

“Well—I thought it was a good idea,” she said uncertainly. “I mean, even if Umbridge asked us to turn out our pockets, there’s nothing fishy about carrying a Galleon, is there? But… well, if you don’t want to use them…”

“It’s an excellent idea!” Blaise Zabini said too quickly. Luckily he was quickly followed by Terry Boot who said, “You can do a Protean Charm?”

“Yes,” Hermione said.

“But that’s… that’s N.E.W.T. standard, that is,” he said weakly.

“Oh,” Hermione said, trying to look modest. “Oh… well… yes, I suppose it is. …” Her eyes shifted towards Zabini, who was smiling widely at her, which only made her blush even harder.

“How come you’re not in Ravenclaw?” Terry Boot demanded, staring at Hermione with something close to wonder. “With brains like yours?” Harry could have sworn he saw Zabini glaring at Boot, cursing under his breath.

“Well, the Sorting Hat did seriously consider putting me in Ravenclaw during the Sorting,” Hermione said brightly, “but it decided on Gryffindor in the end. So does that mean we’re using the Galleons?”

“Yes!” Blaise’s voice overshadowed the murmur of assent and everyone moved forward to collect one from the basket.

“These are very impressive, Hermione,” Tom said examining his own coin.

“They remind me of the Dark Marks,” Harry said, “the Death Eater’s scars. Voldemort touches one of them, and all their scars burn, and they know they’ve got to join him.”

“Well… yes,” Hermione said quietly. “That is where I got the idea… but you’ll notice I decided to engrave the date on bits of metal rather than on our members’ skin…”

“Yeah… I prefer your way,” Harry said, grinning, as he slipped his Galleon into his pocket. Tom grabbed Harry’s arm and smirked at him. “Maybe I should burn something into your skin, Harry?” he teased.
“No thank you,” Harry whimpered, causing Tom to chuckle darkly.

“There’s so many spells we still need to try, though,” Tom whispered in Harry’s ear, his hand going to Harry’s stomach and resting there. Harry blushed deeply and bit his lip, wishing for Tom’s teasing to end as he placed his own hand over Tom’s.

As the first Quidditch match of the season, Gryffindor versus Slytherin, drew nearer, their D.A. meetings were put on hold because Angelina insisted on almost daily practices. The fact that the Quidditch Cup had not been held for so long added considerably to the interest and excitement surrounding the forthcoming game. The Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs were taking a lively interest in the outcome, for they, of course, would be playing both teams over the coming year; and the Heads of House of the competing teams, though they attempted to disguise it under a decent pretense of sportsmanship, were determined to see their side’s victory. Harry realized how much Professor McGonagall cared about beating Slytherin when she abstained from giving them homework in the week leading up to the match.

“I think you’ve got enough to be getting on with at the moment,” she said loftily. Nobody could quite believe their ears until she looked directly at Harry and Ron. “I’ve become accustomed to seeing the Quidditch Cup in my study, boys, and I really don’t want to hand it over to Professor Snape, so use the extra time wisely, won’t you?”

Snape was no less obviously partisan: He had booked the Quidditch pitch for Slytherin practice so often that the Gryffindors had difficulty getting on it to play. He was also turning a deaf ear to the many reports of Slytherin attempts to hex Gryffindor players in the corridors. Draco had to frequently run to Ron, or at least guard him from any foul play from the Slytherins. It all accumulated to a shouting match in a corridor where Draco was yelling Slytherin Keeper Miles Bletchley into a corner for trying to attempt a Hair-Thickening Hex on Ron. The attempts to sabotage the Gryffindor team continued after that, but for some reason Ron Weasley was somehow immune.

October extinguished itself in a rush of howling winds and driving rain and November arrived, cold as frozen iron, with hard frosts every morning and icy drafts that bit at exposed hands and faces. The skies and ceiling of the Great Hall turned a pale, pearly gray, the mountains around Hogwarts became snowcapped, and the temperature in the castle dropped so far that many students wore their thick protective dragon skin gloves in the corridors between lessons.

During all of this Harry seemed lost in thought. His hand would travel frequently to his stomach, and he would always be seen biting his lips in hard contemplation. He never told anyone what he was thinking, and when someone points it out, he did his best to distract them. One day, he and Tom were together alone walking outside. They were wearing their thick cloaks and gloves as they walked around the grounds.

“I have something for you to do, if you’re up for it,” Tom said. “It may involve revealing your… real identity to someone, however.”

“What is it, my Lord?” Harry asked, turning to face him fully.

“I will have you go to the Centaurs in the Forbidden Forest,” Tom said. “Make a treaty with them, I want them on our side. They do not have to know that they are explicitly on Voldemort’s side, just that when the time comes, they will help you. Do you think you can do that?”

“Yes, my Lord,” Harry said, looking slightly submissive.
Tom smirked, “I’m pleased by that, my Prince;” he said. “Now, while I have you in this state of mind… tell me, what have you been thinking about for so long?”

Harry looked up at Tom and gave him a small, cheeky smile. “Something that will make you very happy in the future, Mr. Riddle,” he said.

“Oh? What can it be… Harry Riddle?” Tom purred the name. Harry shook his head and took a step back, holding his hand behind his back as he smiled.

“I can’t tell you,” he said with a sly, cheeky smile. “It will ruin the surprise!”

Tom just chuckled and shook his head. “Fine. Just don’t forget your duties as the Prince.”

“I won’t, my Lord,” Harry said, giving Tom a very innocent smile. “The Dark Prince loves his Lord very much after all!”

Tom just shook his head and muttered something that Harry couldn’t hear. He looked at Harry and said with complete seriousness, “Get the ring and the centaurs on our side, Prince. We need them both.”

Harry nodded and moved closer to Tom, the couple’s business done and their walk continued. Later that night, Harry found himself walking the corridors under his invisibility cloak. Deciding on a direct approach, he made his way towards Umbridge’s office and opened the door. The office was thankfully empty and Harry began to look for an entrance to Professor Umbridge’s living quarters. He searched near the wall of kitten-decorated plates first. He looked at the wall closely, doing his best to keep the disgust to himself, as he noticed something odd. It was a stone that looked slightly out of place. He reached out and touched the stone, only for it to feel cold and metallic like a doorknob. Deciding to give it a twist, he heard a soft clicking sound and pulled it open to reveal a hidden door that lead to a small room with a bed, wardrobe, and a table filled with gaudy rings. Harry snuck in, keeping the door opened, and looked towards the bed. Professor Umbridge was fast asleep, her hair twirled around thick pink hair-curlers and the top of her head covered by a mint-green nightcap. Harry ignored her and moved quickly to the table where all the rings laid around. He spotted his in an instant and took it, smiling at the familiar weight on his finger. He placed his ringed-hand on his tummy and sighed in content. Then he turned to Umbridge and glared at the woman, a wicked hatred swelling inside him that he recognized belonged to the piece of Tom’s soul inside him.

It would never happen, nobody would be insane to do the deed with her, but still Harry hated the fact that she can reproduce naturally but he couldn’t. Taking out his wand, he pointed it at the vile woman and began hissing a chain of words. A poisonous green light descended on the woman, covering her midsection. An evil, cold grin graced Harry’s face as he gave his wand a downward jab and the light went into the woman’s skin, only to come out a moment later looking darker, redder. He could see small bits floating in the magical light. He moved his wand gently and guided the reddish-green spell towards a corner of the room where complete darkness stood waiting. He lowered the spell and said, “Eat up guys, you deserve it.”

He heard a soft craw of a crow and, with his deed done, dismissed the spell. Satisfied with his actions, he hurried away from Umbridge’s office, leaving no evidence that he was there at all.

The morning of the match dawned bright and cold. When Harry awoke he looked around at Ron’s bed and saw him sitting bolt upright, his arms around his knees, staring fixedly into space.
“You all right?” Harry said.

Ron nodded but did not speak. Harry was reminded forcibly of the time that Ron had accidentally put a slug-vomiting charm on himself. He looked just as pale and sweaty as he had done then, not to mention as reluctant to open his mouth.

“You just need some breakfast,” Harry said. “C’mon.”

The Great Hall was filing up fast when they arrived, the talk louder and the mood more exuberant than usual. They received a roaring welcome at the Gryffindor table, where everyone was wearing red and gold, but far from raising Ron’s spirits the cheers seemed to sap the last of his morale; he collapsed onto the nearest bench looking as though he were facing his final meal.

“I must’ve been mental to do this,” he said in a croaky whisper. “Mental.”

“Don’t be thick,” Harry said firmly, passing him a choice of cereals. “You’re going to be fine. It’s normal to be nervous.”

“I’m rubbish,” Ron croaked. “I’m lousy. I can’t play to save my life! What was I thinking?”

“Ronald Weasley, I really don’t want to hear that,” Draco’s voice said behind them. Ron and Harry turned to see Draco standing behind them, ignoring the jeers and boo’s the rest of the Gryffindor Table was giving him. “You are representing my coaching skills out there today, and I do not settle for lousy, Weasley, do you hear me?”

“Should’ve seen me at practice,” Ron whispered miserably. “I slipped off my broom and kicked the Quaffle away by accident.”

“Accidents always happen Weasley!” Draco said. “Did any of the Quaffles hit you in the face?”

“No, but—”

“There you go, focus on that,” Draco said. He leaned down and whispered, “You’re going to be fine, Ron, I’m sure of it,” before kissing him.

“Hey! You better not be giving Draco our secrets now!” Fred yelled at them.

“Doesn’t matter if he’s a Weasley too, he’s part of the enemy today,” George said.

“For the last time, I am not a bloody Weasley,” Draco said as he stood up. “And why would I want to steal your secrets? I’m already superior to Harry, thank you very much.”

“As if,” Harry said, earning him a glare.

“Well secrets or no, this is a no boyfriend zone then,” George said, crossing his arms.

“He’s right, only Weasleys are allowed at the Gryffindor table, and like you said, you’re not a Weasley,” Fred nodded. They both brandished their hand in a flamboyant manner, pointing towards the Slytherin table and, as if they rehearsed it, they both said, “Get thee to the Slytherin table!”

Draco just chuckled and kissed Ron on the mouth again. “I’ll see you on the field, Ron,” he whispered. He walked towards the twins and looked at both of them, “Seriously? ‘Thee?’”

The twins just grinned at him, still pointing at the Slytherin Table. Draco shook his head as he shrugged and walked away.
It soon became clear that Ron was not capable of eating anything more than a couple of bites and Harry thought it best to get him down to the changing room. Ron seemed to come to himself slightly as they walked back across the Great Hall.

The frosty grass crunched under their feet as they hurried down the sloping lawns toward the stadium. There was no wind at all and the sky was a uniform pearly white, which meant that visibility would be good without the drawback of direct sunlight in the eyes. Harry pointed out these encouraging factors to Ron as they walked, but he was not sure that Ron was listening.

Angelina had changed already and was talking to the rest of the team when they entered. Harry and Ron pulled on their robes and then sat down to listen to the pre-match talk. “Okay, I’ve only just found out the final lineup for Slytherin,” Angelina said, consulting a piece of parchment. “Last year’s Beaters, Derrick and Bole, have left now, but it looks as though they’ve been replaced with the usual gorillas, rather than anyone who can fly particularly well. They’re two blokes called Crabbe and Goyle, I don’t know much about them—”

“We do,” Harry and Ron said together.

“Well, they look as if they don’t know one end of the broom from the other,” Angelina said, pocketing the parchment.

“Ahh, thank goodness Draco doesn’t hang out with them anymore,” Fred sighed.

“Yeah, now he’s just with us,” George smirked.

“Which do you think is the worse influence?”

“Beats me, but we can’t be doing much harm to his intelligence,” George laughed.

“Guys! This is serious,” Angelina said loudly. “Just fly like we practice, and we’ll do good. Fred, George, keep the Bludgers out of our way. Ron, remember what I told you about the hoops.”

But it looked as if Angelina’s words did not reach Ron. He was clutching his stomach and staring straight ahead again, his jaw set and his complexion pale grey as overhead they could hear hundreds of footsteps mounting the banked benches of the spectator’s stands.

“It’s time,” Angelina said in a hushed voice, looking at her watch. “C’mon everyone … good luck.”

The team rose, shouldered their brooms, and marched in single file out of the changing room and into the dazzling sky. A roar of sound greeted them. Madam Hooch ordered the captains to shake hands and the next moment Harry knew, they were in the air soaring. In the corner of his eye Harry saw Ron streak off toward the goal hoops. He zoomed higher, dodging a Bludger, and set off on a wide lap around the pitch, gazing around for a glint of gold; on the other side of the stadium, Draco Malfoy was doing the exact same thing.

“And it’s Johnson, Johnson with the Quaffle, what a player that girl is, I’ve been saying it for years but she still won’t go out with me—”

“JORDAN!” Professor McGonagall yelled.

“Just a fun fact, Professor, adds a bit of interest—and she’s ducked Warrington, she’s passed Montague, she’s—ouch—been hit from behind by a Bludger from Crabbe. … Montague catches the Quaffle, Montague heading back up the pitch and—nice Bludger there from George Weasley, that’s a Bludger to the head for Montague, he drops the Quaffle, caught by Katie Bell, Katie Bell
of Gryffindor reverse passes to Alicia Spinner and Spinner’s away—”

Lee Jordan’s commentary rang through the stadium and Harry listened as hard as he could through the wind whistling in his ears and the din of the crowd, all yelling and booing—

“—dodges Warrington, avoids a Bludger—close call, Alicia—and she passes it back to Angelina! Come on now, Angelina—looks like she’s got just the Keeper to beat!—SHE SHOOTS—SHE—AHH!”

Bletchley, the Slytherin Keeper, had saved the goal; he threw the Quaffle to Warrington who sped off with it, zigzagging in between Alicia and Katie.

“—and it’s Warrington with the Quaffle, Warrington heading for the goal, one has to wonder if the Slytherin team will be nice to the Seeker’s boyfriend—”

“JORDAN!”

“It’s true! They’re dating! Anyway it’s the first test for new Gryffindor Keeper, Weasley, brother of Beaters, Fred and George, and boyfriend to the enemy Seeker Malfoy, and a promising new talent on the team—come on, Ron!”

Warrington threw the Quaffle at the central hoop and Ron dove wildly for it, going too fast for him to catch it as the Quaffle simply banged against his head and fell away from the goals. “HE SAVES IT! NICE USE OF YOUR HEAD RON!” Lee Jordan yelled at the top of his voice. “Still nil-to-nil as Katie Bell takes the Quaffle in possession!”

“Harry, WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?” Angelina screamed, soaring past him to keep up with Katie. Harry didn’t even realize that he just stopped to hover and listen. “MOVE!”

Horrified, he went into a dive and started circling the pitch again, staring around, doing his best to block out the commentary. There was no sign of the Snitch anywhere he looked; Draco was still circling the stadium just like Harry. They passed midway around the pitch going in opposite directions and Harry heard Draco yell, “DON’T GO EASY ON HIM! SHOOT YOU IDIOTS!”

“—and it’s Warrington again,” Lee bellowed, “who passes to Pucey, Pucy’s off past Spinnet, come on now Angelina, you can take him—turns out you can’t—but nice Bludger from Fred Weasley. I mean George Weasley—one of them! And Warrington drops the Quaffle and Katie Bell—er—drops it too—so that Montague with the Quaffle. Slytherin Captain Montague takes the Quaffle, and he’s off up the pitch, come on now Gryffindor, block him! AND PUCEY’S DODGED ALICIA AGAIN, AND HE’S HEADING STRAIGHT FOR GOAL, STOP HIM RON! USE YOUR HEAD AGAIN!”

There was a terrible groan from the Gryffindor end, coupled with fresh screams and applause from the Slytherins.

“Ten-nil Slytherin,” Lee Jordan said. “Weasley misses the Quaffle by an arm length!”

Harry continued his search for the Snitch, growing slightly desperate as the game continued and the score rose to Thirty-ten, Slytherin. Ron had only saved the first goal. He dodged a Bludger Crabbe sent zooming his way and spotted it at last. The tiny floating Golden Snitch was hovering feet from the ground at the Slytherin end of the pitch. He dived. …

In a matter of seconds, Draco was streaking out of the sky on Harry’s left, a green-and-silver blur lying flat on his broom. The Snitch skirted the foot of one of the goal hoops and scooted off toward the other side of the stands; its change of direction suited Draco, who was nearer. Harry pulled his
Firebolt around, he and Malfoy were not neck and neck …

Feet from the ground, Harry lifted his right hand from his broom, stretching toward the Snitch … to his right, Draco’s arm extended too, reaching, groping …

It was over in two breathless, desperate, windswept seconds—Harry’s fingers closed around the tiny, struggling ball—Draco’s fingernails scrabbled the back of Harry’s hand hopelessly—Harry pulled his broom upward, holding the struggling ball in his hand and the Gryffindor spectators screamed their approval—

WHAM!

A Bludger hit Harry squarely in the small of the back and he flew forward off his broom; luckily, he was only five or six feet above the ground, having dived so low to catch the Snitch, but he was winded all the same as he landed flat on his back on the frozen pitch. He heard Madam Hooch’s shrill whistle, an uproar in the stands compounded of catcalls, angry yells, and jeering, a thud, then Angelina’s frantic voice.

“Are you all right?”

“Course I am,” Harry said grimly, taking her hand and allowing her to pull him to his feet. “Just make sure Tom didn’t see it.” Madam Hooch was zooming toward one of the Slytherin players above him, though he could not see who it was at this angle.

“Who was it!?” Tom’s angry voice yelled out. Harry could hear footsteps running towards them.

“It was that thug, Crabbe,” Angelina said angrily. “He whacked the Bludger at you the moment he saw you’d got the Snitch—but we won, Harry, we won!”

Harry felt a strong hand pull him behind and he pivoted on his foot to see Tom. His eyes were red with fury, his skin seemingly growing paler with every second as he glared up at the sky towards Crabbe. One by one the Gryffindor team were now landing, yelling and punching the air in triumph, all except Ron, who had dismounted from his broom over by the goalposts and was making his way slowly back to the changing rooms alone, Draco running after him.

Harry did not have much time to think about it as the rest of the team pulled him into their small cheering crowd, the girls hugging him and Weasley twins shaking his hand enthusiastically. When he managed to escape the Weasley Twin’s grasped, they were adamant of trying to throw him into the air, Harry barely managed to see Tom walk into the Slytherin changing room.

In the changing room, Tom waited patiently for the Slytherins to arrive. His anger did not subside or waver as he waited quietly in a corner as the Slytherin team slowly made their way in, Crabbe and Goyle being the last ones, laughing stupidly. Tom waited and listened as they jeered and cheered about Crabbe’s hit on Harry. Draco finally arrived, and Tom walked out of the corner he was hiding. “You must think yourself strong,” Tom said, glaring at Crabbe. His skin was paper-white at this point, his eyes a burning, fire-red. He looked taller now, older. More akin to a skeleton than a man.

The Slytherin team jumped in surprise. Draco was the first to talk, “My Lord?”

“Step aside, Draco, I only wish to speak with Crabbe,” Voldemort demanded. Draco bowed and moved towards the side, sitting on a wooden bench. Voldemort turned his gaze towards the other Slytherins. “Move,” he commanded, his wand appearing in his hand. The Slytherins cowered away, moving away from Crabbe.
The teen looked confused, his eyes bulging slightly as he looked to his left and to his right, the rest of the Slytherin Team distancing themselves from him. Draco was changing, as if nothing was happening at all while the others simply did their best to avoid eye contact. “Vincent Crabbe,” Voldemort said, his voice icy and sinister. “What were you thinking…” Tom waved his wand, but nothing visible happen. “Do you know who you’ve hit with that Bludger right after the game ended?”

“Potter,” Crabbe spat out. He still looked confused, his face screwed up so it looked more trollish than ever.

Voldemort gave a small chuckle. “No… no… it seems that you and your father share an idiocy that cannot be rivaled. How quickly people forget.” He turned his wand towards Crabbe and said, “Who am I?”

Crabbe just stared at him. Voldemort gave the boy a cold smirk. “How quickly you forget,” he repeated himself. “Nevertheless, you will remember…” He flicked his wand and Crabbe immediately screamed in pain as his right hand started to bleed heavily. Draco flinched slightly and did his best to continue getting dress. The other Slytherins looked away as Crabbe continued to scream, words carving themselves on the back of his hand. Soon even the bleeding stopped, and the cuts healed themselves, white scars remaining on Crabbe’s bloodied hand that read: I must respect authority.

Voldemort flicked his wand and the blood disappeared. “Now hopefully you’ll remember your place,” he said, examining his handiwork. He turned to the other Slytherins and said, “The same will go for you. Do not forget your place.”

Draco sighed and stood up, dressed in his regular robes. “My Lord, if I may?” he asked.

Voldemort nodded and Draco walked cockily passed them, stepping over the small puddle of blood that dripped from Crabbe’s blood, past the crowded, cowering Slytherins, and out the changing room. Voldemort turned to stare at the rest of the Slytherin team and flicked his wand again. His eyes began turning back to a handsome brown, his skin becoming less papery and into a marble paleness, his looks became handsome again, humanish. He regained his youth and became his normal self.

Without looking at them, Voldemort left the changing room. The Slytherins stood there, a burning feeling in their throats and mouths, as if not needles were pinning their tongues to the roofs of their mouths whenever they tried to speak. They were forced to change in silence, the five other players keeping far from Crabbe as he kept staring at his right hand, which twitched with residual pain.

Draco found Ron walking slowly. The sun has already set and both boys were shivering in the cold air. Draco constantly brushed snow off of his shoulders and hair. “Come on Ron,” Draco said. “Your team won! You should be happy!”

“No,” Ron grumbled.

“Look, you alright, it was your first game! And you didn’t completely suck—you saved one goal —”

“That was just because I slipped and it bounced off my head,” Ron said. “I’m completely lousy.”

“No you’re not,” Draco insisted again. “Look! So what if that save was just luck, it was still a
save! If Potter wasn’t lucky all the bloody time I would have beat him easily!”

Ron made an unamused sound as he continued walking. Draco frowned at him and decided to see if he’ll be more recipient if Draco was a fox. He got on all fours and shifted into a big fox with snow-like white fur and a long bushy tail. He ran up to Ron and easily jumped on the boy, wrapping around his neck.

“Stop it Draco, I don’t wanna play,” Ron muttered as he tried to push Draco off. Draco gave a small yip and did his best to stay on the Gryffindor, running around the boy and making him squeamish.

“I told you to stop, Draco!” Ron said, doing his best to keep from laughing. Draco just yipped again and dragged his tongue along Ron’s cheeks as he ran around his body. “Stop it!” Ron laughed. Draco ignored Ron as he continued running around him, brushing his tail along every trace of Ron, tickling and teasing him until the redhead fell onto the snow in a fit of laughter. Draco continued to run around, yipping happily and giving tiny licks and bites here and there as he did his best to lift his boyfriend’s mood.

“Weasley! Malfoy!” Professor McGonagall’s voice called out. The two froze in the snow as wandlight shone over them and Professor McGonagall walked briskly to them, a disappointed look on her face. “Mr. Malfoy, if you would kindly transfigure back?” she said.

Draco immediately scrambled off of Ron and shifted back. Ron got to his feet. “Out of the castle this late after curfew… Whatever were you two thinking?”

“I’m sorry Professor, we’ve lost track after the Quidditch game,” Draco said politely. “We will head into the castle immediately.” He grabbed Ron’s hand and started to pull him, but Ron didn’t move was much as Draco was hoping for and Professor McGonagall said, “Not so fast Mr. Malfoy, I am not done here. Five points will be taken from both your houses for breaking curfew. Now Mr. Malfoy, I would ask you a few questions.”

“About what, Professor?”

“About you being an Animagus, Mr. Malfoy,” Professor McGonagall said. “Right… that,” Draco said.

“Yes Mr. Malfoy, that,” Professor McGonagall said. “It is extremely rare to see a Hogwarts Student, let alone a student in their O.W.L. year becoming an Animagus. When and where did you learn this?”

“I uh started looking up the ability in my third year, Professor,” Draco said. “But it wasn’t until… until my parents’ deaths that I’ve given it any real consideration or anything. I just needed something to distract me.”

“I see,” Professor McGonagall said. “It take an extraordinary amount of skill and concentration to become an Animagus, Mr. Malfoy. Particularly, it takes an extreme amount of knowledge in Transfiguration. The fact that you have successfully became one at such a young age is not only incredible, but something to be admired about.” She gave him a small smile. “However,” her voice became stern again, “the fact that you have achieved this will only heighten my expectations for you, Mr. Malfoy. I will expect nothing but ‘Outstandings’ from now on, do you understand this?”

“Yes Professor,” Draco said.

“Good. And I trust that you have already registered yourself at the Ministry of Magic? Despite
our... tense feelings towards their workers, nevertheless it is still the law that you have to register
yourself,” Professor McGonagall said.

Draco bit his lip and said nothing. Professor McGonagall’s lips thinned and she said, “Then I
expect you to do so promptly during the holidays and before certain individuals discover that we
have an unregistered Animagus walking around the school. I hope that your cousin does not
influence your decision, and you go the same route that he does.”

“No Professor, I’ll register myself,” Draco said quickly.

“Good. Now please return to the castle immediately,” Professor McGonagall said and she turned
and left.

“Cousin?” Ron whispered.

“Black… Sirius,” Draco whispered back. “Come on, let’s go.” He pulled Ron’s hand, the redhead
following reluctantly. Draco looked back at him and said, “No! No, stop thinking!”

“What?”

“I know what you were thinking” Draco said. “You had a shite game, so what? So what if the only
goal you saved was an accident—you will get better. You hear me?”

“No, I’m awful,” Ron said.

“Trust me Weasley,” Draco said. “If you were awful in anything, I would not be dating you.”

“That’s a confidence boost,” Ron said grimly.

“I’m serious—look, stop beating yourself up and just admit it. You had a bad game. I’ve had a
large handful whenever I’m up against Harry!” Draco said.

“What?”

Ron sighed. They walked up the sloping hill in silence. When they’ve reached the
entrance hall, Ron was still in a horrible mood, his skin pale and snow covering his hair. He didn’t
not kiss or even wave Draco good-bye, he just walked somberly up the marble staircase, dragging
his feet along and barely lifting them high enough to clear the step.

Ron did not come back until late that night. He was snow-covered, very pale, and still wearing his
Quidditch robes. When he saw Harry and Hermione he stopped dead in his tracks.

“Where have you been?” Hermione said anxiously, springing up.

“Walking,” Ron mumbled.

“You look frozen,” Hermione said. “Come and sit down!”

Ron walked to the fireside and sank into the chair farthest from Harry’s, not looking at him. “I’m
sorry,” he mumbled, looking at his feet.

“For what?” Harry asked.

“For thinking I can play Quidditch,” Ron said. “I’m going to resign first thing tomorrow.”

“No you will not,” Harry said testily.

“I’m awful!” Ron yelled. “If I wasn’t so lousy at Quidditch—”
“Those were just your nerves——”

“No they were my being lousy!”

“You just need more practice,” Harry yelled.

“Not you too,” Ron moaned. “Draco told me the same thing. I’m just lousy! I’m rubbish!”

Hermione got up and walked to the window, away from the argument, watching the snow swirling down against the pane. Ron sat gazing miserably at the damp hem of his robes. After a while he said in a dull voice, “This is the worst I’ve ever felt in my life.”

“Well,” Hermione said, her voice trembling slightly. “I can think of one thing that might cheer you up.”

“What?”

“Hagrid’s back,” Hermione said just as a crow appeared in a shadowy corner, noticeable only to Harry. For some reason the crow looked happy as it held the letter in its beak, and that made Harry’s heart sink.
Chapter 15

Hagrid confirmed what Harry was worried about. He went to meet the giants with Madam
Maxime, but because of the happy crow dancing in the shadows with a letter, Harry knew that
something went horribly wrong for his friend, especially with how he looked. Hagrid’s hair was
matted with congealed blood, and his left eye had been reduced to a puffy slit amid a mass of
purple-and-black bruises. There were many cuts on his face and hands, some of them still bleeding,
and he was moving gingerly, making Harry suspect broken ribs. He kept pressing a dragon steak
over his eye, it’s green bloody juices draining down into his beard. Harry’s eyes kept sweeping
towards the crow in the corner, which was ignored by all expect him. Even Fang didn’t look or
sniff at the bird as it danced joyously with the letter in its beak. Hagrid just about finished telling
the three about his failed venture to the mountains when there was a sudden outburst of rapping on
the door.

Hermione gasped; her mug slipped through her fingers and smashed on the floor; Fang yelped. All
four of them stared at the window beside the doorway. The shadow of somebody small and squat
rippled across the thin curtain.

“It’s her!” Ron whispered.

“Get under here!” Harry said quickly; seizing the Invisibility Cloak he whirled it over himself and
Hermione while Ron tore around the table and dived beneath the Cloak as well. Huddled together
they backed away into a corner. Fang was barking madly at the door. Hagrid looked thoroughly
confused.

“Hide our mugs!” Harry hissed.

Hagrid seized Harry’s and Ron’s mugs and shoved them under the cushion in Fang’s basket. Fang
was now leaping up at the door. Hagrid pushed him out of the way with his foot and pulled it open.
Professor Umbridge was standing in the doorway wearing her green tweed cloak and a matching
hat with earflaps. Lips pursed, she leaned back so as to see Hagrid’s face; she barely reached his
navel.

“So,” she said slowly and loudly, as though speaking to somebody deaf. “You’re Hagrid, are you?”

Without waiting for a reply, she strolled into the room, her bulging eyes rolling in every direction.
“Get away,” she snapped, waving her handbag at Fang, who had bounded up to her and was
attempted to lick her face. Harry felt a harsh pecking and looked down to see the crow angrily
forcing the letter onto his ankle. Annoyed, Harry grabbed it before the others could see and stuffed
it into his sock.

“Er—I don’ want ter be rude,” Hagrid said, staring at her, “but who the ruddy hell are you?”

“My name is Dolores Umbridge.”

Her eyes were sweeping the cabin. Twice they stared directly into the corner where Harry stood,
sandwiched between Ron and Hermione.

“Dolores Umbridge?” Hagrid said, sounding thoroughly confused. “I thought you were one o’
them Ministry—don’ you work with Fudge?”
“I was Senior Undersecretary to the Minister, yes,” Umbridge said, now pacing around the cabin, taking in every tiny detail within, from the haversack against the wall to the abandoned traveling cloak. “I am now the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher—”

“Tha’s brave of yeh,” Hagrid said, “there’s not many’d take tha’ job anymore—

“—and Hogwarts High Inquisitor,” Umbridge said, giving no sign that she had heard him.

“What’s that?”

“Precisely what I was going to ask,” Umbridge said, pointing at the broken shards of china on the floor that had been Hermione’s mug.

“Oh,” Hagrid said, with a most unhelpful glance around the corner where Harry, Ron, and Hermione stood hidden, “oh, tha’ was… was Fang. He broke a mug. So I had ter use this one instead.”

Hagrid pointed to the mug from which he had been drinking, one hand still clamped over the dragon steak pressed to his eye. Umbridge stood facing him now, taking in every detail of his appearance instead of the cabin’s.

“I heard voices,” she said quietly.

“I was talkin’ ter Fang,” Hagrid said stoutly.

“And was he talking back to you?”

“Well… in a manner o’ speaking,” Hagrid said, looking uncomfortable. “I sometimes say Fang’s near enough human—”

“There are three sets of footprints in the snow leading from the castle doors to your cabin,” Umbridge said sleekly.

Hermione gasped; Harry clapped a hand over her mouth. Luckily, Fang was sniffing loudly around the hem of Professor Umbridge’s robes, and she did not appear to have heard.

“Well, I on’y jus’ got back,” Hagrid said, waving an enormous hand at the haversack. “Maybe someone came ter call earlier an’ I missed ‘em.”

“There are no footsteps leading away from your cabin door.”

