### What About Slytherin?

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**Summary**

The Sorting Hat didn't suggest Slytherin because Harry had a piece of Voldemort's soul in him. Harry is plenty cunning and intelligent all by himself. Living with an abusive family will do that to you. What's more Slytherin than getting yourself sorted into Gryffindor to hide your true self after all?

Over his first year at Hogwarts, Harry starts to notice things – like how Dumbledore seems to
be hiding the truth from him. And how both Snape and Malfoy are plenty nice – even if they are tossers.
It doesn't take long for Harry to start questioning who the real villain is. Voldemort or Dumbledore... or both. And what the hell is he supposed to do about it? Especially when he starts to fall in love with his Slytherin allies and his loyalties become that much harder to hide.

Notes

After posting nearly 100K in a month last Autumn, I had both a slight burnout and a lot of changes happened in my life - but nevertheless, I am back! To new-comers - I hope you enjoy this story, and to loyal readers - I hope you'll forgive my slight infidelity with real life.

See the end of the work for more notes.
A Trip to the Zoo

Sometimes Harry cursed his small stature. It meant he couldn’t reach the biscuits Aunt Petunia would place on the top shelf in the kitchen even when he stood on the counter. It was supposed to be an effective measure to stop him getting at them, and it had worked for all of a week until Harry realised he could just grab an umbrella or something equally long to help get them down. The first time he’d attempted to do so was when the Dursleys had been out for a fun day at the zoo - Harry might have been daring, as well as starving, but he was generously cautious too. Being abused did that to you. He had been surprised he hadn’t been beaten for stealing them when his relatives came back to find them gone, but Petunia had only spared a glance at Harry, confirming to herself than his malnourished body wouldn’t have been able to reach them, and went to get an extra cake for her pig of a son, Dudley, assuming that her poor Dudders had gone hungry and been forced to take some. If Harry hadn’t spent the past decade of his life stealing little snatches of food when he could, he really would have been too malnourished to so much as move. Maybe if he had just given up and died on his relatives they would have at least been forced to face some sort of justice system. Prison was too good for them, but it was all humanity had to offer.

Harry often hated his shrunken body, yes, but there was the odd occasion when Harry’s small stature was of benefit to him. One such time was now, on a rare trip where he had been allowed to join his family at the zoo, when he found himself running away from his uncle, ducking under the arches meant for teaching dogs tricks, slipping into the monkey enclosure through the feeding gate accompanied by the shouts of two terrified zookeepers and then out again through a secret tunnel the trapped creatures had been digging out for over a year. Harry felt free and for those ten minutes of metaphorical flight he had been able to forget about the bruises under the over-sized rags he was forced to call clothes even though the over-washed fabric rubbed them raw with every gasp he made. He was even able to forget about all those jauntily healed broken bones which creaked weakly under his own weight. Few had ever been set right and even fewer had made it to the hospital. Harry was only a malnourished boy, one nobody cared about, so it shouldn’t have surprised anyone, least of all him, when he heard his detested uncle bellow just a few meters behind him to, “STOP RIGHT THERE, BOY!” Boy. Not Harry.

Perhaps it was luck that saved him, though he had never seemed to have any before. The next corner Harry turned he saw Uncle Vernon go careening past, his sweaty, bulbous body unable to stop his own momentum. Harry paused as he came face to face with a snake he had seen just a few minutes earlier. It’s convex scales had looked smooth to the touch and when Harry had softly admitted his worries to it, it had paused and listened in. Harry had been convinced it was his own imagination but after a few tender hisses from it, he had suddenly felt a desire to run swell in him. And so he had. And now he was back here.

He would surely be in a lot of trouble for what he had just done but perhaps...

“GET HIM!” echoed up the shadowy corridor he stood in.

Well, there went any doubt of leniency.

Harry doubled over, his hopes shattering and flaking away with every huffed breath from his stuttering frame.

“Sssire.”

Harry paused. He ignored the background howling and his mind grasped at straws in an effort to compute the single word.
“Look at me, ss sire.”

Harry turned slowly, not believing his ears. Was that snake really talking…?

“You heard me talking before, why do you look ssso ssssurprised now?”

“I-! I-!”

Harry’s eyes began to bug out and before he could stop himself, his left leg scurried out to stabilise him and stop him toppling over from shock.

“You don’t believe your earssss, hmm?” Harry focused on the reptile. It was real. This was really happening. He was brought to the realisation that if a snake could look smug, and this one certainly did … then there was no reason why it shouldn’t be able to talk too.

“You- you mean to say you can talk?”

“Of courssse.”

“But how can a snake speak English?”

“Engliissh? Listen to yourself, ss sire! No English word ever sssounded so much like a hiss.”

Harry paused and turned a few words over on his tongue, making sure to actually listen to himself. Hiss. Oh God. Dear God, the snake was right! He sounded like he was a snake too-

“BOY!”

Harry gulped.

“Um, so. As much as I’d like to stop and chat, I really do need to be going. Is there any chance you know a secret way out of here?”

The snake hissed with displeasure. Had he offended her? He certainly hoped not! A ten- no, twenty-foot boa constrictor was most certainly not someone he wanted to be messing with.

“It- it’s not that I want to go- I just need to get away-”

“COME BACK HERE, YOU STUPID BOY!”

“Oh husssh. I’m angry but not at you, ss sire. Any man that thinks they have the right to ssshout at you though, ss sire, is destined to be bitten!” Harry gulped, fear galvanising his throat.

“But you,” the snake turned to look Harry straight in the eye. This wasn’t going to be good. “You can’t behave like a little Hufflepuff either-”

“A HuffleWhat?”

“Why are you running away if all they’re going to do is catch you, ss sire?”

“Because I don’t have any other choice…?” Harry ventured.

“Of courssse you do, ss sire! You can sssppeak with me, but I am not the only one you can command. You are a rare gift that fate has bessstowed on Earth.” Harry didn’t think he was special though. He was just a nuisance and somebody everyone wished would just die already. The Dursleys certainly made him feel that way, at least.
The snake seemed to be able to track his thoughts and interrupted them with a cutting question. “Do you pity usss, ss sire?”

“Us?”

“Me, the monkeys, all of usss majessstic creaturessss caught like prisoners and put on display for puny little Muggles.”

Harry didn’t know what Muggles were either, but nodded his head anyway. He did feel sorry for the animals. They all reminded him of his own prison. The cupboard under the stairs had locks and spiders and all the trappings of a prison. And Harry was certain that soon he would end up in a real one too. He’d been forced to learn how to pick locks and he wasn’t sure he wouldn’t make use of that for his own ends when he finally escaped the Dursleys.

“Exxxcellent. Sssire, are you prepared to trust me?” Harry had never trusted anyone. A snake wasn’t a person though...

“BOY!”

Harry had nothing to lose.

“Of course.”

“Then put your handssss - yesss, both of them - up against the glasss here. Yesss, that’s right. And now, Harry Potter, you will clossse your eyes and imagine freedom.”

Any thoughts Harry had had about why a snake knew his name vanished into thin air. The pounding steps of various zookeepers and even some policemen behind him vanished too. All into the fog of wonder. The glass beneath his fingertips melted away and the shrieks of all the other people visiting the zoo halted his pursuers as the rising sound of panic told Harry that all the animals in the zoo were finally free. And then he thought that maybe he could be too.
You're a Wizard, Harry

Crap. Crap crap crap. Harry had always thought he was smart, though not clever in the traditionally academic sense. He had no clue what on earth it was they taught at school for the simple reason that he cared more about avoiding bullies than watching the board. He had managed to steadily decrease the frequency with which his relatives abused him though. If he’d understood percentages he would have worked it out to be about a 60% drop. As it was though, Harry had always felt confident that if he had any skill at all, it was avoiding danger. And damn was he good at it.

Running away with no provisions and only a snake and a lemur as companions did not appear to be smart in any way though. Not even by Harry’s slightly quirky way of thinking. He felt like kicking himself. If he was going to run away, why hadn’t he thought this through more? He’d figured that it would be better to just suffer the abuse of his family and get away from them at sixteen. It was easier to get his meagre meals and second hand clothes that way anyway. Stealing or working would both take far more time.

Shit.

“Sssire?”

“Yes?”

“Ass much as I enjoy eyeing up the sheep in this field, I rather sssuggest we at least find cover before it starts raining.”

Harry had to agree. He wasn’t sure if what he was feeling was rain, but the silvery tinkle of sensation on his bare arm where he’d caught the fabric of his clothes on a tree trunk during his escape make him uneasy. Cover. Yes, definitely.

Once the trio had made it to the nearby woods and arranged themselves to sit down, Harry was forced to pause.

“Er- I don’t actually know your names do I?”

“No, I sssuppose you don’t.”

“Would you tell me?”

“Nagini.” Harry had expected something more… hissy. He turned to the lemur perched on his shoulder. The little critter had barely said anything but didn’t seem to want to leave Harry alone either.

“And what about you?”

“L-Louis.”

Harry giggled a little awkwardly. He had always hated his laugh. It made him sound like a girl. Not that he hated girls. He respected them immensely. All of them. Except maybe his aunt. But she was more a horse than a woman. He hated his laugh because it made him sound like a girl and that gave Dudley’s friends an excuse to treat him like one. Harry shivered violently, his teeth locking into their favoured position from which slight squeaks were the only remnants of screams. Harry dragged himself inwards and snapped the drawer of his remembered rapes shut, the silky edge of the skirt he’d often been forced to wear trapped between the wood, taunting him and reminding him that that
drawer would never fully close and that no matter how mentally strong Harry was, he was still only a little boy who couldn't control anything. Not yet.

Harry opened his eyes as he came to from his thoughts and realised that his moment's weakness must have dragged on for several minutes. He found Nagini wrapped around him, hissing softly in an effort to calm him down. She was rocking him and keeping him warm whilst Louis silently collected what dead leaves he could find. Harry quickly put two and two together and concluded that the creature was gathering materials for a fire. He looked up at the sky and saw that it starting to go dark. He shared a moment with Nagini as he looked into her eyes and whispered “thank you” whilst stroking her head before getting up to help Louis by carrying the heavier sticks that the little primate couldn’t lift. Harry wasn’t able to shift the biggest ones either but by the end of an hour’s work the trio had both a relatively sturdy shelter covered in huge leaves that Nagini had snapped from some tall tree or other and a large campfire. The only problem was that said campfire wasn’t lit and it was getting cold quickly. It wouldn’t be long before it was fully night.

Harry sighed, feeling the energy from the few meagre biscuits he’d stolen that morning beginning to run out. Between the hefting and carrying and the mad dash earlier, he was beginning to crash. Either way, he’d already got used to the idea of movement out of necessity and reached for two dry looking sticks before rubbing them violently together. Both his new friends looked at him curiously before Nagini hissed out a venomous shriek of indignity and zipped over to Harry’s crouched form. Both Harry and Louis jumped at her sudden action and Harry became very, very aware that he should have offered Nagini to go and steal some of the sheep they’d seen earlier. She stopped abruptly in front of him.

“What doooo you think you’re doing, sssire?” Her voice was mocking.

“Um,” he swallowed audibly, “Making a fire…”

“Fool! That’sss not how wizards make firesss!”

Harry was nervous and confused. Or rather terrified and confused. He started muttering to himself whilst his mind shifted to the logical solution of simply asking the one creature he’d ever seen fit to trust.

“HuffleSomething. Muggle. Wizard. You keep talking about these things I don’t understand… and then back at the zoo! At the zoo you told me to do something and then suddenly you were all free! What-? I mean, how even-? Just, hang on… what I mean to say is, huh? ”

“Very eloquent, Potter.” Nagini swerved her body into a coil and urged Harry to perch in front of her. Her head tilted to indicate her humour and prominent pride at knowing so much he didn’t. Harry hadn’t generally liked that look on anyone. But on Nagini, a snake, he found he could bear it.

“Sssit a little clossser, Harry. Or elssse you might just faint.”

That didn’t sound good, but Harry did anyway. Nagini raised her head up, drawing the first few feet of her body to be perfectly vertical and pronounced deviously, “You’re a wizard, Harry,” before dislocating her jaw and pulsing gushing waves of red from her throat, straight past Harry’s ear, to ignite the wooden pile behind it. The last thing Harry heard before black enveloped him was the hum of warm crackling and Nagini’s smiling voice as she commented, “I warned you that might happen.”
Food Is the First Priority

Harry Potter did not generally let himself believe in the fantastical. He was still a young boy and thus still had a great imagination, but a hero had yet to swing in and save him from his fate, a monster had yet to come and either eat his awful family or just give him the sweet relief of death, and until today he also hadn't thought that he’d be able to talk to animals and make glass disappear, or that he’d nearly have a heart attack when the snake he’d just befriended spat fire past his face. Given, however, that Harry Potter, for all he was daring, tried his best to think logically, he had, as the blackness claimed him, deduced that if he had removed the impossible, then magic, no matter how improbable, simply had to exist.

Such a mind-boggling idea didn’t help him rouse from the closest thing he had ever experienced to a hangover though. A shot of green light flickered across his vision as a dam of memories seemed to smash to pieces in his mind. His pores screamed in agony as past events that trauma had pressed like delicate flowers flooded back into him. Harry’s voice tore itself apart in the utter silence of the nighttime forest as the white face of a man far more snake-like than human loomed over him, as ginger hair spattered on the floor in front of him, as the cold hands of a sobbing hermit of a man grieved over his tiny frame, and as the wrinkled lips of a very very old man smiled down at him in a way Harry couldn’t quite place. Harry fainted again.

X-X-X

“A’m sorry, Dumbledore, but it’s lookin’ like we missed our chance.”

The old headmaster looked stonily at the wall in front of him. Hagrid didn’t seem to be paying any attention to the potency of his glare and just continued on. His dearest patron had always made him feel welcome, after all.

“At leas’ Harry’s gonna be happy now. It’s too bad we couldn’ do more for him but he’ll be comin’ to Hogwarts and he’ll love it here. That’s for sure. It won’ be long b’fore he forgets all about those mean Muggles…”

Dumbledore liked things to go the way he wanted them to. It was such a shame that Harry seemed to be rebelling without even knowing what he was doing. Dumbledore had had it all so nicely set up. Letters and then Hagrid. Harry would fall in love with magic and then with Gryffindor and then with Dumbledore... And he’d become the perfect little pawn. Dumbledore sighed, tuning out the ramblings of the half-giant. He’d still send the letters, but it was quite possible that between his little burst of accidental magic and running into two magical familiars (of all things!) that Harry was already aware he was a wizard.

_The damn snake better not make him into a Slytherin. Not after all this time I’ve spent weakening him so he’ll be able to rise as a Gryffindor. I’ll still send Hagrid too. Potter will need to go shopping, after all._

X-X-X
When Harry next awoke, it was to the dawn chorus. His head hurt and he was more aware of the bruises on his ribs than he had been for a good long while. He remembered everything which had happened to him during the last twenty-four hours with perfect clarity, though of course believing it was another matter entirely. Harry resisted opening his eyes. Whatever he was lying on was bumpy and uncomfortable and not unlike the cramped space he’d spent the past decade of his life struggling to breath in. Had he been caught, beaten and brought back home?

“Oh-Oh-kay. I’m going to ask something.” Harry struggled to breath out his words. He felt mad. Mad! But he couldn’t risk not asking. “Did I really hear a snake talk to me yesterday?”

Nagini’s chuckled breath wreaked a shudder of relief down Harry’s spine.

“That’sss the first thing you want to asskk?”

Harry finally opened his eyes and looked at her.

“What would you rather I asked?”

“Did I really meet the mosssst beautiful ssserpant the world has ever ssseen?”

Harry laughed loudly and for once he actually enjoyed the feeling. It reminded him of how free he was.

Nagini placed a carefully constructed pout of derision across her features as she straightened up and curled away from Harry.

“Nooo, I’m sorry Nagini. You’re the bestest snake ever.”

The boy’s childlike teasing bubbled as affection in her eyes as she paused, poised. Had she had eyebrows, she would have tilted one upwards as she teased him in turn.

“Bessstest’, Potter?”

Harry smirked, “Yeah, ‘bestest’.”

“You appaul me.”

“You amuse me.”

Nagini sneered halfheartedly and towered back over to him, the tip of her tail catching Louis across his forehead as a reminder to wake up.

“We have thingsss we must do today.”

“Yeah, I figured.”

“Food, namely.”

Harry’s stomach growled in agreement and a smirk stretched over Nagini’s lips.

“There were plenty of sheep in the field yesterday if you want to go and-”

“They’ve been moved, sssadly.”

“Oh. So you’ve already checked-”
“I can’t sssmell them anymore.” Nagini looked rather put out. Perhaps lamb was her favourite meal. Harry knew that quite literally anything other than biscuits and leftovers was his. But wait—

“Can we backtrack a moment to the whole magic-”

“After food, sssire. I can’t guarantee that my focuuss on you with an empty ssstomach will be entirely... platonic, ssshall we say.”

Harry quickly squeaked out his agreement as he and his two new familiars, not that he knew to call them that, rose and began to track around the forest looking for breakfast. Food was easy for Nagini, even if she kept admonishing Harry for scaring everything edible away. She quickly chose to forego the fun of stalking her prey and as the small creatures tried to flee, she simply flung her head forwards, burying her fangs into their spines and swallowing them whole. Had Harry been at all like his cousin, which he mostly certainly was not in any way worth mentioning, he would surely have thrown up several times already. He was hungry, though, but no matter how many times Nagini assured him that cooking the rabbit or the rat or the vole would make it perfectly edible for him, Harry didn’t think he trusted himself enough to try. Louis was also swiftly gulping down breakfast but given that the creature was stuffing his face indiscriminately with whatever berry or leaf he could find, Harry didn’t feel that taking the vegetarian route would keep his digestive system any more intact. The still half-asleep boy, therefore, spent the best part of the morning feeling increasingly irritated at his poor fortune before finally snapping quite suddenly.

“You know what, screw it! I’m going to steal food from the Dursleys, God knows they deserve a bit of karma. I’ve already said ‘damn the consequences’ and it’s not like I can fall any further in their eyes.”

Nagini only smirked widely, as if she had been waiting for his change of heart, and cackled, “Oh how very Ssslytherin of you, Potter.”