“Well I… I don’t know why that’d be…” Hagrid said, tugging nervously at his beard and again glancing toward the corner where Harry, Ron, and Hermione stood, as though asking for help. “Erm…”

Umbridge wheeled around and strode the length of the cabin, looking around carefully. She bent and peered under the bed. She opened Hagrid’s cupboards. She passed within two inches of where the three stood pressed against the wall; Harry actually pulled in his stomach as she walked by. After looking carefully inside the enormous cauldron Hagrid used for cooking she wheeled around again and said, “What has happened to you? How did you sustain those injuries?”

Hagrid hastily removed the dragon steak from his face, which in Harry’s opinion was a mistake, because the black-and-purple bruising all around his eye was now clearly visible, not to mention the large amount of fresh and congealed blood on his face. “Oh, I … had a bit of an accident,” he said lamely.
“What sort of accident?”

“I-I tripped.”

“You tripped?” she repeated coolly.

“Yeah, tha’s right. Over… over a friend’s broomstick. I don’ fly, meself. Well, look at the size o’ me, I don’ reckon there’s a broomstick that’d hold me. Friend o’ mine breeds Abraxan horses, I dunno if you’ve ever seen ‘em, big beasts, winged, yeh know, I’ve had a bit of a ride on one o’ them an’ it was—”

Hagrid was blabbling. Harry did his best to take out his wand and aimed it at Umbridge. Squeezing his eyes shut and concentrating as must as he could, *Leave, leave, leave!* He thought to himself.

“You ought to know that as High Inquisitor it is my unfortunate but necessary duty to inspect my fellow teachers. So I daresay we shall meet again soon enough,” Umbridge said. She turned sharply and marched back to the door.

“You’re inspectin’ us?” Hagrid echoed blankly, looking after her.

“Oh yes,” Umbridge said softly, looking back at him with her hand on the door handle. “The Ministry is determined to weed out unsatisfactory teachers, Hagrid. Good night.”

She left, closing the door behind her with a snap. Harry waited until he was sure that Umbridge was leaving before removing the Cloak.

“Blimey…” Hagrid said, “inspectin’ people, is she?”

“Yeah,” Harry said. “Trelawney’s on probation already. …”

“Um … what sort of thing are you planning to do with us in class, Hagrid?” Hermione asked.

“Oh, don’ you worry abou’ that, I’ve got a great load o’ lessons planned,” Hagrid said enthusiastically, scooping up his dragon steak from the table and slapping it over his eye again. “I’ve bin keepin’ a couple o’ creatures fer yer O.W.L. year, you wait, they’re somethin’ really special.”

The three exchanged worried looks. “Look, Hagrid,” Hermione said urgently, dropping all pretense, “Professor Umbridge won’t be at all happy if you bring anything to class that’s too dangerous—”

“Dangerous?” Hagrid said, looking genially bemused. “Don’ be silly, I wouldn’ give yeh anythin’ dangerous! I mean, all right’, they can look after themselves—”

“Hagrid, you’ve got to pass Umbridge’s inspection, and to do that it would really be better if she saw you teaching us how to look after portlocks, how to tell the difference between knarls and hedgehogs, stuff like that!” Hermione said earnestly.

“But tha’s not very interestin’, Hermione,” Hagrid said. “The stuff I’ve got’s much more impressive, I’ve bin bringin’ ‘em on fer years, I reckon I’ve got the on’y domestic heard in Britain—”

“Hagrid, please,” Hermione said, a note of desperation in her voice. “Umbridge is looking for any reason to sack people close to Dumbledore. Please, Hagrid, teach us something dull that’s bound to come up in our O.W.L. …”
But Hagrid merely yawned widely and cast a one-eyed look of longing toward the vast bed in the corner.

“Lis’en, it’s bin a long day an’ it’s late,” he said, patting Hermione gently on the shoulder, so that her knees gave way and hit the floor with a thud. “Oh—sorry—” he pulled her back up by the neck of her robes. “Look, don’ you go worryin’ abou’ me, I promise yeh I’ve got really good stuff planned fer yer lessons now I’m back. …Now you lot had better get back up to the castle, an’ don’ forget ter wipe yer footprints out behind yeh!”

“I don’t think you got to him,” Ron said a short while later when, having checked that the coast was clear, they walked back to the castle through the thickening snow, leaving no trace behind due to the Obliteration Charm Hermione was performing as they went.

“Then I’ll go back again tomorrow,” Hermione said determinedly. “I’ll plan his lessons for him if I have to. I don’t care if she throws out Trelawney but she’s not taking Hagrid!”

Harry nodded as he walked, which was awkward with the letter pressed against him in his sock. He was more than relieved to walk into the boy’s dormitory in the Gryffindor Tower and pull out the letter in his bed. It was obviously from Tom, and after Hagrid’s tale Harry was all but certain about the letter’s contents.

Harry,

We’ve done it. We have made a pact with the Giants, they are on our side. The bumbling oaf Hagrid and that other half-giant Madam Maxime were there as well according to the two Death Eaters I’ve sent to treaty with the giants. It seemed that the oaf was close to making a pact, however it seems luck would be on our side. The giants had a battle with each other, apparently, they cannot live being with each other in close quarters, and the giant Hagrid was treating with died, replaced by the current chief named Golgomath. A vicious brute he is, tore the previous Gurg or whatever they call themselves’ head right off. He seems to have an appetite for violence and killing, which meant that naturally he became friends with one of the Death Eaters I have sent, Walden Macnair, whom you might remember as the man who unsuccessfully executed the hippogriff Buckbeak a couple years back. With the giants at our beck and call, nothing physical can stand in our way. Though, their bloodthirst is something to be concerned about, I must admit. When our business is done with them, I suggest that a simple extermination will be needed for all giants. Although, if we leave them in the mountains, they’ll kill themselves eventually, this matter will require more thinking in the future.

Meanwhile, our negotiations with the vampires seemed to have stopped, it is embarrassing to admit that I have forgotten a law that outright forbids the killing and mistreatment of vampires. The werewolves, however, are leaning towards joining us. Their leader, Fenrir Greyback, is a … picky man, and one whom, while we are grateful for his cooperation, will be needed to be eliminated once our business is done. There will be no arguing this point, Harry, he wanted something that I will never give.

Beside from that, I just want to tell you how proud I am of the D.A. They are progressing at a steady rate in my opinion. Though, they pale in comparison to my best student. If they continue through this rate, I certainly believe that after Christmas holiday we can begin giving them some more… darker spells. None of the spells that true Dark Wizards use, heavens no, I do not want to arm Longbottom with the Killing Curse, he might accidentally him himself or maim someone due to lack of concentration. Though, there are some interesting spells that I wish to teach certain individuals. For example, I’ve given the Weasley Twins a spell that conjures a rope that is impossible to break. They’ve seemed to taken to it quickly, telling me rather enthusiastically about
how they’ve used the spell to tie themselves up, as well as the other seventh years in their dorm. The spell was originally used for interrogation but it seems that they have found a recreational use for it.

On a side note, the Quidditch match between Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw is approaching in a couple of weeks. Cedric seems to have taken his training seriously, yesterday he did not need his cane at all. If all goes well, which let me assure you Harry I hope so, he will be fully healed by the time the match comes. After that, I will keep my promise to you, my beautiful Horcrux.

And I wish you remember your duty to me. We need the centaurs Harry, even if they just owe us a favor. Do whatever seems necessary Harry, I am counting on you.

Love,

Tom

Harry did not know how to feel. He was worried for Hagrid, yet he couldn’t help but feel a sense of joy at the fact that both the giants and werewolves were on his side. He was slightly curious to know what Greyback wanted, but the knot in his stomach, and the way Tom seemed to emphasize the word “never” told him not to think about it. He wondered briefly if all werewolves were like Remus, men who cursed their existence and hate the beast that waited inside them, or maybe there were more ravenous beings who embrace or accept the werewolf inside them. Maybe their acceptance would make the changes easier? Harry couldn’t help but wonder curiously.

Harry told Draco about the letter on Sunday, hoping that he would have more information about werewolves. “Werewolves?” Draco gasped. “You have—” he looked around and said in a much lower voice, “you have bloody werewolves?”

“Yeah… the only werewolf I know is Professor Lupin, though, so I was wondering if you knew more about them,” Harry said.

“Were you paying attention when Snape taught about werewolves, Harry?” Draco demanded.

“Um… no?” Harry winced. Draco gave a dramatic groan and shook his head. “Honestly Harry,” he sighed. “Where to begin?”

“Umm… are they dangerous?” Harry asked.

Draco let out a snort, “Dangerous? You kidding me? Of course they are! Especially that pedophile Greyback, he’s the worst.”

“He is?” Harry asked, paling slightly.

“Yeah,” Draco nodded. “But there are others that are cool… I remember when I was young I used to be obsessed with them, you know? Bugged my mother to buy me every book on werewolves.”

“And… what do they say?” Harry asked.

“They usually respect power, and want to be left mostly alone,” Draco shrugged. “Though if you piss them off, they’re as ruthless and savage as a wild animal. Especially during the full moon.”

“So how should I feel?” Harry asked.

“About the werewolves being our allies?” Draco whispered. “You’ll be fine. You’re our Prince… there is no way they’ll do anything bad to you.”
“But Greyback—”

“From the letter, it seems like Tom has it all planned, you shouldn’t worry so much Harry,” Draco said.

“That actually worries me also,” Harry said, frowning slightly. “I mean, Tom always seems to handle everything, he plans and plans but he barely lets me in for the most dangerous or dark stuff. I mean yeah, he gave me the task to talk with the centaurs here, but I honestly think he’s hiding something from me.”

“Hiding something? What could he be hiding from you?” Draco frowned.

“I don’t know… but my scar’s been hurting recently,” Harry said.

“It has?”

“Yeah,” Harry nodded. “And I don’t know why either. I mean, there’s no way Tom would make my scar hurt on purpose! There’s no reason why my scar should be hurting, it’s just… hurting at times.”

“Well… I’ll be honest, I don’t know what’s the matter but if he told you to talk with the centaurs… I think you should do it,” Draco said.

“I guess so,” Harry said. “I also have another um… think I want to ask you about.”

“What about?” Draco asked. Harry looked around the corridor they were in. He thought he saw a person coming so he grabbed Draco’s arm and pulled him through the corridors and out into the snowing grounds. “Harry! It’s freezing! What are you thinking—”

“Now you think about this?”

“It’s important,” Harry said.

“What is it?” Draco grumbled.

“I’ve been thinking… of umm… perform the…” Harry’s voice went softer and softer as he continued to talk, his cheeks starting to blaze.

“Just say it Potter!”

Harry glared at Draco who just scoffed. “I’m thinking of performing the pregnancy spell on myself! There,” Harry huffed.

“Oh,” Draco said, looking completely taken by surprise. It was obvious that this wasn’t what Draco was thinking Harry was going to say. “T-The pregnancy spell?”

“Yes,” Harry nodded. “It won’t get me pregnant immediately… it’ll just make sure that… I have the um… body parts for that.” Harry’s cheeks were on fire again as he looked at his feet, which started to shuffle nervously.

“You’re… you’re going to change your body?” Draco asked.

“It’s not going to change how I look!” Harry said quickly. “I’ve read about it! It’s just going to… push some things around and umm connect a thing to my thing… I just want to be able to have a
“kid with Tom when we’re ready for one.”

“Wow…” Draco whistled. “You know that this is permanent, right?”

“Of course I know!” Harry yelled, his entire face now red. “I just… I just need to say it out loud. And hear what you have to think…”

“Well… umm… we’re fifteen Harry,” Draco said.

“I’m not talking about getting pregnant now Draco,” Harry said.

“Still, we’re fifteen Harry,” Draco said. “Maybe… maybe you should think about preforming the spell when we’re older? Or at least graduated from Hogwarts.”

“I…” Harry sighed. “I guess you’re right. I just feel like I need to do something!”

“Why?”

“Because I… I don’t know,” Harry growled. “I just need to do something that’s totally mine! I feel like lately everything I’ve done is because of Tom… I just need to do something for myself by myself.”

“But, aren’t you doing this for both you and Tom?” Draco asked.

“I am but—”

“Then you’re still doing something for Tom,” Draco said. “Honestly Harry, if you want to do something by yourself… start with just getting your priorities straight.”

“Excuse me!”

“I mean just listen to yourself, saying stuff like you need to ‘do something by yourself’ and immediately going to performing a pregnancy spell on yourself! Harry, you’ve done so much by yourself that Tom can’t do! Hell, you can cast a bloody Patronus! Tom can never do that! There’s too much emerald around him. I’m not saying to not cast the bloody spell, Potter, I’m just saying that you’re so much more than what you’re describing yourself to be! And also the fact that we’re fif-bloody-teen!” Draco yelled.

Harry just stared at him. “I guess… I guess I’m just being stupid, aren’t I?”

“No you’re—argh! Look at me!” Draco forced his hands on Harry’s cheeks and held them tightly. “You are not depressed, Malfoy!”

“No you’re—argh! Look at me!” Draco forced his hands on Harry’s cheeks and held them tightly. “You are not being stupid, don’t get into a rut—I am not dealing with a depressed Harry Potter. Got it?”

“I am not depressed, Malfoy!”

“Could have fooled me Potter,” Draco said. “Honestly, just listen to yourself. You’re acting like a damn damsel in distress if you think performing the pregnancy spell is the right thing to do at fifteen!”

“So what? You’re not going to do it then?” Harry said angrily.

“Me? Of course I am,” Draco scoffed. “When I’m older! You know, when your age is bigger than fif-bloody-teen and have something called a job. But that’s not the point, Potter. Look, tell me right now what are the things you can do.”
“Fly a broom, best at Defense Against the Dark Arts in our class, alright in other subjects, can talk
to snakes, horrible at being clever, almost got both Tom and I found out by Yaxley, and I lose
control of my bloody body whenever I try to do the Dark Arts,” Harry listed.

“Wrong, Potter, wrong,” Draco said. “Sure you messed up with Yaxley, but who cares? That’s over
with and he’s gone. And believe me, you are not rubbish at the Dark Arts.”

“How do you know?” Harry demanded.

“Because your aura tells me so,” Draco said. “And right now there is more emerald than gold and
both are very, very vivid. It’s almost blinding.”

“Right… I forgot you can see those,” Harry muttered.

“You’ll be surprised at how much I can see,” Draco smirked. “Point of the matter: you are a
bloody brilliant wizard. And my Prince. Sod off with all these negative thoughts you’re having
lately. And sod those thoughts of changing your body just to feel you need to do something for
yourself.”

“So what should I do then, huh? Get the centaurs for myself and not Tom?” Harry said.

Draco looked at him and smirked. “Actually… yeah that doesn’t sound like a bad idea,” Draco said
slowly. “Get the centaurs for yourself. Those ruddy horses will be good for you… I guess. Bloody
bastards.”

“Wow… I never realized how dirtier your mouth is getting,” Harry said, giving a small chuckle.
He felt like Draco was cursing on purpose.

Draco just gave a rueful smile and said, “I learned a lot from the Weasleys. The twins are
especially interesting.”

“How so?” Harry asked.

“Well… the rest of the family is all peachy-clean with auras, all yellow as the bleeding sun,”
Draco said. “Except for my Ron of course, he’s becoming such a nice, good Dark Wizard. Bless
him. …Anyway It’s suffocating how much yellow there is at the Burrow. Except for the twins.”

“Let me guess, the Darkest Wizards you’ve ever found,” Harry laughed.

Draco laughed as well and shook his head, “Hell no! They pale in comparison to Ron! It’s just a
tiny little thing, so tiny that you can’t even see it. You know how I told you that auras tend to flux
a little as we grow? Well the twins had a small nugget of green that’s stabile, and it’s actually
growing very slowly.”

“Huh… I guess that would be Tom’s influence,” Harry said.

“And Ron’s, and mine of course,” Draco smirked. “Anyway, I guess this means that the oaf—
Hagrid is back.”

“Yes, he is,” Harry said, eyeing Draco carefully.

“Every time I called Hagrid ‘the oaf’ Ron gets prissy,” Draco said. “And that usually ends with—
ever mind. He someone has it in his mind that he’s the top of our relationship. So what’s
Umbridge going to do?”
“She visited him last night, Ron, Hermione, and I went to see him as soon as we saw his lights on,” Harry said. “She’s going to inspect him… I really hope he passes, Like Hermione said, I don’t really care if Trelawney leaves but Hagrid? There’s no way I’ll let that happens.” A determined look replaced his earlier depressed one.

“She’ll probably focus her questioning with the Slytherin,” Draco sighed.

“She will,” Harry said.

“I promise to be a good boy Potter,” Draco laughed. “And I’ll make sure that Blaise and I keep a tight leash on the others.”

“You better Draco,” Harry said a bit threateningly. Draco just smirked and winked, “I will, I will. Though I’m not sure about Parkinson… she seems to not like me very much lately. But the others will behave themselves. Believe me, if I don’t I’ll never hear the end of it from Ron. He can nag worse than Mrs. Weasley.”

The two laughed and looked around. The cold finally getting to them, they walked back into the castle, both feeling anxious about the coming Care of Magical Creatures class on Tuesday.

Umbridge was nowhere to be found as Harry, Hermione, and Ron struggled through the snow toward Hagrid, who stood waiting for them on the edge of the forest. He did not present a reassuring sight; the bruises that had been purple on Saturday night were now tinged with green and yellow and some of his cuts still seemed to be bleeding. Harry could not understand this: Had Hagrid perhaps been attacked by some creature whose venom prevented the wounds it inflicted from healing? As though to complete the ominous picture; Hagrid was carrying what looked like half a dead cow over his shoulder.

“We’re workin’ in here today!” Hagrid called happily to the approaching students, jerking his head back at the dead trees behind him. “Bit more sheltered! Anyway, they prefer the dark. …”

“What prefers the dark?” Harry heard Draco yelling, a slight hint of panic in his voice.

“Ready?” Hagrid said happily, looking around the class. “Right, well, I’ve bin savin’ a trip inter the forest fer yer fifth year. Thought we go an’ see these creatures in their natural habitat. Now, what we’re studyin’ today is pretty rare, I reckon I’m probably the on’y person in Britain who’s managed ter train ‘em.” The class shared anxious looks as Hagrid turned and strode straight into the forest.

They walked for about ten minutes until they reached a place where the trees stood so closely together that it was as dark as twilight and there was no snow on the ground at all. Hagrid deposited his half of cow with a grunt on the ground, stepped back, and turned to face his class again, most of whom were creeping toward him from tree to tree, peering around nervously as though expecting to be set upon at any moment.

“Gather roun’, gather roun’,” Hagrid said encouragingly. “Now, they’ll be attracted by the smell o’ the meat but I’m goin’ ter give ‘em a call anyway, ‘cause they’ll like ter know it’s me. …”

He turned, shook his shaggy head to get the hair out of his face, and gave an odd, shrieking cry that echoed through the dark trees like the call of some monstrous bird. Nobody laughed; most of them looked too scared to make a sound.

Hagrid gave the shrieking cry again. A minute passed in which the class continued to peer nervously over their shoulders and around trees for a first glimpse of whatever it was that was
coming. And then, as Hagrid shook his hair back for a third time and expanded his enormous chest, Harry nudged Ron and pointed into the black space between two gnarled trees.

A pair of blank, white, shining eyes were growing larger through the gloom and a moment later the dragonish face, neck, and then skeletal body of a great, black, winged horse emerged from the darkness. It looked around at the class for a few seconds then bowed its head and began to tear flesh from the dead cow with its pointed fangs.

Harry looked at Ron, who was still staring around into the trees and after a few seconds he whispered, “Why doesn’t Hagrid call them again?”

Most of the rest of the class were wearing expressions as confused and nervously expectant as Ron’s and were still gazing everywhere but at the horse standing feet from them. It was then that Harry remembered what Tom told him at the beginning of the year: Only people who have seen death could see the creature in front of them. Harry looked around and saw that there were only two other people who could see the creatures: a stringy Slytherin boy standing between Blaise and Draco whom Harry guessed was Theodore Nott, and Neville, whose eyes were following the swishing progress of the long black tail the creature had.

“Oh, an’ here comes another one!” Hagrid said proudly, as a second black horse appeared out of the dark trees, folded its leathery winds closer to its body. “Now… put yer hands up, who can see ‘em?”

Harry raised his hand, Hagrid nodded at him. “Yeah…yeah I knew you’d be able ter, Harry,” he said seriously. “An’ you too, Neville, eh? An—”

“Oh, Hagrid? What exactly are we supposed to be looking at?” Ron interrupted, his voice breaking slightly.

For answer, Hagrid pointed at the cow carcass on the ground. The whole class stared at it for a few seconds, then several people gasped and Parvati squealed. Harry understood why: Bits of flesh stripping themselves away from the bones and vanishing into thin air had to look very odd indeed.

“What’s doing it?” Parvati demanded in a terrified voice, retreating behind the nearest tree. “What’s eating it?”

“Thestrals,” Hagrid said proudly and Hermione gave a soft “oh!” of comprehension at Harry’s shoulder. “Hogwarts has got a whole herd of ‘em in here. Now, who knows—?”

“But they’re really, really unlucky!” Parvati interrupted, looking alarmed. “They’re supposed to bring all sorts of horrible misfortune on people who see them. Professor Treallwney told me once —”

“No, no, no,” Hagrid said, chuckling, “tha’s jus’ superstition, that is, they aren’ unlucky, they’re dead clever an’ useful! ‘Course, this lot don’ get a lot o’ work, it’s mainly jus’ pullin’ the school carriages unless Dumbledore’s takin’ a long journey an’ don’ want ter Apparate. Righ’, now who can tell me why some o’ you can see them an’ some can’t?”

Harry found himself raising his hand along with Hermione. “All right Harry,” Hagrid said. “It’s because you need to see death to see them,” Harry said. “You need to see someone die in order to see thestrals.”

“That’s right,” Hagrid said solemnly, “ten points ter Gryffindor. Now, thestrals—”
“Hem, hem.”

Professor Umbridge had arrived. She was standing a few feet away from Harry, wearing her green hat and cloak again, her clipboard at the ready. Hagrid, who had never heard Umbridge’s fake cough before, was gazing in some concern at the closest thestrals, evidently under the impression that it had made the sound.

“Hem, hem.”

“Oh hello!” Hagrid said, smiling, having located the source of the noise.

“You received the note I sent to your cabin this morning?” Umbridge said, in the same loud, slow voice she had used with him earlier, as though she was addressing somebody both foreign and very slow. “Telling you that I would be inspecting your lesson?”

“Oh yeah,” Hagrid said brightly. “Glad yeh found the place all righ’! Well, as you can see—or, I dunno—can you? We’re doin’ thestrals today—”

“I’m sorry?” Umbridge said loudly, cupping her hand around her ear and frowning. “What did you say?”

“He said we’re doing thestrals, Professor,” Draco interrupted. “Perhaps you would like to move closer if you’re hard at hearing today.”

Blaise and Theo snickered next to Draco as Professor Umbridge frowned. Harry couldn’t help but smirk as Ron let out a small burst of laugh.

“Well… anyway…” Hagrid said, turning back to the class. “Erm… what was I goin’ ter say?”

“Appears …to …have… poor… short… term… memory…” Professor Umbridge muttered, loudly enough for everyone to hear her. The rest of the Slytherins looked like Christmas came early as Draco gave Ron a sorry look; Hermione, on the other hand, turned scarlet with rage.

“Oh yeah,” Hagrid said, throwing an uneasy glance at Umbridge’s clipboard, but plowing on valiantly. “Yeah, I was gonna tell yeh how come we got a heard. Yeah, so we started off with a male an’ five females. This one,” he patted the first horse to have appeared, “name o’ Tenebrus, he’s my special favorite, firs’ one born here in the forest—”

“Oh yeah,” Umbridge said loudly, interrupting him, “that the Ministry of Magic has classified thestrals as ‘dangerous’?”

Harry’s heart sank like a stone, but Hagrid merely chuckled.

“No—come on!” Hagrid said, looking a little anxious now, “I mean, a dog’ll bite if yeh bait it, won’ it—but thestrals have jus’ got a bad reputation because o’ the death thing—people used ter think they were bad omens, didn’t they? Jus’ didn’ understand, did they?”

Umbridge did not answer; she finished writing her last note, then looked up at Hagrid and said, again very loudly and slowly, “Please continue teaching as usual. I am going to walk—” she mimed walking—“among the students”—she pointed around at individuals members of the class.
“and ask them questions.” She pointed to her mouth to indicated talking.

Hagrid stared at her, clearly at a complete loss to understand why she was acting as though he did not understand normal English. Hermione had tears of fury in her eyes now. “You hag, you evil hag!” she whispered as Umbridge walked toward Pansy Parkinson. “I know what you’re doing, you awful, twisted, vicious—”

“Erm… anyway,” Hagrid said, clearly struggling to regain the flow of his lesson, “so—thestrals. Yeah. Well, there’s loads o’ good stuff about them. …”

“Do you find,” Professor Umbridge said in a ringing voice to Pansy Parkinson, “that you are able to understand Professor Hagrid when he talks?”

Just like Hermione, Pansy had tears in her eyes, but there were tears of laughter. Draco forcibly pushed Parkinson out of the way and said, “He is perfectly understandable, although you should ask someone whose hearing isn’t worse than a dung beetle.”

“Is that so, Mr. Malfoy?” Professor Umbridge asked with a raised eyebrow. “And tell me, isn’t true, however, that you were attacked two years ago during his class?”

“Yes, however that was because I did not follow Hagrid’s instructions,” Draco challenged Umbridge.

Professor Umbridge just gave a little hum and smiled indulgently. And then turned to Neville. “You can see the thestrals, Longbottom, can you?” she said.

Neville nodded.

“Whom did you see die?” she asked indifferently.

“My… my grandad,” Neville said.

“And what do you think of them?” she said, waving her stubby hand at the horses, who by now had stripped a great deal of the carcass down to the bone.

“Erm,” Neville said nervously, with a glance at Hagrid. “Well, they’re… er… okay…”

“Students… are… too… intimidated … to… admit… they… are… frightened…” Umbridge muttered, making another note of her clipboard.

“No!” Neville said, looking upset, “no, I’m not scared of them—!”

“It’s quite all right,” Umbridge said, patting Neville on the shoulder with what was she evidently intended to be an understanding smile, though it looked more like a leer to Harry. “Well, Hagrid,” she turned to look at him again, speaking once more in that loud, slow voice, “I think I’ve got enough to be getting along with. …You will receive the results of your inspection in ten days’ time.” She held up ten stubby little fingers, then, her smile wider and more toadlike than ever before beneath the green hat, she bustled from their midst, leaving Parkinson in a fit of laughter.

Draco glared at her and gave her another shove.

“What the hell was that for?” Pansy Parkinson demanded half an hour later as Draco, Blaise, and Theo made their way back up to the castle through the channels they made earlier in the snow.

“You were being an idiot, again,” Draco said shortly. “Why the hell are you even talking to me? Sod off, Pansy.”
“Draco! What is wrong with you?” Parkinson demanded. “That was… the best class yet! Umbridge got that oaf good and you didn’t even laugh.”

“That’s because Draco, unlike you, has a heart,” Blaise said. “You probably have a hole that’s as cold and dusty as your other one.”

“Agh!” Parkinson said, giving Blaise Zabini a sharp glare. “How dare—Draco!” she shrieked. “Ever since you’ve been with that poor Weasel you’ve changed for the worst!”

“It’s called character development Pansy, you might want to try it,” Draco said in a bored fashion. “Anyway, The Weasleys have been nothing but kind to me. If I hear you bad mouth them again—”

“What? You’ll jinx me or something?” Parkinson said. “As if! I bet those Weasleys killed your parents themselves and slipped you a love potion for your money—”

“*Impedimenta!*” Draco yelled, slashing his wand at Parkinson. She froze in mid-stride and Draco glared at her, his eyes burning with anger as he took a step closer the girl. “Don’t, insult my family,” he growled at Parkinson. He pressed his wand against her robes and said, “*Serpenculus,*” he snarled.

He pocketed his wand and started to walk away from Parkinson, who fell into the snow, her robes now biting at her. When she could move again, Parkinson ran past Draco, Blaise, and Theo crying in pain.

Draco turned to Theo and said, “You can see those horses during class right?”

“Yeah…”

“Umm… can we asked, who did you see die?” Draco asked hesitantly.

“IT’s okay, I saw my Mum die,” Theo said. “When I was young.”

“Oh… sorry,” Draco apologized.

“No need…” Theo said, shaking his head. “I’ve got over it. Honestly.”

“If you’re sure,” Draco said, shrugging lightly. “Anyway, I think that lesson went horribly for Hagrid. Ron’s going to be pissed.”

“And Hermione,” Blaise said.

“What is it with you two and dating Gryffindors, anyway?” Theo asked.

“I’m not dating Hermione…well… yet,” Blaise said.

“I don’t know, just happened,” Draco shrugged again. “Anyway, let’s just go and make sure Parkinson doesn’t tattle on anyone, shall we?”

In the coming weeks Harry paid attention to the Hufflepuff Quidditch team progress. When the day of their first match with Ravenclaw arrived, Harry took out his Invisibility Cloak and walked out the Gryffindor Tower, following the crowd of Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs who made their way to the Quidditch Pitch to support their teams. Harry didn’t stay long. He kept an eye out for Cedric and smiled when he saw the handsome boy walk out of the pitch on his own two hands, waving at the crowd before getting on his broomstick. Harry watched Cedric fly around before turning away
and leaving the pitch. He started heading towards the school again before changing his mind and turning towards the forest. Sneaking past Hagrid’s hut, Harry kept to a dirt path as he walked deeper into the forest until again it was as though he was walking into twilight, the snow on the ground gone. He took off his cloak and looked around. “Repeat after me to Tom,” he said to the darkness. “‘Remember our deal.’ Say it.”

A cawing chorus met his command, all squawking, “Remember our deal! Remember our deal!” In almost human-like voices. Smiling to himself, Harry continued on into the forest, his eyes open for the centaurs.

They found him. Before he knew it, Harry was surrounded by a group of centaurs, the half man, half horse creatures all carrying bows, which they aimed at Harry. “What is a student doing in the forest?” one of them demanded.

“I’m Harry Potter,” Harry said, taking only a small moment to admire the naked male torsos surrounding him. “I just want to talk with you.”

“Harry Potter?” a centaur repeated. He stepped forward from the circle, revealing long black hair that fell on a very muscular torso and black-furred body. “What is Harry Potter doing in the Forest? It is not safe here.”

“I just wanted to um… see your strength again,” Harry said, licking his lips as he continued to stare at their torsos. *I wonder if I can get Tom to work out,* he thought to himself. “I was wondering if… if you would help me with something… your name is Bane, right?” Harry asked, searching the farthest corner of his mind for a name.

“It is… I’m impressed you remember,” the centaur named Bane said.

Harry nodded and looked around at the rest of the centaurs. “Of course I remember you, Bane,” he said sweetly. “You were the strongest-looking centaur I’ve met.”

The others chuckled at Harry’s compliment.

“I will not be won over by compliments, Harry Potter,” Bane said.

“I know you won’t… I’m just stating a fact,” Harry said. “It’s just… the castle is becoming rather dangerous for me… and I just want to make sure that… that I’ve have help when I need it.”

“Then why not turn to your fellow humans?” Bane demanded. “Why invade our forest?”

“Because… because I don’t know who I can trust in the castle. And the centaurs are a neutral party in this whole mess, so I thought I would try and turn to you guys. Besides… there’s… there’s something I want that I know my friends will argue against.”

“And what is it?” Bane asked.

Harry looked up at Bane, his emerald eyes meeting Bane’s dark ones. In a serious tone, Harry said, “I want to become pregnant.”

“Pregnant? You want to carry a foal?” Bane guffawed. “Harry Potter carrying young like a common mare!”