After a few moments, in which Nagini smelt the air to trace the location of the Dursley household, Louis clambered up onto Harry’s right shoulder, and the wizard petted him behind his furry ears, the three set off. The only thing of interest on their journey was an owl flying down low at which Nagini sneered and Harry jumped in surprise. He hadn’t realised the supposedly nocturnal birds were active during the day too. His surprise turned to shock as he lost his balance and felt the cold, jagged edge of pain zip up his spine when he hit the ground. Nagini shifted her sneer over to him but the twisted distaste had slipped into mild concern. Unlike Harry, she noticed the fairly bulky envelope which landed next to the boy’s small frame before being covered by leaf debris. She chose to ignore it, but as the trio moved off once more, she was nevertheless turning the first line of the address over in her mind which stated quite clearly in neat calligraphy: Under the Big Oak Tree.
Familiars

Harry would have said that he hadn’t felt this sneaky in a long time, but that would have been an outright lie. To any passers-by, Harry looked decidedly odd. He was sat, dressed in ragtag clothes, under the windowsill of what was, sadly, his family home. His aunt, Petunia, was no doubt giving the stink eye to the many people who looked at Harry in either confusion or amusement. Harry himself, meanwhile, was riding a wave of adrenaline and hadn’t the time nor care to pity their nature as Petunia’s targets. He was sat in the dirty bog his aunt called a rose bed, with thorns sticking their prickly bastard selves up his arse, whilst his supposed friends had abandoned him to peep through the windows of the house and locate all three unfortunate excuses for human beings. They were, however, doing this whilst invisible, which left Harry fuming and bloody hungry in a spiky pile of shit with his back against the world’s most painful sandpaper - otherwise known as a pebble-dash wall. The whole house didn’t have this effect applied to it. Oh no. Only the tiny, little patch where Nagini had assured him was the only safe spot to hide. Harry Potter was smart and Nagini was a devious little shit. It was therefore no surprise that Harry’s imagination pictured the creatures’ irritating figures sat just in front of him, invisible, sniggering at his painful grimaces and awkward shifting. Someone might have pitied the two familiars had Harry not been absolutely right.

Suddenly there was an almighty hoot from above and the glorious snowy edge of an owl’s wing plummed down towards Harry. He quickly started choking on white feathers as the bird on top of him struggled to grasp hold of anything it could call a perch. Luckily, as soon as the kerfuffle had started, it was over. Nagini had wrenched the poor bird off Harry by looping herself around its feathery neck and was about to snap the essential bone when Harry found his voice and urged her to “Stop! Stop, Nagini.”

“Why, sssire? She looksss tasty…”

The owl squawked in indignation.

“To you maybe, but it’s pretty rude to eat her when she’s obviously following us. Louis followed me just like you did but you haven’t tried to eat him.”

“That’sss because he’s a familiar. Like me.”

“Like the cats witches have?”

“You're a wizard, it can’t possibly strike you as ssstrange.”

Harry tried to butt in and assure her that it really could and really was strange because apart from the fact that he couldn’t deny the existence of magic and that he’d just performed some back at the zoo and that therefore he was, logically, a wizard, he still had barely any information to help him process the news. It was like being told your parents had just been assasinated before being forced to go on the run. Nagini just hissed over his protests like a sulking teenager before suddenly sharpening her eyes and commanding Harry and the two other animals to fall silent. The unmistakable preen of Petunia’s voice as she whimpered at her husband to “go and check if a bird fouled up the window because the neighbours won’t stop looking at it oddly” meant the foursome shuddered and instantly reared to action. Harry grabbed the owl and moved to shuffle further into the bushes so that Vernon wouldn’t catch sight of him, but Nagini clearly had a different plan in mind. Suddenly and with renewed invisibility, she plummeted the full force of her weight downwards, pinning Harry’s already heavily bruised body between her scales and the prickly thorns of disaster which would become ingrained in Harry’s memory as thoroughly as in his arse. Louis meanwhile had what Harry could only describe as a panic attack before finally turning invisible. Just as Vernon was throwing the
prissy lace curtains out of his way and forcing the window open with his greasy thumbs, Harry felt the weight of Louis’ body plop on top of his face. Harry supposed it must have been the only spot left visible because when Vernon glanced down towards the spot from which a dull “oof” had escaped Harry’s body, the lack of anything reminiscent of the man’s detested relative meant he just accepted the sound as one he himself had made on his tiring journey between his puffy chair and the window. Soon enough, the window thankfully clattered closed and the foursome let out a collected sigh of relief. A few seconds later, Harry found himself concluding that had Louis not been so cute, he definitely would not have forgiven the critter for literally making him kiss his arse. 

A significantly long pause passed before the four could firmly agree that they needn’t worry about the human pig’s return, at which point they disentangled their respective limbs and spread out. The owl continued to eye Nagini with caution as Harry gently tucked her feathers back into place whilst the two familiars made sure to keep watching their surroundings. Whilst attending to the new member of their group, the recently informed wizard returned to the query of magic, and considered that if being direct just resulted in his slithering guide deflecting his questions, perhaps it was worth trying a different approach instead. He certainly had nothing to lose.

“So why is Mr Owl here- Ow!” Harry glared at the bird. It glared back. Nagini just cackled happily.

“Try ‘Miss’” Harry kicked himself, remembering that he’d already referred to the owl as ”her”.

“Alright then, why is Miss Owl-” Harry glared at the both of them to reinforce his point, “unable to just disappear like you two?”

“We don’t disappear, Potter. That’s something else entirely. My dinner can’t turn invisible because we are familiars and she is nothing more than a Hogwarts owl.”

Harry’s wide eyes couldn’t convey quite what he wanted to start with first. Tell Nagini off for making the poor bird try and get away again, scratching up his arms in the process; calm said bird down and find a way to either cover up his arms or grab her by the claws; demand to know how a hog could have warts and why that made the owl unable to turn invisible. All three were viable options, but thankfully the first two resolved themselves quite quickly thanks to Louis putting on a show of being disappointed in both his fellow creatures.

By the time the officially accepted hour to have lunch on a Sunday had passed, Harry was still hungry, still had rose thorns stuck up his arse, and was still confused as all heck. But, he supposed, at least now he had learned a few things which relaxed him - even if only marginally so. Hogwarts was a magical school with four houses - Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Slytherin and Hufflepuff - and Harry should either do everything within his power not to end up in lattermost, or should attempt to flee to another country altogether and apply for his education there. Each house reflected certain personality traits with Gryffindor being a brave lion, Ravenclaw - a wise eagle, Slytherin - an ambitious snake and Hufflepuff - a loyal badger. The owl worked at Hogwarts and, unlike Nagini and Louis, had never been a familiar before. This meant that Harry would not be able to talk to her, nor did she have any magic of her own because, as Nagini had put it, “a familiar only gains magic after a bond between owner and familiar has been established”, apparently. The serpent had looked proudly at Harry when he had wisely asked: “Why, then, do you two still have magic?” - to which Nagini only replied by giving a convoluted description about magical bonds which her smirk indicated she knew the young wizard had been unable to follow.

“Certain majestic animals such as snakes are able to talk to a handful of humans who possess a special gift known as Parseltongue, no matter whether they are a familiar or not. But any witch or wizard is able to talk to their personal familiars, or, for that matter, any former familiarss who no longer serve their original master. The trouble is that nowadays few bond with the creature who
loyally serve them.”

“Why’s that?”

“It’s all very ssimple. My former massster could talk to me even before he made me his familiar. He could sspeak Parseltongue and he was known as the Dark Lord.”

Harry gulped.

“Sounds like he was... dangerous?”

Nagini smirked at the lilting question of doubt. “Oh yesss. He isss.”

“Is?”

“Death isss not so simple when you’re a wizard, Harry. You’ll be sure to learn more about my former massster soon. But for now I’m sure you can make the connection between a madman who can sspeak to sssnakes and why so few have familiars these daysss.”

Harry did see. It was all so clear and yet so confusing.

“Does that mean you’re not my familiars yet?”

Nagini simpered and agreed, “No, not yet.”

And then pain engulfed him. Head to toe. His chest pulsing out and his throat ricocheting to tear itself away from the agony and make a mad dash from his mouth. Harry hadn’t even seen it coming. Nagini had swerved over his head and cracked the bones of his neck together, blocking the oxygen to his brain and biting sweetly into the malnourished flesh of his left pectoral. Agony bloomed rapidly as Harry yet passed out yet again, his head being gently caught by the tiny arms of Louis and the soft white down of his third friend - a Hogwarts owl.
Bonding Is a Sacrifice

Harry was really starting to hate this. He groaned and turned over, burying his hand into the soft grass beneath him. He gradually became conscious enough to realise that he had been moved and that he didn’t feel so much as an ounce of pain. It felt amazing. The thought crossed his mind that this was perhaps the first time in his life that he wasn’t hurting anywhere. It was a miracle! He raised his other hand to his ribs and pressed down. Then harder. Then harder still. Nothing. No pain at all. It really was a miracle. He shifted his knees and the ache of poorly healed bones was gone. He twisted his head, searching for Nagini, his initial plan to tell her off floating away with the cool brush of a breeze. When she came into focus she was smiling at him softly.

“How are you feeling, Harry?”

“Amazing.” And he meant it. Louis smiled sweetly at him too and the owl hooted Merrily somewhere in the background beyond where his slightly blurry vision couldn’t quite focus. Harry peeled his lazy eyes open further to try and grasp where they had relocated him to. It seemed like it was the tiny little bit of grass that Vernon always moaned his bad back wouldn’t let him reach with the mower. Petunia had spent many years fretting up a storm about the shame their less than perfect lawn brought to the neighbourhood before finally planting a bush there which now threw the young wizard into merry shade. The ball of green leaves had been tiny when it had first been planted but now it stood as tall as Harry. That still wasn’t very tall, but if Vernon had been able to swing the meat of his flabby fist at Harry’s head since he was six, then there was certainly no validity to the pig’s repetitive argument that it still wasn’t tall enough for him to trim it without putting his back out. Despite this particular patch’s tie to the life he had only just thrown away, Harry couldn’t have been more thankful for the peace and quiet it offered him in that moment.

“So, er- what happened exactly?” Harry asked tentatively.

“Sssimply put, I am now your familiar. A mmasster is supposed to bear the pain of bonding as a ssacrifice for the loyalty they will receive with it. Let it be known, Potter, that I am a very powerful sssnake indeed. You may have blacked out but you didn’t die.” Harry blanched. “And that ssshould give you an indication of your raw power. Essspecially given your age.”

Harry looked down at the gash marks Nagini had left in his hand-me-down top. Could he even call it that anymore? It looked more like the rags Petunia had made him clean the windows with. He carefully peeled back the fraying grey and looked, fearing the worst. Perhaps Nagini had left huge blisters from some sort of fire-projection, or maybe just plain and simple incisions the size of butcher knives. Maybe the only reason he couldn’t feel any pain was because she had anaesthetised him. She was a snake, after all, and whilst Harry’s world had been turned on its head, he still remembered that if an animal looked dangerous, it probably was, and thus is was only sane to be cautious. Especially, as he had been forced to learn, if that animal was a human.

Harry gasped in surprise at what he saw. It wasn’t a wound but rather a tattoo. Harry hadn’t had enough exposure to know whether he liked them or not, but this- this tattoo was frankly gorgeous. The inky swirl of a snake head peered out from a cluster of unrecognisable flowers. Magical flowers probably. It looked positively alive. Harry reached a single finger forward but immediately jumped straight out of his skin, barely silencing himself in time. Holy Christ! It was alive! It was palpitating like the heart beneath it and the inked snake was looking at him with avid curiosity. Its length uncurled and flushed a dozen frightening colours as it slithered across Harry’s chest to meet the fingertips where they had been laid to rest. A tongue peeked out in an innocent hue of pink and touched pinpricks of sensations behind Harry’s nails. It felt incredible. The whole length of the
serpent felt like a slight tickle and Harry had never felt so relaxed. He sighed and moved to caress the sequin pattern across his torso in the way Nagini had indicated she very much enjoyed.

“So is this… you?” Harry stabbed a guess.

“In a way, I suppose.”

“What do you mean?”

“Impatient, Potter. With any luck you’ll be able to hide in Gryffindor.” Harry had already had his Beginner’s Guide to Hogwarts from Nagini, but the statement itself was bemusing. Interrupting her would only gain him her sulking though, so instead he sat quietly until she felt she had sufficiently tortured him with silence.

“I am now bonded to you, Potter. I have my full magical capabilities restored to me. You may summon me by caressing the bite mark imprinted faintly onto your chest and by willing me to be by your side. It is as simple as that. What more you wish to know you shall find out yourself in due time.”

Harry nodded carefully. He didn’t like the sound of arduous research, but he did appreciate the merits of an ally he could call on if he needed help - especially one as strong as Nagini.

“I must warn you though, Harry. My symbol is one which is detested. Whilst you are still young it shall remain furled away as it is, in the flower of your heart. As you age though, it will grow and develop, and it will eventually become very similar to the symbol my former master bears. It is a symbol of hatred and of pain. The inked image is able to move to help you hide it, but you must swear to me that you will do your best to cover it and never show it to anyone but your true allies. And even then, not until you have spent enough time doubting their loyalty, only to be proven wrong each time.”

Harry looked solemnly down with far more sincerity than a boy his age should have had any right to possess.

“Of course, Nagini.”

“Good,” she smiled honestly at him, “I might make a Slytherin of you yet.”

Harry chuckled nervously. He turned to look at the other two.

“What about you Louis? Unless you bit me somewhere whilst I was out, I’m guessing you’re still waiting for your turn to terrorise my flesh." He turned to Nagini. “He is supposed to bite me, isn’t he?”

She hissed out a light laugh at the adorable amusement her new master provided her with and Harry watched Louis give a little nod. The familiar shuffled over and clambered onto Harry’s shoulder, wiggling to try and get into place as he dug his teeth sharply into the flesh below. Harry hissed out but the pain was nowhere near as bad as it had been with Nagini’s bond. Louis was clearly quite young and just as inexperienced as Harry in some respects. It was no wonder that he didn’t seem to hold as much capacity to hurt as Nagini. The tiny little bite mark quickly healed into a faint white outline and Harry sighed again. His hand came up to cradle the side of Louis’ head and the lemur fell against his palm and yawned. The ink body of his mirrored image also curled up into a doze. Harry agreed. It was barely the afternoon (unless he’d been out longer than he thought) and he was already exhausted. Finally his gaze turned to the beautiful white bird next to him. He reached out his other hand and she pecked at him affectionately.
“What about you, beautiful? Do you want to stand by my side and be my friend?”

“You’re sssupossssed to offer your loyalty in exchange for hers.”

“I’m not all that conventional though, am I?”

“I sssuppose you have a point.”

The owl didn’t seem to mind though and stomped elegantly over the plush grass before trying to gesture rather poorly to get Harry to turn onto his front. He eventually got the hint after much hooting and placed Louis into the nest of Nagini’s body before flopping forwards. One moment he was fine, but the next he was stuffing down a “Damnit!” as a sharp beak pounded it’s stiletto into his arse cheek. First those bloody thorns - now this!

“Ow…” he eventually panted out, once he had swallowed his tarnished pride at the renewed abuse of his behind.

“You deserved that. You ignored my letter.” The voice was slightly haughty and of a higher pitch than Harry had been expecting. It wasn’t sensual like Nagini’s but still held the sort of elegance he had come to expect from his female friends.

“Um… Hi, I guess. Would it be strange to ask if I can have your name, please?”

The snowy bird gave him a look and finally pronounced, “Hedwig.” She then hopped off across the grass a little way from Harry. He turned to look at Nagini.

“What letter?”

She gave an exaggerated sigh. “Your Hogwartsss letter.”

Harry just looked at her blankly. Nagini sighed again at the slow uptake of her new Slytherin hopeful.

“You don’t exxxpect that magical folk do things the same way Muggles do?”

Harry had figured out what Muggles were - eventually. And now another light bulb flickered on.

“You mean you don’t have postmen but post owls?”

“Why yes,” Hedwig said ruffling her feathers, “And what an honourable job it is!”

“Only when you’re a perssssonal owl. When you work for the fool at Hogwatsss, there is no pride to be had in your service.”

Hedwig looked uncomfortable, not knowing whether to agree or defend her pride. Harry butted in.

“Who’s the ‘fool’?”

“How the great and grand Headmassster, of coursssse.”

“Is he that stupid?” Inquired Harry, biting back a laugh.

“Oh no. He’sss quite the opposite.” Nagini smirked evilly. “Don’t rely on me for all the ansssswers, Potter. In due time I’m ss sure you’ll have your own opinion of him.”

Harry was forced to accept that and nod. He turned to Hedwig.
“But you’re not a Hogwarts owl anymore, are you?”

“No,” she hooted, “Now I serve you, the great and grand Harry Potter.”

Harry paused.

“Do you mean to say I’m a ‘fool’ too?” He ventured.

“Well,” smirked Hedwig.

“We’ll just have to sssee, won’t we?” Finished Nagini.

Harry swallowed, unsure whether it was meant as a tease or a warning.

“And… what do I need to know about this letter then?”

Hedwig giggled. Harry hadn’t realised she could.

“You could go back to ‘The Big Oak Tree’... orrr you could wait for the next one to arrive.” Nagini smirked evilly as Hedwig continued. “I wanted to be the one to deliver it, but I suppose being your familiar will just have to do.” She puffed out her chest and Harry stroked her feathers fondly, grinning and wondering how he ever got so lucky as to make three friends all at once.
Harry’s stomach protested loudly. It had had quite enough of Nagini and Hedwig griping over things he didn’t understand.

“Will you two just zip it, please?”

Hedwig and Nagini both looked over at him haughtily but stopped nevertheless. Harry turned to glare at the serpent.

“You’re the one who insisted on getting food but I still haven’t had a single crumb.”

Nagini at least had the decency to look guilty. Her eyes swept over the boy’s body - he really was skinny. The magic from her bonding ritual had overflowed and not only healed the wound she had inflicted, as it was supposed to, but also all the other injuries he had suffered over the course of his life. Sadly, malnourishment couldn’t really be called an injury and thus had been left uncured. She would have to get him healthy and quickly. She was sure that somewhere in Diagon Alley there would be foods which could boost his growth. Hopefully if she called them vitamins rather than steroids, her new master wouldn’t resist taking them. She was only looking out for him, after all.

“What do you plan to do about it then, sssire?” She would teach him to think for himself and not just expect her to give him the answers. When her current master enabled her former to return… then things really would get interesting.

“Praise you until you sneakily steal some food from their fridge for me?” Harry inquired with a grin.

Nagini laughed with satisfaction.

“Good - you’re learning. Even so, if you weren’t looking like you might faint on me, I’d demand you ssshow me your stealth and ssskills.”

Harry’s grin brightened all the more and while Nagini kept her expression fairly neutral, she was proud of him. He hadn’t challenged her outright but instead had proven himself perfectly willing to consider using what the old fool would have called shameful, underhanded persuasion (even if the famed Headmaster was the one who used it most of all). Nagini was picturing the future already - she was sure that Harry would prove most useful in highlighting the hidden duality of the old man. She was also growing more and more certain that the young wizard would soon acquire a taste for revenge and learn that it was a dish best served cold.

Nagini sipping in a breath of cooling air and slid into motion, glancing over her shoulder to observe the two familiars who now shared her duty - to protect Harry.

“Aren’t you coming with me in aid of your noble massster’s cause?” She questioned as she slithered away.

Within moments, Louis had eagerly hopped onto Nagini’s tail and let himself be whisked along the grass, both creatures vanishing into a silver current of invisible air. Harry still found himself blinking at the surreal image - or rather, lack of one. He then turned to Hedwig and asked sweetly, “Would you mind helping them out please, beautiful?”