“I do! I know the spell for it, I know the ingredients I need,” Harry said. “The others think I’m being ludicrous, but I’m not. I want to be like a mare as you say, and carry a baby. Tom’s child… our child. I just need to be pregnant Bane, can you please help me?” Harry’s voice went unusually
high, almost feminine, and his eyes become doe-like as he stared at the centaur in front of him. He kept his mouth open slightly, seductively, their plumpness shined with Harry’s spit from his tongue licking.

“I see… so you want our help to gather ingredients?” Bane asked with a smirk and an obvious lustful gaze.

“That and more… if this plan is found out, they might do horrible things to the baby growing inside me… there’s a woman named Umbridge in the castle now, she might try to tear out our child,” Harry said.

“Then you require protection if it comes to it?” Bane asked.

“Yes… protection from everyone who wants to harm my child,” Harry nodded. “I’ll send them here and you guys can have your sport.”

“And if we do that, there is one thing we want from you,” Bane said.

“Name it.”

“There is an intruder in here… a thing that doesn’t belong,” Bane said. “We require you and your man to drive it out.”

“Okay… we’ll do that,” Harry nodded.

Bane smirked and turned to the other centaurs. “Brothers! Let us make Harry Potter into a mare!” There was a loud cheering and laughing among them. Harry smiled when he saw that they were all in agreement. “Harry Potter, we draw you into this pack,” Bane said, offering his hand. Harry seized it and Bane pulled Harry close. “We will make you a mare fit for the head of all centaurs! The sky above will sing of your deeds!”

“Thank you,” Harry smiled. The centaurs gave a loud whooping sound and left Harry. Smiling to himself, Harry turned and followed the path out of the forest. Once he was sure he was away from the centaurs, he started to give a low chuckle. It actually worked. Harry has the centaurs, and all it took was a little flirting and having them believe in his need to get pregnant. Granted the need exists, but not to the extreme extent that the centaurs seem to believe. Sure, he’ll take the ingredients, gladly at that, but Draco was right. They were fifteen, they had plenty of time to plan for that stuff. Yet it was always nice to be prepared, and have a head start. And after all, the centaurs, especially Bane, seem so nice to Harry, how could he refuse them?
December arrived, bringing with it more snow and a positive avalanche of homework for the fifth years. Ron and Hermione’s prefect duties also became more and more onerous as Christmas approached. They were called upon to supervise the decoration of the castle, watch over first and second years spending their break inside because of the bitter cold, and to patrol the corridors in shifts with Argus Filch, who suspected the holiday spirit might show itself in an outbreak of wizard duels. They were so busy that they did not notice Harry’s outings towards the forest. He felt a little guilty lying to both them and the centaurs, but one look at the centaurs’ naked torsos put all guilt out of his mind as he ogled them. He loved Tom with all his heart, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t just look at the centaurs’ masculine, muscular bodies. He really needed to talk to Tom about that, Harry thought to himself. The centaurs all got Harry the ingredients he required for the future, and he made his promise to look into the forest’s intruder again.

Whenever talk of Christmas started, Harry became suddenly quiet. For the first time in his school career, he very much wanted to spend the holidays away from Hogwarts. Between everything that is happening around him, he felt highly resentful toward the place at the moment. The only thing he really looked forward to were the D.A. meetings, and they would have to stop over the holidays, as nearly everybody in the D.A. would be spending the time with their families. Hermione was going skiing with her parents, something that greatly amused Ron and Draco, who had never before heard of Muggles strapping narrow strips of wood to their feet to slide down mountains. Ron and Draco, meanwhile, were going home to the Burrow. Harry endured several days of jealousy before Ron said, in response to Harry asking how Ron was going to get home for Christmas, “But you’re coming too! Didn’t I say? Mum wrote and told me to invite you ages ago!” Hermione rolled her eyes, but Harry’s spirits soared: The thought of Christmas at the burrow was truly wonderful, only slightly marred by Harry’s guilty feeling that he would not be able to spend the holiday with Sirius. He wondered whether he could possibly persuade Mrs. Weasley to invite his godfather for the festivities too.

Ron and Hermione constantly asked Harry about Tom’s plans for the holiday. “I haven’t seen his name on the list of the students staying home,” Hermione said. “Is he going to his parents?”

“I… yeah, he is,” Harry lied. Tom never told him what he was going to do over the holidays. He had been rather secretively lately, something that made Harry’s stomach crawl slightly.

Harry arrived early in the Room of Requirement for the last D.A. meeting before the holidays only to see Tom was already there. “Harry, I didn’t expect you to be early,” he smiled.

“Hi Tom,” Harry said, kissing him lightly. “Just wanted to be here,” he shrugged.

Tom chuckled and warped an arm around Harry’s waist. “So,” he said. “Today is the last meeting before Christmas.”

“Yeah,” Harry nodded. “Oh! You’ll be glad to know that we have the centaurs.”

“We do? Excellent Harry,” Tom smiled. “I knew you could do it.”

“Yeah… you know, they have very nice torsos,” Harry said slyly. “All those muscles… they put up a really authoritarian sight.” He turned in Tom’s arm and placed a hand on Tom’s chest, tracing
along one of his nipples through his shirt. “You know? Those broad shoulders… thick
Tom chuckled, “Are you trying to tell me something, Harry?”

“Yeah, I think you would look very nice with some muscles,” Harry purred. “Nothing too
dramatic… but some definition would make you look much more commanding… My Lord,” he
whispered the final part in Tom’s ear. The Dark Lord just chuckled and tightened his hold on
Harry, bringing the younger boy into a passionate kiss.

“More commanding? Is that what you want my little prince? You want me to command your every
move?” Tom whispered.

Harry groaned and purred in Tom’s ear. “What are you doing, this holiday?”

“Planning something real special for my Prince,” Tom breathed. “Don’t worry, I’ll explain when
all is ready… I just need one more try.”

Harry was about to ask what he meant when the door opened and the D.A. members began to file
in. Harry leaned closer to Tom and asked, “When are we going to—”

“After the holidays my love,” Tom smirked. “We’ll corrupt them after the holidays.” They turned
to the crowd and Harry called out, Okay! I thought this evening we should just go over the things
we’ve done so far, because it’s the last meeting before the holidays, and there’s no point starting
anything new right before a three-week break—”

“We’re not doing anything new?” Zacharias Smith said in a disgruntled whisper loud enough to
carry through the room. “If I’d knew that, I wouldn’t have come…”

“Then please, you can leave right after you perform all the spells we’ve taught you perfectly right
now,” Tom said. “No? Are you sure? Very well then. We will practice in pairs. Starting with the
Impediment Jinx, then moving onto Stunning.”

They all divided up obediently; Harry partnered Neville as usual. The room was soon full of
intermittent cries of “Impedimenta!” People froze for a minute or so, during which their partner
would stare aimlessly around the room watching other pairs at work, then would unfreeze and take
their turn at the jinx.

Neville had improved beyond all recognition. After a while, when Harry had unfrozen three times
in a row, he had Neville join Ron and Hermione so he could join Tom walking around the room
and watch the others. As they did so, Harry noticed that Tom walked with a small limp, “What
happened?” he whispered.

“Regret,” Tom said. “It is a painful emotion. I will be okay.” Harry nodded and the two continued
to walk around.

After ten minutes on the Impediment Jinx, they laid out cushions all over the floor and started
practicing Stunning again. Space was really too confined to allow them all to work this spell at
once; half the group observed the others for a while, then swapped over. Harry couldn’t help but
feel a swell of pride as he watched them all. Tom wrapped an arm around Harry’s waist again and
said, “Look at how far they’ve come, all because of you, my love.”

“No, because of us,” Harry said. “We taught them. I just gathered them here in the first place.”

Tom smiled and said, “Fine, because of us. …”
At the end of an hour, Harry called a halt.

“You’re getting really good.” he said, beaming around at them. “When we get back from the break, we can start doing some of the big stuff—maybe even Patronuses.”

There was a murmur of excitement. The room began to clear in the usual twos and threes; most people wished Harry a Happy Christmas as they went. Feeling cheerful, he collected up the cushions with Ron and Hermione and Draco and stacked them neatly away. Tom pulled Harry towards him for a second and said, “If I don’t see you for a while” before kissing Harry very passionately. “You have done brilliant Harry,” he whispered. “Relax during this break, you deserve it.”

“Yes my lord,” Harry smiled, his mind feeling fuzzy from the kiss. Tom kissed him again and left, waving goodbye behind him.

Tom smirked to himself as he turned into a random corridor and walked down. Just one more try before he is forced to use other methods. But, before that, he decided he’ll spread his Christmas cheer to a very special man. Walking into darkness, Tom quickly found himself in the office of Albus Dumbledore. He looked around the office and noticed all the portraits of the former headmasters, sleeping in their portraits. “I must admit Dumbledore, that I am surprise,” he said aloud. “You have the resources, and yet you have done nothing to stop me.” He turned towards the headmaster desk where Dumbledore was sitting, looking stone-faced and serious.

“I knew that you would come here Tom,” Dumbledore said. “You should never have come back to Hogwarts.”

“But Hogwarts is my home, Dumbledore,” Tom smirked. “After all… this is where everything I hold dear is. I am surprise that you have done nothing to intervene yet, even after I’ve provided myself most… vulnerable.”

“I will not play your games, Tom,” Dumbledore said.

“But you are, and you know it,” Tom smirked. “You know how powerless you are here… For here is Lord Voldemort standing in front of you, living in your castle, and you can do nothing. Because to everyone else; to your staff, your students, and fellow members of the Order, I am not the Dark Lord. No, I am simply Thomas Edward Riddle: A muggleborn whom Harry Potter fell in love with… and soon marry.” Tom smiled.

“You may have fooled Harry for now Tom, but once he figure out who you truly are—”

“Then there is nothing you can do,” Tom said. “I can see it in your eyes Dumbledore, your emotions betray you. You’re worried about Harry, about the Weasleys and Granger… and all of the members of the D.A. Of course, you know about it, I was hoping for that.”

“You will leave those children alone Tom,” Dumbledore said.

“Alone? So, they can fend for themselves against Umbridge and the Ministry? Oh no Dumbledore, I would never do that,” Tom smirked. “Besides… I believe you might have a misunderstanding…”

“And what misunderstanding is this?”

“Why, Professor Dumbledore, your misunderstanding is with me,” Tom smiled. “For the Voldemort you believe to be talking to, why I’m afraid that he is quite dead. Killed by myself and
my dear lover Harry.”

“What are you saying?” Dumbledore demanded, but Tom continued on as if he didn’t hear him.

“Ahh, you should listen to my lovely Harry’s desires… he wishes to grow a womb inside of him, so we can have a child, a sweet, lovely child that will be completely ours,” Tom smiled. “I must admit, the vision of Harry being filled with my seed, seeing his stomach bulge as my child takes place there… it truly is an erotic, pleasurable scene that I cannot wait to make real, however there are some people whom I am sure will be angry at the sight of their hero pregnant with the Dark Lord’s seed. But I am sure Mrs. Weasley will calm down when I marry Harry… she really is such a vicious woman when she needs to be,” Tom chuckled lightly.

“You will not—”

“I will not harm anyone Dumbledore,” Tom said. “Like I said, the Voldemort in your mind is dead. I have been with Harry for such a long time.”

“Explain!”

Tom chuckled darkly. “Since you ask so well, I will tell you the information you need to know; a talent that you seem to lack, Dumbledore. I’ve been with sweet Harry since he was twelve years old. Surely you remember the diary? The one that possessed Ginny Weasley? The one that sweet Harry told you he destroyed?”

Realization came to Dumbledore’s eyes as they widened. “You—”

“—Are from the diary? Yes,” Tom said. “Harry has been working with me since he was twelve years old. He had worked tirelessly to revive me to my former glory, and now here I stand.” Tom smirked victoriously at Dumbledore. “And here you can do nothing to stop me, for who will believe you? You are a man alone, isolated from everyone for knowing a truth they will not even have the chance to partake in. Even your faithful bat Snape is oblivious to the truth.”

“And yet here you are telling me everything,” Dumbledore said, folding his hands on his desk. “Why?”

“Simple Dumbledore,” Tom said. “For even if by a miracle you remember this, nobody will believe you.”

Dumbledore gave Tom a sharp look. “You plan to oblivate my memories,” he said. “You cannot win Tom. You will not win. I have complete faith in Harry. He will pick the right decision in the end, and save this Dark Prince of yours from your influence.”

“The Dark Prince? He will always be under my influence, as well as Harry,” Tom said. “Both boys know the truth, they know what they must do to further the future, and they know who will lead them. You have lost Dumbledore, and there is nothing you can do.”

“Do not say nothing Tom,” Dumbledore said. “Opportunities and miracles occur at truly remarkable places.”

“Funny words from a man thought mad,” Tom said.

“Perhaps, but you must admit there is a certain appeal to madness,” Dumbledore said with a small twinkle in his eye. “It can lead to unpredictability.”

“And you believe that is what you are, Dumbledore? Unpredictable?”
“On the contrary, I am a very predictable and habitually man,” Dumbledore said. “It is the young who are unpredictable.”

Tom’s expression turned stern. “You will get those thoughts out of your head, Dumbledore,” he said. “Harry and the Dark Prince will not even think of betraying me. I’ve raised them to be obedient.”

“I’ve said nothing of that fact, Tom, it is you who have brought the possibility into the world,” Dumbledore chuckled.

“Harry Potter and the Dark Prince are two of the most loyal servants I have ever had,” Tom said. “They will never do any action that will harm me.”

“And what of your followers?” Dumbledore asked. “Corbin Yaxley? Lucius Malfoy?”

“Both murdered on my orders,” Tom said. “For betraying my new ideals.”

“And what are these ideals?”

“The liberation of the Dark Arts,” Tom said. “I will teach everyone what it means to hold true power; power that people like you coward behind, Dumbledore. In order to do that, I have enlisted my sweet young Harry’s help. Before he becomes the bearer of my children… he will be the bearer of our new future. Of course, sacrifices have to be made, but then again… what future came without sacrifices?”

“So you would kill your own people in order for this future?”

“Dumbledore, Dumbledore,” Tom chuckled. “Again you are thinking of the wrong me!” Tom looked at Dumbledore, his eyes shifting from it’s handsome, mysterious dark color to a bright red, his skin paling as a sharp, sinister smile etched itself on his face. “I am willing to kill everyone for Harry’s future,” he said, his voice cold and high. “You… my followers… even yours. In fact tonight one of your followers will get a taste of what I have in store for those who oppose me. But don’t worry, he’s not poisonous…”

“What do you plan to do?” Dumbledore demanded, getting to his feet. Voldemort swiped his hand and the old man was forced back into his chair, invisible tethers locking him to it.

“Like I said, my new snake isn’t poisonous… he won’t die, but he will hurt,” Voldemort crackled. He closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. “After midnight… it’s happening now, I can see it. My dear new pet striking the fool in the corridor, you know the one. The snake is relentless in his assault, biting the redhead countlessly, there’s blood, lots of it, but he is not poisoned.”

“You will stop this at once!” Dumbledore yelled. “Stop the attack immediately!”

“Why? Like I said, Mr. Weasley isn’t going to die,” Voldemort said. “I would never kill my faithful follower’s father surrogate.”

Dumbledore struggled against the invisible holds that bind him. “Tom, if you care for your follower, you will let me go; you will stop this attack this instant!”

Tom took slow, measured steps towards Dumbledore, his hand pulling his wand out slowly. “Harry saw the attack,” he whispered. “He will be here soon enough and you and your people will save him. …You will soon learn that I am a merciful Lord, Dumbledore. And, in the end, that you were wrong.”
He pointed his wand at Dumbledore and smiled, his features returning to his normal self, “I can love Dumbledore,” he said. “And with this love, I am now more powerful than ever before. *Obliviate!*

A flash of green light overtook Dumbledore and he slumped into his chair. Tom pocketed his wand and looked at the man annoyed, “Damn Occlumency,” he said. He looked around and pursed his lips. Talking to himself, he said, “He’ll forget most of what we’ve talked about… I believe, but just in case…” He moved quickly towards a nearby cabinet and opened it, seeing the Pensieve in the same place where Dumbledore stored it last year. He stuck his wand into it and whispered a few words. The cloudy water-like substance glowed a disgusting orange before returning to its original form. Then, just as the door to the office began to open, Tom retreated into the shadows.

“Professor Dumbledore,” Professor McGonagall said as she, Harry, and Ron entered, “Potter has had a… well, a nightmare. He says…”

“It wasn’t a nightmare,” Harry said quickly.

Professor McGonagall looked around at Harry, frowning slightly. “Very well, then, Potter, you tell the headmaster about it.”

“I… well, I was asleep. …” Harry said and even in his terror and his desperation to make Dumbledore understand he felt slightly irritated that the headmaster was not looking at him, but examining his own interlocked fingers. “But it wasn’t an ordinary dream …it was real I saw it happen…” He took a breath, “Ron’s dad—Mr. Weasley—has been attacked by a giant snake.”

There was a pause in which Dumbledore leaned back and stared meditatively at the ceiling. Ron looked from Harry to Dumbledore, white-faced and shocked.

“How did you see this?” Dumbledore asked quietly, still not looking at Harry.

“Well… it was like I was the snake, Professor,” Harry said. “I saw it all from the snake’s point of view.”

Nobody else spoke for a moment, than Dumbledore, now looking at Ron, who was still whey-faced, said in a new and sharper voice, “Is Arthur seriously injured?”

“Yes,” Harry said emphatically—why were they all so slow on the uptake, did they not realize how much a person bled when fangs that long pierced their side? And why could Dumbledore not do him the courtesy of looking at him? An anger boiled inside Harry, both at Dumbledore and Tom.

But Dumbledore stood up quickly and addressed one of the old portraits hanging very near the ceiling. “Everard?” he said sharply. “And you too, Dilys!”

A shallow-faced wizard with short, black bangs and an elderly witch with long silver ringlets in the frame beside him, both of whom seemed to have been in the deepest of sleeps, opened their eyes immediately.

“You were listening?” Dumbledore said.

The wizard nodded, the witch said, “Naturally.”

“The man has red hair and glasses,” Dumbledore said. “Everard, you will need to raise the alarm,
make sure he is found by the right people—"

Both nodded and moved sideways out of their frames, but instead of emerging in neighboring pictures, neither one reappeared, leaving empty frames. Dumbledore walked over to towards his phoenix Fawkes and began stroking his plumed golden head with one finger. The phoenix awoke immediately. He stretched his beautiful head high and observed Dumbledore through bright, dark eyes. “We will need,” Dumbledore said very quietly to the bird, “a warning.”

There was a flash of fire and the phoenix had gone. He looked around at Professor McGonagall and said, “Minerva, I need you to go and wake the other Weasley children.”

“Of course…”

Professor McGonagall moved swiftly to the door, Ron jumped and turned around, “And Draco! Please…”

“Yes… yes bring Mr. Malfoy as well,” Dumbledore nodded. “He is already like a son to Arthur.”

Professor McGonagall nodded and left swiftly. A second later, the wizard called Everard had reappeared in his portrait, panting slightly. “Dumbledore!”

“What news?” Dumbledore said at once.

“I yelled until someone came running, said I’d heard something moving downstairs—they weren’t sure whether to believe me but when down to check—you know there are no portraits down there to watch from. Anyway, they carried him up a few minutes later. He doesn’t look good, he’s covered in blood, I ran along to Elfrida Cragg’s portrait to get a good look as they left—”

“Good,” Dumbledore said as Ron made a convulsive movement. “I take it Dilys will have seen him arrive, then—”

“Yes, they’ve taken him to St. Mungo’s, Dumbledore,” the silver-ringleted witch said as she appeared again. “They carried him past under my portrait… he looks bad…."

“Thank you,” Dumbledore said. He looked at Harry and Ron and wordlessly conjured two armchairs for them to sit down in; Ron sank into his. Dumbledore pulled out an old battered black tea kettle and murmured, “Portus.”

Dumbledore marched over to another portrait, this time of a clever-looking wizard with a pointed beard, who had been painted wearing the Slytherin colors of green and silver and who apparently sleeping deeply that he did not hear Dumbledore’s voice when he attempted to rouse him.

“Phineas. Phineas. PHINEAS!”

He could not pretend to sleep anymore; he gave a theatrical jerk and said, “Did someone call?”

“I need you to visit your other portrait again, Phineas,” Dumbledore said. “I’ve got another message.”

“Visit my other portrait?” Phineas said in a reedy voice, giving a long, fake yawn. “Oh no, Dumbledore, I am too tired tonight…”

“Insubordination, sir!” roared a corpulent, red-nosed wizard, brandishing his fists. “Dereliction of duty!”

“We are honor-bound to give service to the present headmaster of Hogwarts!” cried a frail-looking
old wizard whom Harry recognized as Armando Dippet, Dumbledore’s predecessor. “Shame on you, Phineas!”

“Shall I persuade him, Dumbledore?” called a gimlet-eyed witch, raising an unusually thick wand that looked not unlike a birch rod.

“Oh very well,” Phineas said, eyeing the wand slightly apprehensively, “though he may well have destroyed my portrait along with everything else in that house!”

“Sirius knows not to destroy your portrait,” Dumbledore said. “You are to give him the message that Arthur Weasley has been gravely injured and that his wife, children, and Harry Potter will be arriving at his house shortly. Do you understand?”

“Weasley injured, wife and children and Harry Potter coming to stay,” Phineas said in a bored voice. “Yes, yes… very well…”

He sloped away into the frame of the portrait and disappeared from view at the very moment that the study door opened again. Fred, George, Ginny, and Draco were ushered inside by Professor McGonagall, all four of them looking disheveled and shocked, still in their night things.

“What is going on?” Draco demanded as he made his way towards Ron’s chair, the redhead making room for him. “Professor Snape told me to come with McGonagall, something about Mr. Weasley—”

“Mr. Weasley has been injured in the course of his work for the Order of the Phoenix,” Dumbledore said. “He has been taken to St. Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. I am sending you back to Sirius’s house, which is much more convenient for the hospital than the Burrow. You will meet your mother there.”

“How are we getting there?” Fred asked. “Floo powder?”

“No, no, too dangerous at the moment. The Floo Network is being watched. You will be taking a Portkey.” He indicated the old kettle lying innocently on his desk. “We are just waiting for Phineas to report back. …I wish to be sure that the coast is clear before sending you—”

There was a flash of fire in the very middle of the office, leaving behind a single golden feather that floated gently to the floor.

“It is Fawkes’s warning,” Dumbledore said, catching the feather as it fell. “She must know you’re out of your beds. …Minerva, go and head her off—tell her any story—”

Professor McGonagall was gone in a swish of tartan.

“He says he’ll be delighted,” said a bored voice behind Dumbledore; Phineas had reappeared in front of the Slytherin banner. My great-great-grandson has always had odd taste in houseguests…”

“Come here, then,” Dumbledore said to Harry, Draco, and the Weasleys. “And quickly before anyone else joins us…”

They gathered around Dumbledore’s desk. “You have all used a Portkey before?” Dumbledore asked, and they nodded, each reaching out to touch some part of the kettle. “Good. On the count of three then. One…two…three.”

Harry felt a very powerful jerk behind his navel, the ground vanished from beneath his feet, his hand was glued to the kettle; he was banging into the others as all sped forward in a swirl of colors
and a rush of wind, the kettle pulling them onward and then—

His feet hit the ground so hard that his knees buckled, the kettle clattered to the ground and somewhere close at hand, a voice said, “Back again, the blood traitor brats, is it true their father’s dying…?”

OUT!” roared a second voice.

Harry scrambled to his feet and looked around; they had arrived in the gloomy basement kitchen of Grimmauld Place. Sirius was hurrying toward them all, looking anxious. He was unshaven and still in his day clothes; there was also a slightly Mundungus-like wife of stale drink about him.

“What’s going on?” he said, stretching out a hand to help Ginny up. “Phineas Nigellus said Arthur’s been badly injured—”

“Ask Harry,” Fred said.

“Yeah, I want to hear this myself. The twins and Ginny were staring at him, Kreacher’s footsteps had stopped on the stairs outside. Draco pulled Ron away towards the nearest chair and they both sat down.

“Hey, hey look at me,” Draco whispered. “Look at me.” Ron’s face was still pale-looking, his eyes huge and red-looking. “It’s going to be okay, you hear me?” They listened as Harry told the story again. “Ron, Ron answer me. Talk to me now,” Draco whispered once Harry finished retelling what he saw. The best Ron could do was a small whimper. There was yelling and Draco looked around just in time to hear Fred yell, “’Course we can go to St. Mungo’s if we want, he’s out dad!”

“And what good will that do? Huh?” Draco said strictly. “How are you going to explain that we knew of Mr. Weasley’s attack before the hospital let his wife know!”

“Why does that matter?” George said hotly.

“Don’t you see Weasley? Dumbledore’s trying to draw as little attention to us as possible! He’s trying to hide the fact that Harry can have visions of things happening hundreds of miles away! Just imagine what the Ministry could do with that information.”

“We could… we could say someone else told us—”

“Before they told Mrs. Weasley?” Draco challenged. “He’s been doing work for the stupid Order—”

“We don’t care about the Order, Malfoy!” Fred shouted. “This is our dad! He’s dying!”

“At least he isn’t dead like mine!” Draco shouted back. “At least you still have a fucking dad!”

The room seemed to chill by twenty degrees as if a dementor entered. Harry looked between Draco and the twins; the two redheads’ anger disappeared immediately, replaced by an exhausted guilt. There was a long, tense moment as the three just stared at each other; Draco from his chair and the twins standing. Sirius spoke in a determined calm voice, “It know it’s hard, but we’ve all got to act as though we don’t know anything yet. We’ve got to stay put, at least until we hear from your mother, all right?”

Fred and George still looked guilty. Ginny, however, took a few steps over to the nearest chair and sank into it. The twins stared at Draco and Sirius for another minute before taking two seats on either side of Ginny.
“That’s right,” Sirius said encouragingly, “come on, let’s all… let’s all have a drink while we’re waiting. Accio Butterbeer!”

He raised his wand as he spoke and half a dozen bottles came flying toward them out of the pantry skidded along the table and stopped neatly in front of the seven of them. They all drank, and for a while the only sounds were those of the crackling of the kitchen fire and the soft thud of their bottles on the table. Harry was only drinking to have something to do with his hands. His stomach was full of horrible hot, bubbling guilt. They would not be here if it were not for him; they would all be still be asleep in bed.

*Why was he attacked? What was Tom even thinking? How could he even think of doing something so cruel as to attack Mr. Weasley? I don’t understand,* he thought to himself. *Why would he attack Mr. Weasley after spending a summer with him? After befriending his sons? A cold, hard anger began to grow in Harry. Was everything Tom told him a lie? Was every decree of love, every tender moment just a cover to mask his cruelty, his heartlessness? Could Tom be so malicious as to kill his friend’s father? Why not? After all, you did, a cold voice said in Harry’s head.*

*But that wasn’t me,* Harry thought, *it was the Horcrux inside me.*

*Still, it was your hands that created the potion and performed the Killing Curse,* the cold voice chuckled.

He put the bottle down on the table a little harder than he meant to, so that it slopped over onto the table. No one took any notice. Then a burst of fire in midair illuminated the dirty plates in front of them and as they gave cries of shock, a scroll of parchment fell with a thud onto the table, accompanied by a single golden phoenix tail feather.

“Fawkes!” Sirius said at once, snatching up the parchment. “That’s not Dumbledore’s writing—it must be a message from your mother—here—”

He thrust the letter into George’s hand, who ripped it open and read aloud, *“Dad is still alive. I am setting out for St. Mungo’s now. Stay where you are. I will send news as soon as I can. Mum.”*

George looked around the table. “Still alive…” he said slowly. “But that makes it sound…”

He did not need to finish the sentence. It sounded to Harry that Mr. Weasley was hovering somewhere between life and death. Ron gave a soft sound and buried his head into Draco’s chest, curling around him. Draco did his best to curl around Ron, placing his head on Ron’s shoulder. Fred pulled the letter from George and read it himself. He looked over at Draco and said, “I’m sorry… I shouldn’t have brought up your—”

“No,” Draco said softly. “I shouldn’t have yelled.”

If Harry had ever sat through a longer night than this one he could not remember it. Sirius suggested once that they all go to bed, but without any real conviction, and the Weasleys’ looks of disgust were answer enough. They mostly sat in silence around the table, watching the candle wick sinking lower and lower into liquid wax, now and then raising bottles to their lips, speaking only to check the time, to wonder aloud what was happening, and to reassure one another that if there were any bad news, they would have heard about it immediately.

Draco and Ron stayed in their curled mass of bodies; Fred fell into a doze, his head sagging sideways onto his shoulder. Ginny was curled like a cat on her chair, but her eyes were open; Harry could see them reflecting the firelight. And he and Sirius looked at each other every so often, intruders upon the family grief, waiting… waiting…
And then, half past five in the morning, the door swung open and Mrs. Weasley entered the kitchen. She was extremely pale, but when they all turned to look at her, Fred, Ron, and Harry half-rising from their chairs, she gave a wan smile.

“He’s going to be all right,” she said, her voice weak with tiredness. “He’s sleeping. We can all go and see him later. Bill’s sitting with him now, he’s going to take the morning off work.”

Fred fell back into his chair with his hands over his face. George and Ginny got up, walked swiftly over to their mother, and hugged her. Ron gave a very shaky laugh and, much to Harry’s surprised, hugged a crying Draco as the blond clung onto Ron’s shoulders.

“Breakfast!” Sirius said loudly and joyfully, jumping to his feet. “Where’s that accursed house-elf? Kreacher? KREACHER!”

But Kreacher didn’t answer the summons. “Of forget it, I’ll do it myself!” Sirius muttered. “So it’s breakfast for—let’s see—eight …Bacon and eggs, I think, and some tea, and toast—”

Harry hurried over to the stove to help. He did not want to intrude upon the Weasleys’ happiness, and he dreaded the moment when Mrs. Weasley would ask him to recount his vision. However, he had barely taken plates from the dresser when Mrs. Weasley lifted them out of his hands and pulled him into a hug.

“I don’t know what would have happened if it hadn’t been for you, Harry,” she said in a muffled voice. “They might not have found Arthur for hours, and then it would have been too late, but thanks to you, he’s alive and Dumbledore’s been able to think up a good cover story for Arthur being where he was, you’ve no idea what trouble he would have been in otherwise, look at poor Sturgis. . . .”

Harry could hardly stand her gratitude, but fortunately she soon released him to turn to Sirius and thank him for looking after the children through the night. Sirius said that he was very pleased to have been able to help, and hoped they would all stay with him as long as Mr. Weasley was in the hospital.

Harry walked away, past the twins who were not hugging onto the crying Draco for dear life, past Ron who had a hopeful lost stare, and past Ginny who kept staring at a spot on the table. He walked out of the room, nobody noticing him leaving, and walked silently until up the stairs until he was sure he was far away from them. He entered a room and took a deep breath. He needed to control his anger or else the others will hear his yelling, which is the last thing he wanted to happen. Turning, he locked the door behind him and looked around. It was a disheveled bedroom, two wide windows opened and letting in the morning sunrise. He moved quickly to close them and turned around to the new darkness.

In a controlled snarl, he said, “Bring me the Dark Lord. Now.”

He waited, his arms crossed, body perfectly still like a raging fire frozen in time. It took a minute before Tom appeared. “Harry—”

“You bastard,” Harry snarled. “You manipulative, evil, slimy bastard! He could have died. You almost killed him. Why? What sort of reason could inspire you to do this?”

Tom sighed, “Harry,” he began in a soothing voice, “My sweet—”

“Don’t call me that! Tell me now why I shouldn’t hurt you the way you’ve hurt the Weasley family!”
“He was never in any harm,” Tom said. “The snake is not poisonous, the worst he can do is cause bleeding, which it did. There is no poison, Mr. Weasley was never in any harm. I knew that you would see it, run to warn Dumbledore about it, and securing Mr. Weasley’s safety. He was never in any real harm, this was all about sending a message to Dumbledore—”

“A MESSAGE TO DUMBLEDORE!” Harry roared. “Are you kidding me! Tom! Listen to yourself! This! Is! Not! Right! This is not how I wanted to do things!”

“Then tell me how you would do otherwise?” Tom asked. “How would you stop Dumbledore from guarding the Department of Mysteries?”

“The Department of—What are you hiding from me now?” Harry stressed. “You are being worse than Dumbledore now hiding things from me.”

Tom’s eyes narrowed and said, “I am not!”

“Then tell me! Tell me why you’ve attempted to kill Mr. Weasley! Why this Department of Mysteries is so damn important! What are you planning Tom?” Harry demanded, his voice growing loud.

Tom glared at Harry. “How dare you talk to your Lord like that—”

“How dare you hide from your Prince like that!” Harry interrupted. “I will go out there right now, tell Sirius and Mrs. Weasley and Dumbledore the truth if you don’t tell me right now why I shouldn’t. Tell me right now why you attacked Mr. Weasley.”

“You will do no such—”

“Yes I will and you cannot stop me!” Harry yelled. “Ever since you’ve came back you did nothing but hide things from me! No more hiding Tom! If you want this to continue, if you want us to continue. Tell me everything. Now.”

Harry stood his ground as Tom stared at him, their glares meeting. Finally, Tom looked away.

“Fine, but at least come here so I can—”

“No, I can hear you just fine from here,” Harry said.

Tom gave him a short glare but nodded. “There’s a thing in the Department of Mysteries, a prophecy that involves you and me. I intended to get it before Dumbledore and his Order. I’ve tried multiple times but failed. Tonight Mr. Weasley just had the inconvenience to be stationed to guard the door to the Department of Mysteries tonight. The snake is mostly harmless, despite the amount of blood it spilled. It is not poisonous like Nagini, but twice as long. Angry at Dumbledore’s interference I’ve had the snake attack Mr. Weasley while I talked to him in his office. The old man needed to know that he is not untouchable. That was the message. I can get him and his supporters anywhere at any time. I was not going to kill Mr. Weasley, no I would never do that.”

“You just needed to send Dumbledore a message,” Harry said slowly.

“Exactly.”

“That is…” Harry sighed. “I should hate you, I really should…” He looked to glare at Tom. “I don’t want to hear from you Tom for the entire break.”

“I was doing what was best for our goals, our fight—”
“Putting our friends through that was not best for our goals, Riddle,” Harry said. “You were just doing what the husk would do. And that is inexcusable.”

“Harry! I am not like the husk!”

“Right now you are Tom,” Harry said. “You are exactly like the husk. This is something he would do.” Tom looked he was about to argue but Harry shook his head. “No, don’t talk,” he said. “Just… just go. I’ll see you back at Hogwarts.”

“Harry… Harry, I love you,” Tom said.

“I know, now leave me alone. Let me think.”
Chapter XVII

Harry was still in an awful mood when he and the Weasleys got to St. Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries escorted by Mad-Eye Moody and Tonks. While everyone else was in a celebratory mood, Harry couldn’t get his mind off of Tom, and a horrible feeling of anger and guilt that he felt because of him.

Mrs. Weasley went up to a bored-looking blonde witch sitting behind a counter and said, “Hello, my husband, Arthur Weasley, was supposed to be moved to a different ward this morning, could you tell us—?”

“Arthur Weasley?” the witch said, running her finger down a long list in front of her. “Yes, first floor, second door on the right, Dai Llewellyn ward.”

“Thank you,” Mrs. Weasley said. “Come on, you lot.”

They followed through the double doors and along the narrow corridor beyond, which was lined with more portraits of famous Healers and lit by crystal bubbles full of candles that floated up on the ceiling, looking like giant soapsuds. They climbed a flight of stairs and entered the “ Creature-Induced Injuries” corridor, where the second door on the right bore the words “DANGEROUS” DAI LLEWELLYN WARD: SERIOUS BITES.

“We’ll wait outside, Molly,” Tonks said. “Arthur won’t want too many visitors at once. …It ought to just be the family first.”

Mad-Eye growled his approval of this idea and set himself with his back against the corridor wall, his magical eye spinning in all directions. Harry drew back too, but Mrs. Weasley reached out a hand and pushed him through the door, saying, “Don’t be silly, Harry, Arthur wants to thank you…”

The ward was small and rather dingy as the only window was narrow and set high in the wall facing the door. Most of the light came from more shining crystal bubbles clustering in the middle of the ceiling. The walls were of paneled oak and there was a portrait of a rather vicious-looking wizard on the wall, captioned URQUHAT RACKHARROW, 1612-1697, INVENTOR OF THE ENTRAIL-EXPELLING CURSE.

There were only three patients. Mr. Weasley was occupying the bed at the far end of the ward beside the tiny window. Harry was pleased and relieved to see that he was propped up on several pillows and reading the Daily Prophet by the solitary ray of sunlight falling onto his bed. He looked around as they walked toward him and, seeing whom it was, beamed.

“How are you, Arthur?” Mrs. Weasley asked, bending down to kiss his cheek and looking anxiously into his face. “You’re still looking a bit peaky…”

“I feel absolutely fine,” Mr. Weasley said brightly, holding out his good arm to give Ginny a hug. “If they could only take the bandages off, I’d be fit to go home.”

“Why can’t they take them off, Dad?” Fred asked.
“Well, I start bleeding like mad every time they try,” Mr. Weasley said cheerfully, reaching across for his wand, which lay on his bedside cabinet, and waving it so that seven extra chairs appeared at his bedside to seat them all. Harry sat down and looked around. His eyes narrowed when he saw that, under Mr. Weasley’s bed, were several pairs of red beady eyes. *Shoo,* he thought angrily. *Go away.*

He kept staring at the red beady eyes and grimaced at them, especially when he realized that one of them was holding a flesh-colored string. He felt a great rush of annoyance as he continued to stare at the birds. *I thought I told him to leave me alone,* he thought to himself. *I suppose he could just be checking on Mr. Weasley, but still… I told him to leave us alone.* Harry stared at the birds for the entire visit. He barely noticed when Mrs. Weasley dismissed them and Ron stood up awkwardly, asking if he could tell them something important. The two nodded and the rest left while Ron stood next to Mr. Weasley’s bed.

“I um… I’m planning on… I want to marry Draco,” Ron blurted out. “Not now obviously!” he said quickly looking at Mrs. Weasley’s shocked face. “I just… after Dad’s scare…”

“Well, I’m not going away anytime soon,” Mr. Weasley said. “And, well to be honest, a marriage proposal so young—”

“I’m not saying that I want the wedding this summer or anything,” Ron said. “I just… I just want to tell you two that… I want to marry Draco, and I’m asking for your umm permission.”

Ron’s face was blushed red. He started shuffling on his feet.

“Well… despite our relationship with his father,” Mr. Weasley began, “I have to say that Draco is a polite boy.”

“And he gets along with the others very quickly,” Mrs. Weasley said.

“That’s true,” Mr. Weasley nodded. “But you promise us that you two will not get married until at least after graduation?” he turned to Ron.

“Yeah, of course,” Ron nodded.

“Then I’m okay with it,” Mr. Weasley said.

Mrs. Weasley nodded and said, “I’m okay with it as well… just promise not to even think of proposing until both of you are of age.”

“Yeah… thank you,” Ron smiled. He hugged them both and Mrs. Weasley shoo’ed him away, saying that Tonks and Mad-Eye still needs to see Mr. Weasley.

When he got out of the room, Ron went straight to Draco and hugged him as Mad-Eye and Tonks went in. “What’s that about?” Draco asked as Fred and George pulled out two flesh-colored string.

“Oh nothing, just something really good,” Ron smiled before kissing Draco fully.

“Shh! We can’t hear them,” Fred said turning to the couple. He gave one to Harry, who stuck it in his ear.

“…they searched the whole area but they couldn’t find the snake anywhere, it just seems to have vanished after it attacked you, Arthur, …But You-Know-Who can’t have expected a snake to get in, can he?”

“I reckon he sent it as a lookout,” Moody growled, “cause he’s not had any luck so far, has he?
No, I reckon he’s trying to get a clearer picture of what he’s facing and if Arthur hadn’t been there the beast would’ve had much more time to look around. So Potter says he saw it happened?”

“Yes,” Mrs. Weasley said. She sounded very uneasy. “You know, Dumbledore seems almost to have been waiting for Harry to see something like this. …”

“Yeah well,” Moody said, “there’s something funny about that Potter kid, we all know that.”

“Dumbledore seemed worried about Harry when I spoke to him this morning,” Mrs. Weasley whispered.

“Course he’s worried,” Moody growled. “The boy’s seeing things from inside You-Know-Who’s snake. …Obviously, Potter doesn’t realize what this means, but if You-Know-Who’s possessing him—”

Harry pulled the Extendable Ear out of his own, his heart hammering very fast and heat rushing up his face. He looked around at the others. They were all staring at him, the strings still trailing from their ears, looking suddenly fearful.

He didn’t talk as they made their journey back to Grimmauld Place. He was pale, his eyes shifting to the others around him. As soon as they made it back to Number 12 Grimmauld Place, Harry hurried away towards a faraway room. He knew that he told Tom to stay away from him, but he couldn’t keep his threat. He was angry, pissed, and scared. And only Tom could make him feel better.

Following the crows, he arrived at a manor that was only half-way built. It was tall and wide and beautiful. The first two floors were fully built, the exterior walls reminding Harry of an old manor while hints of a third floor showed. Construction equipment, materials, and trucks were scattered along the vast overgrown lawn which was covered in a foot of snow. Harry ran to the manor and, without knocking, barged through the set of large wooden oak doors. “TOM!” he screamed.

He heard footsteps and soon saw Tom walking into the empty foyer. “Harry, what are you doing here?”

“I need… I need to talk to you,” Harry sighed. Tom nodded. “Can I hold your hand?” he asked Harry.

“Yeah… though I’m still angry at you,” Harry said.

“Understandable,” Tom said. He stepped forward and took Harry’s hand gently. “The drawing room is furnished, we’ll go there,” he said. Harry nodded and allowed Tom to lead him out of the foyer.

The drawing room was spacious and had a nice dark wood panel floor covered in the center by a massive rug. The walls were decorated with bookshelves and empty shelves, all mostly empty except for a few dark tomes. The wallpaper was a dark blood-red with golden stripes making designs. There were a few ornate armchairs and a long sofa, all of which were pointed towards a large marble fireplace which had a silver tin on the mantle as well as a rather large clock. Between the armchairs and on either side of the sofa were small wooden end tables that matched the wooden floor. On top of one was an open book.

They moved to a sofa and Harry sighed as he looked up at the ceiling, seeing a chandelier in the middle of it. “So, Harry… what happened?” Tom asked.

“They know,” Harry said. “Or at least they suspect… that there’s a connection between me and
you. Because of our Horcrux.” He took a breath and explained the hospital visit to Tom, including what he and the others overheard through the Extendable Ears. When he was done, he looked at Tom and asked, “What now? They all probably think that you’re possessing me or something.”

“But I’ve already done that,” Tom chuckled. ” Harry gave him a sharp look and Tom frowned. “Okay then… the serious answer is that I would not be worried. The others can be convinced easily enough. If they see you worried then they will also worry, if not avoid you. You are not the weapon I am looking for Harry, the prophecy is. As for Mr. Weasley… I am glad that he is recovering.”

“Yeah I saw those crows under his bed,” Harry said hotly. “What were you doing—are you spying on me?”

“Never,” Tom said. “You told me to leave you alone and I did so. Those crows were there ever since Mr. Weasley was sent to his new ward. I was monitoring his recovery. I have told you Harry, our new snake’s bites are not poisonous like Nagini’s. Instead, his wounds just take a rather longer time than usual to heal, but heal it shall. He will be back to his old self by Christmas.”

“You’re positive?” Harry asked.

“Yes, I am,” Tom said. “After my rightly deserved yelling, I’ve been doing some thinking. That is what I was doing when you came. And I’ve come to a decision.”

“Which is?”

“One that I should have come to a long time ago,” Tom said. “I will never lie to you, or hide things from you ever again. My plans and thoughts are now an open book only for you. That said, if you have time, I would like to tell you my next plan.”

“Okay…” Harry breathed. “What is it?”

“We need to start our revolution from scratch,” Tom said. “Our friends in the D.A. are just the beginning, however we also have our other allies to think of as well. Mainly the werewolves, the giants… and my followers still in Azkaban. I need them momentarily, but even so there is someone whom the Husk has gained that I do not wish to let see the light of day.”

“Who?” Harry asked.

“Bellatrix Lestrange,” Tom said. “She is too dangerous for our goals. She has the potential to ruin everything. Which is why she needs to die.”

“You plan to kill one of your followers in Azkaban?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Tom nodded. “This is a task I would impose on someone else usually, but you are the only one I trust, and I will not send you out to kill until you tell me that you are ready.”

Harry turned to look at the fireplace. “She’s the person who tortured Neville’s parents to insanity,” he said.

“That is correct,” Tom nodded. “She has no children, if that helps with your decision-making. She is insane, dangerous, and practically murderous at every instant she gets. She is more akin to a ravenous bear to a human being.”

Harry sighed and closed his eyes. “I’m the Dark Prince,” he said. “I’m supposed to be the Prince of the Dark Arts… yet I can’t really be that if I don’t actually use them, all of them, consciously.”
“If it helps, I am not planning to do the assassination until we are back at Hogwarts,” Tom said. “That way, there can be no suspicion on us.”

Harry nodded and said, “Yeah… yeah that helps. I’ll think about it.”

“Good… and, though I might be being selfish here, while you are thinking, can you think about the possibility of forgiving me?” Tom asked. Harry looked at him and saw, for the first time in his life, Tom Riddle looking sheepish.

The sight melt his heart. He stood up and quickly joined Tom’s side of the sofa. “Of course,” he said. “You’re my husband, right Mr. Riddle? Of course I’ll forgive you.”

“Thank you,” Tom said. “It was stupid of me to have the snake attack Mr. Weasley in the first place.”

“Yes, it was,” Harry mused. “But that is in the past. As long as we know now that—”

“We’re only killing our enemies,” Tom finished.

“Our enemies who have no children,” Harry corrected.

“Of course,” Tom said. “But we shouldn’t talk about that now, we can worry about it later. We have other things to worry about.”

“Like?”

“Umbridge,” Tom shrugged. “She was not happy when she saw you and the Weasleys were gone this morning.”

“And Draco—”

“He’s practically a Weasley now,” Tom said, waving his hand. “Umbridge, anyway, was livid this morning that you disappeared under her nose. Especially when she learned that Dumbledore gave you all permission to leave to St. Mungo’s. She even had the gall to question me on the way to the Hogwarts Express!”

“What did she ask?” Harry asked.

“Mainly about where you are,” Tom said. “But she’s not a threat.”

“She isn’t?” Harry asked, confused.

“No, not as much as Dumbledore is at the moment,” Tom said. “She is just a nuisance for now.”

“I guess compared to Dumbledore, yeah,” Harry sighed. “But still those quills of her…”

“We’ll take care of her soon enough, don’t you worry,” Tom said. He looked a bit apprehensive and asked, “Can I kiss you?”

“Uhh… I’m still a bit angry at you Tom, but yeah,” Harry nodded. Tom leaned forward and kissed Harry gently, soothing Harry’s worries away as the small boy moved onto Tom’s lap automatically. “Is this where you’ll be?” Harry whispered.

“Yes,” Tom said. “All break I’ll be here… if you ever need me.”

Harry smiled softly. He looked around and asked, “This is Riddle Manor?”
“Yes, well this is the property for Riddle Manor,” Tom chuckled. “The old manor was destroyed, I’ve had the house teared down, even the foundation was destroyed, and in its wake our new home is being built.”

Harry nodded and looked around, “I like it,” he said. “Big, a bit too big, but we’ll fill it up over time.”

“Yes we will,” Tom promised, his hand going to lie on Harry’s flat stomach. “Once everything is over, once we have won, I promise you Harry on that day we will celebrate until you are pregnant thrice over.”

Harry smiled with a blush. “I’ll like that,” he said softly, imagining his body cum-covered, his hole filled deeply with Tom’s cum as he impregnated Harry’s womb. “Wait a minute… does this mean that that place is here also?” he asked. “The place where you hid this?” Harry indicated to his ring.

Tom nodded. “Gaunt House,” he said. “A sad excuse of a hovel for the descendants of Slytherin. When I have time and money I will have to buy that disgusting hut and tear it down. This will be the manor that lives up to Slytherin’s greatness!” He indicated broadly to the manor they were currently sitting in.

Harry hummed in agreement and rested his head against Tom’s chest. He gave a small, sad chuckle and said, “I can’t even be mad at you properly. I’ve told you to leave me alone a few hours ago and look at us…”

Tom sighed and wrapped his arms around Harry. “We needed that, Harry,” Tom said. “But don’t worry, I’m sure there will be times where we argue, it’s inevitable. If we didn’t, I would say there’s something wrong with us. I mean look at Ron and Draco, those two practically argue every day.”

“Yeah, they do,” Harry said with a soft chuckle. “But I don’t want to be mad at you Tom.”

“Believe me, I don’t want you mad at me either,” Tom said. “Come on, I’m sure Mrs. Weasley is worried about you.”

“Don’t wanna leave,” Harry muttered.

Tom chuckled. “Go on my little prince, we will have time together later my love. Go now…”

Harry nodded and kissed Tom once more before slipping off of his lap. “I’ll think about it… Azkaban,” he said.

Tom smiled and nodded. Harry turned and walked out of the drawing room, immediately seeing a couple of crows and followed them back to Grimmauld Place. He arrived at the room he left from, and heard Mrs. Weasley’s voice calling for dinner. He went down, but stayed silent as he felt everyone’s eyes on him. He did his best to ignore them and after dinner he went straight into his room to sleep.

Everyone else spent the next morning putting up Christmas decorations. Harry could not remember Sirius ever being in such a good mood; he was actually singing carols, apparently delighted that he was going to have company over Christmas. Harry could hear his voice echoing up through the floor in the cold and empty drawing room where he was sitting alone, watching the sky outside the windows growing whiter, threatening snow, all the time feeling a savage pressure that he was giving the others the opportunity to keep talking about him, as they were bound to be doing.

He didn’t move or talk when he noticed Draco walking into the room with an annoyed snarl on his face. “Ok Potter, get up,” he said. “Mrs. Weasley sent me to get your useless ass for dinner so let’s
Harry just turned to stare at Draco. Draco huffed and walked up to Harry. “I am not above the muggle method, Potter,” he said clearly annoyed. “You have been sulking all day up here, and that will stop now. So let’s go—no one thinks you’re crazy!” He grabbed Harry’s arm and pulled, Harry stood up and turned to Draco.

“Tom—he gave me another assignment,” Harry said.

“So? What does that have to do with eating dinner?” Draco said. “Come on, let’s get going before Granger comes up and fetches you—oh yeah, Granger’s here. Apparently she’s awful at this thing called ‘skiing’ though don’t tell Ron.”

“He wants me to kill someone,” Harry blurted out. Draco stopped midsentence and turned to Harry. “He wants me to kill someone,” Harry repeated again. “And… and he was the one who sent the snake…”

“I—I…I knew…about the snake,” Draco said slowly, his voice soft. His eyes darted around, “Who… does he want you to kill?”

“Bellatrix Lestrange,” Harry said.

“Oh…” Draco frowned.

“You know her?” Harry asked.

“Yeah, she’s my aunt,” Draco said. “My mother’s sister.”

“Oh… umm—”

“We weren’t close,” Draco said. “I only saw my Aunt a handful of times, and they were all after her arrest. Most of what I know about her is from stuff my parents told me.”

“Well… Tom told me either I kill her, or he does,” Harry said softly. “I don’t… I think I need to be the one to do it. After all, I’m the Dark Prince. I shouldn’t be scared to use the Unforgivable Curses, right?”

“I guess so but this is killing,” Draco said.

“I’ve killed before,” Harry said darkly. “I’ve killed Quirrell, the Basilisk… your parents… I can do this.”

Draco frowned and sighed. “Perfect way to ruin the Christmas spirit—when did he tell you to off my aunt?”

“Umm… he wasn’t planning to do it till after the new year when we’re back at school,” Harry said.

“Good. Then forget about it and get your ass downstairs now,” Draco said. He grabbed Harry’s arm and pulled him out of the room. “What you’re moping about is a later problem. Right now, focus on now problems.”

“Like what?” Harry said, trying to keep up with Draco’s quick strides.

“Like surviving Christmas here for instance,” Draco said. “As well as trying to figure out how to relax for a bloody change! Don’t think I don’t see you always worrying or moping around like a
common teenage girl! You’re better than that.”

They went down the stairs as Draco continued to berate Harry. The others did not bat an eye as Draco forced Harry into a seat and took his own next to Ron. Harry looked at them all and saw that Draco was right; Hermione was here. “Voldemort is not possessing me,” he said. You don’t need to worry. I don’t have blanks in my memories, and I never felt weird.”

The others looked at Harry for a moment. Harry looked down and began eating his dinner. Taking their cue from Harry, the others shrugged, believing him, and began to eat. Harry sighed. He felt lighter, now that everyone knows that he wasn’t being possessed by his boyfriend. He found that he was rather looking forward to Christmas, that he was filled with so much happiness and relief that he felt like joining Sirius as he began his walk towards Buckbeak’s room, singing “God Rest Ye Merry, Hippogriffs” at the top of his voice.

But he didn’t. Instead Harry just relaxed, and mentally prepared himself to his first holiday or just relaxation for the first time in a long while.

Harry woke up to Christmas morning to see a large pile of presents at the end of his bed. Draco and Ron were already opening their presents. “Good haul this year,” Ron informed Harry through a cloud of paper. “Thanks for the Broom Compass, it’s excellent, beats Hermione’s—she’s got me a homework planner—”

“As if that’ll work,” Draco said. “If I can’t get you to keep on track of your work, there’s no way a planner will.”

Harry sorted through his presents and found one with Hermione’s handwriting on it. She had given him too a book that resembled a diary, except that it said things like “Do it today or later you’ll pay!” everything he opened a page.

Sirius and Lupin had given Harry a set of excellent books entitled Practical Defensive Magic and Its Use Against the Dark Arts, which had superb, moving color illustrations of all the counterjinxes and hexes it described. Harry flicked through the first volume eagerly. Hagrid had sent a furry brown wallet that had fangs, which were presumably supposed to be an antitheft device, but unfortunately prevented Harry putting any money in without getting his fingers ripped off. Tonk’s present was a small, working model of a Firebolt, which Harry watched fly around the room. Ron and Draco had given him an enormous box of Every-Flavor Beans; Mr. and Mrs. Weasley the usual hand-knitted jumper and some mince pies; Dobby, a truly dreadful painting that Harry suspected had been done by the elf himself. And lastly Tom’s present had a small note which said “Open the smaller box inside alone.” Confused, Harry opened to see a replica small crown that made Harry laugh and a smaller wrapped box that said, “For my Prince.”

Harry placed Tom’s crown aside when, with a loud crack, Fred and George Apparated at the foot of his bed.

“Merry Christmas,” George said. “Don’t go downstairs for a bit.”

“Why not?” Ron asked.

“Mum’s crying again,” Fred said heavily. “Percy sent back his Christmas jumper.”

“Without a note,” George added. “Hasn’t asked how Dad is or visited him or anything…”

“We tried to comfort her,” Fred said, moving around the bed to look at Harry’s portrait and crown. “Told her Percy’s nothing more than a humongous pile of rat droppings and Draco’s better—”
“—didn’t work,” George said, helping himself to a Chocolate Frog. “So Lupin took over. Best let him cheer her up before we go down for breakfast, I reckon.”

“Hey look at Draco holding his sweater,” Fred said, turning from the painting to Draco, who just unwrapped an emerald green sweater with a silver D on it. “Seeing you in that will really give Mum something to smile about.” He went towards Draco, who stood up suddenly.

“You’re not going to force me to dress,” Draco said.

“Then either you put it on now or we’ll do it ourselves,” Fred smirked. Rolling his eyes Draco quickly threw off his shirt, revealing his lean body for a moment, before being covered by his Weasley jumper. “There we go! Good job Draco Weasley,” Fred smirked.

“I swear when I’m seventeen you are going to get it,” Draco growled.

“Hey! Forget Draco! Look at this,” George called out. He took the crown from Harry’s open box and held it in the air, the gold shimmering in the candlelight. It was just a simple large band of gold with three triangular points jutting out. “Damn… looks like Tom wasted no expense on you Harry,” George whistled. He placed it on Harry’s head and gave a ridiculous, over-the-top bow as he said, “Hail, Prince Harry.”

“Hail Prince Harry!” Fred laughed, bowing also.

Harry’s neck burned as he looked at Ron and Draco. He could see a small hint of jealousy in Ron’s eyes as he looked at the golden crown. “It’s fake,” he said quickly. “See for yourself.”

He quickly took it off and threw it at Draco and Ron, who caught it. Ron looked at it a bit dimly while Draco leaned against him to look at it. “Harry’s right, it’s fake,” he said. “Not even close to gold. Must be just painted.”

“Why would Tom give you this?” Ron asked.

“Because of our nicknames for each other,” Harry said. “It’s a laugh, that’s all.”

“Oh, all right,” Ron said, looking immensely relieved. He looked at the twins, then at Harry. “Umm… Draco, can you follow me?”

“No need Ron, we’ll go out of your way,” Fred said.

“Yeah, come on Harry, let’s leave the couple together before they start snogging,” George said. He grabbed Harry’s arm and pulled him out of the room.

Once the door was closed, Ron stood up and moved to lock it. “I uh got one more gift for you Draco,” He said nervously.

“You do? Ron, you don’t have to do that, the candy was enough—”

“No, no this one’s the real one… the important one,” Ron said. He moved to the dresser and opened it. In the back was a small box. He swallowed and closed his eyes as he took it out. Squeezing his hand over it, he closed the wardrobe and turned to Draco, who was watching him curiously. “We’ve been together for a bit… and I just know that there is no way we’re getting out of each other’s lives…”

“You got that right Ron,” Draco drawled.
“And I know that there will be no one else but you that I’ll love this much, which is why I thought ‘sod it’ let’s just make it official now…” Ron said. He looked at Draco and, with a shaky breath, got on one knee. “I know that Fred and George have been joking about it, but I think we should make it real so… Draco Malfoy, in the future, once we’ve graduated or else my Mum will kill us, will you marry me and become Draco Weasley?”

Ron opened his hand and the small box inside it to reveal a small golden ring with a single silver diamond. “It’s not much, I owe a lot to Fred and George… but I just needed to make it official.”

Draco shook his head, “Bloody fools the lot of you. First Harry wanting to become pregnant and now you wanting to get married. Must be a trait of Gryffindors to forget how young we are…” He looked at Ron and gave him a cheeky grin before Ron’s expression could sour. “Of course, we’re going to marry Weasley, was there any doubt? Though I have always planned on me being the one to propose…”

“So you mean…”

“Yes Ron, I’ll marry you,” Draco said. Ron gave a loud whooping sound as he smiled. He slipped the ring on Draco’s finger and he examined it. “Draco Weasley…” Draco said, testing the sound of it on his lips. “Draco Weasley… I like it.”

“I like it too,” Ron blushed.

“Well then, husband, I have something for you too,” Draco smirked.

“What is it?” Ron asked.

“I’m going to fuck you rough and hard like a good husband should,” Draco said. “Now get your clothes off and present your ass to me.”

“Yes, Fox!” Ron said gleefully as he began to tear off his clothes, both boys laughing.

A little while later everyone was downstairs dressed for the day. Harry just got out of the Twins’ grip when he noticed a crow sitting in plain sight. “First time I see you in the light,” he said. “What do you have?” he asked it.

The crow gave Harry a small roll of parchment before flying off. Harry immediately unrolled the letter from Tom.

Happy Christmas my love,

Though it has been only hours since we last saw each other, would you believe me when I say I miss you? While returning to our new home have allowed me to made several advancements on our plans, I must admit that I did not expect to feel so lonely. If it were possible, I would make up any excuse just to have you in my arms again.

That said, until that time I would like you to first thank Mrs. Weasley for the jumper she sent me. I was surprised to see the amount of presents I’ve actually gotten, to be honest I was only expecting yours but Mrs. Weasley’s and Draco’s were a pleasant surprise. Speaking of, I hope that you are surprised and happy with both my presents for my prince, and my Prince, both of whom are near and dear to my heart.

You should also know that Mr. Weasley’s recovery is going smoothly and he should be out today,
if it wasn’t for his fascination with Muggle methods. But, I am sure you will learn about it, or hear Mrs. Weasley yelling about it, later.

Love,

Tom Riddle

His thoughts turned to the wrapped present he still need to open. With the present in hand, he went into an empty room and quickly unwrapped it. It was a book, a small, compact book filled with pictures and descriptions of more Dark spells. One of them perfectly outlining and listing, in more detail than Harry ever knew, of a pregnancy spell that will permanently change a male’s body. It was so weird to Harry, the book was a whole book of spells that modifies the body either by stitching wounds and entire body parts together to the pregnancy spell and even a spell that can make the caster look unrecognizable.

Harry’s mind wondered at the possibilities and smiled as he began to read the chapter dealing with the pregnancy spell and ritual, a small smile etching on his face as he stored the information for much later, his heart soaring. Hugging the book to himself like he has done with Tom’s Diary for so long, Harry turned and went downstairs, any anger or annoyance at his beloved disappeared.
Chapter 18

Harry decided that leaving Mr. Weasley’s room for tea was a very good idea as the door swung close behind him, Draco, Ron, and Hermione, the four heard Mrs. Weasley shriek, “WHAT DO YOU MEAN, THAT’S THE GENERAL IDEA?”

“Typical,” Ron sighed. “Stitch… honestly.”

“Well they work well on non-magical wounds,” Hermione said fairly.

“Who cares… where’s the tearoom again?” Draco asked, his hand automatically holding Ron’s.

“Fifth floor,” Harry said. They walked along the corridor through a set of double doors and found a rickety staircase lined with more portraits of brutal-looking Healers. As they climbed it, the various Healers called out to them, diagnosing odd complaints and suggesting horrible remedies.

“Will you all sod off!” Draco demanded, glaring at the medieval wizard who had followed them through several paintings, convinced that Ron had a case of spattergoit. “They’re freckles you dead imbecile! Go!”

Looking purely offended the medieval wizard sputtered nonsense before storming off. Keeping a straight face, Draco asked, “What floor is this?”

“The fourth, one more—” Harry said but he stopped when he stepped onto the landing, staring at the small window set into the double doors that marked the start of a corridor named SPELL DAMAGE. A man was peering out at them all with his nose pressed against the glass. He had wavy blond hair, bright blue eyes, and a broad vacant smile that revealed dazzlingly white teeth.

“Blimey!” Ron said, also staring at the man.

“Isn’t that Lockhart?” Draco said. “What’s he doing here?”

Their ex-Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher pushed open the doors and moved toward them, wearing a long lilac dressing gown. “Well, hello there!” he said. “I expect you’d like my autograph, would you?”

“No.” Draco said shortly.

“No.” Draco said shortly.

“Er—how are you feeling, Professor?” Ron said, sounding slightly guilty. Harry remembered that it was Ron’s damaged wand that caused Lockhart to lose his memories when the man tried to obliviate his and Ron’s memories in their Second Year.

“I’m very well indeed, thank you,” Lockhart said exuberantly, pulling a rather battered peacock-feather quill from his pocket. “Now, how many autographs would you like? I can do joined-up writing now, you know!”

“None,” Draco said shortly again. “Why are you wandering the corridors? Shouldn’t you be in a ward or something? Maybe an insane asylum?”