Hedwig ruffled her wings a little and looked a touch ashamed but swiftly ran after them, her two whizzing bird feet being the first to disappear. Harry would have to be careful not to call Hedwig “beautiful” in front of Nagini again in case he triggered a war of jealousy. He had witnessed the truth
of the saying “hell has no fury like a woman scorned” and he certainly didn’t want to entangle himself in such a conflict, especially not one he had provoked between two creatures he was finding himself growing to care very much about. On the other hand, calling Hedwig that when it was just the two of them would strengthen their bond and it seemed to boost his bird’s confidence a little too. Did she feel inadequate next to the almighty power of Nagini? Or maybe having come from Hogwarts really was a stain on her pride and something she needed to gradually get over. Either way, if a little cajoling would make her happier, why not? Especially as she really was beautiful.

Harry smiled softly as he caught the tail end of a titter and heard the slow pull of a drawer revealing its contents through the open kitchen window. He dearly hoped Petunia wouldn’t come in and trap Louis in a drawer or Hedwig in the fridge. On the other hand, if Nagini happened to trip Petunia up whilst she was carrying her “bestest” china… perhaps he wouldn’t be able to find it within himself to admonish her for such an “accident”.

X-X-X

The Ministry of Magic was abuzz with new prospects. As is natural at the beginning of a school year, the Minister supposed. He was a stout man who believed he knew very much indeed, but, as his cabinet had experienced rather intimately, this aspect of his image was entirely untrue. Some might have wondered how he could succeed in his position - or even attain it in the first place - when so many of his skills were simply artifice and he relied unceasingly on the people around him.

Amelia Bones who was currently rocking on a chair emblazoned with the Hufflepuff crest concluded that it could only be his ability to manage things, which, given his position as a figurehead and nothing more, shouldn’t have been all that unusual. Being the curious soul that she was though, she couldn’t help feeling as though perhaps he wasn’t the Ministry’s puppet, but rather someone else’s. Every Minister whom she had served somehow felt different. Closed off and inept, yes. But at least they all seemed to be a good judge of character and were aware of their own fallibility and status as a tool. Year-old Minister Fudge, on the other hand, appeared to genuinely believe in his own pompous worth. And whilst a well-defended mind was hardly unusual for politicians, the curses and compulsions other than Occlumency surrounding Fudge’s mental defences were a novelty. Not only because he didn’t seem to be aware that she, and many other people for that matter, were testing the limits of them on an hourly basis, but also because they allowed for control over long distances and for long periods of time without renewal, and thus had never been used by (or rather on) a Minister before. To Amelia, the only logical explanation was that the puppeteer was indeed exterior to the Ministry. While she had yet to make the link between Fudge and the man who kept denying the post of Minister in favour of “moulding the minds of the youth”, the culmination of many years of manipulation dictated that it wouldn’t be long now before the answer to the witch’s curiosity came to light. The Eureka moment would be certain to reach Amelia and her peers first, and in that time, the rest of the Ministry, if not the intuitive cabinet members, would continue to firmly believe that Fudge’s mind was simply a tougher fortress than most and all the more powerful for it.

X-X-X

Just like he had done over the past several decades, the Headmaster was branding his plots as plans and allies as friends - to the readers of the Daily Prophet, at least. Fudge was benefiting greatly from the public support for the changes he was slowly working to pass, as well as from the extra mental defences, as he scurried around in what would have been called a tizzy if it were seen to affect a
young witch. He couldn’t help his thoughts leaking out - and who could blame him given his position? - so it was only natural that a certain someone had sealed them away with various enchantments. Fudge was not aware of this second form of aid though, and instead kept wondering how on earth the white-bearded man expected him to be able to put so many things in place within the next few years. All he knew was that with a new intake of magic-wielding scoundrels, there would be even more potential opposition to the changes... He had to find a way to silence the fools, and quickly!

It was to be yet another busy July and August - it always had been and always would be the pique time for magical politics. But, just like the current Minister was a little different than those who had come before, so was the yearly panic of paperwork. To most, the differences were unrecognisable for few would bother to fully read what they were stamping and the world would be all the better for it. Yes it would. Fudge smirked at the thought.
A world away, the cackling ferocity of a mad genius echoed up a tiny stairwell. The jarring duality to be found in a man so powerful was intense and persistent, so much so that his own brother often couldn't recognise the boy he had grown up with below the layers of corrupt age and fanciful desires.

Rule the world? Destroy all the filthy Dark wizards? Vengeance really could have seemed so sweet if only Aberforth had not spent so long in the company of the one man who had the power to make it possible.

When the old wizard watched his brother, especially in moments like these, he often wondered what exactly it had been which had driven the genius to his breaking point. The white beard on the madman's face marked the years he had pondered the topic and, indeed, searched for an answer - and yet he was no nearer to knowing - no nearer to saving him... or finally shattering the devil into impotent pieces. The mat of white hair haunted Aberforth, reminding him of his own ineptitude, and left him cursing his own uselessness. Now, more than ever, he felt the desire to act swelling up inside his as the same creeping age steadily sank downwards from his chin. Now, this shared feature not only reminded him of how long his brother's silent hand had pushed pawns to their demise, but also of how little time he had left to fulfil his destiny to rise from the shadows and trigger the long-needed counter-attack.

Swoosh. Aberforth observed the oily face and thinning beard which whipped around the cellar and splashed into the bubbling cauldron beneath his brother's hands. It was almost ironic how the madness only ever seemed to overcome the twinkling goodness of the man's mask whenever he set about brewing this potion - almost as if it reflected the poison of his plotting - the chess game which seemed to be constantly expanding. The old coot swung around, happy on the buzz of dull drunkenness and keen insanity. Aberforth could only be thankful for his own wisdom in never showing his true hand - his ability to keep up with his brother. Not in terms of power or skill - but they were born of the same blood and shared some aspects of their soul. While Albus had gone insane, Aberforth had watched and avoided the path to ruin - and after so many years of tracking the genius and minimising the effects of his puppetry, he felt ready to end this trauma once and for all. Aberforth had become a jaded observer - he knew there was no saving the old coot. Life had lost its meaning and sometimes Aberforth wondered why he was still trying... but the proud and stoic man knew the meaning of duty, and he knew that his was to save the world from following his brother into ruin.

Physical sensation distracted Aberforth from his thoughts as his brother swung in to splodge a sloppy kiss on his only family's face. The twinkling eyes captured by photos and the innocently wise charm of an aged master reverberated only as far as superficiality would penetrate. Beneath that lay only the depression of horrifying reality, and when his brother was so close, the reminder of the truth was as cutting and cold as death itself.

Aberforth knew his fate, and it wasn’t to be one of glory. It was the only thing he could do, because this insane swarm of horror was his only family. Aberforth couldn’t rule the whole world and he couldn’t protect it all either. But he could be the martyr who sacrificed familial love for the suppression of a most terrifying future. There were people who could act to turn the tide - including him - and no matter how small their actions seemed, they would total up, and by the time the greatest
concoction the world had ever seen was ready to be born, there would be an army of justice ready to overpower the old Headmaster. The codger would crumble in the face of new belief, one not misled by the paranoid stars in an old man’s eyes, and the new order of humble protagonists would embrace their fate. The world would neither be ruled nor saved - it would quite simply survive through whatever ugly rebirth it could manage.

Aberforth knew that the stars in his brother’s eyes were from madness, not genius, and that, no matter what the cost, he would not allow the world to be pinned under the thumb of Albus Dumbledore. He had made up his mind and chosen the fate he would pursue. It had taken him decades to unravel the web pinned by murders on the vast canvas of his brother’s machinations - it would not be long now until they fought the Final Battle - for the Truth.

“Nox.”

Aberforth left the cellar and his brother in darkness, knowing it would make no difference to the keen-eyed madman. The end was nigh, but now it was time for a nap before the evening customers rolled in.

X-X-X

“What on earth is this, Petunia?”

“What’s what, darling?”

“This! It’s a Sunday. There’s no post on Sundays.”

Petunia teetered over her husband’s shoulder. It was undeniable that in his chubby palm lay a thick envelope embellished by a wax seal, the likes of which the Dursleys had never seen outside of a history textbook.

“‘Hogwarts’? Isn’t that the place where your damned sister went?”

Petunia froze and then felt the shock of shivers shuffling down her spine, forcing her to squeak out an “Oh God.”

“‘Oh God,’ indeed. I’ve had enough of the Potters. Especially right this moment. After the stunt the freak pulled yesterday... My God. I’m going to whip that boy good and proper when I get my hands on him...”

Petunia whimpered.

“I’ll teach that boy a lesson,” Vernon growled. “I won’t have his freakish kind infecting our home!”

Petunia swallowed and stuttered out shakily, “I-I’ll go and make us some tea.”

“Get us some biscuits too. We need to have a serious think about this.”

“Dudders!”

“What, Mum?” came an estranged voice from upstairs.

“Mummy and Daddy are just going to have a talk so you stay right up there.”
“’Kay…” No interest or indication of having listened rather than just heard could be detected in the bland reply.

Petunia hurried off to the kitchen. Her first task was jerking open the glass fronted cupboards. Her spindly frame meant the doors didn’t even have enough power to clatter against the other fixtures, but the force the woman attempted to apply made her dizzy. She had never been one to engage in physical labour and it took her all to try and lift the delicate china set out all together rather than shifting it piece by piece as she normally did. Petunia didn’t trust her nephew. Not in the slightest. But her hatred of work and desire to live a life of leisure meant that all other tea sets, besides this one (her best), had always been ordered into the hands of Harry so that he could serve them tea whenever they so desired it.

In the next moment, almost toppling over from her exertion, she reached for the cutlery drawer, failing to notice it was already open. Her hand dived into it, grasping for the box containing her favoured silver implements and dragging her wrist back out again. Her panted shuffling as she moved back over to the row of cupboards could be heard outside where Harry was biting his nails in worry for his friends. The slam of the drawer being forced shut was covered by the clatter of a biscuit tin, and then another and then another, but Nagini could smell the flowering scent of blood. It was fresh and tangy and Louis’ whimpers as he nursed his poor tail from the claustrophobia of an almost shut drawer was pitiful. Nagini hissed in contempt.

“Petunia, is it normal for owls to be out during the daytime?” Vernon’s voice carried heavily through the house and to Harry’s ears. Crap. Had he seen Hedwig?

“It depends on the owl, dear…”

“Well come in here and have a look. They’re all lined up on the fence!”

Petunia frowned and hurried off to look. Nagini wouldn’t admit to her sigh of relief but as soon as the blasted woman was out of sight, she was off, hissing towards the drawer and pulling Louis out ever so gently. He clung to her scales and she quietly slipped off to hide in an alcove near the despicably non-magical broomstick. She leaned in and tipped the smooth edge of a fang past the small familiar’s hide, injecting a healing serum which would hopefully free the poor critter from pain within moments.

All too soon though, Petunia had returned. Biscuits wouldn’t be enough. There were too many weird things happening. There wasn’t supposed to be post on Sundays. And the owls! Maybe an owl might have decided to show up during the afternoon. And maybe even sit on their white picket fence. But not twenty-seven of them! And certainly not all with their beady pairs of eyes staring directly into their sitting room through the flimsy window. No - there were simply too many coincidences!

She ripped open the fridge door, her own beady eyes searching for the comfort only food could provide. She’d spent the past week baking and even if her poor Dudders had been very hungry indeed, there was sure to be at least some desserts left. She was not left disappointed. She was, however, alarmed. Terrified even. She screamed! A whole tray of lemon tarts was floating in mid-air! Floating! The comfort of sweetness she had sought had betrayed her. She slammed the fridge door shut. This was all too much!

Hedwig had naturally spied the most delicious food for her new owner. She had spent a good few minutes trying to figure out how to carry the tray and just as she turned her crumpled wingspan around, her eyes widened in horror as the upside of a horse’s nostrils brazenly shrieked loudly enough to offend even her resilient ears. Hedwig felt dizzy. Christ. She hadn’t noticed the fridge door close but she was too confused to care. One claw-footed limb thrust outwards, burying itself in
a plastic bottle of milk and forcing the door back open. Petunia fell over. No! No! Hedwig’s confusion had made her drop her invisibility enchantment. Petunia stared in wide-eyed horror at the white monstrosity that had emerged from her fridge. Where had it come from? It was contaminating her precious food!

“Vernon!” She squealed.

No. No no no. Owls might appear during the day. The might even sit on their fence. But they shouldn’t gather in flocks and they shouldn’t be in her fridge! Petunia began to panic and her shrill nasal heaving became even more painful to listen to. Nagini uttered a hiss of discontent with Hedwig for her blunder but smirked evily nevertheless. Milk was spewing out between the owl’s toes and the lemon tarts in their individual glass ramekins were dropping one after another off the dull black tray they had been housed on. Smash. Smash. Smash. Nagini’s grin widened further. Why not have a little more fun?

“PETUNIA!” Came as a bellow from the other side of the house. SMASH! The owls who had been lining the white picket face had made their move. The flimsy window panes buckled without resistance and Vernon’s fat face was stuffed to the brim with hundred of thousands of feathers. The unruffled birds hooted out and seemed only to summon more as first the sitting room and then the corridor and then the kitchen were invaded by the flying beauties.

“POTTER! I’LL GET YOU FOR THIS, YOU FREAK!” Continued Vernon. He tripped then, falling backwards onto the spongy mat of his arse.

“VERNON!” shrieked his wife. The panic in her was rising. Folded parchment minted with red wax rained unrelentingly onto her body. She was being buried - buried by the spawn of her hated, freakish sister. She clambered up, desperate to escape. And Dudders! She had to get her precious Dudders out of this place! It was unsafe! She turned then. But her china! She reached for it, grasping the edge of the service tray and slowly getting to her feet, protecting her delicate material pride and stumbling to the door. She froze. No. No no no.

The biggest, fattest, most hideous of beasts she had ever seen was lying directly in front of her. The hissing venom melted the final dregs of security Petunia had felt in her own home. The white fangs glinted like the bones she feared it was about to snap in her. The flushed green appeared scarlet as she envisioned her blood splattering up against her perfectly clean walls. The owls which had broken into the kitchen were still pelting her, and then another flock flooded in to join them. “Reaching for the Biscuits, Kitchen”. “Serving Tea, Sitting Room”. “Cowering in Fear, The Cupboard Under The Stairs”. The inky damnations flew at her and finally she was forced forwards, tripping over the hideous body of a revolutionary wizard’s snake, smashing her precious china, and finally fainting.

Harry’s gut was strung tight at the panic and commotion as he could no longer understand what was happening. Had he not convinced himself he could believe in magic, he would have been worried for his friends. His precious friends. Hedwig had seemed to have multiplied, confusingly enough, but it was clear upon reflection that she had simply been joined flock of other owls. Almost all of them, amazingly, white. Harry took a moment to finally grasp the events occurring before him, peeking
over the ledge of the kitchen window into an incredible sight. A swarm of owls of various sizes were attacking his family with such vigour that Hedwig and Louis were forced to gradually crawl to the safety of their master. Harry watched with animated glee as Nagini ripped apart his notions of propriety and gave his relatives the greatest scare they had ever had in their entire lives. Had Harry Potter been destined to be a Gryffindor, he might have cringed at his own enthusiasm. Harry Potter was not as noble as some would have liked to believe though, and thus loved every minute of it.

After what felt like a strung-out forever but had probably been closer to only twelve minutes, Nagini’s silky body slipped out of the window and curled around Harry and together the four of them enjoyed the warmth of the setting sun, smirks dancing across all their faces. Harry cradled Louis against his chest and petted his two other familiars in turns. Soon enough, a light weight hit his head and Harry glanced up as the telling twit two of an owl fluttered down from a bird who seemed to nod at him, satisfied. Harry extracted himself from the comfy cuddle and hummed as he turned the letter over.

“That’ll be your Hogwartsss letter, Harry,” murmured Nagini.

Hedwig bit at his finger affectionately.

“I know, girl, but I really don’t have the energy to go back to the forest for yours.”

Harry smiled openly and happily. He had never felt so free. And yet, a moment later, his joy somehow managed to increase yet again.

“MUM!?” howled Dudley as his fat feet hit the bottom step. The sound of a splash echoed though the house as his jiggling weight slipped along the carpet of feathers, knocking over a glass vase and making Dudley hit his head into blackness. That, for Harry, was just the icing on the cake. Harry looked down, mesmerised. How had his life changed so much and so quickly? It was incredible. By God was he lucky!

Louis held out his two small hands then, offering up the one salvaged lemon tart he had managed to steal away from the chaos and Harry could do nothing but laugh merrily, before splitting the tiny desert into four and deciding they would worry about food later. He had his appreciation to show first, after all.

Chapter End Notes

This has been my favourite chapter to write so far! I hope you enjoy it too!

Opinions?: Did I accurately capture the panic of the moment or do you think I could improve it?
Dumbledore sighed into his hands. It had been difficult to obtain a competent minion who wouldn’t ask any questions about the events which had taken place at Number 4 Privet Drive the day before. Thankfully, a little house-elf magic had been all it had taken to clean up the numerous feathers and tornado of a mess. Dumbledore had found the disaster zone an amusing and just punishment for the Dursleys - although he had to admit that he was slightly disappointed that his Muggle pawns would be less useful now. It could have been far worse though, and it was gladdening that a few words from a smartly dressed Muggle-born to a local policeman had convinced him that the Dursleys had simply gone insane. In fact, the moment the threesome had woken up and started babbling was the nail in their coffin - demon snakes and flocks of owls and post on Sundays had the figure of authority instantly convinced. If the useful Muggle-born might also have persuaded the policeman to look into free cells in a mental asylum for the three of them... then it was all the more amusing. Amusing - but still problematic. Dumbledore had wanted to remind the Muggles of who held all the power, and show Harry enough of the wonder of magic and how it could bring him justice to pull Harry over to the Light side. That had not happened.

Dumbledore was staking everything he had on making Harry his. But that damned snake…! Dumbledore had thought that he wouldn’t see that hideous beast until Voldemort returned, but that was turning out to be yet another thing he had been wrong about. Too many examples of his failed predictions had been piling up over the last two days and the old man was fuming. He wouldn’t have his prize corrupted. Not after all his hard work.

And Hagrid - the incompetent fool! He was supposed to be there to greet Potter properly after his relatives had gone through their trauma. Instead, he had been too preoccupied by nursing the birds back to health after glass had buried itself in their wings and various other implements had bruised their muscles in the confusion.

At least Potter had gone back to the house. Dumbledore’s trackers weren’t perfect, but since the boy had no knowledge of them and thus couldn’t resist them, the only interference Dumbledore’s magic had was when the boy passed through a magically-rich area in which the signal would be utterly distorted. Hopefully this wouldn’t happen until Harry headed to Diagon Alley, and by then he would already be in love with the half-giant and then directly under Dumbledore’s control. The revelation that Potter had guided himself back to the Dursleys even without interference and managed to get himself back on track gave Dumbledore hope though.