The smile faded slowly from Lockhart’s face. For a few moments he gazed intently at Harry, then he said, “Haven’t we met?”
“Er… yeah, we have,” Harry said. “You used to teach in Hogwarts, remember?”

“And you were bloody horrible with it,” Draco said.

“Teach, I bet you I taught you everything I know!” Lockhart said, his smile reappearing at an alarming rate. It seems that he had either hadn’t heard Draco or completely ignored him.

Needless to say, Draco once again commented, “Which was nothing.” A motherly healer appeared and said, “Gilderoy, you naughty boy, so this is where you’ve run off to.” She smiled warmly when she saw Harry and the others, “Oh Gilderoy, you have guests! How lovely, and on Christmas Day too! Do you know, he never gets visitors, poor lamb, and I can’t think why, he’s such a sweetie, aren’t you?”

“We’re doing autographs!” Gildeory told the Healer with another glittering smile. “They want loads of them, won’t take no for an answer! I just hope we’ve got enough photographs!”

Draco glared at Lockhart as the Healer took his arm and beamed fondly at him as if he was a two-year-old. He did not know how or why, but somehow the Healer guilt the four of them into following her into the Janus Thickey ward. The ward bore unmistakable signs of being a permanent home to its residents. They had many more personal effects around their beds than in Mr. Weasley’s wards: the walls around Gilderoy’s headboard, for instance, was papered with pictures of himself, all beaming toothily and waving at the new arrivals. He had autographed many of them to himself in disjointed, childish writing. The moment he had been deposited in his chair by the Healer, Gilderoy pulled a fresh stack of photographs toward him, seized a quill, and started signing them all feverishly.

“Why are we here?” Draco grumbled to Ron. “Honestly if there was a person I never thought of seeing again, or wanting to see…"

“Hush up,” Ron said. “It’s kind of my fault he’s in here, right?’

“No it isn’t, the idiot did this to himself,” Draco said. “The man should never have tried to steal other people’s fame, let alone try to wipe your memory using your faulty wand.”

“My wand works perfectly, thank you very much,” Ron said.

“Of course it does, husband,” Draco smirked. “And I love it. But right now I just want to be out of here.”

“I swear the first opportunity I get, you’re going to get it,” Ron growled. Draco snickered and just lightly slapped Ron’s inner thigh. “Sure cub,” he said.

“This cub’s gonna turn into a fully-grown bear, you’ll see,” Ron said.

“Say that again when you become an Animagus like me—oh crap,” Draco said.

“What is it?”

“Just remembered,” Draco sighed. “We promised Professor McGonagall that I’d register with Animagus Registry.”

“We still got time,” Ron said. “We’ll tell Mum about it when we get back, yeah? Hang on…” Both he and Draco looked and saw two visitors walking away from the beds on the end: one a formidable-looking old witch wearing a long green dress, a moth-eaten fox fur, and a pointed hat decorated with what was unmistakably a stuffed vulture and, trailing behind her looking thoroughly
“Neville!” Ron called out. Neville jumped and cowered as though a bullet had narrowly missed him. “It’s us, Neville!” Ron said brightly, getting to his feet. “Have you seen? Lockhart’s here! Who’ve you been visiting?”

“Idiot,” Draco hissed, pulling Ron back down to his seat.

“Friends of yours, Neville, dear?” Neville’s grandmother said, graciously, bearing down at them all.

Neville looked as though he would rather be anywhere in the world but here. A dull purple flush was creeping up his plump face and he was not making eye contact with any of them.

“Ah yes,” the grandmother said, peering at Harry and sticking out a shriveled, clawlike hand for him to shake. “Yes, yes, I know who you are, of course. Neville speaks most highly of you.”

“Er—thanks,” Harry said, shaking hands.

“And you are clearly a Weasley,” Mrs. Longbottom continued. “Yes, I know your parents—not well, of course—but fine people, fine people… and you must be Hermione Granger? You… why is a Malfoy here with you all?” she said, her eyes staring down at Draco. “Heard about your parents. Not sorry for them one bit.”


“Are you… suppose something good might come out of it,” the woman muttered.

“Neville? What are you doing here? Who are you visiting?” Ron asked.

“What’s this?” Mrs. Longbottom said sharply. “Haven’t you told your friends about your parents, Neville?”

Neville took a deep breath, looked up at the ceiling, and shook his head. Harry could not remember ever feeling sorrier for anyone, but he couldn’t think of a way to help Neville out of the situation.

“Well, its nothing to be ashamed of!” Mrs. Longbottom said angrily. “You should be proud, boy, proud! They didn’t give their health and sanity so their only son would be ashamed of them, you know!”

“I’m not ashamed,” Neville said very faintly, still looking anywhere but at Harry and the others.

“Well, you have a funny way of showing it!” Mrs. Longbottom said. “My son and his wife,” she said, turning haughtily to Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Draco, “were tortured into insanity by You-Know-Who’s followers.”

Hermione clapped her hands over her mouth. Ron looked mortified while Draco looked away from Mrs. Longbottom, looking guilty.

“They were Aurors, you know, and very well respected within the Wizarding community,” Mrs. Longbottom went on. “Highly gifted the pair of them. I—yes, Alice dear, what is it?”

Neville’s mother had come edging down the ward in her nightdress. Her face was thin and worn, her eyes seemed overlarge, and her hair, which had turned white, was wispy and dead-looking. She did not seem to want to speak, or perhaps she was not able to, but she made timid motions toward
Neville, holding something in her outstretched hand.

“Again?” Mrs. Longbottom said, slightly weary. “Very well, Alice dear, very well—Neville, take it, whatever it is…”

But Neville had already stretched out his hand, into which his mother dropped an empty Droobie’s Blowing Gum wrapper.

“Very nice, dear,” Neville’s grandmother said in a falsely cheery voice, patting his mother on the shoulder. But Neville said quietly, “Thanks Mum.”

Harry frowned, he felt something in his heart break at the sight of Mrs. Longbottom and Neville’s reaction. He wanted to help Neville, he wanted to hold the boy to him like a teddy bear and tell him that it was alright. But he couldn’t, he felt like he couldn’t move to comfort Neville, to hold Neville. Even without being an Aura-Reader, Harry knew that Neville was purely Light, a golden hue must be radiating from him. Harry felt that he didn’t deserve, didn’t want, to hold onto Neville, to hug the poor depressed boy, thinking that by contact with him he would corrupt the boy. He would corrupt Neville’s golden hue with his own emerald Darkness. No in that moment Harry thought to himself that he couldn’t comfort Neville, he could only give him revenge.

Hermione was looking tearful as Neville and his grandmother leave, Neville slipping the paper into his pocket. “I never knew,” she said.

“Nor did I,” Ron said rather hoarsely.

“I did,” Harry said glumly. “Dumbledore told me but I promised I wouldn’t mention it. …that’s what Bellatrix Lestrange got sent to Azkaban for, using the Cruciatus Curse on Neville’s parents until they lost their minds.”

“My aunt is a horrible woman,” Draco said softly. He looked at Harry and gave him a small nod, which Harry returned.

“I’ll do it,” Harry said walking into the bedroom at Riddle Manor. “I’ll kill Lestrange.”

Tom was in the middle of changing. He turned to Harry shirtless and smiled softly. “What happened that changed your mind?”

“Neville,” Harry said. “I saw him at St. Mungo’s… and his mother. I saw what that woman did to her, and how it affected Neville.” Harry took a deep breath and looked up at Tom. “Tom?” he said, his voice innocent and childlike, “can I stay the night here, with you please? I need it.”

“Of course, yes,” Tom smiled. “I am able to call a meeting. We wouldn’t want our followers to see their Dark Lord in a jumper,” he chuckled. “Would you rather wait here or—”

“I’ll be there,” Harry said.

“Good,” Tom said. “I have clothes for you to wear.” He pointed towards a plain black button-down shirt and dress pants, as well as black robe that goes over it. Harry nodded and immediately started to change into those clothes while Tom continued where he left off. When he was dressed, Harry turned to see Lord Voldemort standing in front of him, his skin chalky white, eyes red, and nose only two silts.

Voldemort took his wand and tapped it against Harry’s glasses, transfiguring them into the
Prince’s Mask. “Follow me,” Voldemort said.

The Dark Prince nodded and followed his Lord a step behind. Voldemort led him down into a basement area. The walls and floor were made of cold stone. It was barely lit, only a few torches hung on the wall. In the center of the room were two chairs, one taller than the other. The Dark Prince immediately took his seat in the lesser of the two majestic looking chairs while Voldemort sat in his. “Soon,” Voldemort said to the Dark Prince.

They waited, and five minutes later men cloaked in black started to appear before them. They silently walked up to Lord Voldemort and bowed down onto their knees, kissing his feet, before returning to their place. The Prince stayed quiet as he watched a trembling man step up towards The Dark Lord, a thick, long snake following after him. Recognizing him as Mr. Nott, the Prince had a sense of satisfaction as he saw the man’s trembling state.

“Nott… have you learn your lesson?” The Dark Lord asked.

“Y-Yes My Lord,” the man stuttered. “I have… please… please take him away, I can’t survive one more night—” The man’s screams filled the air as Voldemort casted the Crucius Curse on the man. The Dark Prince watched silently, his eyes falling towards the snake which he gave a glare to. “Don’t talk to me,” he told the snake as it slithered towards him. “You’ve hurt someone I care about.”

“Only on our masters’ orders,” the snake chuckled. “Besides… what I have done to the orange man pales in comparison to him…”

The Dark Prince just gave the snake a dirty look before turning back to his Lord, who was still torturing Mr. Nott. He only stopped once the man’s screams died out to hollow breaths and he was left shaking on the ground. “Leave him,” Voldemort said as the others moved to help him. “We do not help filth.”

The Death Eaters nodded and moved back to their positions. “My friends… my comrades… we are missing a great deal of our allies, of our family. Locked away in Azkaban, these faithful have done what you were scared to do: put complete trust in your Lord. The fates of Wormtail and Nott are but a shade to my disappointment in each and every one of you. However, there is no reason to despair. For soon the faithful in Azkaban will return to us. It will be a simple manner of convincing the Dementors, a task that I and your Prince will carry out personally.” He motioned a long skeletal hand towards the Prince. The Death Eater’s eyes turned to him and he met each and every one with a look of determination. “Afterwards, it will be a simple manner of building our ranks for the attack on the Ministry. For now… I will allow you to update me…” Voldemort leaned back in his chair and waited. Nobody moved.

The Prince frowned and turned to Voldemort, “Your followers are all idiots,” he hissed, “who cannot get a simple job done. How long as it been since you held a meeting like this?”

“You attended it, my love,” Voldemort responded in Parseltongue.

“That was a long time ago, in September I think,” The Prince said. “And they’ve done nothing since then?”

Voldemort chuckled. He turned to his followers and said, “Tut, tut. It seems that your Prince is disappointed in all of you, a feeling that I must agree with. None of you have done what was asked of you? None of you have started the preparations I have planned out? Crabbe! What have you done?”
“Don’t bother asking them, you’ll know the answer,” the Dark Prince said.

“That they will need punishment, my Prince,” Voldemort said. “If you believe they are all unfaithful… punish them.”

“Will the spell work if I say it in Parseltongue?” he asked.

Voldemort just gave a sadistic smile. His eyes shifted from the Prince to his followers and said in English, “Why don’t you try it yourself?”

The Dark Prince nodded his head and stood from his chair. He turned to Voldemort and extended his hand. Voldemort gave him his wand, and the Prince turned to the Death Eaters. He took a breath and asked, “Which one is closest related to Bellatrix Lestrange?”

“They are all in Azkaban. Choose by your will,” Voldemort said. The Dark Prince thought for a moment then pointed Voldemort’s wand at Snape. Wanting some sadistic joy, and not stepping over the chance to torture his second-most hated teacher, he snarled, “Move up!”

Snape betrayed nothing as he stepped forward, understanding The Dark Prince’s command despite the boy speaking Parseltongue. The other Death Eaters watched on curiously as the Dark Prince raised his wand at Snape and said with a cold voice, “Crucio!”

Snape did his best not to scream. He fell to his knees and forced his lips shut as the Unforgivable Curse had its way with him, but soon the pain became unbearable and Snape’s screams filled the basement dungeon. The Dark Prince kept his arm steady, his hand ridged and wand perfectly straight, exactly as his Lord have taught him. The spell did not waver or seem to decrease as the Prince poured all of his venom and hatred for the potions’ master into the spell. He lost time of how long he casted the spell. Seeing the man bent over in pain, hearing his screams, and having the rush of anger turn into pure unfiltered power was like a natural high for the Dark Prince. He felt empowered, invigorated, addicted. This was the power that The Dark Lord was training him for, this was the power he would have both as The Dark Lord’s heir and lover. Everything in his one moment felt right for the Dark Prince.

And he wanted more.

He kept the spell going even after Snape’s screams died out. The other Death Eaters watched on nervously, each looking at each other as if silently asking if they should stop the Prince. They started to back away, their feet shuffling apprehensively towards the door, but the thick snake stopped them as it started slithering towards them. The Prince only stopped once Voldemort said, “Enough. You have done enough, my love.”

The Prince disconnected the spell and turned to Voldemort, giving him a satisfied grin that only the Dark Lord could see. He gave his Lord his wand and returned to his seat. Voldemort waited for Snape to get back to his feet. It took the oily-haired man several minutes to stop shaking, his limbs seemed to disobey him as he struggled but nobody helped him as he stood. “When next I call you… I expect better results,” Voldemort said coldly. “Leave.”

They all vanished at once. Without waiting for Tom to shift back, Harry jumped off of his chair, onto his lap and kissed him deeply. Tom returned the kiss with full passion and Harry felt a pull at his navel as they were transported to the bedroom, their clothes gone.

Tom reached for Harry, but he knocked his hands back smiling, “No,” he said. “Tonight, I do everything.” Grabbing Tom’s wand, Harry casted a lubing and stretching spell on his hole before moving down to sit on Tom’s pelvis. He rubbed his ass on Tom’s growing cock. Smirking, Tom
placed both hands behind his head as he watched his beautiful prince reach behind his body. He felt Harry’s hand on his cock and soon the entire length was engulfed in a tight hotness as Harry lined his hole onto it.

Harry did not wait to adjust, instead he bounced on Tom’s cock at a savage pace, the two quickly groaning and moaning as Harry adjusted himself on it. He paused early on only to adjust the cock’s angle and soon the bedroom was filled with his screaming as Tom’s cock rammed against his prostate, going deeper and deeper every time. Harry rode the high the Dark Arts gave him as he touched his tits while he rode Tom, squeezing and twisting them as they both quickly sheened with sweat. Tom did nothing as Harry rode himself, he watching with a proud, satisfied look as he felt himself coming close to the edge far too quickly for his taste. Harry felt Tom’s cock pulsing inside him and he growled out, “You will cum in me!”

Tom obliged a moment later he came with a loud groan while Harry screamed, his own cock cumming untouched, his cum splattering on Tom’s chest. Breathing heavily, Harry reached and slipped Tom’s cock out of his ass and bent to lick his own cum off of Tom’s chest, looking up at him with a cocky grin with each and every long swipe of the tongue. “We’re far from done,” Harry said. “I want you to cum so much inside me that it’ll look like I’m pregnant without that ritual. And you will not move at all.”

Tom only grinned at Harry and said, “My body is yours, my love. Use it to your heart’s content.” And so he did. The couple spent the rest of the evening and well into the night making love, Harry having complete control as he rode Tom’s cock, making the Dark Lord cum inside him numerous times until, at the end after countless orgasms and completely exhausted, Harry’s stomach extended slightly as if he was a few months pregnant.

“I love you Tom…” Harry said sleepily, his glasses on the nightstand next to their wands. His hands were on his stomach, Tom’s over his.

“I love you too Harry,” Tom said. “You mean the world to me… I promise, as soon as everything is over I will give you what you want most of all.”

Harry smiled and looked down at their hands. “What I want most of all,” he whispered. He looked up Tom and kissed him softly. “I’m sure we’ll do great, Mr. Tom Riddle.”

“Of course, we will, Mr. Harry Riddle… now sleep my love, I’m sure we’re both exhausted…” Harry nodded and nuzzled closer to his love before closing his eyes and drifting off to a peaceful sleep.
Chapter XIX

The Christmas holiday ended too fast in Harry’s opinion. He felt guilty leaving Grimmauld Place, the thought of leaving Sirius alone with only Kreacher for company broke his heart. They took the Knight Bus back to Hogwarts, and Harry spent the entire ride sitting, staring at the wrapped package that Sirius gave him before he left. His godfather told him to open it when he was back at Hogwarts, though Harry knew that he would never use it. He would never do anything to risk Sirius.

The next day was filled with D.A. members asking him when the next meeting will be, Harry answered with the same response, that he needed to talk to Tom about that. After classes, he met with Tom at the Room of Requirement.

“Tom,” he moaned as Tom bit and licked his neck, leaving a mark. Tom smirked against the mark he made and bit harder. “Tom—please, someone’s going to see!”

“That’s the point, love,” Tom whispered. “Tonight, we’re going to do it tonight.”

“What?” Harry moaned as Tom gave his neck another harsh bite.

“Our plan, my Prince,” Tom whispered. “Azkaban… I want my followers to see you marked by me.”

Harry gave a low moan as Tom moved and bit right above his Adam’s apple, licking at the bruise. “Mark me,” he mewed.

Tom smirked and bit harder, Harry gave a painful yelp as he felt the mixture of pain and pleasure. Tom sucked the area, and the pain increased slightly, causing Harry to moan even more. “Tom… please,” he said.

“‘My Lord,’” Tom said, looking at Harry seriously.

“My Lord,” Harry gasped. “Please… more.”

Tom smirked and continued sucking on the same spot, his teeth gnashing at it. He held Harry still, one hand on the back of his neck and the other around his waist as he continued to suck and bite Harry’s neck. He was done a minute later, leaving a large, dark-red mark on Harry’s neck. Satisfied with his work, Tom took a step back and smiled. “There, you’re marked now, my Prince. Change, we have a prison to visit.”

“Yes My Lord,” Harry smiled. He pressed his wand against his glasses and felt it shift into his mask. He felt a small gust of wind around his body as Tom changed his school robes into a plain black robe. He watched as Tom turned into Voldemort and couldn’t help but smile at the figure.

Voldemort looked down at the Dark Prince. “Pocket your wand,” he said. The Prince did so. “Remember our rules, Prince.”

“Yes, My Lord,” The Dark Prince hissed. Voldemort gave the Prince a proud smile, like a father to
his son, and motioned for him to walk into the now familiar darkness. As always, they followed the crows. Voldemort ahead of the Dark Prince, their strides long and measured as pair after pair of red eyes stared at the two from the darkness. Both were silent, there was no need to talk, as a small light appeared in front of them.

Voldemort and the Dark Prince stepped into a stone corridor. There were no torches, the only light coming from the lightning strikes as thunderous rain filled the Prince’s senses. An incredible coldness swept over the Prince, a sense of despair and sadness following. He could feel the dementors around them, though he saw none. He looked at Voldemort and frowned. “Can I cast a Patronus?” he asked.

“If you must,” Voldemort said. He handed the prince his wand and the Prince closed his eyes, focused on all the time he and Voldemort were together as just Harry and Tom, and whispered, “Expecto Patronum.”

A large silver snake burst from the wand. All of a sudden a surge of warmth and happiness swelled inside the Prince as the Patronus slithered around them. He returned Voldemort his wand and started to look around the prison.

Cell upon cell were filled with people, all made of the same cold stone, there was nothing in them but tattered blankets and men and women in clothes, hunched in the far corner of the cells. They looked up as he and Voldemort passed, their eyes hollow and cloudy. Some Harry he recognized from Dumbledore’s memories while others he did not. The Death Eaters who recognized Voldemort reached out towards him pathetically. The Dark Prince couldn’t help but sneer, thinking, This is the best the Death Eaters have to offer? Disgusting. He turned to Voldemort and hissed, “These are your followers? They look awful.”

Voldemort chuckled, “The effect of dementors, my love. They sap away all chance of hope and happiness, leaving nothing but despair.”

“They deserve worse than that,” the Prince said. He walked up to one cell and peered in. A man was sitting in the corner of it, his eyes staring directly at the Dark Lord in awe. “Rockwood,” Voldemort said. “He fed us information from the Ministry, though he was also present at Lestrange’s attack on the Longbottoms.”

“Then why should he live? Why should any of them?” the Prince asked. He turned to Voldemort, who frowned.

“They are our followers, Prince—”

“Your followers, the most ruthless of your bunch that exist,” the Prince argued.

“And you suggest to kill them all?”

“Well why not? What good are they to us? What good are the werewolves or the giants to us? We want to make this community a better place, wouldn’t The Dark Prince killing the old Death Eaters be a good way to start? To show the world that we mean to change it for the better?” The Dark Prince asked.

Voldemort gave him a sharp look. “You are being delusional, Prince. Tell me. What will happen when their bodies are found? How will the Death Eaters we already assembled react? Dumbledore? The Ministry? All of our actions have consequences, Prince. So tell me. We cannot simply kill everyone who stands in our way. I have thought we have been through this, Prince.”
The Dark Prince stared annoyed at Voldemort, a scowl on his face. Voldemort met his gaze and grabbed his upper arm, squeezing tightly. “Answer,” he commanded.

The Prince sighed and frowned. “The Death Eaters outside will rebel again… Dumbledore will most likely focus on finding us… he might realize that we are Tom and Harry Riddle. The Ministry… I don’t know what they’ll do but…” He looked up at Voldemort, a somber face on it, “It will be bad. … We can’t kill them.”

“No, we cannot,” Voldemort said.

“M-My Lord?” a hoarse voice said. The two turned towards Rockwood to see the man crawling towards them. Voldemort took a step towards his follower and stared at the man. The Dark Prince crossed his arms, irritated, and started to walk away, his Patronus following. The Prince’s eyes fell on inmate upon inmate, his scowl growing as he looked at each and every pathetic form. They’re all disgusting, he thought to himself. Scum. Not fit for the world I’m—Tom and I are building… but does Tom know that? He turned back towards Voldemort. If I had his wand, I could at least do something.

His thoughts were interrupted as Voldemort moved towards him. “We shall deal with Bellatrix before we free the others,” he said, giving The Prince his wand. The Dark Prince was about to pocket it, but Voldemort stopped him, grabbing his arm roughly. “Keep my wand out where I can see it,” he said.

“Yes, my Lord,” the Prince sighed.

The two walked through the corridors until they found a stairway leading up. Taking it, Voldemort’s hand slipped down onto his wand and whispered something Harry couldn’t hear. The wand began vibrating between their hands and seemed to be pointing up. They followed the wand to the highest floor, the silver snake Patronus weaving between them, keeping any and all dementors away. The Prince stayed quiet, doing his best to clear his mind and mentally prepare himself to murder Bellatrix Lestrange. This is for Neville, this is for Neville, this is for Neville, he thought to himself as they continued to climb the stairs.

Lestrange’s cell was the only one with noise from it. She was standing fully, holding the bars of her cell. “My Lord, My Lord is that you?” her voice rang out of the corridor.

“Yes, Bellatrix, it is I,” Voldemort said as he and the Prince walked towards her cell.

“I knew this day would come,” Bellatrix said gleefully. “I was always a faithful servant my Lord, I knew you came the moment I saw the dementors leaving… who’s the kid?”

Voldemort and the Prince stood in front of her cell. Voldemort’s hand left the Prince’s as he raised his wand. The Prince aimed his wand at Bellatrix, he began to breath face as over and over in his head he thought, This is for Neville.

“You going to kill me?” Lestrange asked, an insane smile on her face. She gave a high laugh. “Is the kid going to kill me?”

The Prince found his hand was shaking slightly. He licked his lips, but found that he couldn’t form any words. He just aimed his wand at the Death Eater, her laugh ringing out in the corridor. Voldemort bent towards the Prince’s ear, “Do it,” he hissed. “You know the words… you know your job. Do it Prince, or give me the wand. …”

The Prince turned to Voldemort. He gave no emotion away as he stared at the Dark Lord before
turning back to Bellatrix. He opened his mouth and began to say, “Ava-Avada…A…” He started to feel frustrated with himself.

“What’s the matter? Can’t kill me right?” Lestrange taunted. “Come closer and give me that wand, I’ll show you how to cast it.” She began to laugh and the Prince continued to struggle casting the Killing Curse. The Prince’s breath hitched, he found that his lips are getting constantly dry no matter how much he licked them. He looked between Bellatrix and Voldemort. His Lord was watching him expectantly, as if waiting for the moment he was going to give him back his wand; while Bellatrix just watched with an insane glint in her eye. She’s too dangerous to let live, the Prince told himself constantly. He tried to calm himself but couldn’t. Voldemort motioned for his wand, but the Prince refused. Instead he just continued to point it at Lestrange.

His hand was shaking more violently than ever. He squeezed his eyes shut, moved his hand somewhere and yelled, “BOMBARDA!”

A large explosion, followed by a constant rumble followed afterwards. The Prince winced then opened his eyes to see the ceiling of Bellatrix Lestrange’s prison cell caved in, the inmate nowhere to be found. He did his hardest to look, squinting very hard, but the only evidence of Lestrange that the Dark Prince could find was a dark liquid that seemed to be seeping out of the rubble on the stone ground. He turned to Voldemort, who did not looked pleased. “What was that?” he hissed.

“I… I couldn’t do it, that was the first spell that came to mind,” the Prince said.

“I see…” Voldemort said. He took his wand from the Prince and waved it. The Prince turned away as the stone ceiling went back to their rightful place, a sickening, moist, slicking sound filling his ears. He did not want to look at whatever was left of Lestrange. Voldemort bent down and stayed quiet for a moment before saying, “She is dead. You have done well, I suppose, though correction is still needed.”

“I’m sorry… I couldn’t do the Curse,” The Prince said, his back still turned to the cell.

“Never mind that, let us go now,” Voldemort said. He snapped his wrist and The Prince’s Patronus disappeared. “Now, we must talk to the dementors,” he said. But they did not have to wait for as soon as the silver snake disappeared, The Prince felt as though he was flooded with cold, horrible memories as the Dementors swarmed them. The Dark Prince couldn’t see anything expect for the swarm of blackness, he closed his eyes and did his best to block out his parents’ screaming, which slowly became louder and louder. “Harry!”

Voldemort either ignored his suffering or did not notice as he turned to the dementors. “I will be short. Join me, and you will have freedom to gather all souls that you want. Allow me to free my followers, and your wants will be rewarded.”

The Dementors did not answer, instead they have moved slowly away, and with them, the Prince’s parents screams lessened in his head. Once he felt like he could open his eyes without experience pain, the Prince looked around. “Wha—What happened?” he asked.

“They agreed to my proposal,” Voldemort said. “Come, my Prince, we have followers to free.”

The Prince nodded and followed Voldemort, who unlocked certain cells as they passed. The Prince did not look at any of the Death Eaters, he just stuck close to his Lord and ignored the curious stares the Death Eaters were giving him. Nine men followed their Lord up to the top of the prison, they recovered their wands in a storage room on the top level. Voldemort aimed his wand at a wall, and with a small flick of his wrist, the Prince heard a loud explosion as the wall in front of them. The Prince somehow felt that more than the wall was destroyed as Voldemort turned to his
followers. “My most faithful followers,” he said. “Your belief in me and our cause have been rewarded. Return home and recover, for your Lord will soon call for you.”

The men bowed, and one by one they disappeared, Apparating away. The Prince turned to Voldemort, thinking that their work was done. “The Ministry will be here soon,” he said.

“I know, my heir, but first there is one thing we must do,” Voldemort said. He turned and walked away from the hole in the prison, the Prince following him. They return to Lestrange’s cell where her body still laid battered and broken. The Prince couldn’t help but wince and turn away from the sight. He instead focused on Voldemort and watched as he took out his wand once more and flicked it around. “Look,” he commanded, and the Prince obeyed. Reluctantly he turned towards the body only to see that it wasn’t there anymore, instead there was what looked like a jagged stone sitting on the cell floor. Voldemort flicked his wand from the jagged stone to the wall, and the stone flew, smashing against the wall and breaking into smaller pieces. He then pointed his wand at the wall and, like before, the wall collapsed, the cell floor now scattered with broken pieces of both wall and ceiling.

“Now, we may leave,” Voldemort said, pocketing his wand. He led the Dark Prince back into the shadows, and they walked back into the Room of Requirement in Hogwarts. “Take off your mask, Harry,” Tom said, his form back to normal.

Harry tapped his own wand against his mask and felt them transfigure back to his regular glasses. “I uhh…”

“You wanted to kill our followers, and did not do as I ordered,” Tom said.

“Yes I did,” Harry argued, seeing the disappointed expression on Tom’s face. “Lestrange is dead. Why are you even annoyed about this? I did the job.”

“Yes, but the point was for you to cast the Killing Curse intentionally,” Tom said. “You cannot surrender fully to the Dark Arts without performing the Unforgivable Curses.”

“She’s dead Tom,” Harry said. “I’ve killed her, that is enough. There is more to the Dark Arts than the Unforgivable Curses. Something I thought you knew.”

“Of course I know that—”

“Then why are you so interested in me performing it?”

“Why do you want to kill our followers?” Tom countered.

“Because I don’t trust them,” Harry said. “They’re just vicious monsters, the lot of them. The world is better off without them.”

“Well, we need them Harry so they are not going anywhere,” Tom said. “I am starting to get annoyed by your disobedience lately.”

“Disobedience? You think me looking out for our friends, me not wanting these killers outside, whether they’re on our side or not, is disobedience?” Harry asked. “No, it’s not Tom, in fact if that is simple disobedience, then what I am going to tell you is a betrayal.”

“And what is that?” Tom asked, crossing his arms.

Harry stood as tall as he could and looked at Tom straight in the eyes. “Once we no longer need them, I will kill each and every one of them. …And you will watch as I do so,” he said, his voice
surprisingly deep. There was a fire burning behind his eyes which made them seemingly glow. He expected Tom to be angry, to yell at him again. But instead, there was an amused smile on his face, a glint in his eyes as he extended his arms and placed his hands on Harry’s shoulders.

“That, is what I wanted to hear, my love, my Prince, my everything,” Tom said happily. He kissed both of Harry’s cheeks before kissing him fully on the lips. “When we are done, you will round up all of our supports, all of my old Death Eaters, and kill them one by one in front of me. But until then, while they are still useful, stay your murderous wants and focus on our current problems.”

“Like Umbridge?”

“Yes, like Umbridge,” Tom nodded. “I need her away for our plan to work, though it is still in its infancy. But let me worry about that for the time being, I will talk to you about it once I have my thoughts more organized. I wanted to just discredit Dumbledore, turn the world against him and have him locked away in Azkaban… but now… now that we have an army… I think a more direct assault will be required.”

“You’re not saying—”

“Attack Hogwarts? No, of course not,” Tom said. “I would never even risk harm to anyone here. But if we can lead Dumbledore away…”

Harry gasped. He looked at Tom and said, “The prophecy! The thing in the Ministry of Magic that the Order is doing their best to protect—we can use that!”

“Exactly what I was thinking love,” Tom smiled. “But I’m going to need time to think it through more fully.”

“Okay,” Harry nodded. “I uh needed to plan our next D.A. meeting anyway.”

Tom smiled and pulled Harry into a hug. “It wasn’t how I envisioned it, but you were right, you did get the job done. I’m so proud of you, my love.”

“Thank you Tom… I love you,” Harry said in the hug.

“I love you too Harry,” Tom whispered. “Don’t worry Harry, we’re almost done… I can feel it.”

The next morning, Harry wasn’t surprise to see the *Daily Prophet* has written about his and Tom’s actions at Azkaban, however a surge of anger quickly filled when he saw Sirius’s picture.

MASS BREAKOUT FROM AZKABAN
MINISTRY FEARS BLACK IS “RALLYING POINT” FOR OLD DEATH EATERS

The Ministry of Magic announced late last night that there has been a mass breakout from Azkaban.

Speaking to reporters in his private office, Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic, confirmed that ten high-security prisoners escaped in the early hours of yesterday evening, and that he has already informed the Muggle Prime Minister of the dangerous nature of these individuals.

“We find ourselves, most unfortunately, in the same position we were two and a half years ago when the murderer Sirius Black escaped,” Fudge said last night. “Nor do we think the two breakouts are unrelated. An escape of this magnitude suggests outside help, and we must
remember that Black, as the first person ever to break out of Azkaban, would be ideally placed to help these individuals, who includes Black’s cousin Bellatrix Lestrange, have rallied around Black as their leader. We are, however, doing all we can to round up the criminals and beg the magical community to remain alert and cautious. On no account should any of these individuals be approached.”

“They would rather blame Sirius then even entertain the possibility that Voldemort is alive?” Harry said irritably. “Are they really that stupid?” Though, I now understand why Tom hid Lestrange’s body like he did.

“What other option do they have?” Hermione said bitterly. “He can hardly say, ‘Sorry everyone, Dumbledore warned me this might happen, the Azkaban guards have joined Lord Voldemort and now Voldemort’s worst supporters have broken out too.’ I mean, he’s spent a good six months telling everyone you and Dumbledore are liars, hasn’t he?”

Hermione ripped open the newspaper and began to read the report inside while Harry looked around the Great Hall. *She is right, I suppose, but still... the sooner we get this done the sooner I can get rid of them, all of them. For now, I’ll just focus on what I have: the D.A.*

News of the escape spread quickly throughout the castle and over the course of the next D.A. meetings, Harry was very pleased to see that the news of the ten, though Harry knew personally only nine, escaped Death Eaters seemed to have motivate everyone, especially Neville. The news of his parents’ attacker escape has wrought a strange and even slightly alarming change in him. He had not once mentioned his meeting with Harry, Ron, Draco, and Hermione on the closed ward, and taking their lead from him, they had kept quiet about it too. Nor had he said anything on the subject of Bellatrix and her fellow torturers’ escape; in fact, he barely spoke during D.A. meetings anymore, but worked relentlessly on every new spell Harry and Tom taught them, his plump face screwed up in concentration, apparently indifferent to injuries or accidents, working harder than anyone else.

Harry wanted to tell Neville that Bellatrix Lestrange was gone, that she was dead and that he killed her, but couldn’t think of a way that did not involve telling Neville everything. The only person to get a word out of Neville, surprisingly, was Theo Nott, who seemed to have become steadily healthier over the Christmas break. Harry couldn’t help but noticed that they would practice together, and that Theo would be the only person Neville would actively talk to during breaks. He did not want to read too much into it, but was happy that the two supposedly had each other to lean on. It didn’t help that Harry accidently saw the two kissing each other in the corridors early February.

Harry did not even realized that time was moving so quickly. Before he knew it, the fourteenth of February had come. Hermione had received a letter which she read eagerly that morning, and turned to Harry saying, “Listen Harry, this is really important. Do you think you could meet me and Cedric Diggory in the Three Broomsticks around midday? I’m going to ask Cedric the same thing.”

“Umm sure... I don’t think Tom and I had anything planned,” Harry said.

“Good. I’ll go and talk to Cedric now,” Hermione said as she stood up. Harry watched as she quickly made her way to the Hufflepuff table. Harry couldn’t help but frown, wondering what it was that Hermione was planning. He looked across towards the Ravenclaw table to see Tom too watching Hermione talk with Diggory. The older Hufflepuff smiled and nodded. *What could she be planning?* Harry wondered as Hermione went back to the Gryffindor table. “You don’t mind if Blaise will be there too, right Harry?” she asked.
“Uhh…”

“Good,” Hermione said. “I swear that boy is a bit too territorial, but he’s cute.” She shrugged. Harry just stared at her, a small feeling of dread rising up as he wondered what it was Hermione Granger was planning. For some reason, it scared Harry more than the things he and Tom have done to their enemies as the Dark Prince and his Dark Lord.

Chapter End Notes

A bit late in the game, but I have to ask. As readers what do you prefer? Short chapters around 4-5k words or long chapters around 7k?
On Valentine’s Day Harry and Tom walked into Hogsmeade around noon. It was easy to find Hermione, Blaise, and Cedric sitting in a booth, but Harry stopped in shock when he saw who they were sitting with: Luna Lovegood and none other than Rita Skeeter, ex-journalist on the *Daily Prophet* and one of Hermione’s least favorite people in the world.

“You’re early!” Hermione said, moving along to give Harry and Tom room to sit down. “I though you two were going to spend some alone time.”

“Do not worry,” Tom chuckled. “Harry and I spend more than enough long time.”

“How you doing Harry?” Blaise Zabini asked. “Think this is going to be long? I have this plan for Hermione see—”

“I don’t know, what are we doing here, Hermione?” Harry asked.

“Little Miss Perfect was just about to tell me when you arrived,” Rita said, taking a large slurp of her drink. “I suppose I’m allowed to talk to him, am I?” she shot at Hermione.

“Yes, I suppose you are,” Hermione said coldly.

Unemployment did not suit Rita. The hair that had once been set in elaborate curls now hung lank and unkempt around her face. The scarlet paint on her two-inch talons was chipped and there were a couple of false jewels missing from her winged glasses. She took another great gulp at her drink.

Tom leaned towards Harry, “I believe I know what is going on,” he whispered.

“Yeah, Hermione is going to want Cedric and I to speak about the night when Voldemort came out,” Harry whispered. “And I believe that it is going to be published on Lovegood’s father’s newspaper, what was it called?”

“The Quibbler, I believe,” Tom whispered. “Will you need my help?”

“No, no you relax yourself,” Harry said. He sat up straighter in his chair and relaxed against his seat. “In fact,” he said a bit louder, “why don’t you get us a drink Tom? I’m kind of parched.”

Tom smirked and patted Harry’s shoulder, “Yes, my prince,” he said before sliding out of the seat and walked towards the crowded front. Harry turned to Hermione and said, “I assume that you would like me and Cedric to talk about the night when Voldemort came out? And as well as the smear campaign the Ministry has ran against Dumbledore and me?”

“Y-yeah…”

“So you actually stick to it, do you, that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is back?” Rita said, lowering her glass and subjecting Harry in a piercing stare while her finger stayed longingly to the clasp of the crocodile bag. “You stand by all this garbage Dumbledore’s been telling everybody about You-Know-Who returning and you being the sole witness—?”

“But I wasn’t the sole witness,” Harry said calmly. “There were his Death Eaters as well, would you like me to tell you their names?”
“I’d love them,” Rita breathed, now fumbling in her bag once more and gazing at him as though he was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. “A great bold headline: ‘Potter Accuses …’ A subheading: ‘Harry Potter Names Death Eaters Still Among Us.’ And then, beneath a nice big photograph of you… maybe Cedric can be in it too: ‘Disturbed teenage survivor of You-Know-Who’s attack, Harry Potter, 15, caused outrage yesterday by accusing respectable and prominent members of the Wizarding community for being Death Eaters. …”

The Quick-Quotes Quill was actually in her hand and halfway to her mouth when the rapturous expression died on her face.

“But of course,” she said, lowering the quill and looking daggers at Hermione, “Little Miss Perfect wouldn’t want the story out there, would she?”

“Actually, I believe that is her plan,” Harry said, looking at Hermione as well. “She will want Cedric and I to give you the facts, all the facts, and you to write down what we say, exactly as I say it. Is that right, Hermione?” he cocked his head a little, giving her an innocent look.

Hermione looked at Harry, shocked, but nodded. “Yeah… I do.”

Rita blotted the front of her grubby raincoat, still staring at Hermione. Then she said baldly, “The Prophet wouldn’t print it. In case you haven’t noticed, nobody believes his cock-and-bull story. Everyone thinks he’s delusional. Now, if you let me write the story from that angle—”

“That would be useless,” Harry sighed. “We’ve no need of another story speaking of my insanity, no matter how pretty you write it. Most likely Fudge is leaning on the Prophet—no actually, he is leaning against it, how else can it be so idiotic lately—oh thank you Tom,” Harry smiled as Tom returned, placing a mug full of butterbeer in front of him. Harry took a sip and looked at Luna. “Which is where you come in, I believe,” he said. “Instead of The Prophet, the interview will be on The Quibbler.”

Rita snorted so loudly that people at a nearby table looked around in alarm.

“I could manure my garden with the contents of that rag,” she said. “You think that people will take him seriously if he’s published in The Quibbler?”

“So—

“Of course not,” Harry interrupted Hermione. “There will be those who don’t, but then again the Prophet’s version of the Azkaban breakout had a lot of holes that left people… wanting. There will be people left wondering and wanting for a better version, a more filled version of the events, and in their search they will find The Quibbler, an ….unusual magazine of questionable quality, no offense Luna, where they will see the interview with me and be a bit keen to read it.”

Rita did not say anything for a while. Hermione and Blaise stared at Harry, shocked, while Luna looked around dreamily.

“All right, let’s say for a moment I’ll do it,” Rita said abruptly. “What kind of fee am I going to get?”

“I don’t think Daddy exactly pays people to write for the magazine,” Luna said dreamily. “They do it because it’s an honor, and, of course, to see their names in print.”

Rita Skeeter looked as though the taste of Stinksap was strong in her mouth as she rounded on Hermione. “I’m supposed to do this for free?”
“Well, yes,” Hermione said calmly, taking a sip of her drink. “Otherwise, as you very well know, I will inform the authorities that you are an unregistered Animagus. Of course, the Prophet might give you a rather lot for an insider’s account of life in Azkaban…”

Harry noticed that Blaise was staring at Hermione with complete awe, a huge smile on his face as he gently placed his arm around Hermione’s shoulders. Rita looked as though she would have liked nothing better than to seize the paper umbrella sticking out of Hermione’s drink and thrust it up her nose.

“I don’t suppose I’ve got any choice, have I?” Rita said, her voice shaking slightly. She opened her crocodile bag once more, withdrew a piece of parchment, and raised her Quick-Quotes Quill.

“Daddy will be pleased,” Luna said brightly. A muscle twitched in Rita’s jaw.

“Okay, Harry!” Hermione said, turning to him. “Ready to tell the public the truth?”

“After Cedric tells what he saw,” Harry said, looking at Cedric. “Though he was knocked out for most of it, he was in there too.”

“The readers wouldn’t care for Diggory,” Rita said. “They would only care for you.”

“Though Cedric’s viewpoint would be a nice opening, don’t you think,” Harry asked. “He could tell you about how he almost died. …and How I somehow saved him from the Killing Curse.”

Cedric looked between Harry and Tom. “I…I guess I can…”

Rita looked between Harry and Cedric, a sour expression on her face. “Fine, go ahead… so Cedric, in your own words what happened that night?”

Cedric nodded and took a moment to gather his thoughts. “Harry and I… we reached the Triwizard Cup at the same time. We touched it and were taken away to this graveyard, yeah? Then there was a flash of green light, I felt something push me and I was knocked out. …When I woke up my dad was crying on top of me. It was hard to breath. I thought I was going to die. Nobody was noticing me… then Tom came and saved me.”

“You did?” Rita asked, looking at Tom, who nodded.

“I see… that’s not much to go on… So Harry, tell me about that night in the graveyard,” Rita said. “Were you scared? Who was there?”

Harry gave Tom a look and smiled. “I’ll start from the beginning,” he began. “We got to the graveyard just as Cedric said. The Triwizard Cup was a portkey. One of Voldemort’s follower snuck up on us and tried to kill Cedric with the Killing Curse. I moved without thinking, I pushed Cedric away with a spell but his head hit hard against tombstone. Before I could go and check on Cedric, I was forced to a tombstone, ropes binding me to it. The Death Eater was revealed to be Corban Yaxley, his hood fell as he pushed towards me a giant stone cauldron. In it he placed a bundle with a disgusting unhuman-looking baby, a husk of what a real human is supposed to look like. He dropped that, bones, his own flesh, and he forced blood from me into the cauldron.

“I do not know what potion it was or what ritual… but it was horrible. I was hoping, wishing that the thing would drown, that the ritual would fail… but it didn’t. There was a great smoke and from it he appeared, Voldemort.”

Rita jumped at the name and then asked, “And how did he look? What did you feel looking at You-Know-Who?”
“He was monstrous,” Harry said, staring at Rita. “Tall, skeletal, his entire body a boney white, red eyes and slits for a nose, snake-like you can say. Just looking at him can paralyze you with fear. He was coming closer to me… I couldn’t run away and then… he touched my scar. The pain was indescribable. My vision was blurring as the pain took over. As it came back I saw that his followers where there now. They were as scared as I was, if not more. They hesitated coming towards us… Yaxley was the only one close by, but he was too busy whimpering in pain.”

“Did You-Know-Who talk to his followers?”

“Yes,” Harry said. “He addressed them by name, in fact. There was Crabbe and Goyle, whose sons are currently in Hogwarts, my year. Avery, Nott, and Macnair, the Ministry’s executioner. They were only a small handful of the Death Eaters who arrived.”

“They are all Ministry members, Avery, Nott, and as well as Yaxley were prominent and well liked,” Rita said.

“Still, that does not excuse the fact that they are Death Eaters and they hold ill intent. Look at what happened with Yaxley,” Harry said.

“You are referring to Corbin Yaxley’s recent arrest for attempted poisoning of the Minister of Magic as well as the murders of Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy?” Rita asked, writing down furiously.

“Yes,” Harry said simply. His eyes went towards Hermione and Blaise. Hermione continued to stare at Harry, shocked, as if she could not believe Harry’s behavior and demeanor. Blaise was also shocked, but Harry could also see a hint of curiosity. He smirked and looked back at Skeeter.

“You’ve read about the murders, I hope?”

“Of course, and I have followed Corban’s arrest very closely,” Rita said.

“So you know that Yaxley poisoned Mrs. Malfoy and used the Killing Curse on Mr. Malfoy,” Harry said. “I always wondered why he would do that, after all they were both suspected Death Eaters.”

“What do you think happened, and how does this relate to that night?” Skeeter asked.

“Well, I believe that Mr. Malfoy was innocent, or maybe he turned away from Voldemort,” Harry said. “Either way, Yaxley felt betrayed and killed the Malfoys, perhaps in order to please Voldemort when he returns, and as for the Ministry… I can only guess that Voldemort ordered him to.”

“But he got caught,” Skeeter said.

“Then he was not a good killer,” Harry shrugged. “Thankfully,” he added as an afterthought.

“Yes, thankfully,” Skeeter said, writing down Harry’s response. “Now, getting back to the graveyard, you were tied to a gravestone, were you not? How did you get out?”

“Voldemort freed me,” Harry said. “Instead of just killing me… he freed me in order to duel me.”

“Duel you?”

“Yes,” Harry said. “He demanded it, really. I expect it is part of his egotistic nature. He couldn’t just kill a fourteen-year-old, he needed to beat me, prove his superiority.” He felt Tom’s hand on his inner thigh, edging close to his flaccid cock, and couldn’t help but smile. “But really that was his mistake. He forced me to bow, casted the Imperius Curse on me to do so, and then we fought. I
couldn’t think, I couldn’t plan, I was running away through most of it. It was scary, horribly so… I thought that I was going to die. That I was going to let Cedric down… never see Tom again.

“The Death Eaters laughed all around us, watching us, closing in on me. Voldemort ordered them not to attack, just to witness. He was demanding that I showed myself, that I face my death. I couldn’t breathe… I can’t remember what I was thinking…” Harry made sure to look away from Skeeter, instead just staring at the table between them. He reached for Tom’s hand on his inner thigh and squeezed it. He closed his eyes for a moment and took a shaky breath. “I don’t know how Cedric and I got out of there. I casted the first spell I could think of… it met Voldemort’s Killing Curse. An explosion of light happened, and I ran. I ran to Cedric’s body and fell on it before summoning the Triwizard Cup, hoping that it will take us away, far away from Voldemort.”

Harry felt Tom kiss his cheek and smiled softly. Good, he thought. Play the concern boyfriend, Tom.

He looked up at Skeeter. “Luckily, the portkey worked both ways and Cedric and I were pulled away from the graveyard and back to Hogwarts. As for what happened after that… you should know Rita. …But that fear. To stand in front of Voldemort, feel his power… see him in front of me… I was never as scared in my life.”

“That… is quite a story, Harry, I have to say,” Skeeter said, a twinkle in her eye. “Though there is something that both you and Cedric forgot to explain.”

“And what is that?” Harry asked calmly.

“How exactly did the Triwizard Cup became a portkey that brings you to this graveyard when it was known that the cup was enchanted to bring whoever touches it back at the beginning of the maze?” Skeeter asked.

“That… Voldemort had one of his followers in Hogwarts,” Harry said. “The Death Eater used a Polyjuice potion to disguise himself as Professor Moody year round. He actually kept the real Mad-Eye locked in a trunk. You can speak to Professor Dumbledore or Moody if you do not believe me.”

“And this is the whole story? Everything that happened in the graveyard?” Skeeter asked.

“This is the truth, I have not lied to you once,” Harry said. He took a deep breath and looked at Tom. Tom nodded and helped Harry to slide onto his lap where Tom wrapped his arms around Harry’s waist. Skeeter spent a moment silently writing. When she was done, she opened her crocodile bag and placed her parchment and quill away.

Turning to Harry she said, “Well Harry… this has been a most illuminating meeting. Miss Granger, believe me that I will write a very interesting article about you.” She got up and left, leaving the others at the table.

Blaise looked at Hermione and gave a low whistle, “I think you made her angry, Hermione,” he chuckled.

“Like I care,” Hermione said. Blaise just smiled and kissed her cheek. He looked at Harry and Tom and said, “Well… Hermione and I are going to go now. I had a nice plan to impress her.”

Hermione rolled her eyes but allowed Blaise to escort her from her seat. Before they left, she looked at Luna and said, “Thank you for doing this Luna.”

“You’re very welcome,” Luna said dreamily. “Daddy will be very happy to get an article about
Harry Potter. He was a bit jealous that he didn’t have one yet.”

“Yes… well… I am sure that this interview will make your father very proud,” Hermione said. “Harry,” she turned to him. “Can I… what was that?”

“What was that?” Harry asked innocently.

“Your entire behavior during the interview,” Hermione said. “I never saw you like that before… it was freaky.”

Harry gave a soft giggle and smiled at Hermione. “I was just acting like myself Hermione,” he said. “Tom taught me many things, Hermione. It’s only natural that I pick up a few of his talents.”

“But that didn’t sound like you at all Harry,” Hermione frowned.

Harry shrugged. “If I didn’t act like that, the interview would drag on and become much more difficult as Skeeter try to pull every detail from me. Look, I don’t want to talk about that night, okay? It was either I do what I did or have Skeeter have her fun. And between you and me, I prefer the way I handled it.”

Hermione was still looking at Harry weirdly but shook her head. “Fine, the interview’s over anyway,” she said. “Now we’ll just have to wait for Luna’s dad to publish it.”

Harry received letters two weeks later. It was Monday morning and the Gryffindor table was amazed as they watched owl after owl fly towards Harry, dropping their letters before hooting away, flapping their wings against one another.

“Harry! Read this one first,” Hermione said breathlessly, plunging her hand into the feathery mess and pulling out a screech owl bearing a long, cylindrical package. “I think I know what this means—open it!”

Harry ripped off the brown packaging. Out rolled a tightly furled copy of March’s edition of The Quibbler. He unrolled it to see his own face along with Tom’s grinning sheepishly at him from the front cover. In large red letters across his picture were the words:

**HARRY POTTER SPEAKS OUT AT LAST:**

**THE TRUTH ABOUT HE-WHO-MUST-NOT-BE-NAMED**

**AND THE NIGHT I SAW HIM RETURN**

“It’s good, isn’t it?” Luna said, who had drifted over to the Gryffindor table and now squeezed herself onto the bench between Fred and Ron. “It came out yesterday. I asked Daddy to send you a free copy. I expect all these,” she waved a hand at the assembled owls still scrabbling around on the table in front of Harry, replacing those who flew off, “are letters from readers.”

“When did she get a picture of us?” Harry said absentmindedly as he looked at the cover.

“Just what I was wondering, love,” Tom’s voice said. “Hermione, if you would… thank you.” He moved onto the bench as well and automatically rapped an arm around Harry’s waist. “Though, I must say, it is a good picture… though that should say ‘fiancé’ instead of ‘boyfriend.’”

Tom picked up one of the letters and opened it. “‘Dear Mr. Potter, I believe that there is a perfectly
permanent ward in St. Mungo’s waiting for you for spreading such stupid lies. You are deeply disturbed and a danger to our society.’ I’m surprised that this is not from Professor Umbridge,” Tom chuckled.

“Can we…”

“Help yourselves,” Harry said, feeling slightly bemused.

Ron and Hermione both started ripping open envelopes.

“This one’s from a bloke who thinks you’re off your rocker,” Ron said, glancing down his letter. “Ah, well…”

“This one seems okay… she believes you,” Hermione said.

“This one’s in two minds,” Fred said, who had joined in the letter-opening enthusiasm. “Says you don’t come across as a mad person, but he really doesn’t want to believe You-Know-Who’s back so he doesn’t know what to think now. …Blimey what a waste of parchment.”

“Here’s another one you’ve convinced, Harry!” Hermione said excitedly. "Having read your side of the story I am forced to the conclusion that the Daily Prophet has treated you very unfairly …Little though I want to think that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has returned, I am forced to accept that you are telling the truth. …’ Oh, this is wonderful!”

Tom chuckled, picking up a letter with a photo. “This one believes you’re a hero, and seems to want to seduce you… poor girl.”

“Even if she was a guy, I wouldn’t look twice,” Harry whispered, kissing Tom’s cheek.

“Good boy, I’ve trained you well,” Tom joked. Harry smiled and nodded in response.

“What is going on here?” said a falsely sweet, girlish voice.

Harry looked up with his hands full of envelopes. Professor Umbridge was standing behind Fred and Luna, her bulging toad eyes scanning the mess of owls and letters on the table in front of Harry.

“Why have you got all these letters, Mr. Potter?” she asked slowly.

“Is that a crime now?” Fred said loudly. “Getting mail?”

“Be careful, Mr. Weasley, or I shall have to put you in detention,” Umbridge said. “Well, Mr. Potter?”

Harry hesitated, but he did not see how he could keep what he had done quiet; it was surely only a matter of time before a copy of The Quibbler came to Umbridge’s attention.

“People have written to me because I gave an interview,” Harry said. “About what happened to me last June.”

“An interview?” Umbridge repeated, her voice thinner and higher than ever. “What do you mean?”

“I mean a reporter asked me questions and I answered them. Surely you know what an interview is, Professor Umbridge, though if you don’t, here, use this as an example,” Harry said. And he threw the copy of The Quibbler at her. She caught it and stared down at the cover. Her pale, doughy face turned an ugly, patchy violet.
“When did you do this?” she asked, her voice trembling slightly.

“Last Hogsmeade weekend,” Harry said.

She looked up at him, incandescent with rage, the magazine shaking in her stubby fingers.

“Then there will be no more Hogsmeade trips for you, Mr. Potter,” she whispered. “How you dare… how you could…” She took a deep breath. “I have tried again and again to teach you not to tell lies. The message, apparently, has still not sunk in. Fifty points from Gryffindor and another week’s worth of detention.”

“Unfortunately, Professor, you seem to forget your place,” Tom said. He stood from the bench and smiled politely at Professor Umbridge. “You see, only the Heads of Houses can ban Hogsmeade trips for their students, and while you are the… ‘high inquisitor’ your position only allows yourself to evaluate your fellow staff members, not decide which privileges to give or take away.”

“You… Mr. Riddle, just who do you think you are?” Professor Umbridge demanded.

“Why, just a student who is very observant, professor,” Tom smiled. “And, I hope, a humble reminder to you that you are not as powerful as you think you… because quite frankly you are getting on my nerves. But, never mind that, it seems that you are looking to create another Educational Decree… which number will this one be? I find myself losing track of them.”

Umbridge stalked away, clutching The Quibbler to her chest, the eyes of many students following her.

By mid-morning enormous signs have been put up all over the school, not just on House notice boards, but in the corridors and classrooms too.

BY ORDER OF

THE HIGH INQUISITOR OF HOGWARTS

Any student found in possession of the magazine The Quibbler will be expelled.

The above is in accordance with Educational Decree Number Twenty-seven.

Signed:

Dolores Jane Umbridge

HIGH INQUISITOR

“I must admit, she is starting to get annoying,” Tom sighed as he and Harry stood in front of one of the many signs. “Though, it seems that she has played herself. This will only want the students to read the article even more so.”

“You’re right,” Harry said, leaning against his boyfriend. “By the end of the week I’ll say that everyone will have read the article. Though… I don’t know how you expect to send Umbridge away, or kill her now…”

“True, I was hoping that we could suffer through her a little while longer but, she really is becoming an annoying nuisance. Like a loud fly that you cannot seem to swat,” Tom said.

“So what do you think we do?” Harry asked, looking up at Tom.
“I was going to take my time planning our break in at the Department of Mysteries, try and learn everything I could, as well as make sure that it was after your O.W.L.s so you don’t have to worry about the break in while you study or vice versa. However now… now I’m just annoyed,” Tom said.

“We can kill her, and have one of your—our followers replace her,” Harry said. “Like last year?”

“Last year was the result of Crouch studying Moody’s habits and knowing the man on a personal level,” Tom said. “No, no we can’t kill her… but that doesn’t mean she has to stay in the castle.”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked. Tom looked down at Harry and smiled. He placed a hand on Harry’s stomach and said, “What I mean, my love, my dear prince, is that we have centaurs… We can simply lead the woman to them and have them whisk her away.”

Harry stared at Tom. “That’s… that’s actually a good plan,” he said. “But what about afterwards? What will Hogwarts do without a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher?”

“That is a good question, Harry,” Tom said. “We have half a term left, and so far we have learned nothing from Umbridge. Knowing Dumbledore, he will do his hardest to find a replacement before the Ministry does. If you have any suggestions…”

“For teaching? Well um… Professor Lupin was actually the best teacher we had,” Harry said. “But he’s too busy working for the Order—”

“I am sure keeping an eye on you is far more important than whatever Dumbledore sent him to do,” Tom chuckled. “Though we won’t commence our plan immediately, my love, no, no too soon for that. No, I need to plan more, think more carefully. I need to hasten everything it seems…”

“So, when do you think we can do it?” Harry asked.

“Give me a month, my prince, and I will have prepared everything we need,” Tom said.

“Yes Sir,” Harry said.

However, it seems that only two weeks from Umbridge’s newest Decree, Harry and Tom’s alliance with the centaurs seemed to be tested. Professor Umbridge had sacked Professor Trelawney, trying to exile her from the castle only to be stopped by Dumbledore, who insisted that Trelawney continued to live at Hogwarts. In her replacement, he hired the centaur Firenze, who Harry remembered from his first year. After his first Divination class with the centaur, and hearing of how his herd banished Firenze for working for Dumbledore, Harry made his way quickly to the forest, running deep inside of it. “Bane! Bane!” he yelled out. “Bane!”

He heard the quick stomps of many hooves and was once again surrounded by beautiful men, their naked torsos gleaming with sweaty muscles that made Harry’s throat suddenly dry. The strongest, and most muscular of the group stepped forward. “Who are you, Potter, to demand our presence?” Bane demanded.

“Bane…” Harry breathed. “I was worried… about us. Once I saw Firenze in Hogwarts—”

“Do not mention him,” Bane ordered.

“Of course not, I’m sorry,” Harry said quickly, bowing his head submissively.
The older centaur chuckled. “You are so quick to submit, Harry Potter, a trait that I look long for. It is a shame that you are another man’s mare. If you weren’t, I would have mount you the moment I saw you,” Bane said with a confident smirk. “I am the leader of our herd, after all… and can give you pleasure no human can.”

“That… that is a wonderful offer Bane,” Harry purred. He slowly made his way towards the centaur and placed a delicate hand on his chest. “You look so strong, stronger than my man… I am a bit wishing that he had the physical size that you have.” He felt a muscled arm wrap around his torso and was picked up easily.

“Then you should leave him, little boy, and become a real stallion’s mare,” Bane growled. Harry found his cheeks flushing as he moved his arms around Bane’s neck, looking into his dark eyes.

“Bane… I love my stallion, my man… he is my Lord, my Master,” Harry said softly. “He made me into the mare—boy I am today. Though, it is true that without you, I could never be a true mare. Even now inside me is a womb that waits to be filled.”

“So it has worked?”

“Yes Bane, and I will be forever grateful to you for that,” Harry confessed. He opened his mouth to speak again, but Bane caught it, pulling the boy into a rough, surprising kiss that shocked Harry. He tried to struggle out of the kiss, but Bane’s arm kept him locked to his human, muscular torso. “Bane!” Harry gasped when the centaur released him.

“It is our tradition, that the leader of the herd gets a taste of every mare,” Bane smirked. “You are a beautiful boy, and a healthy mare, Harry Potter. If your Master prove unsatisfying, I shall always be here ready to show you a true stallion. Until then, our bond is still intact. I do not care what that traitor does, you have not made the pact with him, but with me.”

“Thank you Bane,” Harry said as the centaur lowered Harry back to the ground. “I promise if my Master is ever less than I deserve, I’ll come to you and submit fully.”

“Good. And on that day, I will fully make you a mare,” Bane smirked. “Goodbye Harry Potter.”

Harry stood still as he watched Bane and the other centaurs ride away. Harry couldn’t help but notice that he has ever saw male centaurs, never female. He wondered briefly where they were, but decided to stop thinking. The mare talk was confusing Harry, and he was still shocked, and a little angry, about Bane’s kiss. Taking several deep breaths, he forced himself to focus on positives. He still had the pact with the centaurs, they’re still honoring their agreement. We need to get rid of Umbridge soon, Harry thought to himself. The sooner he didn’t have to see Bane ever again, the better.

Though… Harry had to admit to himself that he did like Bane’s physical body, and decided that he was definitely going to bully Tom to get a more muscled body. He might gladly be Tom’s submissive, but that didn’t mean he didn’t want Tom to do things he wanted. Quickly making his way back to Hogwarts, Harry’s mind switched towards the D.A. There was a meeting that night, and he and Tom had to figure out what they were going to teach.

They both decided on Patronuses. “One final purely Light Arts spell,” Tom said to Harry, “before we delve into the Dark Arts.”

The members were very excited to start casting Patronuses, though as Harry kept reminding them, producing a Patronus in the middle of a brightly lit classroom when they were not under threat was very different to producing it when confronted by something like a dementor.
“Can you make a Patronus?” Cho asked Tom.

“No, I cannot,” Tom said simply. “To make a Patronus, you need to have a pure heart. No matter how much I’ll try, I wouldn’t even make a mist.” To emphasize his explanation, Tom waved his wand saying, “Expecto Patronum,” but nothing came.

“You two don’t need to be such killjoys,” Cho said brightly, watching her somewhat swan-shaped Patronus soar around the Room of Requirement during their last lesson before Easter. “They’re so pretty!”

“They are not supposed to be pretty, Cho,” Tom said a bit harshly. “They are supposed to protect you from dementors.”

“What we need is a boggart or something,” Harry said. “That’s how I learned, I had to conjure a Patronus while the boggart was pretending to be a dementor—”

“But that would be really scary!” Lavender Brown said, who was shooting puffs of silver vapor out of the end of her wand. “And I can’t—do it!” she added angrily.

Tom sighed and shook his head. He walked around the room as Harry took control, he was the one who knew the most about Patronuses after all. He moved towards Draco and Ron. Ron was producing a silvery substance that Tom thought was a tiny bear while Draco kept flicking his wand in frustration. “I can’t do it!” he said angrily.