It looks like that boy is enough of a Gryffindor to resist even that frightful serpent. As soon as they get to Hogwarts, I'll make certain that it's locked away until the appropriate time draws near. Voldemort always lived on spite... it should have come as no surprise to me that he slipped his foul pet into a pen to hiss at the Muggles he so detests. But it doesn't matter. It'll be so easy to remove Harry from her influence. I know full well he can talk to snakes - given his inheritance - but a silent owl and a monkey will be far better companions. I'm sure I can persuade him of that. And then there'll be one less beast defiling my cause.

Dumbledore smirked at the pile of parchment Fudge had discreetly delivered to his office. There were an awful lot of Muggle-borns set to arrive this year. Perfect. Even more chances to succeed.
“Wake up, Harry.”

The messy-haired boy blinked up from the nest of blankets that the foursome had torn straight from the linen basket and heaved out the house the night before. Harry could admit that he was a little daring, but he hadn’t been rash enough make use of the much-coveted memory foam mattresses which now stood surrendered by his relatives - not whilst his tormentors were still in the house at least. Thankfully, he wasn’t teased about it by his new friends, if only because they didn’t much fancy rolling in the muck of human sweat that the vile Muggles had surely pressed into their beds. When Nagini had put it like that in response to Harry’s query, he had found himself even less inclined to make use of the new luxury - and anyway, he much preferred the comfort of soft quilts and the shade of a small oak in the nearby park to the dank reminder of his horrifyingly recent past. What made choosing this spot even better in Harry’s eyes though, was the fact that Nagini had praised him for it. She had commented that it was a wise move considering that when his relatives woke up they would no doubt be on a warpath heading straight for him.

Harry’s stomach grumbled. In the past he had easily managed to survive starvation which stretched for far longer than a single day, but for some reason the craving for necessities felt so much sharper, more insistent, now than it ever had done before.

“That’sss because magic uses a lot of energy. When you get to Hogwartsss you’ll be surprised by the feastssss. But trust me when I say you really will need to eat ass much as possible from now on.”

Harry had been impressed by his own talent and ability to talk to animals, but Nagini’s apparent ability to read his mind impressed him far more. Harry slowly shuffled upwards and snorted an oak leaf off his face. It landed on Nagini’s nose and she hissed at him pettily.

“Where have Hedwig and Louis gone off to then?”

“Oh… you know… getting sssomething, Potter,” she smirked.

“Getting something’?”

“Yesss, and you’d do well to be awake and alert for them when they come back.”

Harry sighed, but agreed to do as she bid nevertheless. He clambered up and stretched, working out the kinks in his neck and wandering over to the park fountain to wash his face. He didn’t trust the water so resisted the urge to take a quick swig, or even to rinse his mouth out. It didn’t matter though - he knew that in the heavy bag of supplies he’d packed in a panic there were as many drinks as he could find in the Dursley fridge, so it wasn’t as though he was in a critical state - the most he’d have to do would be to walk a couple of paces! Harry snorted slightly as he thought about how appalled his relatives would have been with such a notion, and indeed how to them it truly would have been a tragedy. They’d probably even call it an infringement of their more-monster-than-human rights! As if they were in any position to talk about rights...

Thanks to his pensive pauses, it had taken Harry rather longer than normal to get himself ready. By the time he’d turned and started to head back, he could see the proud display of Hedwig’s speckled wingspan and the adorable expression of eagerness on Louis’ face. Harry peered, trying to spy what it was that the owl was hiding behind her impressive reach but he still had no clue even when he’d come to a stop in front of her.
“Morning, you two,” he half yawned.

Hedwig hooted at him and Louis grinned, his eyes slipping shut in happiness.

“What are you two up to then?”

A gentle hiss caught him by surprise. It’s softness was calming and with the first few familiar notes that had never before been directed at him, Harry felt his emotions well up.

“Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday, dear Harry. Happy birthday to you.”

The hushed melody increased in volume as the twitters of Hedwig sweetened the sound of Nagini’s beginning and Louis’ nervous muttering supported the words. Harry felt tears bloom in his eyes. Oh God. It was incredible. He’d- he’d forgotten it had been his birthday. He hadn’t even know he had one for the first seven years of his life - nevermind what date it was. He’d only discovered that last year. And now- now-! Hedwig’s white wings curled in to reveal a simple treacle sponge covered in brightly coloured fruits.

“We know it was on Thursday, but we still wanted to celebrate,” began Hedwig, "So."

"Happy birthday, Harry,” the three whispered at once.

Harry couldn’t stop his tears and as they flooded down his face and with them he felt the troubles of his past tragedy seep away. His smile pierced the blackness that had come before and his happy - free and happy - laughter burst into the quiet air of the morning, drawing the thrushes and robins from their foraging to tweet at him merrily, celebrating his simple and tangible joy.

Nagini smiled as him softly and gently admonished, “Now now, no need to turn into a Hufflepuff on me.”

Harry couldn't help it. The absurdity of it all and the brilliance of the day made him giggle. The sound was girly and yet he didn’t care. He felt like he was on top of the world! The weight of the letter which sat unopened in his bag was forgotten in the bliss of the moment as Harry finally stretched his eyelids back beyond comfort to try and fully absorb the picture before him. The silver cutlery Nagini had insisted on taking as yet another small act of vengeance was laid out on a patterned plate - one of the few pieces of china salvaged by Louis. Next to it was a crystal cut glass which the serpent had denounced as nowhere near as pure as wizarding crystal but had thieved from his relatives anyway. Hedwig was tilting her head easily and Louis was fiddling with a shimmering bottle of a drink whose brand he had never heard of before.

“Pumpkin Juiccee,” stated Nagini. “I thought it would only be appropriate for you to have your first tassste of the wizarding world on the day that we celebrate your birthday.”

Pop! The cap flew off and the drink flowed steadily into the glass goblet.

“I won’t deny that there are tassks which must be addresssed today, Harry. But for now, forget about it all. Forget about being Harry Potter - a wizard - and just be you. Happy birthday, Harry.”

At that, both the other familiars cheered in agreement, which was followed promptly by them all tucking into the tiny feast.

Chapter End Notes
Are you enjoying the peep into Dumbledore's side of things? Or are you finding that it detracts from the main story? I'd love to hear your feedback!
Nagini didn’t like treacle sponge. She liked thrushes and robins. But the smile on her master’s face was worth putting up with having to sip at a spoonful of syrup and ignore the delicious feathered snacks littered across the park.

6 AM quickly faded into midday and after a lot of happy murmuring and laughter and stories and little tidbits to gradually ease Harry into the idea of being a wizard, Nagini sighed and concluded that Harry Potter needed to know his fate as the Boy Who Lived.

“Harry…”

Nagini wasn’t nervous, but caution was still advisable. Harry felt the sudden change in atmosphere as frigidly unexpected as the first smack of his uncle’s fist. He straightened up and turned to his snake as his other two familiars quietened down. He gulped.

“Nagini?”

“I realissse you are only just starting to believe the fact you are a wizard, Harry. But I’m afraid that I cannot give you any longer to adjussst to such a simple thing.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you know what happened to your parentssss, Harry?”

What did his parents have to do with anything?

“They- they died in a car crash.” He nodded imperceptibly to reassure himself.

Nagini shook her head roughly and slid closer to her boy.

“Ten yearsss ago, your wonderful mother and father gave their lives for you. In the middle of the night, having been trapped by several magical wardsss and finding their wands stolen, your parents did the best they could to sssave you, Harry. Save you from a man born Tom Riddle but who called himself Lord Voldemort. A prophecy had been made just a few months before in which it was said that you would have the power to defeat this man, the Dark Lord, and ass he was desperate to attain eternal life, he naturally went after you. Had you not been born to the sound of that prophecy, you
might not have survived that night - prophecies hold strange powers of protection, after all. Although, that said, without those damming words, Voldemort might not have gone after you at all. But he did and you survived. And it was all because your mother died in front of you - the magic she sacrificed for love protected you and the Killing Curse rebounded, hitting Voldemort instead. Harry... you are incredibly lucky. Not because you survived, but because your parents loved you enough to let you survive in their stead.”

Harry was weeping. He couldn't believe that his self control had been weakened so thoroughly twice in one day. But whereas he had known the alien feeling of pure joy earlier, this time he couldn’t understand his emotions. Happiness? It felt so misplaced. He was hearing about his parents’ death - and yet he was happy? But then... of course he was happy. Harry hadn’t ever felt this way. He felt loved. Loved beyond the bounds of life and he could barely breath. He was choking on the force of the sacrifice love had given him and he felt himself melting into the hot and heavy seas flowing freely down his face. Heart-wrenching sadness for a love he had never known, knew now, and was sure he would never know again. Anger. Impossible, incredible anger. At himself for trying to forget his parents. At Voldemort for bringing about his tragedy. And at himself again for being born. But also... relief. He was beloved. He was beloved beyond the bounds of life and now... he had friends with whom he could go on living.

“Harry, Voldemort was a legend and still is. He may have died that night but he lives on. He was obsessed with immortality and with you. And no one ever found a body. He will be back. Of this I am sure. There are many that fear that day. Many who fear him. And so most people know him as ‘He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named’, or more often ‘You-Know-Who’. There are some who wish for his return though. Most wish it secretly, pretending they were never by his side. They call him the ‘Dark Lord’. And ten years ago, when you were no more than a baby, I myself called him ‘Master’.”

What? No! Harry sat there frozen. Terrified. Nagini…? His friend-! Why…?

“There are people who think he is good and those who think he is evil. He is seen as both the epitome of Light and Dark. He murdered your parents, Harry, and when he returns he will try to kill you once more. But Harry - know this: he is not the most evil wizard of all, and all the hatred and pain that exists in our world to this day is not because of him - it is because of another man you will soon meet. I can't make you believe me, Harry, but I am now your loyal servant, and I wish for you to vanquish the real demon and whether you do that by gaining vengeance for the death of your parents or by befriending an equal victim of an old fool’s manipulation - I will stand by your side. No matter what.”

Harry whimpered, shaking. He didn’t know what to do. Nagini... But, above all else, he still had hope. If he lost what small ground he had gained in three days, then there wasn’t much to lose. But if he gained all that was promised to him, then the risk was worth the reward. He shakily reached out his buzzing arms to cup Nagini’s head and then, trembling and finally sobbing openly, he kissed her softly.

“I am forever yourss, Harry. And I know you shall make me proud.”

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Fudge breathed a sigh of relief. Somehow, he had done it! He wouldn’t deny the help he got from the old man... but getting the contracts legalised, the signatures stamped without the documents being recognised for what they were and then having them delivered to Hogwarts without being
intercepted had been nothing short of a miracle, especially as he had managed to get it all done within only a few short weeks. Not even his cabinet had caught onto his scheme! He had thankfully managed to delegate all ministerial duties to them for a total of seven days and whilst they were close to being run into the ground, no disaster had happened for the abuse of his privilege. And now Fudge was ready to take up the reins again, for a few weeks at least. When Dumbledore managed to get the innocent little Mudbloods to sign away their worth, it would be all systems go again for him. The pause would give his wondrous colleges the rest they desired though and this whole operation would only serve to highlight how truly valuable Fudge was to Dumbledore’s cause. After he succeeded in all these laborious and treasonous tasks, Dumbledore would surely be unable to deny him his reward - a large share for the final winnings. A whole continent under his control in the very least!

Fudge cackled merrily as he passed by the golden knobs of Hufflepuff’s ancient chair, leaving the office for the night. A wandless “nox” allowed the chilly air to extinguish the humming candles instantly just as the door slammed to.

Fudge had never been as smart as he liked to think he was though, and whilst Amelia still found herself unable to penetrate his mind, the fact he had murmured part of his speech out loud rendered his improved defences rather pointless and certainly proved useful in satisfying her curiosity. Only for a second though, for when she pieced together the reality of what she knew - unknown documents victimising Muggle-borns (she shuddered at her superior’s slur) and Hogwarts as the stage - she found herself only all the more intrigued. She had yet to place her mind on the innocent-seeming wise man who gave speeches to the bowels of the Great Hall, but her furry body in Animagus form had blended into the shadows well enough to give her a foothold into the story of truth.

X-X-X

It had taken over an hour for Harry to calm down and he was still feeling rather prone to the odd burst of a sniffle but he tried his very best to patiently listen to more and more details as Nagini fed them past the wings and tiny hands of comfort of his smaller familiars and into the quilts where he lay cocooned in a soft embrace.

“You must be sure to call him ‘Voldemort’ though. You are his vanquisher and he hasss marked you both as his equal and his enemy. The force of Light which symbolises life has sstruck a scar across your forehead,” Harry reached up to touch the red bump of a lightning bolt softly, “And all the wizarding world knows your name. They might be scared or intimidated by your bravery in using your enemy’sss name - but to all the world it is important you maintain the image of a Lionheart. In thissss you must not falter.”

Harry wanted to ask "why" so desperately but the few riddles Nagini left unsolved were his to unravel on his own. Her attitude had made that clear enough. Instead he found himself asking something quite… opposite and seemingly frivolous.

“Does that mean… I’m famous?”

Hedwig snorted and Nagini hissed out a laugh fondly, the ice around Harry’s heart shuddering into sprinkled fragments and then to dust.

“Oh Potter, you’re as if not more famousss than any legend that has come before, and ssshould you
fulfil your duty as I believe you shall - you shall rise even higher and not only write your own history, but rewrite the path the past will try to impose upon the future. You can change the world, Harry.” She paused. “Will you?”

Harry didn’t think there was more than one answer and so he nodded simply and said, quite honestly, “Yes.”

Nagini smiled.

“Well then, I think it’s time for you to rest. It has been another exhausting day. We shall find more food for your recovering body tomorrow, Harry. For now, rest. I think tomorrow may well be the day you first hear your title as the ‘Boy Who Lived’.”

Harry chuckled.

“Everyone seems to be obsessed with cool nicknames in the wizarding world.”

Nagini huffed.

“‘Cool’, Potter?”

“Yeah, ‘cool’.”

Harry yawned slowly and even before sunset he was out like a light.

Chapter End Notes

Did I pull at your heartstrings? I hope I did. :P Oh, and I hope we can all agree that Fudge is an utter idiot.
“Well then it’s only logical for me to use that seal-thingy you were talking about then.”

“‘Ssseal- thingy ’? I worry about you, Potter.”

“Oh there’s no need for that,” Harry teased with his tongue out. Nagini hissed hers out to mirror him.

“Did you not hear me when I said that sealing the bonding symbols will limit your power?”

“Yup,” Harry popped out.

“Then why are you sso adamant about doing it? I can appreciate that you don’t want to take any risks and that without a ssseal the bite-marks, no matter how faint, would ssstill be visible even if the inky familiars hid from sight, but you are a ssstrong and powerful wizard with a great duty that you must bear. You need all the power you can get and I’m going to train you to-”

“Nagini?”

She hated being interrupted but hissed out a sigh of encouragement to go on anyway.

“Everyone expects me to be powerful because I defeated Voldemort, right? But they can’t expect me to be that powerful because I’m still only eleven. Plus - the people who actually know what happened will know that what protected me was my mum, not my own powers.”

Nagini had to acknowledge his point.

“And sure you said some of my power is going to come from the love she gave me, but if the head start I currently have is from my mum, then why not seal it away? For now at least. If it eases your conscience then just view it as a handicap to make me more motivated to learn!”

The snake sighed. Again, she couldn’t fault his reasoning. If anything, she felt a little put out that she hadn’t considered the perspective he’d brought up in greater detail.

“Fine then. If you want to learn how to ssseal them you’re going to have to lissten to me very carefully.”

“I’ve always followed your instructions to a T, haven’t I?”

Nagini glared at him lightly and he took that as his cue to shut up.

“It’sss 8 AM at the moment which gives us plenty of time. In theory, sssealing is an incredibly difficult thing to do and it should only prove to be more difficult the more powerful you are because it takesss far more control to guide your will, but because of your nature-”

“My nature?”

“It ssshould theoretically be achievable within the remaining hours of the morning, rather than the remaining monthssss of the year.”

Christ! That’s how long it took normally? Whatever nature he had, Harry was certainly thankful for
“So... step one is... what?”

Nagini smirked at him as though she was about to have a whole sheep all to herself.

“Why, it’s all very simple, Potter. If you want to seal a part of yourself away, you have to understand yourself first.”

“But how on earth am I meant to do that? I still barely understand what it means to be a wizard. And I really don’t understand how I’ve even been doing magic when every other wizard and witch you’ve told me about has always had a wand.”

Nagini snorted at his naivety.

“You don’t have to understand what you are or where you’ve come from even. It’s a case of understanding your own soul. What makes you angry? What makes you happy? What motivates you? What scares you? What is it that makes you...?”

Harry thought he was beginning to understand. Nagini may not like it but the only way he knew how to focus himself was the Muggle method of meditation so he slowly scrambled into position as his familiar continued her pronouncement.

“This will be the best time for you to do this, Harry, because this afternoon I’m going to take you to a place to get your precious wand where you’ll be met by the expectations of thousands of magical folk. If you don’t do this now you may never know, because later today you will have to become not only a massk, but a two-sided coin. You must become the Slytherin within that knows whom to believe and the Gryffindor Golden Boy on the outside that can make anyone believe in him. Do you understand, Harry?”

Harry shivered but after a moment calmly said “Yes.”

X-X-X

“Was it really necessary to challenge him like that?”

“He won’t learn how hard life actually is unless we show him. You know as well as I do that the old fool is going to try and manipulate him from the get go - protecting him from reality and prepping him for slaughter.”

Hedwig gulped. She couldn’t argue against that. Hogwarts was a magical place, but for many generations of students it had become a place where a madman weaved his web and pruned select pawns for his chessboard.

“You’ll tell him the limits of our power if he seals our bonds, won’t you?”

“You exxpect me to do otherwiss?” Hissed Nagini in return. “Louis, will you go and waken him?”

“He hasn’t fallen asleep has he?” Hedwig asked with ruffled feathers.

“No, bird, he’s just retracted into himself.”
Hedwig huffed out her annoyance.

“And you’re not to ask him about anything that happened whilst he was in that state, do you understand?”

Hedwig nodded. Nagini had no need to explain that to Louis though for he, like her, had already been a familiar despite his young age. She heard the rustling sounds of Harry turning and beginning to rejoin them and began slithering over, Louis in toe.

“Hello, Harry,” the serpent smiled out gently.

Harry felt somehow… distant. But that was to be expected. He had gone through loss and abuse and whilst there was still further hills to climb… it was natural that whatever conclusions Harry had reached in the company of no one but himself would change him fundamentally. The purpose of this exercise in its most basic form was an acceptance of yourself, and every wise man knew that this harmony was the key to any success.

“Do you feel ready to try sealing now?”

Harry could only nod. He’d been trying to accept everything he’s learned about so far but during the past three hours he had found himself just forgetting about it all and confirming to himself the truth of Nagini’s words. He knew what motivated him: love. And he knew what he feared: hatred. He knew what made him angry: abuse. And he knew what made him sad: ignorance. These would of course change over time, but for now Harry knew these four pillars of his own soul and could appreciate not only logically, but also emotionally, why he would have to become two masks and he could only hope that he would be able to find not only allies, but friends before whom he would be able to take off both. Harry had preserved his hope. He nodded at Nagini once more.

“I cannot begin to describe the nature of magic to you, Harry. It’s not even something taught at Hogwarts. But the first thing you need to do is to feel within yourself your motivation and your power and your strength. You must separate all three of these. In some ways you can view your motivation as your mental aspect, your power as your spiritual aspect and your strength as your physical aspect. But in other ways you can view your power as your ability to do something, your motivation as your ability to call upon that power, and your strength as your ability to control these two things. So, Harry. I want you to imagine these three things inside of you. Separately... Visualising it with a metaphor may well help.”

Metaphor. Harry tried to follow her speech. He really did. But it just felt so... difficult to envisage. She had said to think of a metaphor... that meant if he chose a part of his body for each it should be easy enough, right? Harry wasn’t relaxed but now he had acquired a certain calm certainty. Okay. If motivation was his mental aspect, then that surely meant the brain. And if strength was his physical aspect, then that meant his body. But perhaps he should narrow it down. His hands then. The creators of good and evil in humankind. That left power as the heart then. His spirit would surely lie there.

And yet... when he pictured the trinity like that, it just seemed to shuffle out of reach. It was there. It was close. Perhaps swap them around? Harry reached out within him and felt his own hesitant exploration as he moved along his veins and arteries, across the tissue and muscles of his scrawny body. What if his spirit - his power - was all of what he was instead? That made sense. Then he would isolate the spirit in his hands instead. So what about strength then? Nagini had said it was the ability to control the two other elements. Did that make it his brain then? And then that left only... his motivation. That wasn’t as simple as logical beliefs. No. No of course not. He should have seen it instantly. That was desire. It was lust for a cause. It was irrational and brutal and the central life force of every being. It was impossible for his motivation to come from anywhere but his heart!
The moment the realisation dawned on Harry he felt light envelop him. Blinding beams of sun hurled forwards from him as though he had achieved some sort of enlightened state. Perhaps he had. Perhaps Buddha had been a wizard. Perhaps all religious figures had. But Harry had more pressing issues beside these ponderings. He was burning and then freezing and then he was floating. Up, up in the air! Slowly, drifting... He’d gone further and understood what he himself was. He’d thought this so often over the past few days but this was undeniably the freest he’d ever been. If the chains of fate had shackles awaiting him, let him remember and treasure this feeling. Let his motivation be to return to this place of grace and to bring it to every witch and wizard he would ever meet. And then he felt himself back on the grass, it’s emerald touch beneath his knees.

“Harry?” Hushed out Hedwig in awe.

Harry’s mouth parted into a smile as he looked at her.

“Yeah?”

“That was incredible.”

Harry wasn’t modest but more than that he felt in awe too. Not of his own ability… but of the capabilities of magic. Mental. Physical. Spiritual. He wondered if emotional was yet another aspect he would learn about.

“Do you feel ready to create your ssseals, Harry?”

“I’ve never felt more ready.”

Nagini smiled proudly at him.

“Remember you won’t be able to contact us or sssummon us if you seal the ssymbols but you will still be able to hear us talk and we will ssstill be able to use our powers.”

Harry nodded.

“You must reach out to the whole of your body and feel the magic pulsing through you. The gift you were born with will grow and grow but even now it should form sssstrands thicker than those of most. You should not only be able to feel them but also grab hold of them. Trace the ssstands flaming away from our symbols. Try visualising them in two different coloursss. Your magic might be white and the magic trickling into your ssssystem from these marks should all feel slightly different and that should help you visualise them in different colours. All pale. All almost white. But still reflecting the union between you and usss - your familiars.”

Gosh... that sounded hard. Splitting himself into three aspects had been abstract enough. At least he had been able to physically sense his hands, his head and his heart. But this? Feel magic? Magic didn’t feel of anything. But it makes you feel free, idiot. Oh. That was true. That was certainly true. Harry dived into himself, searching madly for the tail end of his freedom before if shifted away. And there he found it. It was pulsing quickly, vibrantly. It was red in his arteries and thundered around his body like an unstoppable wagon. Freedom. It was in his blood. It was a gift he was born with. And his veins? There he could feel it too. But it was slower. It was darker. It felt more dangerous and weighty. Was that what lay ahead of his. Was that duty? Was that his fate? Harry would have to become a two-sided coin. He had accepted that. He grasped for both and pulled, feeling his magic respond to his own control fiercely. It shuddered and tried to resist his control but Harry was adamant. He’d control his own destiny! He’d accept it and mold it and he wouldn’t let it run away from him!
Blood. Red red blood. But it wasn’t supposed to be red. Not yet. It was supposed to be white. Maybe in time it’d be stained red or black with the awful truths he would discover. But for now it was white. White and Light as realisation. As enlightenment. His whole body sprang alive with clarity. And there he could see clearly the wisps of colour. Lilac for Louis and Amber for Hedwig. Innocence in the pastels. The congealed green which crossed his heart was darker though. More insistent. Whether he would be able to colour it white or it would colour him green he didn’t know. But now was not the time for that. He’d located them and he grasped for them. Palms full he pulled and dragged their magical signatures into his control. It was his spirit and he was the master of it! Pressure build in him voraciously.

“Have you got a hold of it?”

It took all Harry’s strength to jerk his head forward into a nod.

“Then sshshout out with all your might, ‘Gentei Reiin’!”


Three symbols but only two hands. No. That was wrong. This wasn’t his body. This was his soul. He had as many hands as he needed. Grasp. Pull. And-

“GENTEI REIIN!” And then Harry’s world went black.

Chapter End Notes

My God I loved writing this! Did you like the aspects of lore I brought in?
Holy shit. Was this going to be a staple of his new life as a wizard? Blacking out. Oh Christ. His head… not just that but his whole body was pounding. Ahhh. Maybe this is what Nagini meant when she was talking about magical exhaustion and why he had to make sure to eat so much now. Oh God. He’d be glad to eat so long as this feeling would just stop already! He’d never had a hangover but the amount of times a kick had driven him again the unyielding hearth had given him an impression of what one might be like, and this certainly felt like a hangover worse than any Muggle could ever imagine. Huh. He hadn’t even noticed that he’d started referring to them as “Muggles” in his own head. Not a few hours ago they were still just… “people”.

“Are you awake yet, Harry?” Chirped Hedwig.

Harry groaned out an acknowledgement. A reluctant one though. He didn’t want to move… unless maybe it was to eat.

“I-I’ve never seen anything like that before. I didn’t know whether to be amazed or worried.”

Harry chuckled softly.

“Did Nagini seem worried?”

“Well… no. She even slithered off somewhere immediately afterwards!”

“Then I’m sure I’ll be fine, beautiful. Even if I do feel like I’ve been hit by a truck.”

Hedwig preened at the endearment and shuffled closer to nuzzle at his cheek.

“Hah! Haha! Hedwig! Oh gosh you’re tickling me!”

Harry’s body ached yes. But by God was he ticklish. He tried his best to scurry away by rolling along the grass. Hedwig tilted her head and then hooted in amusement, chasing after him.

“I leave you alone for jussst a moment and what do I come back to?” Smirked Nagini.

“Na-Na! Nagini! Make her sto-o-oop!”

“Oh, and why would I do that, Potter? You look to be having ssso much fun.”

“I-! I-!”

Hedwig noticed that Nagini had brought various vials of potions with her. Stolen no doubt, she harrumphed to herself. But if it’s going to help Harry… Hedwig quickly drew her wings back in and toddled over to the log where she had been perched before, allowing Harry to clamber up into a sitting position.

“What’s that?”

“Potions, Potter.”

“...Wizards have potions too?”
“Evidently. Magic isn’t limited to spell-casting after all.”

Harry just nodded his acceptance. It wasn’t like he could do anything else.

“So… I’m guessing I have to take them?”

“If you don’t want to collapse after you’ve taken a few steps, then yes.”

Harry groaned as he crawled towards her, her stillness making it clear she wouldn’t come to him. You’ve got to work for it, Harry.

Harry took the vials one by one. First his fingers trembled around the silky exterior of wizarding crystal, the stylised water droplet containing a tranquil, diluted blue. Harry uncorked it. It smelt… alright? Like a mixture between raspberry and medication. Harry swallowed dutifully.

“Ugh. Do I at least get some water between these?”

“Oh stop acting like a Hufflepuff. It wasn’t that bad and the quicker you drink them the quicker you’ll be back to normal. Well… your normal, at least.”

Harry sighed but took the next potion all the same. Royal purple. Then carmine. Then mandarin orange. Then… a swirling mix of daffodil and lime? Oh God. That had nearly made him vomit. By the time Harry had re-stoppered the eighth and final vial, Louis was already holding out his aunt’s crystal decanter full of water. Harry gulped it down and then petted the creature’s head thankfully.

Huh. He could feel the difference between the two crystal creations beneath his fingertips. Would he have been able to tell a few days ago? Even a few hours ago? Or was getting in touch with his magic what made him so aware of the lingering sparks of melting wonder beneath his fingers when he had touched the magical glass?

“Try walking for me, Harry.”

The boy got up and walked without hesitance. Perhaps he even allowed a certain swagger to infect his stride. Nagini chuckled out a smirk.

“Good. Good. So many potions and of that potency would have killed most other wizards your age.”

Harry paused.

“I don’t say these things to scare you, Harry, but it is essential that I give you the truest picture of yourself that I can.”

Harry sighed but turned faithfully around and slinked back to his familiars nevertheless.

“Of course, Nagini. I get it. I appreciate your help.”

Nagini smiled softly in appreciation.

“Okay. Okay! Time for a crash course before we go!”

Hedwig broke the comfortable moment but Harry could see the humor in her eyes as she had succeeded in riling Nagini into a hiss.

“It’s almost midday and you’re the one who said we’d be ready to go by the afternoon.”

After ruffling her scales Nagini settled back down and regained the reins of the conversation.
“Do you remember what I sssaid about why so few people have familiars?”

Harry tried to shift his mind back into his memories.

“Something to do with Voldemort and other Dark wizards, right? That’s why I was trying to hide the bonding marks.”

“Exxxactly. But hiding the bonding marks will do you no good if you can still talk to uss.”

“So I’m not going to be able to communicate with you?” Harry looked put out.

“Of course you will!” Interrupted Hedwig. “You just can’t let on that we understand you back.”

“So I’ve got to pretend not to hear your reply.”

“Yesss… but more than that - there’s a bigger problem we need to fix.”

“...Is there?”

“Well you haven’t been talking to usss in English all this time, have you?”

Oh. Ohhh. Harry’s mind grasped at the freeze frames it had made of his escape from the zoo. No. No. Not English. Nagini had pointed out he’d been hissing. And he had. Harry listened to the words he’d just spoken, rotating them round and round his head. Oh. Even when talking to Hedwig it had sounded foreign. More like a melody. Or earlier still. With Louis. A strange noise he’d never heard before and had no comparison for. Oh. No. No it wasn’t English at all.

“Oh.” Was all Harry said.

“Precisssely. So what are you going to do about it?”

“Make sure to talk in English with you.”

Nagini stared at him until he realised she was waiting for him to try. He pause and then opened his mouth... Hiss! Oh crap. He was sure he’d been trying for English. He tried again. HISS! Oh shit. Oh shit. How was he going to do this?! Nagini’s fickle laughter caught him off balance. He paused.

“Not everything is going to be as easssy as thinking of your goal and being able to get there. Sssometimes you need to be able to think outside the box. What differencesss do you notice when you talk to the three of us?”

“I... sound different each time. Like I’m mimicking the sounds you naturally make.”

“Exactly. It’s a natural responssse. Maybe in time you’ll have control over it, but for now… just imagine me asss a human.”

Human? Easier said than done. Nagini was twenty feet of gargantuan snake. But if she had been a woman… Tall. Impossibly slender. But curvaceous where it counted. Elegant. Seductive. Dark hair pinned in place but skin as pale as parchment. And in a shimmering gown of pure green cut to her body. Gripping it sensually. Riding provocatively up her legs. Bare legs. Simple heels. Ones that would fade from memory but gave her the most aristocratic of poises, whilst her eyes glimmered in rebellious lust. Oh. Oh shit. Oh Bugger. Harry was eleven years old. He hadn’t had thoughts like this very often but that didn’t mean he hadn’t had them at all! Christ! He felt heat blooming under his collar and steam spewing from his ear, his face surely a tomato. He stuttered out nonsensically the first thing which came to mind.
“E-er! Nice you meet you!”

In English.

...In English!

He’d done it! He jumped from his spot and hooted happily before realising suddenly that all around him his friends were also laughing unashamed, tears streaming from their faces, almost choking on their own joy. Wait. They were laughing at him. No. No! He hadn’t been that obvious had he? He looked down, his embarrassment reminding him of its position across his brow as the slight rising in his trousers highlighted the problem of puberty he was only just starting to grasp. The laughter continued. No. No! He had to shut them up. But he knew they wouldn’t be quiet no matter what he said. No. No! He did the only thing that came to mind and whined out the most pitiful cry.

“SHUT UPP-p-p-ppp!”

Chapter End Notes

I'm not going to tag all the pairing until I write them in. Nagini/Harry won’t be a pairing (in the normal way) but I think I may well enjoy writing her teasing him about this moment throughout the fanfic.
So apparently this was the entrance into the wizarding world. This! This aged and decrepit-looking pub in the side streets of London. It looked like the sort of place all the worst types of Muggles might try to congregate in. Or the worst types of wizards. Maybe there was some sort of barrier on the door, or maybe it was like all those enchantments on Hogwarts Nagini had told him about where Muggles simply forget their desire to approach or investigate and never actually went in. Harry wondered if Muggles could also split their soul in three, and whether there were some Muggles that had a strong enough motivation aspect to defy such compulsions. Was that how Muggles became wizards and witches? Were they the ones who become Muggle-borns? Is that why some viewed them as being less pure? He’d heard all about the stupid blood wars and ideas of blood purity. It had been Nagini who had called them “stupid” so Harry felt utterly justified in believing them to be so too, especially given that her history suggested that, if anything, she should have been in favour of them. Later, when he’d asked Nagini if his theory regarding Muggle-borns was right, all she gave him was a smirk and no reply at all.

Thud. The heavy elm door of the Leaky Cauldron swung open. Thud. Someone’s heavy paw slammed a wooden mug down onto the bar counter, sloshing alcohol over his front. Harry almost cringed. The man looked and sounded far too much like his uncle. Thud… Silence. Everyone had stopped. They had stopped and were looking at him. *Keep calm. Keep calm.* Harry took a step forwards and no one moved. No one moved until there was a narrowing in his path between the door and the counter. Harry moved softly. A light heave of his feet as his small body moved forwards. One step. Two step. A heavier sound of sliding mass as Nagini followed behind him. Hedwig and Louis tittered incoherently for effect from their perches on the heavy bag Nagini effortlessly held in mid air behind him. The magical folk shuffled, edging towards the sides of the room. Making way. Making way for him. He got to the counter and pronounced the phrase all three of his familiars had drilled into his head.

“I wish to have a look out back.”

Nobody moved. Harry thought that perhaps he’d said it wrong. Perhaps Nagini had been pulling his leg. She did have a sadistic sense of humour after all. But no. The man behind the counter finally reacted. Jerking away from him and slipping into the shadows with all the grace of an unoiled robot. Harry followed. He assumed he was supposed to. Why did he even need to say the phrase though? Could it be because some Muggles really did come in accidentally? Or was it because the wizarding world feared even the slightest possibility of discovery and wanted to have precautions in place for situations which “just might” happen?

Harry tried to focus. *Stay on task, idiot.*

“-Harry Potter-”

“You can’t deny-”

“-scar.”

“But what about-?”

“-snake.”
“-so small-”
“-an owl, sure-”
“Do you think-?”
“I heard Dumbledore-”
“Wasn’t Hagrid supposed-?”

So many questions. Some snippets he could rationalise, others he couldn’t. What was a “Hagrid”? Was it the magical name for a lemur? He’d assumed Louis was a lemur. Had Harry been wrong about that…?

Harry had made it into the back of the establishment and was now confronted with a brick wall. The man who had led them there wouldn’t stop staring at him and Nagini hissed, hoping he would get the message and go away. Now he looked petrified but still couldn’t seem to move. Harry took a calming breath and looked at the wall. Nagini had said that magic didn’t come from a wand - it came from inside him. He’d been able to free the animals at the zoo; he was able to talk to his friends; and he didn’t yet have a wand. Okay. Left hand on the brick with the top right corner crumbling, right foot on the circular inlay of terracotta. Now imagine a completed puzzle. One you’ve just lifted up. And see it crumbling away onto the ground beneath you until all that’s left are the few pieces you’re clutching onto. The pieces are the bricks. The pieces are the bricks.

“Open your eyesss, Harry.”

He did.

Bright, vibrant air.

He sucked a deep breath in, escaping the stagnant atmosphere of stinking beer. Oh. Oh wow. He’d done it! The man next to Harry also seemed to be in awe.

“You- you-” he uttered before racing out and shouting loudly enough for Harry to still be able to hear him through the dusty walls. “He did it! And without a wand! He must be Harry Potter! He can control his magic even though he’s-” The rest faded away but it was followed by “underage”, “grew up with Muggles” and “even before going to Hogwarts”. It all felt rather bizarre. But a helpful nuzzle from Nagini and he grasped for his courage, stepping out into what could only be Diagon Alley.

Instantly sound poured over him. Like rainbow candy. Boiling. Steaming. Streaming in sweet rivers of joy. Burning the ground with the imprint of magic. He heard children laughing and old witches murmuring and the yellow howls of creatures behind bars. They would be unlikely to experience the gift he had been given - to bond with his friends and make them his familiars - and for that, Harry felt sorry for them.

“Find an alcove, Harry, before anyone ssspots you.”

Harry barely nodded and rushed into the shadows. A couple of heads turned but they hadn’t seen enough to notice him for who he was. He stilled against the side of a wooden building.

“Where’s your first stop, Harry?” Nagini reminded him gently.

The bank. The bank called Gringotts. Nagini said it was run by elves, right? No - goblins. And that they were very wise creatures and would know all about his bonding. Harry wouldn’t be able to hide the marks even with his seals and there would be no point denying the existence of them. The
goblins wanted to maintain trust in their bank so they wouldn’t ask anything condemning or reveal any sensitive information about him in public. All very hush hush. It sounded almost evil, but for Harry it was perfect.

Okay. The most beautiful building in Diagon Alley. Harry mentally prepared himself for further onslaught of surprise.

One step. Two step. Up as tall as he could make himself. Proud and confident but not cocky. Enough attitude to make people wary about approaching him without being off putting. Harry drew a slight smile to his face as a pair to the mask he now wore. A two-sided coin. I’m focused. Don’t disturb me. I’m kind. We’ll talk soon.

“...Mum?”

“Hang on a sec, Arthur-”

“Is that really-?”

“It can’t be-”

“-finally here!”

“They said he was supposed to be joining-”

“-wasn’t the giant meant to-?”