“Of course you can’t, you’re a Malfoy,” Tom said. “Generation after generation of Dark Wizards? It would be a miracle if you can produce even a wisp.”

Draco shot Tom a glare and tried again, failing. “You should stop at this point Draco,” Tom sighed. “Dark Wizards cannot produce a Patronus, even if it is just because of their affiliation. You can read Auras, look around, tell us what you see.”

“Just various shades of yellow,” Draco said, looking around. “You and Harry are the only truly emeralds ones… but Harry still has yellow on him.”

“And you are most likely the same as me,” Tom said.

“Hang on,” Ron said, frowning between the two of them. “You’re muggleborn Tom, how can you have so much green on you? Draco and I’ve been practicing for a year or so and he told me I still barely have green.”

Tom looked at Ron. Giving the redhead a smile he said, “Simple, Ronald, I am a curious mind. That, and I always had difficulty casting more light-affiliated spells. My soul and heart are too perverted by the Dark Arts that it is impossible for me to perform it.”

“Well… that’s unacceptable for you Draco,” Ron said. “You’re going to perform the spell one way or another, yeah.”

“How many times do I have to tell you, I can’t?” Draco groaned. “It’s impossible.”

Ron gave Draco a harsh look and screwed up his face in concentration. He swirled his wand and yelled out, “Expecto Patronum!” A silvery mist shot out of his wand and started to take shape, becoming slightly more corporeal until a bear was standing in front of them for a brief second, turning into mist again.

“Congratulations, you can do it,” Draco drawled. “Still does not mean that I can.”
“Try.”

“Or?”

“Try, Weasley,” Ron growled out. Tom raised an eyebrow as Draco shot Ron another glare before pointing his wand in the air, swirling it around and attempting to perform the spell again. Tom watched as Draco continued to try, his face actually starting to shine with sweat from his attempts, but the best Draco could muster was a faded wisp that was barely visible for a second.

Draco’s next attempt was distracted, however, as the door of the Room of Requirement opened and then closed again; Tom looked around to see who had entered, but there did not seem to be anybody there. It took a few moments to realize that it was Dobby the House-elf, who was stuttering to Harry.

“Harry Potter … she… she…”

Dobby hit himself hard with a fist, which Harry quickly grabbed.

“Who’s ‘she’ Dobby?” Harry said. “Umbridge?”

Dobby nodded, then tried to bang his head off Harry’s knees. Harry held him at bay.

“What about her? Dobby—she hasn’t found out about us, about the D.A.?”

He read the answer in the elf’s stricken face. His hands held fast by Harry, the elf tried to kick himself and sank to his knees.

“Is she coming?” Harry asked quietly.

Dobby let out a howl. “Yes, Harry Potter, yes!”

Harry straightened up and looked around at the motionless, terrified people gazing at the thrashing elf.

“What ARE YOU STANDING AROUND FOR?” Harry bellowed. “RUN!”

They all pelted toward the exit at once, forming a scrum at the door, then people burst through; Harry could hear them sprinting along the corridors and hoped they had the sense not to try and make it all the way to their dormitories. It was only ten to nine, if they just took refuge in the library or the Owlery, which were both nearer—

Tom sighed and looked at Harry, “I’m done pretending, love,” he said as Hermione yelled for Harry in the center of the knot of people now fighting to get out.

“What do you mean?”

“Let them come,” Tom shrugged. “Leave the elf and let them come.”

“Alright,” Harry said. They joined the others trying to escape and made sure they were the last ones through. “Dobby! This is an order. Go back to the kitchen with the other elves and if she asks you whether you warned me, lie and say no. Also, you’re not allowed to hurt yourself!”

“Thank you, Harry Potter!” Dobby squeaked and he streaked off.

Tom and Harry looked around, Tom could hear people running towards them from their left and turned. Harry did too and saw a group of Slytherins as well as Umbridge running towards them.
Harry immediately recognized Parkinson and Crabbe and Goyle along with Daphne Greengrass. He looked at Tom, and said, “Do not—”

“Of course, I won’t, my love, I’ll simply do this,” Tom said. Before Harry noticed, Tom had his wand out and flicked it. The corridor seemed to vibrate, the walls shaking violently and caused Umbridge and the Slytherins to fall to the ground. Tom gave another flick and ropes appeared, tying around Umbridge and the Slytherins.

“Knock the woman out please, love, I need a talk with them,” Tom said.

Harry smiled and walked up to Umbridge, who was struggling against the rope that bind her. “Stupefy,” he sighed and a red beam of light shocked her.

“Vincent… Pansy… Daphne… Gregory… Tracey… Millicent… Urguhart… and young Malcolm Baddock,” Tom listed off. “My, my… look at the disloyalty. Tell me, why shouldn’t I kill your parents now?”

The Slytherins all stared at Tom in horror. Tom moved in front of them, his wand dragging from one student to another. “Or… perhaps I should kill you,” he said, “and let your parents find your mangled, torn bodies on their doorstep?”

“You…My…”

“Yes, I would Parkinson,” Tom chuckled. “You and I both know the truth. So, why has it you have done this? Any of you? You, Baddock, you are only twelve. Why are you here?”

“They—they made me… told me it was good,” the twelve year old stuttered. Tom frowned and looked at the Slytherins, wholly disappointed. He waved his wand and the ropes tying Baddock disappeared.

“Leave,” Tom commanded, and the second-year went running. Ignoring the other Slytherins, Tom turned to Harry. “What do you suppose, my love, that they would do if they have caught us?”

“Well… someone must have snitched on us,” Harry said. “I’m guessing bringing us back to her office… no wait…” Harry frowned as he thought for a moment. “Dumbledore’s office, because it is Dumbledore’s Army. Umbridge will use us to try and get Dumbledore to Azkaban or fired!”

“And thus he is our of her way, and ours, in Hogwarts,” Tom said with a knowing smile. “This woman truly is the most annoying and predictable woman in existence.”

“You mean…” Harry gasped. “You planned for this to happen?”

“Why else name ourselves ‘Dumbledore’s Army,’ love?” Tom asked. “I am completely confident that the Minister of Magic is in this school as we speak. Most likely in Dumbledore’s office.”

“So we use this chance to kill him?” Harry asked hopefully.

“No, no not yet… but, that does not mean we can’t lay the foundation for his death,” Tom said. “Tell me Harry, how skilled are you at injecting and removing potions via spell?”

“I don’t know,” Harry admitted. He looked at Umbridge’s unconscious body and said, “I’ve took away her uterus when I went to get my ring.”

“No this is something completely different,” Tom muttered. “Ahh, there’s no time to do that… oh well.”
“So what now?” Harry asked.

“Now, we will escort Professor Umbridge to the headmaster’s office, and talk with the Minister of Magic,” Tom said. “Afterwards, we shall watch the events unfold and I’ll have to change my plans accordingly.”

“Meaning?”

“All in good time, my love,” Tom chuckled. “When we are alone, we will talk more about it. As for now… these children need punishment for going against their Lord.”

He turned towards Parkinson and the other Slytherins, his skin turning chalky white, his limbs expanding hideously as his eyes shifted to a murderous red. Voldemort said nothing. He just slashed his wand and the seven Slytherins all screamed in pain as the sound of bones breaking filled the corridor. The Slytherins all screamed and whimpered in pain as Voldemort waved his wand again, and with another sick sound their bones were repaired, though purposefully poorly. He turned to Umbridge and shifted back to his normal appearance before waving his wand over her head.

Professor Umbridge began screaming angrily but Tom stopped her with a jab of his wand to her throat. “Come along Dolores,” he said. “Time to go visit Dumbledore and the Minister.”
Tom was right. The Minister of Magic was in Dumbledore’s office, along with Kingsley and another Auror Harry did not know. The Minister was rocking backward and forward on his toes beside the fire, apparently immensely pleased with the situation. Harry also saw Percy Weasley hovering excitedly beside the wall, a quill and a heavy scroll of parchment in his hands, apparently poised to take notes.

The portraits of old headmasters and headmistresses were not shaming sleep tonight. All of them were watching what was happening below, alert and serious. As Harry and Tom entered, a few flitted into neighboring frames and whispered urgently into their neighbor’s ears.

“Minister, I am not surprised to see you,” Tom Riddle said as he and Harry escorted Umbridge into the room. “Would you believe that your employee attacked myself and my fiancé as we were heading back to Gryffindor Tower.”

“Well, well, well, no use lying now, Mr. Potter,” The Minister said, looking victorious at Harry.

“We’re not lying,” Harry said. “Tom and I were on our way back to Gryffindor Tower when Umbridge attacked us. I do not believe we have broken any school rules or those Ministry degrees. Unless it is now illegal to walk with your boyfriend.”

“So,” Fudge said, his voice thick with anger, “it is news to you, is it, that an illegal student organization has been discovered within this school?”

“Yes, it is,” Harry said.

“I think, Minister,” Umbridge said, silkily from beside him, “we might make better progress if I fetch our informant.”

“Yes, you do that,” Fudge said, nodding, and he glanced maliciously at Dumbledore as Umbridge left the room. “There’s nothing like a good witness, is there, Dumbledore?”

“There’s nothing like a good witness, is there, Dumbledore?”

“Nothing at all, Cornelius,” Dumbledore said gravely, inclining his head.

There was a wait of several minutes, in which nobody looked at each other, then Harry heard the door open behind him. Umbridge moved past him into the room, gripping by the shoulder Cho’s curly-haired friend Marietta, who was hiding her face in her hands.

“Don’t be scared, dear, don’t be frightened,” Professor Umbridge said softly, patting her on the back, “it’s quite all right, now. You have done the right thing. The Minister is very pleased with you. He’ll be telling your mother what a good girl you’ve been. Marietta’s mother, Minister,” she added, looking up at Fudge, “is Madam Edgecombe from the Department of Magical Transportation. Floo Network office—she’s been helping us police the Hogwarts fire, you know.”

“Jolly good, jolly good!” Fudge said heartily. “Like mother, like daughter, eh? Well, come on, now, dear, look up, don’t be shy, let’s hear what you’ve got to—galloping gargoyles!”
As Marietta raised her head, Fudge leapt backwards in shock, nearly landing himself in the fire. He cursed and stamped on the hem of his cloak, which had started to smoke, and Marietta gave a wail and pulled the neck of her robes right up to her eyes, but not before the whole room had seen that her face was horribly disfigured by a series of close-set purple pustules that had spread across her nose and cheeks to form the word “SNEAK.”

Tom smirked and said, “You better hope that your new marks aren’t permanent, Miss Edgecombe. Would be a horrible thing to ruin your life over this mistake.”

Marietta gave a muffled wail as Umbridge gave Tom a dirty look. “Never mind the spots dear, just take your robes away from your mouth and tell the Minister—

But Marietta gave another muffled wail and shook her head frantically.

“Fine, I’ll tell him,” Umbridge snapped. She hitched her sickly smile back onto her face and said, “Well, Minister, Miss Edgecombe here came to my office shortly after dinner this evening and told me she had something she wanted to tell me. She said that if I proceeded to a secret room on the seventh floor, sometimes known as the Room of Requirement, I would find out something to my advantage. I questioned her a little further and she admitted that there was to be a sort of meeting there. Unfortunately at that point this hex,” she waved impatiently at Marietta’s concealed face, “came into operation and upon catching sight of her face in my mirror the girl became too distressed to tell me any more.”

It was clear that Marietta was not going to talk. Tom gave her a sharp look as he crossed his arms, looking impatient as Umbridge continued. “You will remember, Minister, that I sent you a report back in October that Potter had met a number of fellow students in the Hog’s Head in Hogsmeade—

“Objection!” Tom yelled, getting the room’s attention. “You are very good at giving stories, Umbridge, but where is the evidence?” he asked.

Professor Umbridge sneered at Tom, giving him the ugliest look Harry has ever seen. “Why Mr. Riddle, I have testimony from Willy Widdershins, who happened to be in the bar at the time. He was heavily bandaged, it is true, but his hearing was quite unimpeached,” Umbridge said smugly. “He heard every word Potter, and you Mr. Riddle, said and hastened straight to the school to report to me—

“If memory serves me, Mr. Widdershins has done a little crime of his own,” Tom said smoothly. “Setting up regurgitating toilets, was it not? So you’ve sweep his crime away for a testimony?”

“Blatant corruption!” roared the portrait of the corpulent, red-nosed wizard on the wall behind Dumbledore’s desk. “The Ministry did not cut deals with petty criminals in my day, no sir, they did not!”

“Thank you, Fortescue, that will do,” Dumbledore said softly.

“The purpose of Potter’s meeting with these students,” Professor Umbridge continued, “was to learn spells and curses the Ministry has decided are inappropriate for school-age—

“I think you’ll find you’re wrong there, Dolores,” Dumbledore said quietly, peering at her over the half-moon spectacles perched halfway down his crooked nose.

Harry stared at him then turned to look at Tom, who had a quizzical look on his face. “I’ll have to think about this one carefully,” Tom whispered under his breath. “One wrong move…”
“Oho!” Fudge said, bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet again. “Yes, do let’s hear the latest cock-and-bull story designed to pull Potter out of trouble! Go on, then, Dumbledore, go on—Willy Widdershins was lying, was he? Or was it Potter’s identical twin in the Hog’s Head that day? Or is there the usual simple explanation involving a reversal of time, a dead man coming back to life, and a couple of invisible dementors?”

Percy Weasley let out a hearty laugh. “Oh, very good, Minister, very good!”

Harry could have kicked him. Then he saw, to his astonishment, that Tom was laughing as well.

“My, my… how an imbecile like you became Minister I wish to know,” Tom said, still chuckling darkly. “Do you even know how to work with dates, Minister? Perhaps I can teach you. The Educational Decree, which makes such groups illegal, was passed on October seventh. However, the Hogsmeade visit when such a gathering could have taken place was on October fifth, two days before the passing of the decree. If such a gathering happened at that time and place, it was, by all legal terms, completely legal and Harry and I broke no rules.”

Percy looked as though he had been stuck in the face by something very heavy. Fudge remained motionless in mid-bounce, his mouth hanging open.

Umbridge recovered first. “That’s all very fine, Mr. Riddle,” she said, smiling sweetly. “But we are now nearly six months on from the introduction of Educational Decree Number Twenty-four. If the first meeting was not illegal, all those that have happened since most certainly are.”

“All those that happened since? Tell me Professor, how do you know if such meetings occur? That this was not the first meeting since October fifth? Do you have evidence that the meetings continued?” Tom asked, a knowing smirk growing on his face.

As Tom spoke, Harry heard a rustle behind him and rather thought Kingsley whispered something. He could have sworn too that he felt something brush against his side, a gentle something like a draft or bird wings, but looking down he saw nothing there.

“Evidence?” Umbridge repeated with that horrible wide toadlike smile. “Have you not been listening, Mr. Riddle? Why do you think Miss Edgecombe is here?”

“She can tell you of six months worth of meetings then? For all I remember I only see her in class,” Tom said. “Besides Umbridge, I thought we were all under the impression that she was merely reporting a meeting tonight.”

“Miss Edgecombe,” Umbridge said at once, “tell us how long these meetings have been going on, dear. You can simply nod or shake your head. I’m sure that won’t make the spots worse. Have they been happening regularly over the last six months? Just nod or shake your head, dear.”

Everyone in the room was gazing at the top of Marietta’s face. Only her eyes were visible between the pulled-up robes and her curly fringe. Harry thought it was a trick in the firelight, but he thought that the eyes looked blank, staring at Tom. And then—to Harry’s amazement—Marietta shook her head.

Umbridge looked quickly at Fudge and then back at Marietta. “I don’t think you understand the question, dear? I’m asking whether you’ve been going to these meetings for the past six months? You have, haven’t you?”

Again, Marietta shook her head.

“What do you mean by shaking your head, dear?” Umbridge said in a testy voice.
“Her meaning should be quite clear,” Tom said. “There has been no secret meetings for the past six months. Correct, Marietta?”

Marietta nodded.

“But there was a meeting tonight!” Umbridge said furiously. “There was a meeting, Miss Edgecombe, you told me about it, in the Room of Requirement! And Potter was the leader, was he not, Potter organized it, Potter—why are you shaking your head, girl?”

“Surely you know the universal sign of ‘No,’ Professor?” Tom said coldly.

Professor Umbridge seized Marietta, pulled her around to face her and began shaking her very hard. A split second later Dumbledore was on his feet, his wand raised. Kingsley started forward and Umbridge leapt back from Marietta, waving her hands in the air as though they had been burned.

“I cannot allow you to manhandle my students, Dolores,” Dumbledore said, and for the first time he looked angry.

“Dolores,” Fudge said, with the air of trying to settle something once and for all, “the meeting tonight—the one we know definitely happened—”

“Yes,” Umbridge said, pulling herself together, “yes… well, Miss Edgecombe tipped me off and I proceeded at once to the seventh floor accompanied by certain trustworthy students—”

“Parkinson, Crabbe, Goyle, Greengrass, a couple others and a bullied Malcolm Baddock, who was forced to join Umbridge,” Tom interrupted. “Hardly a trustworthy group, seeing how they constantly bully and harass other students. But please, continue.”

Both the Minister and Umbridge gave Tom death glares and Harry couldn’t help but feel an itchy feeling in his hand. He wanted to curse them, to hurt them for looking at his Lord like that. Just kill them and be done with it!

He thought in his head.

“It does not matter what you say Mr. Riddle, I have your name… all of the names in fact… on this pretty piece of evidence,” Umbridge said. And much to Harry’s horror, she withdrew from her pocket the list of names that had been pinned upon the Room of Requirement’s wall and handed it to Fudge.

“The moment I saw Potter’s name on the list, I knew what we were dealing with,” she said softly.

“Excellent,” Fudge said, a smile spreading across his face, “Excellent, Dolores. And… by thunder…”

He looked up at Dumbledore, who was still standing beside Marietta, his wand held loosely in his hand.

“See what they’ve named themselves? Fudge said quietly. ‘Dumbledore’s Army.’

Tom let out a soft, almost silent chuckle, his face perfectly still though Harry knew that he was smirking inside. “You lose, old man,” Tom said under his breath. Harry stared at Tom and it only took a moment to realized what he had done. Without Harry noticing, Tom somehow slipped the list in Umbridge’s pocket and altered her memories.

“Well, the game is up,” Dumbledore said simply. “Would you like a written confession from me, Cornelius—or will a statement before these witnesses suffice?”
Fudge looked utterly surprised. “Statement?” he said slowly. “What—I don’t—?”

“Dumbledore’s Army, Cornelius,” Dumbledore said, still smiling as he waved the list of names before Fudge’s face. “Not Potter’s Army. Dumbledore’s Army.”

“But—but—”

Understanding blazed suddenly in Fudge’s face. He took a horrified step backward, yelped, and jumped out of the fire again.

“You?” he whispered, stamping again on his smoldering cloak.

“That’s right,” Dumbledore said pleasantly.

“You organized this?”

“I did,” Dumbledore said.

“You recruited these students for—for your army?”

“Tonight was supposed to be the first meeting,” Dumbledore said nodding. “Merely to see whether they would be interested in joining me. I see now that it was a mistake to invite Miss Edgecombe, of course.”

“Harry,” Tom whispered. He leaned close to Harry’s ear and whispered, “What have we learned tonight?”

Harry answered immediately, his eyes glancing at Tom. “Play to people’s fears,” he whispered. “Fudge is scared of Dumbledore stealing his power… so you forced Dumbledore into a corner where he has to admit Fudge’s worst fear.”

“And now… Dumbledore’s worst fear will be realized,” Tom whispered. “Forced to flee this school, leaving his students vulnerable to Lord Voldemort’s whims. Though, they both will be dead soon.”

“But everyone will learn so much under you,” Harry whispered.

“Shh… watch,” Tom said, his eyes flickering towards the scene in front of them.

“Weasley!” Fudge cried, now positively quivering with delight. “Weasley, have you written it all down, everything he’s said, his confession, have you got it?”

“Yes, sir, I’ve got it, yes!” Percy said, scanning his notes joyfully.

“Very well, then,” Fudge said, now radiant with glee. “Duplicate your notes, Weasley, and send a copy to the Daily Prophet at once. If we send a fast owl we should make the morning edition!”

Percy dashed from the room, slamming the door behind him, and Fudge turned back to Dumbledore, “You will now be escorted back to the Ministry, where you will be formally charged and then sent to Azkaban to await trial!”

“Ah,” Dumbledore said gently, “yes. Yes. I thought we might hit that little snag.”

“Snag?” Fudge said, his voice still vibrating with joy. “I see no snag, Dumbledore!”

“Be ready to duck,” Tom whispered in Harry’s ear. “When I tell you, move.”
“I am afraid you are under the delusion that I am going to—what is the phrase? ‘Come quietly.’ I am afraid I have no intentions of going to Azkaban, Cornelius.”

“Enough of this,” Umbridge said. “Take him!” she yelled at Kingsley and the other Auror. Chaos happened. There was a streak of silver light flashing and then a bang, like a gunshot, and the floor trembled. Harry and Tom ducked quickly, Tom shielding Harry. When the light started to vanish, Harry was surprised to see that Dumbledore was gone.

“Where is he?” Fudge yelled, “Where is he?”

“I don’t know!” Kingsley shouted.

“Well, he can’t have Disapparated!” Umbridge cried. “You can’t inside this school—”

They were interrupted by a cold, harsh laughter. The two Aurors, Fudge, and Umbridge turned towards Tom. He was standing to his feet, laughing maniacally at their actions. Harry ran towards Marietta and said, “Get out of here!” She ran and Harry smiled when the door closed. He pulled out his wand and locked it.

“Mr. Riddle this is no laughing matter!” Umbridge said. “You will cease this instance!”

Tom turned towards Umbridge and took a step forward, still laughing. His laughter grew higher and colder with each step, his body changing before the four of them. Harry aimed his wand at Kingsley and the other Auror and disarmed their wands before they had a chance to raise them.

A cold skeletal man stood in front of them now, with a smooth, snake-like head with red eyes and slits for a nose. “I had quite enough of your babblings… Professor Umbridge,” Voldemort teased.

“You—you—”

“My god,” Fudge gasped, his face turning white as a sheet. His horrified eyes turned desperately to Harry. “Well! Do something!” he cried out.

Voldemort turned to Harry, “Yes Harry,” he said, his cold voice now airy, “do something.”

Harry looked at Voldemort and smiled, saying three words that shattered everyone’s hopes in that room. “Yes, my Lord.” Quick as a flash he aimed his wand at the Minister. “Incendio.” A wave of fire shot from Harry’s wand and the Minister’s clothes quickly caught on fire.

The portraits of the past headmasters and headmistresses screamed in panic, all of them trying to run away from their portraits, to get away from Hogwarts castle and warn someone, anyone, of what is happening. Unfortunately, Voldemort waved his wand and the portraits all fell to the ground, their occupants sealed in their frames. The Minister’s panicked screams filled the room along with smoke from his burning robes as the flames started to lick and touch his skin.

“Harry! What are you doing?” Kingsley demanded. Harry turned away from the burning Minister and smiled. “Simple,” he said. “I’m serving my Lord as his Dark Prince… however… we can’t let you tell anyone. I’m sorry Kingsley.”

“Harry we can talk about this, we can help you,” Kingsley said. “We can run—do the right thing. Nobody has to get hurt. He is… that thing is a monster, Harry, a monster who is using you to—”

“Do not talk about my love that way!” Harry screamed. “I don’t want you to die Kingsley! I like you, I have no problems with you! But things need to change…” Harry wiped away the angry tears that were forming in his eyes. “And if… and if this is the way it has to be… I’m sorry.”
Harry turned to Voldemort and said, “Make his quick… and painless. Please?”

“Of course my love,” Voldemort said. He pulled Harry into a possessive kiss, wrapping an arm protectively around Harry as his other aimed at Kingsley. Harry shut his eyes as Voldemort said against their kiss, “Avada Kedavra.”

Kingsley’s body fell to the floor, followed quickly by the second Auror. Voldemort continued to kiss Harry, shielding his eyes from the burning Minister as Voldemort turned his wand towards Fudge. Voldemort said the Unforgivable Curse again against Harry’s lips, biting Harry’s lower one.

Harry moaned as Fudge’s body fell, Voldemort waving his wand to extinguish the flames.

During this time Umbridge just stood in horror, shocked at what occurred. Voldemort turned his red eyes unto her and smirked as he moved away from Harry and towards her again. He jabbed his wand towards her, and she fell unconscious.

“Harry, order the crows to steal Percy’s transcript and wipe his mind of the last two hours,” Voldemort commanded. “I will tidy this room.”

“Yes, my Lord,” Harry said. Tom quickly put out the fireplace and Harry ran towards the darkest corner, disappearing into it. “Lead me to Percy Weasley, now!” he yelled in the total darkness. Bands of red eyes appeared and seemingly created a pathway that led towards a faraway light. Harry followed the trail the crows made and was surprised to find himself in The Owlery. Percy Weasley was sitting and frantically copying his own notes. “I would stop that, if I was you,” Harry threatened.

Percy jumped and turned to see Harry. “P-Potter!” he said, surprised. “You’ll not get out of this one —”

“I don’t have time, Obliviate!” Harry yelled. A soft light hit Percy and he slunk into his seat. Harry walked towards his unconscious body and took his notes. “Destroy these,” he ordered the crows, throwing the notes on the ground. “And bring him to his home. Unharmed.” Harry stressed the last part. He watched as the darkness in the shadows appeared to grow, crows manifesting as if from nowhere and slowly covering Percy’s slumped body until Harry could barely see a piece of his red hair. Then the darkness disappeared all at once, along with Percy’s body.

Harry stepped back into the complete darkness and returned to the Headmaster’s office. He was shocked to see that it was clean. Kingsley’s, Fudge’s and the other Auror’s bodies were nowhere to be found. Everything was back in their place, and the headmasters and headmistresses of Hogwarts were all sleeping in their portraits. The only people in the room was Tom (who was back to his handsome body), who was sitting in the Headmaster’s chair, and Umbridge, who was still lying on the floor unconscious. “Where are—”

“The bodies will appear at different times spaced weeks apart,” Tom said. “The portraits were all given a complex memory charm, please do not ask me how I managed that and Umbridge is still alive. It is as if nothing has happened in this room tonight. But come, we have unfinished business. I hoped we could wait until your O.W.L. exams, but no more. We strike tonight.”

“Okay,” Harry said. “What is the plan?”

“Follow me, and I will tell you,” Tom said. He flicked his wand and rope appeared, tying Umbridge’s hands together. With another flick, the toad woman woke up. “Get up Dolores,” Tom said in a falsely sweet voice. “We are going for a little walk, and you are going to hear about all the
delightful things Harry and I are going to do to your precious Ministry.”

“You will unhand me, Potter!” She screamed, apparently recovered from her shock and fright of seeing the Minister of Magic burned then killed. Tom frowned, and, with a snap, a piece of cloth was stuffed in Professor Umbridge’s mouth. “Much better,” Tom sighed in relief. He took Harry’s hand and the two walked out of the office, Professor Umbridge following them as if pulled by an invisible leash.

They walked down the spiral staircase and into the empty corridor. “I have wished we could have delayed this until after your examinations, love, but Dumbledore has just presented me the perfect opportunity,” Tom began.

“It’s okay, I’ll just study twice as hard when we’re done,” Harry smiled.

“Good boy,” Tom said, squeezing Harry’s hand affectionately. “Believe me when I say that I will be disciplinary if I find you slacking.”

“Yes, My Lord,” Harry said, grinning slightly.

“Good. As for tonight, once we dispose of Miss Umbridge, we will contact our followers immediately. I believe my Death Eaters will be all that is needed. Greyback will come along, just so he can act as messenger to the rest of the werewolves.”

“Oh…” Harry frowned. “I don’t like him. He scares me a little.”

“I know he does, but our alliance with the werewolves is only temporary, my love,” Tom said. “And he will be doing little to nothing here. I am sure bringing a ravenous werewolf into the Department of Mystery is not a very good idea. It is something the husk would do, but not us. However, that does not mean the werewolves don’t have their usefulness, my love. But we can talk about that later, for now let me tell you what I have planned out.”

They kept walking down the deserted corridors, Harry surprised that they weren’t running into anyone. The two turned a corner and started slowly going down the marble staircase.

“We will infiltrate the Ministry using the Floo Network,” Tom continued. “I believe we have given our followers enough time to rest after their stay in Azkaban. The Order will obviously be notified immediately about our break-in, but they should provide no difficulty for us.”

“What if Sirius comes? Or Remus? Or Tonks or—”

“If you or I see that our members are about to provide a killing blow to them,” Tom continued, “then you will simply stop them first.”

“As a way to distract the Order? Make them think we’re on their side?” Harry asked.

“Precisely,” Tom said. They stepped into the entrance hall and Tom turned to Professor Umbridge. “Get the door,” he ordered, swiping his wand and letting Umbridge’s body fly out in front of them, slamming into the wooden doors that led outside, opening them slightly. The two walked through the door and out into the grounds. “With the prophecy in our possession, all we would need to do is kill Dumbledore and make it look as if I too have died.”

“What!” Harry said, looking alarmed.

“Do not worry my love,” Tom chuckled. “It is just a way for us to end this war before it starts properly. We will simply have one of my followers impersonate me.”
“And they won’t know of this part?”

“The impersonator? No, he won’t.” Tom said. “What reason would I have to explain my plans to the dead?” His eyes shifted towards Umbridge as they walked down to the grounds. In the distance Harry could see Hagrid’s hut, there was a light on and smoke rising from the chimney. They turned and walked away from the hut as they continued towards the forest.

“What about after that?”

“Well with the prophecy in our possession, and the bodies of Dumbledore and ‘Voldemort’ to be found… the world will conclude that the two have killed each other and speculate on what happened and why their precious Minister Fudge seemingly ran away,” Tom said. “It will be easy to insert a puppet for our uses until things eventual normalize. Ahh, here we are,” Tom smiled as they walked into the forest. He turned to Harry and said, “If you would be so kind, my love.”

Harry nodded and took the lead. He led Tom and Umbridge deeper into the forest until they could barely see in front of them. Then they heard hooves running on the ground and stopped. “Bane! Bane come help!” Harry yelled out. The hooves stopped for a moment before becoming louder. Bodies appeared and soon the centaurs have circled around them, Bane stepping forward.

“Harry Potter, what do you need help with?” Bane asked.

Harry pointed at Umbridge and said, “She tried to rip the child growing inside me out, she tried to kill the mare that you’ve help create Bane. Please, help me, she is the one I warned you—told you about. Take her far away from me, from my child, before she can hurt me or anyone again.”

“Understood,” Bane said. He looked at the other centaurs. The herd gave a great whooping sound as they ran towards Tom and Umbridge, snatching Umbridge from Tom and running away with her, her muffled screams filling the forest night. “You are Harry Potter’s man?” Bane asked, looking at Tom.

“I am, and I am very grateful for all you have done for my Harry,” Tom said. “And, just so you know, I am more than enough to satisfy my boy,” Tom gave a lewd smirk. “He has no need for your… size.”

Bane glared at Tom angrily, his hooves stomping on the ground. “Though I must admit your physical appearance is something to be admired… perhaps Harry is right, I might try to imitate it. Though that will be done the road. For now, our business with each other is done.”

He took Harry’s hand and the two walked out of the forest, satisfied and calmer than before. Once they reached the Forest Edge, and Tom knew that they weren’t being followed by Bane or the centaur herd, he turned to Harry and said, “Our business with the Centaurs is complete. But our night is far from over. Come my love, your Lord has need of his Prince.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter last chapter
Chapter 22

Chapter XXII

The Ministry of Magic was empty as Voldemort and his Prince walked through the atrium, their Death Eaters following them. The only sound in the Atrium was the steady rush of water from the golden fountain, where jets from the wands of the witch and wizard, the point of the centaur’s arrow, the tip of the goblin’s hat, and the house-elf’s ears continued to gush into the surrounding pool. They walked down the hall pass a security desk where the Dark Prince’s wand has been weighted on his first visit. Voldemort instructed his followers to enter the lift while he and the Dark Prince stayed behind.