“Wait-”

“Master Malfoy, please don’t move quite so much-”

Harry had thought the street was busy before. He couldn't have been more wrong. Every slab shared its space with with at least three wizards or four witches; every roof bore the weight of a hundred dozen owls; every shop window was disfigured by the flattened faces and eager eyes of daring children. Only a thin path remained for Harry to walk down. Stay looking ahead, don’t look at anyone in particular.

There, rising before him, were three steepled turrets that looked like they had sailed from a cathedral in Florence. They rose higher and higher through the mist and finally, almost before he knew it, Harry had arrived at the stunning deep brown doors of the Wizarding Bank. Gringotts. Slowly, almost tentatively, Harry forced the huge panels open, hauling his weight backwards and feeling his magic helping his labour. When one of the doors had been pulled open far enough. Harry set his lips into a thin line and stepped forwards. He turned around as his familiars followed him in.

*Don’t look at anyone.*

“Potter!”

He hadn’t meant to, he really hadn’t - but just as he was pulling the great entrance shut, Harry met the cold blue eyes of a beautiful boy. It would only be a few hours until he connected the brilliant shock of blond hair with the name “Draco Malfoy”.

Chapter End Notes
So we finally see a glimpse of Draco! I hope you enjoyed this chapter. ^u^
Potter? As in Harry *Freaking* Potter?

Where was he? He had to see him!

Draco ripped out of the clutches of whatever witch had been attempting to dress him. His father would surely lecture him repeatedly about the rule book of manners which he almost always abided by - but there were more important things to do now! Namely, find Potter.

That boy had been his point of comparison growing up. Either looking up to him or trying and failing to beat him. His life had been overbearing, confusing. Blood purity meant all. The Dark Lord was all-powerful. *Blood purity is a scapegoat. The Dark Lord is dead.* His father wanted him to befriend Potter. His father wanted to make a sacrifice out of Potter. Draco didn’t know anything. Nothing at all. He tried to be pompous. He tried to live up to his name. But when things were so confusing and he simply couldn’t bear to think anymore, he deferred to his father. Always had and… *possibly* always would. How else was he to navigate this minefield of contradictions?

He had to find Potter. Potter was the answer. No matter what sort of relationship he would form with his peer... it didn’t matter. Draco just had to form one. Of any kind. He needed a life of his own. He needed some of his own control. He would not give Potter to his father. Potter would be his. His father wouldn’t hear about this. No. Never! But in order to hide the truth, Draco had to ignore his own actions - his own thoughts. He had to work on instinct. That’s what every book had always told him to do. But it terrified him. It chilled him to the core. *If you don’t believe that you’re doing something, that you’ve done something, that you’ve made plans to do something - nobody, no matter how strong, will be able to find out about it if they scour your body, your mind, or even your very soul.* Why did he have to give up all control in order to gain even a little sliver of it? Draco cursed his fate. Potter. Potter-!

“Potter!?”

The messy-haired boy had walked proudly. As proudly as any Potter should. As proudly as any boy who had suffered the amputation from his magical reality should. He had defeated the Dark Lord and he had gone on fighting. That boy was stunning. Draco had to have him. However he could. The boy wasn’t looking at anyone but he was taking in *everyone*. He was smart, he was clever. *He has to be mine.* Harry was walking as a proud conqueror to the gates of secrets. *Potter! Harry!* The boy turned and his conviction was as strong as ever. Draco felt his hope failing but he had to try just once more-!

“Potter!”

And their eyes met. And Draco’s heart clenched the first beat of his own, independent life. Draco Malfoy was hooked. Hooked on Harry *Freaking* Potter.
Harry was stood in a vacant hall. It was dimly lit and it looked utterly empty. Harry could hear his lisping shoes loudly in the sharp echo of the tall roof. He could hear the ridges of Nagini’s belly skim the flawless tiles below. He could understand how one might go insane here. His eyes slowly adjusted as he bravely continued to put one foot in front of another. He wasn’t alone.

He walked up to the goblin his path was already leading him to.

“Good afternoon. I’d like to discus my vaults.”

Harry wasn’t sure if he liked goblins. They seemed to know so much. But Nagini had made it clear they weren’t liers. Only holders of secrets. Withholders of truth. His statement had been plain enough. Vague and indicating his desire for privacy. A hiss from Nagini felt like he was being showered in praise.

His eyes saw even better now. There were a few other cloaked wizarding folk loitering around some of the counters, some being led away, some coming back, some turning to look at him wide-eyed, others following his form with curiosity as he walked behind the goblin he’d spoken to. Soon it was only them in a smaller room where privacy was paramount.

“You say ‘vaults’, but what is it you wish for, Mr Potter?”

Mr Potter? That might take some getting used to.

“Tell him you want to do an inheritance tessst firssst,” hissed Nagini.

So Harry did.

“You usually do this with a wand. Do you believe you can control your magic adequately enough to to guide this feather—” the goblin said, placing one down, “—into this vial?”

Harry nodded and reached out his hand, focusing. He felt for his power. There it was — in his whole self. Waiting for his command. He felt for his motivation. What was it? To please Nagini. And his strength? He looked at the vial and slowly, ever so slowly, the soft brush of white lifted and tinkled head over knees and then ankles and then toes as it plopped smoothly into the crystal.

“And now a sample of your blood.”

“I don’t know if you have the ssstrength to control your magic in attempting to make the correct ssized cut in the right place, so just allow Berckles to do it.”

Berckles? Was that the goblin’s name? Harry held out his right arm, as Nagini hissed he should, and the goblin was already prepared, sliding a slip of silver smoothly into him and taking only what was needed, before pressing down a honey-coloured seal of light from his fingers which stopped the flow of blood. The feather and red life was stoppered and simply vanished into sparkling air.

“That shall be completed shortly. Would there be anything else you wish to do, Mr Potter?”

“Yesss, tell him you wish to see your parentsss’ vaults. And only your parents’ vaults.”

Did he have even access to others? Five seconds later, Berckles looked bemused at his request. Five minutes later, he stood before the Potter/Evans vault. Harry gulped loudly.

“I shall wait outside for your return.”

Harry nodded far more calmly than he had thought possible in his current excited tension and walked
into the furnished room. The shelves were laden with artefacts: books, crystals, cauldrons, broomsticks, mysterious pouches which rattled like coins and-

“Hmm. I hadn’t expected them to combine the vaultssss.”

“Were they supposed to be separate?”

“That depends on how you view thingsss. I, at leassst, expected them to have remained apart.”

That didn’t make a whole lot of sense. Or at least it didn’t to Harry.

“Grab ten of the pouches from the ssshelf to your right. That ssshould be enough money to tide you over even some of the more dramatic events sssecure to come your way.”

Harry couldn’t help feeling a sense of foreboding tickle his mind.

“It'sss time to go… Harry?”

“Oh. Right.”

Harry let Nagini out first, as she had insisted he do for safety’s sake and not because she was a lady. And as she did, Harry looked at the sleeping form of Louis and the half-alert eyes of Hedwig. Lovely. Loveable. Beloved.

When Berckles had guided them back to the office they had already visited and sat Harry down, he threw open his palm expectantly. It was like an order to nature. And nature obeyed! A scroll fell into his hand and the goblin began to unravel it.

“Ssstop him!”

“Stop. I-” Harry coughed. “I mean to say please hand it over without looking at it, thank you.”

Nagini had told him to finish questions and pleas with “thank you” so it left no room for opposition. The goblin peered at the young boy before him.

“Your name is known amongsssst magical folk - human or otherwise. Remember to be sssecure to let few truly know you rather than sssimply know of you. Berckles is currently wondering about the power balance between usss and trying to make conclusionsss, believing he knows you. Stop him. Don’t allow him in!”

Okay. Okay. Quickly, now. How on earth…? Ah! An order!

“Nagini, can you collect the scroll and Hedwig, please put it in my bag.” Harry didn’t try to imagine his friends as humans. Goblins saw through all. There was no need to hide. His voice was a silky hiss slipping into a sweet melody. He was in control. His familiars - his advisers not his masters. The goblin shuffled back - either reassured or all the more confused for the exchange - but obeyed Harry’s wishes all the same.

A couple of signatures later to register Harry’s first official visit to the bank and the handing over of his family vault’s key and Harry was returned to the vast entrance hall of the building. Harry felt tempted to whistle at the scale of it in awe, but his memories of the shameful highlighting of even the slightest of sounds prevented his desire from manifesting. Strength penning in motivation. It was simple when you understood it.

Harry reached the doors to the outside world and prepared himself for the brighter light. Light.
Mesmerising whiteness! Blond, blond hair. There had been a boy! About his age! Harry almost felt disappointed when he swung the doors open, edging towards being over-eager, and saw no trace of the boy. So pale. So magical. He almost looked like a fairy… Did they exist too? Had the boy been one?

A ruffled hoot got him back on track as he remembered the earlier rules of poise and gaze and set off again, not noticing the slight furrow of concern on Nagini’s face. Something had affected Harry. What had she missed?

“Where next, Harry? Do you remember?” She hissed instead of questioning him.

Harry nodded subtly. Next he needed a wand.

Chapter End Notes

Finally! Let mystery bloom into awkwardness and turn into friendship then spin into romance and later mold into love.
Mr Ollivander was a curious sort. He looked like Einstein, although Nagini had hissed derisively at Harry’s comparison to a Muggle figure.

“He was sarcastic - like you,” Harry tried to persuade her, but that only made her slither past him to inspect the wands in their prim cases, ignoring him. Harry sighed out a chuckle. Well, that was to be expected.

Nagini had told Harry to wait for the wandmaker’s return. Why he’d excitedly clapped his hands together, babbled a little and then dashed off, Harry didn’t know. Perhaps the Mad Hatter would be a better comparison.

There was some logic to be had in this shop though. Or at least in the visit to it being a first priority. If Harry obtained a wand, it would mean he would be able to hide his dexterity with wandless magic as no sane witch or wizard would ask him to perform magic given he had yet to step foot in Hogwarts and thus may burn down their establishment. But if he suddenly needed to use magic… a wand wasn’t a seal. Harry would still be safe.

“Now, Mr Potter!”

Harry almost jumped out of his skin! And was it normal to be addressed with a Mr in the wizarding world, even at eleven? Harry turned and looked at the man.

“I have heard great tales about you Mr Potter but it will be your wand that captures the true essence of who you are. You can’t fool me, Mr Potter. People change - for better, for worse, for weaker, for stronger - but in the moment they ask me for a wand, the wand they belong with will show me all that they are at that point in time. They may well evolve and so might their wand... but for now, I have found you some wand shells which may well suit you. Whichever you appear to possess an affinity with shall be guidance for the next batch I try you with.”

A slightly daunting speech followed by an explanation but… it seemed simple. Unless there was something else being hidden from sight. Harry locked eyes with the brilliant madman before him and tried to grasp for the truth in his eyes. There wasn’t a truth to be had though. His eyes were a reflection. The man himself was a mirror. That was his identity. Throwing back the truth in the face of all those who asked. Harry’s clenched fist signaled to Nagini that he’d reached his conclusions and she smirked proudly at him. She could trust his judgement of character.

Harry eyed the three open cases in front of him.

“So… what do I need to do?”

Don’t be arrogant. Don’t be nervous. You’re still allowed to look amazed.

“Oh it’s quite simple, Mr Potter. Just grab hold of the first wand shell and tell me if you feel anything!”

Harry nodded and smiled, moving his hand forwards and grasping for the first length of wood. What did he feel? Did he feel anything? ...Perhaps. The wood felt like tiny pinpricks that didn’t hurt. Like champagne. Was it pleasant? Was it meant to be?
"I feel something but… it’s only slight."

"Most wizards only."

"No, I’ve felt more connected to even random objects I’ve touched so far today. It feels far too weak."

*Assertive but without shouting.* Good. Ollivander ‘hmm’ed and seemed to look into Harry’s very soul.

"Apple wands repel Dark magic so it was the natural beginning choice for the Boy Who Lived."

There was that name for him again. He’d heard it hissed in the streets but this was the first time someone had said it to his face.

"Perhaps then the…"

Harry’s fingers touched the cedar length next. Better. More buzzing. He could connect to the magical properties of this wood but not the character of it. It didn’t capture him well enough.

"So loyal, but more than that," concluded the wandmaker softly.

Harry reached for the third and final carcass on the counter. Blackthorn. Oh gosh. That felt strange. One moment it felt alive and the next moment it lay dead as earth. *What the…?*

"The potential to be a warrior but equally able to avoid the role. How strange. That is certainly an unusual fate to bear." And the aging man shuffled off once more.

This was all so confusing. He needed Nagini’s help. *Okay. Okay. I can’t hide the truth of my nature, but I can hide what I’ve done with it. Nagini as a woman. Beautiful. Tall. Proud.* Before he could open his mouth to ask, she was hissing at him.

"Every type of wood suitable to be made into a wand possesses certain properties. There are several elements that make a wand, but for now Ollivander is searching for which wood would best encompass you. So far he’s learned that you are not entirely opposed to Dark magic, that you could easily be a warrior but could also change your fate and that you are loyal. But more importantly he has learned that those are not your defining features and so the wand will not answer to you as an extension of your soul. This is what he means when he says he will know all about you. He is a master in his craft. You can only be thankful that your future enemies know little about it. So remember never to give the details of your strongest tool - your wand."

Being able to know all that he was from such a craft... It was a wonder wandmakers didn’t rule the world then. Politically speaking, they could prune and pick the best for the roles and promote only those loyal to them. But perhaps the nature of being such a craftsman came with the inability to desire anything but the research and creation of such incredible tools.

"Next three, Mr Potter!"

The afternoon dragged on as the two wizards and handful of familiars remained pacing and testing in the humid air of the shop. Harry began to notice things - like how it smelled like a forest on fire one minute and then the roaring heart of a cave another. It was incredible and he almost felt dizzy with the trials Ollivander set before him. Had the windows and doors not been charmed for privacy (and Harry was forced to conclude they had to be) then there would surely have been numerous wizarding folk peeping in - looking not only for the wand which would finally be Harry’s, but also being fascinated by the gradually increasing affinity he held with the woods. The original flow of
champagne tittered into conjuring silvery breezes and then a whole bouquet and even a hugely tall oak tree - right in the middle of the shop! Had the wandmaker not swiftly pulled out his own wand to chop the thing down, Harry would have surely challenged the extension charms buried in the lining of the small room’s ceiling.

“So if we take the road of being a warrior…”

Ebony. A zip of rapid lightning which left the end smoking but refused to produce anything else.

“So you’re a good combatant… quick reflexes… but reluctant to continue fighting…”

Redwood gathered much the same effect.

“So focusing on reflexes isn’t it either…”

Cypress. Now that was strange. When Harry grasped for it it summoned a perfectly still sphere and when Harry carefully placed the wood down, half the globe shattered like glass whilst the other burst into droplets of water that turned once more into silver air.

“…Well on a positive note, Mr Potter, it looks like you only have half a chance of dying a heroic it death. Maybe it’ll be a dishonourable one instead or maybe you won’t die at all…”

Oh God. That wasn’t reassuring in the slightest! And how did the second option have the possibility to be worse than the first?!

“…but it showed duality. Perhaps we should revert to loyalty…”

Larch was the one which produced the bouquet of flowers.

“Oh that’s positive!”

“Is it?”

“Why yes! It’s the first sign of actual life!”

But the moment Harry’s focus shifted, the flowers withered into dust. The wandmaker frowned again and muttered various thoughts over.

“Larch instils confidence. So it was not your confidence that waned. Nor your bravery or other loyal and noble traits… Perhaps we need something which embraces your traits rather than supports them…”

English oak. That, rather logically, was the one which summoned the tree. A huge living thing. Harry had thought that was rather good but it only served to frustrate the master more.

“No! There’s no point in cloning yourself! Giver of life. Restorer of life - of original forms. Insight and knowledge of true forms. But that’s not a show of loyalty…”

Next: hazel. Apparently to see if he had control of his own feelings. He did and produced a simple yet straight beam of rainbow light.

“So many colours! Perhaps I’ve been looking at this the wrong way… How about black hazel, then?”

There was a difference?
“So the rainbow doesn’t reflect only clear insight,” the man remarked when the new wand left all the objects within a ten foot radius of Harry transparent but dyed them multiple shades.

“We know you have greater control over your fate than most… so what about yew? Control over life and death itself?”

That sounded like something Harry wasn’t sure he wanted. He was glad when the product was something… incomprehensible. And even gladder when they moved on.

“You keep surprising me and yet I thought I knew you. Perhaps the choice should instead be vine!”

Oh. Oh now this was interesting. This was actually pretty amazing. The wand glowed brightly and Harry felt the connection bubbling. Ollivander looked pleased with himself.

“Vine wands are among the less common types, and I have been intrigued to notice that their owners are nearly always those witches or wizards who seek a greater purpose, who have a vision beyond the ordinary and who frequently astound those who think they know them best.” It sounded like a recital and it probably was. But- *Hang on a moment.* The connection Harry felt was impressive but… it was as though the clasp wouldn’t close.

“Mr Ollivander. May I…?” And instead of finishing his sentence, Harry simply raised the vine shell and pulled all the essence he could find within it forwards - into himself! This was close but it wasn’t the one! No - it couldn’t be! So close and yet-!

A shell flung itself across the room at him, almost hitting Ollivander in the head, diving out of the older wizard’s storage. The dull shine it held as it ripped its vine peer from Harry’s grip caught the man’s eye as he experienced what he rarely got to feel with his penetrating knowledge - absolute awe.

When the dust had settled, the old wandmaker breathed out simply:

“A dear friend and famous wandmaker once said this about hawthorn: ‘It makes a strange, contradictory wand, as full of paradoxes as the tree that gave it birth, whose leaves and blossoms heal, and yet whose cut branches smell of death.’ Mr Potter, Harry, you are certain to become an interesting wizard beyond what fate or fame could have ever predicted.”

Harry swallowed. *Oh Christ.*

Chapter End Notes

With Harry's changed personality it seemed only right to change his wand. I worked from the descriptions the HP Wiki had for the wand woods and shall be doing the same for the other elements. I hope this chapter wasn’t too confusing and that you enjoyed it! If you find yourself curious, here's the link I used: http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Wand
“The wand chooses the wizard, Mr Potter!”

“I don’t understand - didn’t I just choose mine now?”

*Know when to admit you don’t know. But it is better to admit nothing than admit the wrong thing.*

Harry knew he had to be wary but he trusted Ollivander.

“Oh no. Choosing the wood is a partnership, if anything. It’s finding a balance between yourself and your tool. Think of it as an extension of your heart. Your will and desire and motivation to do something is funneled through the wood. But your power? Your very soul? Now that is linked to the core of your wand. The shell is made from a magical wood and the the core is made from a magical creature. Wood is passive but must agree to work with you for the balance to stay focused. A magical creature, however, won’t simply stay on the sidelines, which is why we say that the wand chooses the wizard. Now, try and focus.”

Harry stood in front of three stands, each of them decorated ornately with two fixtures that drew the sample cores out like strings of a violin. *What sort of music exists in the wizarding world…? Stop it! Focus!*

Harry lifted his hands up in front of him. The three Supreme Cores lay before him. Which would be his? Harry closed his eyes, breathed softly and waited. It could have been a decade for all he knew. There was perfect stillness all around him. A soft sort of quiet. Harry didn’t even register the gentle melody being hummed as golden strings of light began to weave a crown of sugar-crystal web over his head. When the weight was finally enough to edge him to wakeful murmurs he noticed that it felt like a crown of thorns. Would he become some sort of sacrificial Christ? He dearly hoped not. Slowly, timidly, the three representatives retreated back to their posts which Harry had not even noticed were empty. His first thought was to look to Nagini. She was the queen of his chess board - his best adviser and most powerful ally. What had happened in his haze?

“My goodness, Mr Potter… I’m-”

X-X-X

Fifteen minutes later, Harry walked slowly, half-stumbling his way out of the wandmaker’s shop, feeling blessed and incredibly lucky. He wouldn’t have understood what had happened - or at least not fully - if not for the stunned expression of everyone’s faces.

“It’s been awhile since anyone has been chosen by more than one core, and even longer since all three have given their blessing. I can’t quite bring myself to believe it-” Those words still rattled around Harry’s mind. When Ollivander’s back was turned, Louis had climbed up his shoulder and shakily whispered into his ear how it was normal for only one core to show a level of fidelity to a witch or wizard. *But I sealed some of my magic! I don’t understand why I’m still-*

“Come on, Potter. People are sssstaring.” Nagini whooshed on in front of him and Harry rushed to
catch up to her.

“Don’t get usssed to your power, Harry. In its natural form without a wand it is of courssse very powerful because of who you are - but it issss also harder to control. Being able to do more advanced and refined magic with a wand takessss time and mental strength. Don’t let your ego blow up with sssteam. If fate and nature’s instinct have read your potential for growth and the power of your sssoul - be proud! But don’t get cocky. It only meanssss that mastering that beassst of a wand will be a hell of a lot more difficult than the wand of any of your peersss and even many of your professorssss.”

Harry gulped. He could feel the weight of everything which tied him to wizarding world piling up on his shoulders like cannon ball dust. Harry’s stomach groaned and the messy-haired boy remembered his exhaustion. No wonder he felt as lethargic as he did. He’d just done the most magic he’d ever done in his life! He was about to try and get Nagini’s attention when he noticed her leading him the the front of what looked like… a pub? He glanced at his serpent and then bravely opened the door. Just like in the Leaky Cauldron, all activity seemed to stop. Harry approached the counter far more quickly than he had been walking before, the promise of food assuring him that he wasn’t about to collapse from exhaustion. Oh dear. What was he supposed to order though? Nagini hadn’t told him that. No. No, he didn’t need to ask her. He remembered his independence and his charming smile and asked:

“I’d like something to eat and drink. What would you recommend?”

Give people the illusion you trust their opinion, and by extension them. It doesn’t make you look cocky and it doesn’t make you look unsure. Perfect.

Chatter gradually rose around him, and whilst it hadn’t regained the raucous level it had been at when Harry had first walked in, life had returned in the squeaks of surprise and eager rumour mill turning. The wand would cost him only seven gold coins and if Nagini had assured him that the money he’d collected from his family’s-no, his vault would be enough to get him through even the most difficult of circumstances, then Harry was sure it would enough to pay for a meal. Harry wasn’t wrong and ten minutes later he was perched on a table with his familiars curling around his feet, the heavy bag Nagini had been carrying stowed on the chair opposite him, giving his beautiful snake a well deserved rest.

There was a light thud and Harry’s attention was jerked up. He had assumed he would be left in relative peace and that people would be more content making up rumors about him than actually approaching him. The round face of a kind smile and a riot of flaming hair was proving him wrong though. Harry’s eyes kept trailing up until his gaze met hers. She looked like a kindly sort of woman. Stay on guard!

“Hello,” Harry smiled warmly.

“Oh you’re such a dear. You’re Harry, right? Why don’t you come and sit with us?”

Harry was about to decline but her mothering attitude just seemed irresistible. And appearing to be welcoming of approach would be far better than closing off. Harry supposed he therefore had no choice, but the overflowing seats covered by a pack of bright-faced ginger menaces meant that it didn’t feel like a chore at all.

All of five minutes later, Harry was seated next to a boy he assumed was his age and his familiars were cuddling closer to his feet in the more cramped space. His bag had been loaded between the
four feet of his chair and a little spark of magic from the woman had brought his meal to his new spot effortlessly.

Harry did his best to make easy conversation and even succeeded in persuading the little girl across from him that his snake wouldn’t bite her and that she should try petting her head. Nagini had glared at Harry for making the offer but went with it anyway. The larger woman who had invited him over in the first place insisted that Harry called her Molly and not Mrs Weasley and slowly but surely Harry began to feel as though maybe, just maybe, these people would be able to go on the list labelled “potential allies”. “Allies” because, no matter what Harry wanted and no matter how at home he felt, he was a long way off being safe and needed a break from his abusive relatives before he stood a chance of feeling like he could be part of a family once more.

Chapter End Notes

To those of you waiting for the appearance of the Weasleys - Ta Da!
“As… much as I really would like to stay, I need to finish shopping for school supplies.”

“Oh don’t be like that, Harry!”

“You know you want to stay!”

If Harry had feared it would be hard to tell the family of gingers apart, it was nothing compared to his new worry now that he realised that two of them were twins. And devilish pranksters too!

“Oh it’s nothing to worry about, dear, we’ll just come with you. We’ve finished all of our shopping now-”

“Yeah! And we’ll take you to Zonko’s-

“-and to Honeydukes!”

“And we’ll buy out the store!” They chorused together.

“No you won’t.” Molly’s voice snapped in a caring manner. “Now sit down you two or I’ll confiscate what you’ve already bought.”

“But muuuum-”

“No buts about it-!”

“Um. Sorry to interrupt, but really. Bill and Percy are still eating and I don’t want to inconvenience anyone-”

“Don’t be silly, dear. As if you could inconvenience-”

Harry put up his hands in pacification.

“It’s just that I really want to be done quickly so I can get back to the Muggle world. I need to find a place to sleep tonight.”

“A place to sleep’? What on earth do you mean? Didn’t Hagrid bring you here?”

“E-Exactly what it sounds like,” Crap, he wasn’t supposed to let himself get intimidated. *Although maybe if I sound more vulnerable I’ll be able to stay with them... “When I realised I was a wizard I ran away from my relatives so… I’m kind of on my own right now.”*

Harry heard Nagini hiss softly as she snuck her head into his lap, as though to comfort him. She was actually praising him though with words like “well done” and “keep going”.

“A-Apart from my friends here of course. They really made it bearable.”

One minute he was speaking, the next he was being taken over by a large motherly hug and honest tears and he was being told:
“Well there’s no two ways about it then! We don’t have a lot but what we do have we’ll share. You can share a room with Ron,” Harry glanced over as his new acquaintance. He hesitated to call him a friend yet. His freckles spun into a grin. “See how thrilled he is? And we’ll be sure to get some food in you! Just look at how skinny you are-!”

This lovely warmth surrounded Harry for a very long time, the words melding into one comfortable envelopment as happiness. People were looking at them strangely and they were torn between whispering conspiracies to one another even more fervently and actually staying silent to listen. It caused a rise and fall in the lull of sound around Harry and it was almost dizzying. But the shared lionheart of the Weasley family kept him strong. The steady beat of modest happiness was like a pulse keeping him plodding on.

Harry had to try and remember all of them. All nine of them. Jesus Christ. Molly and Arthur were easy enough to remember. And if he ever forgot there was always the default back to Mr and Mrs Weasley. Then there was Bill, then Charlie, then Percy. Then the twins… heavens knew which was Fred and which was George. Or if they really were Gred and Forge as they kept insisting. And then Ron and Ginny. Harry suspected he would probably grow closest with the youngest two. All of them were warm and open though. No exception. Not even the studious and slightly uppity Percy. All happy. Harry found himself accepting everything and then there were more hugs and more kind words. It really did feel like it might just become home.

What felt like an eternity later, Harry was being dug out of the warm bosom of the mother who he was pretty sure had just nigh on adopted him.

“You said you wanted to go and finish your shopping yourself. Now you don’t have to worry about a roof over your head, but how about you still go off and have some alone time. It’s a lot to take in I’m sure. And the boys always want to be left alone in their rooms now that they’ve hit that age, so I’m used to missing you boys for a few hours at a time anyway!”

It all sounded so cheery that it took a moment for Harry to realise what she was getting at. Had the twins not turned an even more vivid red than their burning carrot hair and shouted “MUM!” far louder than was polite for a public environment, Harry likely would not have made the link between Molly’s gentle words and her knowledge of stained sheets and the effects of puberty on her sons.

The tightly dressed emerald lady flashed before Harry’s inner vision and he quickly felt his face heating up too. Maybe he was already becoming a Weasley.

X-X-X

“I’m disappointed in you Draco. You are a Malfoy and must always live with consideration for your ancestors and your family pride. Acting out in public like a commoner is not something I would have expected from you. Now what do you have to say for yourself?”

Draco would have been cowering if not for the honour of his surname pulling his shoulders straight and his shame pushing his chin up in forced acceptance of this verbal evisceration, rather than allowing his jaw to droop and avoid his father’s eyes.

Draco had long learned how to forget the exact content of any conversation he had with his father. Especially ones like these. He only paid attention for the moment, and then it could all fade from memory. Draco only had to remember to stay aware of the consequences of whatever had taken
place or been agreed.

After precisely twenty-seven minutes of lecturing (Draco counted because he had little better to do), his father concluded that he had done enough work on the upbringing of his heir for the day and proceeded to leave for some official function or other. Draco wasn’t weak and he refused to sob. Not at the mental strain nor at the abandonment. Instead he pushed his chin up and flounced from the now empty meeting room and back into Diagon Alley.

Draco would have to practice his Occlumency more. He could clear his mind but what if he wanted to lie? Draco wanted to have secrets and wanted to rebel. Messy hair flashed in his memory and Draco paused mid-stride. Fuck. He wanted to keep a secret. He wanted to keep him a secret. He wanted him to be his secret.

Would Harry still be in Diagon Alley? Draco had caught him going into Gringotts, so surely that meant that the boy hadn’t had any money and that that had therefore been his first stop. Draco had wasted plenty of time getting his robe measurements finished and then being lectured about the heritage he wished to throw off but there was hope yet!

Wait. Stop. There he was! The unmistakable bob of a small bespectacled body as Harry stumbled away from Ollivander’s. He looked exhausted. Doing all those trials was sure to have tired him out. He must be ready to eat. Draco wasn’t wrong. He watched the object of his growing obsession walk towards one of the Three Broomsticks’ branches. Draco suppressed a shiver at the thought of being in such a cramped environment with so many unsightly people. Draco didn’t want to be prejudiced but that didn’t mean his outlook on life wasn’t still as privileged as ever. Even so, he clamped down on his desire to flee and instead crept closer to the large windows of the establishment, trying his best not to look out of place. If he tilted his head down a little and ruined his posture somewhat so as not to be recognised, then it was only so that he wouldn’t look suspicious. Not because he was ashamed of his curiosity nor because he didn’t wanted be associated with the place. No, not at all. But by the time Draco was close enough to peer in, his heart sank when he saw his Harry in the arms of the Weasley matriarch. Never before had Draco felt the unsightly desire to simply growl, but he most certainly did now.

Draco dashed off and hid in an alcove, gathering both his breath and his sanity. Harry won’t have had time to get his robes or his books. Maybe he’ll even be interested in broomsticks. But maybe not. James Potter had loved Quidditch. If you’re nothing like your father, don’t assume he is either, he scolded himself. Okay. Hopefully Harry would go and complete the rest of his shopping by himself - without those pesky Weasel-faces. That would be Draco’s chance to finally speak with him. The blond boy felt his cheeks flush prettily at the mere thought. Damn! He knew he had fixated on something and that that was probably very dangerous indeed. But he was high on the thoughts of rebellion and he needed to see Harry Potter. Needed to talk with him.

Draco, unbeknownst to him, had already invoked a special kind of magic with that single shared glance, and now it was almost fate that in his path lay the quicksand of innocent obsession.

Draco Malfoy was a very lucky wizard because Harry Potter was not the sort that would let him drown.

Chapter End Notes

Did I manage to pull at heartstrings?
“What on earth did you agree to that for!? ” Hissed out Nagini in a fit of utter despair.

“I thought you were encouraging me to go with them!”

“To befriend them! If you’re to blend in with Gryffindor, you would do well to have sssome of the mosst notorioussly Gryffindor allies. Plus, with how connected they are to the Order, the chain of information-”

“What ‘Order’?”

Nagini hissed out versions of “be quiet” and “ssshut up” and other sarcastic dabbling at pointing out his incompetence.

“I thought you were clever!”

Harry didn’t want to answer “I am!” because that seems both presumptuous and, to him, not really all that true.

“Nagini. Will you just hear me out?” Harry took a deep breath and changed his tone to a roll call he thought would be difficult to interrupt. “My reasons for agreeing to go with the Weasley family are as follows: One. They seem to be kind and caring and are unlikely to kill me, capture me, question me, blackmail me, imprison me, curse me, or do any number of other weird things to me, whilst I am asleep or generally under their roof. Point number two. I have no idea how much money is in these pouches but I am doing the thing you’ve so far only praised me for - being cautious. I’m not going to spend it if I can possibly avoid it because who knows if and when I might need to fund a bribe or two. A stack of gold will get me further than a stack of silver. And point number three. Staying with them gives me a connection with the wizarding world and an insight into what life is like. It’s all very well listening to you, or even reading the books we’re about to get, but I feel like a fish out of water here and I’m only just keeping it together. Some immersion will do me good! And if you add to that your point about fitting in with Gryffindor - which I didn’t even think or know about - I think I have a fairly good set of reasons for acting as I did!”

Harry wasn’t used to getting passionate. He said “passionate” because that was what he was. He wasn’t angry. Not at all. And he hoped Nagini wasn’t either. Just irritated at most.

Because Harry was hoping not to push Nagini past irritation, he gladly agreed to sit through her ten minute rant about all the negatives which Harry (somehow!) managed to find a point to counter with each time. Afterwards, Nagini wouldn’t admit that the wind whispered that Harry had won, so instead both moved from their hiding spot and back out into Diagon Alley, agreeing to accept what was done and happy to regain their peace. Hedwig hooted in relief and Louis slid out of his hiding spot in Harry’s bag where he’d been trying to cover his ears and ignore the argument.

Neither saw the gallant smirk not the glint of tied blond hair in the darkness, but once the boy and his familiars had left, the capable wizard spent detailed moments anchoring the information he had gleaned from the hissed exchange and thanked his family name for his position and the fact it allowed him to be late to functions without consequence.
“Now then, Mr Potter! If you would just stand there for me. Yes yes. And hold onto the crystals.”

Harry looked down into his woven fingers. Mr Ollivander had painted intricate pentagrams on his palms and had now tipped out a total of twenty-four crystals into his cupped hands. Did they have some sort of function?

The wandmaker gradually began to chant and had Harry learnt Latin, he might have stood a chance of understanding it. As it was, however, all Harry could identify was the occasional word that the Dursleys had taken extreme pride in reciting despite never knowing the meaning behind the mottos their were turning into a middle-class mantra.

The crystals were growing warm in his hands and were actually beginning to glow too. It was almost as if life force was flowing through them. Maybe it was. Harry tried to name all the colours he could see. Some were easy enough. Navy. Lime. Teal. The same colour orange as Weasley hair. But as he got past number fourteen, Harry realised he either needed to expand his dictionary, or just start calling them “blue one, two and three”.

Suddenly the chanting stopped. Was he done? Or had something happened?

“Now you can step down from there, Mr Potter! We’re almost done!”

...Okay. What purpose did all that serve anyway?

The wandmaker reached out for the crystals and instantly panted out various versions of “ow!”

“I keep forgetting about that, no matter how many times I do it!”

What on earth…? The stones were perfectly cool to the touch now. They hadn’t even gotten hot when they’d glowed.

“It’s the bond you see! You magic has bonded with them so they try and repel other magic and magic-users until the bond fades.”

Harry furrowed his eyebrows and looked on amused as the genius moved to take the crystals from him, this time wearing some sort of durable glove. Harry guessed that the bond meant the man couldn’t use his own wand to just levitate the stones onto the counter instead. Harry heard muttering as he continued down the small steps and hopped back down onto ground level. He noticed Ollivander scribbling quickly on a piece of paper with the same quill and ink that everyone seemed to use. The man seemed to be assessing tiny black symbols which had appeared on the crystals, but before Harry could inspect them further, the wandmaker began flipping them over one by one, now writing down a series numbers which had inked themselves on the reverse sides.

“Alrighty, Mr Potter! I now have the correct measurement for your wand and the property which would best meet your needs.”

The older man pushed an almost complete wand into Harry’s hand and the boy wonder felt it thrumb to life immediately. He looked down at the polished length of Hawthorn and watched as the mad hatter brought a silver scalpel to the edge, shaving the wooden tip down. Harry felt pity for the shivering wood but recognised he had to be unyielding in this necessary process. And then there was more polish to cover the now exposed end. A quick spell to seemingly protect the wood itself and then the man was pulling on the triple core which was twisted into a ribbon that hung out of both
ends of the wood. Harry felt inexplicably petrified that the man would begin to slice away at that length too. Bearing the pain of living wood was hard enough, but the pain of a creature? Harry didn’t think that after his already tiring day, he’d be able to hold up. Instead, Ollivander just continued twisting the length until it neatly matched the length of wood and then secured it at the base. Harry sighed in relief. Another thrum of life filled Harry and he couldn't help the bubbling awe inside him. A quick movement later and Harry felt a shiver ride through him too as he imagined the effect the wandmaker’s action had just had on his new partner. The fiery life of the phoenix struck heavily in a straight run down the central path of the wand core, whilst the unicorn hair and dragon heartstring breathed life in a swirl around the edge of the hollow cove. An air gap was evident, although Harry didn’t know how he knew. And then the man was widening it and sealing the other end. And then all action stopped together.

Ollivander smiled at Harry and pronounced softly, “There you go, Mr Potter. All done. Most witches and wizards come back to me in a few months or a few years to have a specific design inlaid into their wand, a handle turned, the point sharpened, a case made, or heartfelt objects embedded into the wood. But for now - you’re done. Eleven inches meaning mostly precise work, but with the ability to put on a show of power or emotion. And supple, meaning willing to change but with a path of your own. I hope you like your wand, Mr Potter.”

Harry smiled with so very much feeling and uttered simply:

“It’s perfect. Thank you.”

And it was.

Chapter End Notes

Four chapters in one day? I’m so proud of myself! Thank you to Dinkydog who actually inspired me to quickly press out yet another chapter with her comment!
A Silk Skirt

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Harry was seven gold coins - *Galleons*, he reminded himself - lighter as he trudged up the street. His belly was full, he had made arrangements for his stay, and most importantly - *he had a wand*. Harry didn’t know if it was normal to feel such life thrum through the thin length of wood but if every witch and wizard shared this incredible bond on a daily basis, he didn’t know how anyone could have it in them to feel anything but awe.