“What are we going to do, my Lord?” The Dark Prince asked, looking up to his lover.

“We are going to search for the prophecy,” Voldemort hissed. “Let our followers blunder about.”

He waved a hand and crows appeared. They followed the crows into the familiarity of darkness and reappeared in a corridor with nothing but torches and a black door. “The Department of Mysteries,” Voldemort said to the Dark Prince. The two walked to the black door and it swung open. It led to a large, circular room. Everything in here was black including the floor and ceiling —identical, unmarked, handle-less black doors were set at intervals all around the black walls, interspersed with branches of candles whose flames burned blue, their cool, shimmering light reflecting in the shining marble floor so that it looked as though there was dark water underfoot.

The Prince frowned as he looked from door to door and turned to Voldemort. Voldemort took out his wand. The Dark Prince watched as Voldemort walked slowly around the room, dragging his wand against the black walls and doors, muttering softly to himself. The Dark Prince could see nothing visible, but rather felt a heavy veil falling over him as magic flared from the Dark Lord. The room seemed to warp, seemed to stutter as if it was sitting on a cog that failed to turn. Voldemort made a full rotation of the room then moved to the middle of the room. The Dark Prince heard footsteps and turned to see their Death Eaters silently entering the circular room, crowding at the empty room.

Voldemort did not regard them. He raised his wand at a door and began muttering under his breath. The Dark Prince once again felt the room warping and stuttering, the door behind him forcibly closing. The Prince thought that the room was actively fighting against Voldemort, the walls stuttering violently, wanting to spin uncontrollably. Voldemort kept his arm stiff, the wand pointing at a door until, with an explosion like a cannon shot, the door was blown open and the wall stopped spinning. The Dark Prince stepped forward to see beautiful, dancing, diamond-sparkling lights. As the Prince’s eyes became more accustomed to the brilliant glare he saw clocks gleaming from every surface, large and small, grandfather and carriage, hanging in spaces between the bookcases or standing on desks ranging the length of the room, so that a busy, relentless ticking filled the place like thousands of minuscule, marching footsteps. The source of the dancing, diamond-bright light was a towering crystal bell jar that stood at the far end of the room.

“Enter, make sure the room is clear,” Voldemort commanded. The Death Eaters all filtered around the Dark Prince and Voldemort, going through the opened door and into the dazzling room. Voldemort and the Prince waited a few moments in the small room before Voldemort led the way into the dazzling room.

The Prince could not see any Death Eaters, but somehow felt like he and Voldemort were going the right way. The two walked down the narrow space between the lines of the desks, heading for the
source of the light, the crystal bell jar quite as tall as he was that stood on a desk and appeared to be full of a billowing, glittering wind. They walked past it, ignoring the jar and its contents, which was a tiny, jewel-bright egg, and through the door behind it.

The room was high as a church and full of nothing but towering shelves covered in small, dusty glass orbs. They glimmered dully in the light issuing from more candle brackets set at intervals along the shelves. Like those in the circular room behind them, their flames were burning blue. The room was very cold. Voldemort and the Dark Prince moved down the rows, each of them numbered. “How will we know which one to look for?” the Prince asked as behind them the Death Eaters slowly followed.

“Who knows. We shall let our followers do the grunt work,” Voldemort whispered to his Prince. He turn glanced back to see the Death Eaters waiting for instructions. “Search out my orb. It will have mine and Potter’s name on it.”

The Death Eaters all nodded silently, fanning throughout the room for the prophecy. The Dark Prince couldn’t help but frown as he looked around. “I would have thought that Dumbledore or the Order would be here by now,” he said.

“Patience, my love, they will be here soon. There is no way our presence will not go unnoticed… in the meantime, I have a question and would like to see your reasoning,” Voldemort said.

“What is it, my Lord?” The Dark Prince asked.

Voldemort smirked and gestured his hand lazily towards the air. “Fudge is dead, and the seat for Minister of Magic is currently empty. Who shall we have fill it? They must naturally either be moldable to our values or in a position to be controlled easily. I currently have two in mind. Rufus Scrimgeour, the current Head of the Auror Office and a reasonable choice to follow Fudge but heavily against our ideals… or Pius Thicknesse. A lesser worker in the Auror Office who is… weak-minded.”

“Scrimgeour,” the Dark Prince said immediately. “If he seems the next logical choice, we should pick him. Though I guess that means we’ll have to keep some of the Death Eaters around for a little while… for a few years.”

Voldemort chuckled. “Don’t worry my love, you’ve promised to kill all of them, and I am more than happy to give you your murderous wants.”

“Leave Parkinson,” The Dark Prince said. “He already works in the Ministry, and was friends with Mr. Malfoy… He will have the task of performing the Imperius on Scrimgeour… think of it like a chance to redeem himself. He’ll do it, but if he doesn’t tell him that we will force his daughter into marriage.”

“With whom?”

“I don’t know… who does she hate the most?” The Dark Prince couldn’t help but smile humorously.

“You, Harry Potter, but there is no way she will wed you,” Voldemort said.

“I’ll think of someone,” the Dark Prince shrugged. “Did you hear Theo’s dating Neville?”

“He is?”

“Yeah, caught them snogging before the D.A. today,” The Dark Prince said.
“Hmm…”

“My Lord!” A Death Eater ran up to them. Harry immediately recognized him as Rockwood.
“We’ve found it.”

“Lead,” Voldemort commanded. Rockwood bowed and led Voldemort and the Prince down the rows of dusty orbs, The Dark Prince noticing that the numbers etched on the rows were quickly climbing. They stopped at row ninety-four and Rockwood pointed to one of the small glass spheres that glowed with a dull inner light, though it was very dusty and appeared not to have been touched for many years.

There was a yellow label underneath the ball. In spidery writing was written a date of some sixteen years previously, and below that:

S.P.T. to A.P.W.B.D.

Dark Lord

And (?) Harry Potter


Voldemort nodded and reached forward to the orb and gently lifted it off of the shelf. “This is the prophecy,” Voldemort hissed to his Prince. “Interesting… so this is the reason why the husk has visited your home so many years ago…”

“How do we listen to it?”

Voldemort turned to Rockwood. “Leave. This is only for myself and my heir,” he commanded. The Death Eater nodded and left the two alone, gone back to patrolling the room. Voldemort turned to the Dark Prince and smirked. He touched his wand to the orb and Professor Trelawney’s hoarse voice seemingly came out of the orb.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies....”

The Dark Prince frowned at the orb. He looked hesitantly to Voldemort, biting his lip nervously. “Tom…”

“This was it?” Voldemort chuckled. “This is what Dumbledore was trying so hard to protect? Pathetic.” He moved his hand that was holding the prophecy slightly and the Dark Prince watched as it slipped from Voldemort’s hand and fell, smashing onto the floor.

“What did you do that for?” The Dark Prince gasped.

“It is useless, the husk is dead,” Voldemort said. “The Dark Lord that his prophecy refers to... is no longer a threat, and both of us are not going to kill each other, far from it. When this is done, I’m going to fuck you into submission until you are filled with my seed and every pore of your body is leaking my essence.”

“T-Tom—” the Dark Prince mewled.
Voldemort smirked at the Dark Prince’s reaction.

*BANG.*

A loud exploding sound rumbled the entire floor. The sounds of fighting reached the Dark Lord’s and Dark Prince’s ears. Voldemort smirked as he looked down at his Prince. “*It seems Dumbledore and his Order have arrived. Shall we?*”

The room continued to rumble as the screams slowly became louder and louder. Voldemort made the Dark Prince walk towards the fight, even though the Prince’s legs screamed for them to run, to join the fray and make sure that everyone they loved and care about are safe. In the distance the Dark Prince could see figures fighting. He couldn’t make out the Death Eaters, they all were wearing the same robes and mask, but he could easily recognize Tonks’ bubble-gum pink hair as well as the disfigured figure of Mad-Eye Moody. Lupin and Sirius were there, fighting their hardest against Nott and Dolohov, whose masks were knocked off. The Prince found his feet moving faster, ignoring Voldemort’s commands as he watched Sirius fight.

Sirius whipped his wand and Nott fell to the ground. Dolohov dodged a stunner sent from Lupin and aimed his wand at Sirius. “Avada—”

“*EXPPELLIARMUS!*”

The Prince’s spell rushed towards Dolohov and his wand soar into the air towards the entrance of the hall of prophecy. “DON’T KILL THEM YOU IDIOT!” The Dark Prince yelled out, causing Sirius and Lupin to look at him.

“It’s the Dark Prince!” Sirius yelled out. “Don’t harm the boy!”

The Dark Prince looked around but did not see Dumbledore anywhere. *Where is he?* He thought to himself as he watched the battle unfold in front of him. It was like a firework spectacular; flashes of spells going off one after another. Nobody seemed to be giving The Dark Prince any thought or looks as he watched the battle in front of him transfixed. Dolohov has found his wand and joined Nott again as they dueled Lupin and Sirius; Mad-Eye Moody was fighting two at once while Tonks fired spells off at any Death Eaters she could see. The Dark Prince turned to Voldemort, “*Dumbledore isn’t here!*”

“*He has to be in the Ministry, leave them and follow me,*” Voldemort commanded before sweeping pass the fighters in a column of black smoke.

The Dark Prince frowned. He couldn’t leave Sirius, he didn’t want to leave his godfather’s fate unknown. He had to be certain that Sirius would live—that he would make it out of here. Getting an idea the Dark Prince pointed his wand at one of the shelves. “*Bombarda!*” he yelled. The spell hit the shelf next to him with full force. It shattered into pieces and flew into the nearby shelves. Blue orbs fell from up high, smashing into blue mist on the ground as shelf after shelf began to be destroyed. The fighting stopped for a second to see the wave of prophecies falling from the sky. The Order all looked stunned for a second too long as the Death Eaters began to run away, their wand still trained on Sirius, Lupin, Tonks, and Mad-Eye, firing spells. “No!” The Dark Prince screamed, waving his wand frantically as he ran, forcibly pushing Sirius out of the way of a get of white light. “Run you idiot!”

The Order seemed to snap out of their daze at that moment and began to run. The Dark Prince ran ahead of them and he could hear Moody shouting to the others to get him. The Prince shot spells over his shoulder, not bothering to aim properly. All he had to do was get away from them, separate Sirius from the Death Eaters. But the Death Eaters did not seem to want to end the fighting.
Walden Macnair, the man Harry remembered who almost executed Buckbeak, turned on the spot and aimed for the Order, the Dark Prince in his line of fire, and yelled out “Avada Kedavra!”

The Dark Prince whipped his wand and orbs flew in front of him, the Killing Curse shattering them to blue dust. The Prince, enraged, pointed his wand at Macnair and yelled, “AVADA KEDAVRA!”

His Killing Curse found its mark on the shocked Death Eater who fell dead, quickly being buried by the falling shelves and prophecies. The Dark Prince continued to run. He could see the door in front of him, soon he’ll be in the room with all the clocks. He could lose the Order there, separate them from the Death Eaters in there—then an arm wrapped itself around the Prince’s body.

“No!” he snarled as he was forcibly lifted into the air. He looked up to see that Lupin has somehow caught up to him and lifted him up. “Let go!” he yelled. “You’ll get us all killed!”

“I’m getting you somewhere safe,” Lupin yelled as they ran through the doorway, which closed after Mad-Eye ran through. Lupin dropped the Dark Prince safely on the ground and held his hands out. “You’re safe now… You-Know-Who isn’t here, his followers aren’t here… you’re safe with us.”

“Stupid idiots,” The Dark Prince muttered to himself. He got to his feet slowly as he looked around, trying to figure out a way away from them.

“Boy’s a murderer,” Moody grunted. “Killed one of his own.”

“Well that can’t be his fault can it?” Tonks asked. Moody grunted and banged his staff to the ground; the Dark Prince’s wand flew into the air away from them. “Just to be safe…”

“Who are you?” Lupin asked. “You look barely old enough to fight, where did You-Know-Who take you from?”

“You can talk to us, yeah, we’re all friends here,” Tonks said. “And you have nothing to worry about, Dumbledore’s rounding up those Death Eaters as we speak.” She gave the Dark Prince a smile, which he did not return. He just stared at the four adults in front of him, his mind working overtime.

“Yeah, we’re all good pals here,” Sirius said. “So why don’t you take off that mask of yours so we can talk? I’m sure that Dumbledore can help you get away from You-Know-Who and his lot.”

_They know my voice, I can’t speak to them, but I don’t see how I can get away from them either_, the Dark Prince thought, his eye moving frantically behind his mask.

“Hey, hey look at us, huh, you can trust us,” Sirius smiled. The Dark Prince shook his head. He took a step back from them. He needed to get away. “No, no, no, you can trust us see? No wands pointing at you…”

The Dark Prince shook his head away, his eyes constantly searching for a way out.

“We can just stun the boy and bring him to headquarters,” Moody grunted.

“That would just make things more difficult, Mad-Eye!” Tonks said. She turned back to the Prince and asked, “How old are you? You look very young, you know, you should be in Hogwarts, not running about with a bunch of Death Eaters.”

_Just shut up. Shut up and run away—you’re all going to die if you stay here_, Harry thought frantically in his mind. _If Voldemort finds me here with you all—Kingsley’s already dead, he’ll do..._
“Can you tell us your name, at least? Or your age?” Tonks asked. She was leaning on her knees. The Dark Prince’s eyes shifted for a moment then whispered, “Fifteen,” hoping that he can change his voice somehow just by pure skill alone.

“Fifteen huh? Yeah you should definitely be in Hogwarts,” Tonks smiled.

The Prince’s eyes started looking around towards the corners of the room, looking for any noticeable shadows. The bell jar they were standing near was giving off a brilliant diamond-bright light. There were no shadows that the Dark Prince could see, no red eyes that stared out at him. He was cut off from the crows and couldn’t rely on them.

“Think Dumbledore will let him be in Hogwarts?” Tonks asked, looking at Sirius, Lupin, and Mad-Eye. Lupin shifted his eyes towards her but Sirius and Mad-Eye continued to watch the Dark Prince.

“Hopefully,” Lupin said. “Though we can’t say how far behind he is in his normal studies, if he is at all. For all we know You-Know-Who could have only taught him Dark Magic.”

Deciding to try out an experiment, The Dark Prince whispered again. Maybe if he kept whispering, his soft tones would make it so they can’t recognize him. “I know other magic… I know more than kids my age,” he whispered.

“Oh? Like what?” Tonks asked.

“He made me follow Hogwarts’ curriculum… along with learning Dark Arts…” The Dark Prince whispered. His eyes shifted towards the bell jar. Drifting along in the sparkling current inside was a tiny, jewel-bright egg. As it rose in the jar it cracked open and a hummingbird emerged, which was carried to the very top of the jar, but as it fell on the draft, its feathers became bedraggled and damp again, and by the time it had been borne back to the bottom of the jar it had been enclosed once more in its egg.

Tonks noticed the Dark Prince’s staring and looked at the bell jar. “Weird stuff, eh? Come on, why don’t you come with us and we’ll talk about what you’ve learned. Get you away from You-Know-Who for good.”

“No, can’t do that,” The Dark Prince whispered, his mind working overtime. Should I knock that jar over? What’ll happen when I do? Should I do something else—THINK POTTER!

“Sure you can, besides at Hogwarts you’ll meet folks your age, meet new people, make friends, its so much better than hanging around drafty Death Eaters, and so much safer too,” Tonks said.

Wand, wand I need my wand—if only I still had my wand I could at least make something dark, the Dark Prince thought frantically. Hang on, I’m an idiot...

The Dark Prince nodded and looked at Tonks through his mask. “I won’t attack… but can I have my wand at least? It’s… my dad’s.”

“Your father’s?” Tonks frowned.

The Dark Prince nodded again. “He…he killed him… then took me…”

“What’s the boy saying? I can’t hear him,” Sirius said.
Tonks turned to look at Sirius and said, “He says he’ll go with us but he wants his wand back. It’s his dad, poor bloke. You-Know-Who killed him then probably kidnapped the boy.”

“Well, if that’s the case,” Sirius said a bit more brightly. “I’ll get it. Just in case, keep an eye on him.”

The Dark Prince raised his hands in the air, his palms open. *I’m so sorry for lying to all of you, I promise I’ll make it up real soon.*

Sirius walked off to retrieve the Dark Prince’s wand. He came back with it a second later and said, “I’m going to slip it into your pocket. I want to see your hands out at all times, alright?”

The Dark Prince nodded and felt Sirius shove his wand in his outer pocket. The four Order members surrounded the Dark Prince and the group walked the narrow space between the desks towards the circular room. The Prince couldn’t help but give a sigh of relief as he saw the coming darkness of the room, suddenly very thankful for its black marble walls and flooring. As soon as they stepped in the Prince noticed the crows. Red eyes were surrounding the group, only going as high as to their ankles. Harry nodded and watched as the crows seemed to center around a nearby area. *I’m sorry!* He screamed in his head as he shoved the nearest body away and ran towards the crows, feeling an empty darkness when he should have run into a wall. He kept running, not daring to look back for fears to see his friends chasing him. *Please stay there, please stay there,* he chanted in his mind.

The Prince looked at the crows that lined his pathway. “Bring me to Voldemort—and make sure my friends don’t get hurt!” The crows all cawed in understanding and the Dark Prince suddenly appeared out of a fireplace that lined the Atrium.

“You took your time,” Voldemort said. The Dark Prince smiled in relief as he looked around.

Most of the Death Eaters seemed to be gone, except for a masked one that Harry didn’t know. “Lupin got me… but I ran away. They’re all fine in that circular room downstairs. Where is everyone?”

“Gone. Except for this one… he shall be my body double… not that he knows it,” Voldemort chuckled. “I was waiting for you to perform it. Do not worry, he has no family to look for him, and no child will go orphaned with his death.”

“Oh… in that case,” The Dark Prince pulled out his wand as he walked towards his Lord and the random Death Eater.

“My Lord? What are we waiting for?” the man asked, his voice slightly fearful as he looked between Voldemort and the Dark Prince. “W-We have what we needed, correct?”

“Almost…” Voldemort said. He looked to the Dark Prince and nodded.

“*Avada Kedavra!*” The Dark Prince said, and the skittish Death Eater fell dead.

“That was not your first kill,” Voldemort said in English, looking at the body.

“No… I’ve killed Macnair as well,” The Prince answered. “He tried to kill Sirius and the others while I was between them.”

“Stupid man,” Voldemort chuckled. “Now, if you can remove his mask, we’ll begin.”

The Dark Prince nodded and pulled off the Death Eater’s mask. An unremarkable face of a man in
his mid-twenties stared back, his eyes glassy. “Who is this again?” The Prince asked, looking at Voldemort, who only shrugged.

“That is not important, love,” he said. “What is important is that he looks like me. So…” Voldemort moved towards the body and began to wave his wand in complex motions, muttering softly to himself. The Dark Prince watched as the unremarkable face slowly paled to a chalky white; the nose collapsing into itself until the space turned smooth, leaving only slits. Hair seemed to forcibly pushed themselves back into the Death Eater’s skull before the face started to lose definition, become reptilian and skeletal. His glasses eyes became an unhuman-like red. “You’re taller,” The Dark Prince couldn’t help but comment.

Voldemort gave him an annoyed look, as the Dark Prince spoke the obvious. The body began to length, its arms and legs becoming skinner behind the robes. The Dark Prince watched as the body became the size of his Lord. He looked at the body, then back at Voldemort and frowned. “Your lips have a little definition right here,” he said softly, his finger reaching up to drag along Voldemort’s upper lip. “You’re not completely lipless, and it’s pinker…there should also be grooves along the jawline,” The Prince traced them.

Voldemort added them. The Prince smiled and turned to his Lord. “Now he looks like you,” he said. “Now all we have to do is kill Dumbledore… who is precisely on time.”

Voldemort turned around and the Dark Prince looked with him as Dumbledore was standing in front of the golden gates.

“It was foolish to come here tonight, Tom,” Dumbledore said calmly. “The Aurors are on their way—”

“By which time I shall be gone, and you dead!” Voldemort spat. He sent a Killing Curse at Dumbledore but missed, instead hitting the security guard’s desk, which burst into flame.

Dumbledore flicked his own wand. The force of the spell that emanated from it was such that the Dark Prince felt his hair stand on end as it passed, and Voldemort was forced to conjure a shining silver shield out of thin air to deflect it. The spell, whatever it was, caused no visible damage to the shield, though a deep, gonglike note reverberated from it, an oddly chilling sound. …

“You do not seek to kill me Dumbledore?” Voldemort called, his scarlet eyes narrowed over the top of the shield. “Above such brutality, are you?”

“We both know that there are other ways of destroying a man, Tom,” Dumbledore said calmly, continuing to walk toward Voldemort as though he had not a fear in the world, as though nothing had happened to interrupt his stroll up the hall. “Merely taking your life would not satisfy me, I admit—”

“There is nothing worse than death, Dumbledore!” Voldemort snarled.

“You are quite wrong,” Dumbledore said, still closing in on Voldemort and speaking as lightly as though they were discussing the matter over drinks. “Instead your failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness—”

Another jet of green light flew from behind the silver shield. The stone centaur from the fountain galloped in front of Dumbledore and took the blast and shattered into a hundred pieces, but before the fragments had even hit the floor, Dumbledore had drawn back his wand and waved it as though brandishing a whip. A long thin flame flew from the tip; it wrapped itself around Voldemort, shield and all. For a moment, it seemed Dumbledore had won, but then the fiery rope became a serpent,
which relinquished its hold upon Voldemort at once and turned, hissing furiously to face Dumbledore. Voldemort vanished. The snake reared from the floor, ready to strike—

There was a burst of flame in midair above Dumbledore just as Voldemort reappeared, standing on the plinth in the middle of the pool, the statues all jumping away. One more jet of green light had flown at Dumbledore from Voldemort’s wand and the snake had struck—

Fawkes swooped down in front of Dumbledore, opened his beak wide, and swallowed the jet of green light whole. He burst into flame and fell to the floor, small, wrinkled, and flightless. At the same moment, Dumbledore brandished his wand in one, long, fluid movement—the snake, which had been an instant from sinking its fangs into him, flew high into the air and vanished in a wisp of dark smoke; the water in the pool rose up and covered Voldemort like a cocoon of molten glass—

For a few seconds Voldemort was visible only as a dark, rippling faceless figure, shimmering and indistinct upon the plinth, clearly struggling to throw off the suffocating mass—

Then he was gone, and the water fell with a crash back into its pool, slopping wildly over the sides, drenching the polished floors.

“Are you done yet old man?” The Dark Prince sighed, causing Dumbledore to turn to him. “Honestly I thought you would be better than that Professor… instead of playing around.”

“Dark Prince, you do not need to—”

The Prince’s cold high laugh filled the Atrium. “I don’t need to what? Continue fighting for Voldemort? Side with the Death Eaters? Voldemort is dead you daft fool, haven’t you seen the body I’m standing over?” The pointed towards the body double with his own wand. “I’ve actually respected you sir, for a year or two… before I met my loving husband.”

“Prince, what are you—”

Again the Dark Prince laughed, walking closer and closer towards Dumbledore. “Honestly how is Yaxley of all people smarter than you, sir? He figured out who I am just by a slip of a tongue… yet you’ve heard my voice for five years, seen my unkept hair and green eyes for five years… and still in the dark.” The Prince’s eyes flickered and saw Voldemort appearing behind Dumbledore, looking highly amused. “Still don’t know?”

All of a sudden realization seemed to hit Dumbledore. His eyes widen drastically as a look of pure fear fell on his face. “No.. no Harry, please no,” he whispered.

The Dark Prince smiled and took off his mask, giving Dumbledore an undisturbed look at his face. His eyes seemingly glowing a bright, murderous green as a sinister slasher smile grew on his face as he chuckled coldly. “Hello Professor,” he said.

“Harry… Harry no what have you done?” Dumbledore said.

The Dark Prince placed his mask back on and looked at Dumbledore, still smiling sinisterly. “I’ve found love Dumbledore… in a very special diary.”

Voldemort sent a final Killing Curse. Dumbledore did not have time to turn around as the curse killed him, the man’s face still facing the Dark Prince. The Prince expected shocked or anger on Dumbledore’s face as he died. But instead, Dumbledore’s face stared at him with sad, regretful glassy eyes behind his half moon spectacles. Relief did not fill the Prince as he looked at Dumbledore’s body.
A twinge of sadness filled him. He squashed it quickly and looked up at Voldemort. As he walked towards the Prince, he shifted, becoming more human and shrinking to the handsome teenage body of Tom Riddle.

“It is done… we’ve done it,” Tom smiled.

“Yeah… now what though?” the Prince asked, looking at Tom. “Now we leave,” Tom said. He tapped Harry’s mask and turned them back into his glasses. Holding hands, they turned and left the Ministry of Magic, disappearing into darkness. Mere minutes later the Order of the Phoenix ran into the room, followed by Aurors and Ministry workers who started to walk in through fireplaces before stopping shocked in front of the two bodies of Dumbledore and Voldemort. Lupin quickly hid Sirius from the others, both men not wanting to stare at the scene. They’ve slipped out somehow and began a fruitless search for the Dark Prince, who, unbeknownst to them, was back safely in Hogwarts snoring loudly after an exhausting night.

Down two staff members and grief-stricken by Dumbledore’s death, Hogwarts was in a chaotic state until Professor McGonagall stepped up. The new Headmistress of Hogwarts, she quickly rehired Professor Lupin as a temporary Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. Harry was happy to have Professor Lupin back, but he knew how difficult a job he had, having to try and correct Professor Umbridge’s mistakes before the end of the school year. Both Tom and Harry kept their promises after their deeds in the Ministry. After a long, enjoyable night of lovemaking, the two practically strapped Harry to a chair in the library as the Gryffindor endlessly studied for his O.W.L.s, which he felt he did a really good job at when the time came at the end of June. Talk of Dumbledore’s and Voldemort’s death were starting to die down, the Wizarding community quickly settling in for a time a peace. The Order of the Phoenix disbanded, all giving up in their search for the Dark Prince.

Everything was going perfect for Tom and Harry. After his graduation, Tom applied for a job at the Ministry where he could keep a close eye on Parkinson and the new Ministry of Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour. Scrimgeour’s first order of business shocked Britain as he declared Sirius Black innocent, claiming to come upon missing crucial evidence. Ecstatic about the news, Sirius wore his most outrageous clothes and traveled to the Burrow, where Harry was spending the summer, to tell the good news.

Lupin did not come back to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts again, instead the job went to Professor Snape, much to Harry’s hatred, as Professor McGonagall convinced the old Potions Master Horace Slughorn to come out of retirement.

For once Harry has spent an uneventful year at Hogwarts, and he enjoyed it immensely. During the summer between his sixth and final year, he and Tom spent his birthday alone in their manor at Little Hangleton. “It is time, my beautiful love,” Tom whispered in Harry’s ear. They were naked in their bed, Harry resting on Tom’s chest as he loose hole leaked of Tom’s cum. “For my final present.”

They both got out of bed and Tom dressed them both in pure black robes. Tom escorted Harry down to their home’s dungeon where a radiant throne was waiting for them. Harry looked around and frowned when he couldn’t see his normal seat which was usually next to the throne. “Where’s my chair?” he asked.

“Right in front of us, my Prince,” Tom smirked. “Lord Voldemort is gone… dead to the world, but the Dark Prince is still out there, and he promised the Dark Lord something a long time ago.”
The two shared a smile. Harry slipped his wand out and tapped his glasses, transfiguring them into his mask. He walked up to the throne and sat down. He placed one leg over the other and leaned forward slightly, resting his elbows on the arms of the chair as he twirled his wand between his fingertips. He looked at Tom, a sinister smile growing on his face as he said, “Summon them.”

Voldemort obliged and soon the room was filled with their faithful Death Eaters, all wearing masks and bowing before the Dark Prince. “We knew you haven’t died, my lord,” a Death Eater said.

The Dark Prince sneered at the Death Eaters. “Look at me,” he commanded. The Death Eaters all jumped and turned to the Dark Prince, who looked at the men as if they were lesser than dirt. Voldemort paced around the room and sat at one side of it in a simple chair. With a wave of his hand the door was locked. The Dark Prince looked slowly around the room. “Parkinson isn’t here… as well as Snape. Pity. Nott, come forward,” he commanded, and Mr. Nott stepped forward.

The man was practically only skin on a skeleton now, so weak that it looked as if standing was a strain for him. “Smile Nott,” The Dark Prince said. “For today you all will be rewarded for the service you have given to our Lord and me.”

“T-Thank you milord,” Nott stuttered, bowing gracelessly.

“You are very welcome Nott, after all, I believe it is high time that you all receive what you justly deserve for all of your actions. Now, bow down before me,” The Dark Prince said.

Nott did so, his limbs shaking.

“Look at your Lord and thank him for all we have done for you,” The Dark Prince commanded, his wand still twirling between his fingertips.

Nott turned a shaking head to Lord Voldemort. “T-Thank you—my Lord. For all that you have d-done for us,” he forced out.

“Avada Kedavra.”

Nott fell dead, still staring at the Dark Lord. Voldemort looked down at the body then at the Dark Prince. The boy barely shifted, he still looked calm, composed, uncaring in his throne. He only looked at the body for only a moment before looking out to the crowd of Death Eaters. “Goyle.”

Goyle Snr. did not move immediately. He stared scared at Nott’s body. Then he felt as if hooks were attaching to his feet and hands. With great pain and effort, the fat man moved towards the Dark Prince. He was shaking his head viciously, his cheeks flapping in the wind. “No, no, no I-I’ve always b-been a loyal servant!”

“Kneel down and face your Lord,” The Dark Prince commanded uncaring.

“P-Please, I have a son—”

“Who is now legally a man,” The Dark Prince said. “And will be here instead of you if you do not kneel.”

The Death Eaters broke out in tears. He got to his knees and looked at Lord Voldemort.

“Thank your Lord for all he has done for you,” the Prince said.

Crying heavily, Goyle Snr. blabbered to Voldemort. “T-T-thank you… my L-Lord… for all… for all that…that you have done for us.”
“Avada Kedavra.”

Goyle’s body joined Nott’s on the ground, his eyes, like Nott’s staring at Voldemort. The Dark Prince did not regard the bodies at all, instead looking at the remaining Death Eaters for his next victim. And so it went on. One by one the Prince had the Death Eaters come up to him and kneel, looking at Voldemort and giving him their thanks before The Dark Prince killed them. The piles of bodies grew, and with each one added to the pile the remaining Death Eaters grew more and more reluctant. Some tried to fight, but the Dark Prince was too quick, too powerful for them. At some point the Prince felt a weight on his head and figured that a crown was fitted on him as a long and heavy snake draped himself along the Prince’s shoulders.

The last one to die was Rodolphus Lestrange. He walked unflinching to the Dark Prince and knelt before him without the Prince’s command. Lestrange looked at Voldemort and said in an even voice, “Thank you for all you have done for us, my Lord.”

“Avada Kedavra.”

Silence filled the room. In the middle was a crowd of bodies piled one on top of another, all their heads turned towards the Dark Lord sitting against the wall. In the middle sat the Dark Prince on his throne, his mask long turned back to glasses, his snake draped along his shoulders and down to the arms of the chair. His robes were black and made of the finest silk, smooth and undirtied, even after dragging on the stone floor. On his head was a golden crown with emeralds fitted on the arches of the crown. His eyes shifted from the pile of bodies to the Dark Lord sitting and smiled sinisterly. Giving the bodies one last look, he stood up, the snake slithering off his body and onto the floor. “Eat up,” the Prince commanded as he walked past his old followers and looked towards Voldemort.

His sinister smile turned sly as he opened the door out of the dungeon. “Get up,” he laughed. “We have a wedding to prepare for.”

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!