Nagini hissed at him - the signal he’d come to associate with a reminder to get on task. Okay. Okay. Robes. Books. Potions supplies. *I hope it’s not anything weird like spider legs.* Harry visibly shivered and Nagini’s brow indicated her mixture of confusion and derision.

*Then what?* Well it was obvious he wouldn’t need to get another creature. Nagini had assured him that all three of his current familiars were low enough on the “X” rating system and would be able to come with him to Hogwarts. The other limit of bringing a maximum of five creatures also didn’t apply. Harry wondered though - if he ended up befriending more than that and wanted to bring them with them… would he be able to sneak them in? Or would there be some sort of charm that would alert the Headmaster?

Harry sighed and tried to stop straining his brain. He’d had enough for today. He mentally scanned down the memorised list again. Given Harry was a first year, he wouldn’t be allowed a broom. Harry had snorted at the warning the first time he’d seen it though. “Parents are reminded that…” sounded suspiciously like it was the parents’ generation that had made the rule necessary. It was a story Harry dearly wanted to hear. Nagini had told him his dad had been amazing on a broomstick… so maybe he was the troublemaker responsible. Either way, spending just a little time looking through the window of Quality Quidditch Supplies wouldn’t hurt.

*Stay on task* - he reminded himself yet again. Okay. What hadn’t been on the list but Nagini had instructed him he needed? Quills and ink. That was easy enough to remember with everyone around him using the ancient stationery.

Harry passed by a sign with audacious lettering spelling out “Junk Shop”. As he continued on past the window and glanced in, it looked as though the prices were only handfuls of coppers each. Harry had told Nagini he didn’t want to waste money, but he wondered if he might persuade her to pop in with him on their way back. There might be a gem hidden in the dust, and with Nagini’s insight, he was sure he’d be able to find something… so long as he could persuade her to stop hissing in distaste when he revealed his plans.

*But seriously - focus, now.* First stop - robes. But Harry also wanted to visit a joke shop. Apparently both Honeydukes and Zonko’s were up in Scotland! Harry had been confused about how the twins had even planned to take him there until he remembered that he was, in fact, a wizard. And maybe he could get some food too! Between those two things he was sure he could win the Weasleys over even more. The curly writing of “Rosa Lee Teabag” caught his eye on a swinging mint sign. Should he get them tea?

A second later he was pulled rudely from his own thoughts as his autopilot body pushed the door open to Madam Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions. The bell above the door jingled and Harry quickly composed himself. Okay. Alert. Charming. Ask for their recommendations. Don’t admit you don’t know.
“Hello!” He called out.

The lady tittering at the back of the store, whose fashion sense indicated she could be none other than the owner herself, turned around and her gentle face split into a twee kind of smile as she welcomed him in with a happy chirp of “Mr Potter!”

X-X-X

Rubeus Hagrid was a Gryffindor. The hat had sorted him fair and square. The trouble, therefore, was not so much that he was afraid to approach, but rather a mixture of simmering emotions including such potent pride that it drew tears to his eyes, and a fascination with Harry’s choice of companions.

The half-giant knew he was supposed to have been the one to meet Harry and explain the wizarding world to him. In fact, Hagrid had rather been looking forward both to doing that and to doling out some justice to the poor boy’s family... but Harry had managed that all by himself himself. *He’s getting on so well…*

Old Dumbledore had made him take an unbreakable vow to protect Harry and he had been all too keen. It didn’t matter that now he would be unable to tell anyone about the secretive quests Dumbledore had sent him on or the close moments of friendships he had spied between the boy and his friends. When Hagrid found himself doubting his decision, he just thought about how it meant that he could treasure the soft comfort he had been a voyeur to all the more.

Hagrid had seen how Harry was a Parselmouth, and when he’d told Dumbledore - the man didn’t seem surprised at all! Instead he asked whether Hagrid had seen his charge talking to his owl and lemur too. Hagrid had felt his excitement drain from him during that meeting when the only answer he could supply was “no”.

But no matter! Hagrid had been doing his best to covertly follow Harry today. Dumbledore had wanted him to intervene, but Harry had been doing perfectly well all by himself! He’d even run into the Weasleys and they were certain to keep him safe and right.

Various owners of cafes had been too daunted to protest when Hagrid had squashed their reinforced chairs on the far-too-small patios, and stretched their parasols by trying to tuck his bearded head underneath their shade. Hagrid was being a shadow to Harry - it simply wouldn’t do to be spotted. The people who didn’t know Hgrid likely couldn’t decline his desire to peep through bookshelves for fear of his size or the massive dog he had been parading down the street only yesterday, whilst those who were acquainted with him couldn’t help but smile fondly as he peered from behind lampposts, which couldn’t hide his body no matter how much the half-giant tried, because his attempts at helping Harry was just so typically quaint of the old Headmaster’s protection.

If the name “Rubeus Hagrid” didn’t give pause to any who intended to interrupt him, then the name “Albus Dumbledore” most certainly did.

Plop!

Oh, Hagrid heaved himself back up to a standing position just as Harry slipped into Madam Malkin’s and tried his best to add eleven plus two sickles together in his head which was how much his morals dictated he had to offer for the repair of yet another chair and flagstone.
“Oh I’ve been waiting for the day when I get to fit robes for you, Mr Potter,” Madam Malkin breezed out in a twinkling laugh.

Harry tried to chuckle softly but he felt himself falling behind her enthusiasm.

“But you are skinny, aren’t you? Well I suppose after some Hogwarts feasts you’ll be as good as new. I’m sure you’ll grow up to be plenty strong.”

Harry somehow felt himself doubting that. He felt destined to forever be the scrawny kid that was short enough to kick in the head without even being pushed to his knees.

“You’ll be needing several sets of robes, Mr Potter, but if you just let me take your measurements and then spend a short while deciding which style will suit you best, then you can go on and do some more shopping whilst I get these made for you. Just be sure to come back before it starts going dark. I’m getting on in years now, you know, and I’m a big believer in getting a good night’s sleep. It helps my weary bones, you know…”

The sweet prattling went on a while and in that time Harry had found himself positioned, photographed, pinned and measured. He was honestly amazed by the dexterity of the floating needles and multi-coloured chalk. If he hadn’t thought that perhaps impressed whistling would have offended such a sweet woman as much as it had enraged his uncle, then he would have shown his appreciation in the cockney way he had always connected with - not that he had seen more than a few glimpses of it when Dudley had been forced to watch a documentary on the workers left behind during the war. What Harry had respected, the fat pig had sneered at.

“Alright, Mr Potter, if you’d like to step down now.”

Harry spun his head over to a wary Nagini who could see her master drooping and was worried he might already be too weary. Harry gathered himself as best he could and produced an honest smile for her before turning up the charm and making it into a brilliant grin for the aging seamstress.

“Thank you. Is there anything else I need to do now?”

“Yes yes, come and have a look through these catalogues whilst I just find some fabrics for… you…” The merry witch trailed off as she pottered over to draws stuffed to the brim with all sorts of colours. A silk skirt. Black panties. His girly laugh.

“Sorry, Mr Potter, it might just be a little longer, it looks as though I need to open another batch for school robes…”

A frilly blouse and tights. Putting him in tights. Wearing tights. Ripping a hole in the tights. Spitting on him for being clumsy and ruining such a thoughtful gift. The hole being used. His hole being used. His other-


Five seconds became five minutes and by the time Harry’s agonising eternity had slipped away into calm, Nagini’s comforting weight had faded away into just the tip of her tail brushing the back of his ankle.
“I’m ba-ack! Have you chosen which designs you want Mr Potter?”

No. No he hadn’t. But before he could begin to panic again, Hedwig’s flapping wing drew his attention to several designs Louis had circled with the red pen provided. Harry drew on a wobbly smile and thanked whichever deity wizards preyed to that the aging witch didn’t seem to notice his vulnerability.

“These please, Madam.”

“Why! What stunning choices, young man.”

Nagini’s hiss diverted the hand of the grey lady before it reached to pat Harry, but thankfully she didn’t seem frightened or intimidated by the gesture and continued on unaffected.

“Now how about some colours?”

Chapter End Notes

Well... that took a turn I hadn’t been expecting. It kinda just wrote itself. I hope you enjoyed Hagrid though and the ending wasn't too harsh! :P
So the boy could talk to snakes. That was interesting news in itself. He hadn’t been expecting to find the Golden Boy camping in the very entrance to Knockturn Alley but it was undeniably a pleasant surprise.

The Dark Lord had been gone for many a year, but he had made it quite clear that he would accept that boy dead or alive. A prophecy could be interpreted differently - there were few fools who believed it could only be a literal fate. Harry Potter was the Golden Boy but he was not the Dark side’s enemy. And any information would be helpful - to bring back the Dark Lord or to equip him with the Light side’s figurehead of hope.

So the boy can talk to snakes? And fate has gifted him the most beautiful irony in his familiar. I wonder if Potter knows who she is... If he’s listening to her, it is unlikely he doesn’t know. If he’s listening to her... the Dark side has hope yet!

X-X-X

There was little to be said or even considered as Harry left the robe shop. He knew he’d paid in advance for several sets of garments and he was pretty sure that he had ordered some in red, green and blue in addition to his Hogwarts uniform but… the details were lost to him.

Harry did his best to keep his good posture as he approached yet another nondescript alcove and was directed by Nagini to sit down on a crate. Harry supposed it was unlikely anyone would ask him to move so he was fine to sit down. Avoid confrontation and avoid fuss. You don’t have to be strong all the time, you just have to protect yourself when you’re not.

“Harry. I need you to ssstay here, alright? I’m going to leave you with Hedwig whilst I go and get ssome potions for you. I’ll need Louis’ help, but don’t think for a ssingle moment that you are unssafe. If you need help or ssomeone tries to approach you, just make the biggesst racket you can. The more commotion the better. Ssso long as you don’t leave Diagon Alley you will have more allies here than you do enemiesss. And if you think you’re in ssserious danger, I need you to bellow ‘Hagrid’ assss loudly as you can. Did you get all that, Harry?”

Harry had but he found it difficult to do anything but nod slowly and sloppily, his head lolling as if not under his control.

Nagini took a deep breath. There was nothing else she could do but be as quick as possible. She peeked out and checked that nobody was watching before turning invisible with Louis and rushing off down Diagon Alley before turning into Knockturn Alley to obtain enough potions to reinvigorate Harry but still keep him calm. She hadn’t wanted to resort to this, namely because she had already forced potions down Harry earlier to deal with his magical exhaustion. He’d pushed himself too far for food to help, but giving him so much exposure to direct magic all at once wasn’t good either. Maybe that was part of the reason why he was crashing so quickly now. Either way - if she was in any way responsible, then she would fix the problem. She only hoped that Harry would be safe with
Hedwig whilst she was gone.

X-X-X

“Harry’s taking a long time isn’t he, mum?”
“Well it’s only to be expected, dear. He said he’d only been to Gringotts and Ollivanders.”
“But we’ve already been waiting ages.”
“Now now, don’t be like that, Ronniekins-”
“-just be happy that your idol is going to be staying with you!”
Ron’s face lit up like his hair.
“He’s not my-!”
“Oh yeah? Then why do you have all those posters-”
“-and newspaper clippings-”
“-and speculation reports all over your room?”
“You’ll have to take those down before he gets home-”
“-but I’m sure you can manage that. You’ll do anything to make him feel welcome-”
“Oh, stop teasing your brother. you two! You’re just as happy as he is to have him stay with us.”
“Of course we are! But unlike Ronniekins-”
“-we can admit it!”

Molly Weasley would have huffed in despair had she been a weaker woman. As it was, she was busy entertaining her family in the middle of the cozy pub, waiting for the arrival of the boy she was determined to feed and help get on his feet.

X-X-X

“Nagini?”
“Yesss,” she hissed reassuringly as she carefully unstopped potion after potion and gently pressed the vials to Harry’s lips.
“Why didn’t you tell me Hagrid was a giant?”

The snake paused. Had something terrible happened? Had she missed it? Was Harry in shock now? No... Harry’s hand was reaching out to her and petting her scales far too softly to have been driven to
a panic attack within the few short minutes she had been away.

“There’s… no need to worry. I was just sitting here… and he came over. He was huge and I really started to get worried. I didn’t know if I should shout out or not because he seemed friendly. But I know that doesn’t mean anything… He wouldn’t stop walking towards me even when I ignored him and glared at him and then when he was almost here… I just shouted out ‘Hagrid!’ Next thing I know he’s laughing his head off with the loudest voice I’ve ever heard and saying something like ‘That’s me, ‘Arry!’ It- It was so strange…”

Harry had learned that potions tasted vile the first time he’d had to suffer through them so was taking deep breaths before swallowing, hoping to avoid the taste. With each swallow, he paused, and whilst the awful taste was unavoidable, he was starting to feel better with every gulp. It wasn’t as though he could forget about what had just happened in the middle of his robe fitting, but at least he felt he could ignore it now. The faint shivering he hadn’t even realised was sliding up his body eased and eventually stopped, and then his voice stopped sounding quite so lethargic. Another potion later and his vision stopped crossing into doubles and another empty vial signaled his clarity of focus returning.

“I thought he was actually going to give me a hug and I wasn’t sure what to do. But then Hedwig distracted him and he just started babbling about magical creatures. Do you know who he is, Nagini? Should I trust him?”

“You know what I’ll tell you, Harry. Whom you trussst iss up to you. Do you trust him?”

“I- I want to but I don’t know if I can yet.”

“Well then - that’s your answer.”

“He.. dropped something though.”

Nagini paused.

“Define ‘sssomething’.”

“It looked like an egg. Hedwig is sitting on it now.”

Nagini’s head whipped over to the white bird and began nudging the dozing pile of feathers out of the way. What is it was a cursed object? The owl wasn’t attuned to the Dark Arts like she was. A sliced tongue flickered out and a keen pair of nostrils flared. Oh.

“Potter... What on earth are you doing with a Fresssian dragon egg?”

“A DRAGON-!”

“Ssshhh! Keep it down, Potter.”

Maybe she’d overdone the Pepper-Up Potion…

“But- But-! What am I meant to do with a dragon!!”

“Well, theoretically you can’t bring it to Hogwartssss because it’sss too high up the ‘X’ rating ssssystem - stupid thing that it issss - but because it’s sssstill an egg...“

Harry gulped.

“You optionssss are to either try and return it to Hagrid or keep it and learn how to cassst enough
protective ssspells on it so that it doesn’t hatch.”

Harry thought Hagrid was a nice wizard… but a dragon? He didn’t want to part with the one creature he’d always loved to draw in pre-school. At least until his uncle had found out…

“I’m keeping him.” Harry said resolutely.

Nagini just sighed at him, having already known what his answer would be. If she didn’t keep him in line, then it was entirely possible that his potential to love would weigh down his heart with too many duties. And he has a difficult enough fate to bear as it is.

“Ssso, how did you persssuade Hagrid to leave?”

“I don’t know,” Harry answered frankly. “One moment he was just there and the next moment he seemed to remember something and cantered off. The only word I caught him muttering was ‘shadow’.”

Nagini snorted. Sometimes the old fool’s pawns were just so predictable in their unwavering belief in supposedly noble duty and valor.

“Nagini?”

“Are you feeling better now, Harry?”

The messy tufts of near black swooped down into a shy smile and Harry draw his thumbs along the lines of his familiar's jaw.

“Yeah. Thank you, Nagini.”

Chapter End Notes

I really hope I can get a third chapter out tonight but I might not manage it. If I don’t, I hope yesterday’s forth upload will make up for only two today. :P
Draco woke up with a start and instantly began to panic. He didn't remember falling asleep, but
given he was leaning up against a bookshelf with a crick in his neck, he doubted he'd been cursed.

Why on earth did he feel so weird? He tilted his head side to side. Ow. Fuck that hurt! That was one
bitch of a headache, alright. It was a good thing his father had yet to peer inside his mind whilst he
was swearing his head off. It was his favourite way to silently rebel and it certainly helped to ease the
throbbing migraine he was now suffering from.

Hell. What had happened? Draco tried to cast his mind back. What had he been doing besides
fantasising about Potter?

…

…

… Fantasising about Potter?!

Bleeding hell. What on earth-? And worse still - had the Boy Who Lived seen right through him and
cursed him for his thoughts?! Draco had no idea how powerful he peer was and that didn’t reassure
him in the slightest.

Ow!

Oh God… Draco thought he was going to vomit. He held his breath. Oh God. No. No. Not now-!

An eon later, it passed.

Christ… why was I even thinking so much about Potter? I know I want to befriend him. He’s the
only one I think I can trust. He’ll either be glad for my help in claiming his titles in the wizarding
world or he’ll think he’s got a spy he can use to get information out of the Dark side.

Another painful throb ripped an undignified squeak from the blond boy as he tumbled to his knees
once more.


Oh God…. Oh - finally it was easing. Did he have any potions on him?

Flashes of the hours he’d spent mooning over the boy so much shorter than him flickered to life
before his tightly-pressed lids. Fuck. Potter wasn’t attractive! Another spurt of pain. Ah! No! No way
was that scrawny body pretty! His spine curved in on itself and jerked his skull back against
unyielding oak. Ooooh Christ almighty. Okay. Okay he’d admit he could see it. He hadn’t been
able to think of anything else since he’d seen the fire in those green eyes of his. Potter had to become
his ally, there was no two ways about it. Friend even. Yes. And if Potter and he grew closer…

With accepting the feelings an ancient magic had doused him with in an overload of addiction only
hours before, Draco’s pain quickly eased and all but faded, leaving only a light thrumming in his
heart.
With a clearing head, Draco could remember that he had come to the bookshop for its privacy, and because it was unlikely that the Weasleys would want to follow Harry in to buy his books. The blood traitors had no appreciation for knowledge - only for heroic ideals and the easy path of blindly following a fraud. Draco took a moment to remind himself that he would soon be considered one too... A blood traitor in the most noble house of Malfoy.

Draco's thoughts were once more pulled back to Harry. He wanted to be the boy's shield. His own limbs were far longer than what would have been expected of a wizard his age, which had only made him feel that much more protective of Harry when he had glanced him. Draco wasn’t a coward but he wasn’t a Gryffindor either. He would handle his own feelings in the most cautious and logical of ways. He could feel a tittering in his soul that called for Harry. The protectiveness stayed. So did the twinges of desire and the trust and loyalty and dedication he naturally felt toward the figurehead that his Malfoy birth should have made him hate. But Draco was the master of his fate and the captain of his soul. He would fight against the current to reach his prize and in doing so he would fulfill the destiny he did not yet know was his.

The name of the magic which fate had doled out to bith Harry and him would not come to light for many years. Draco acknowledged his own desire for his peer to fulfil his plans, but as Draco did not believe in a fate greater than the expectations of his birth, he allowed himself to conclude that his excessive emotions earlier that day were either a sign of an oncoming feverish illness or evidence that he had been caught by the edge of a nasty curse on his way from Knockturn Alley.

He would befriend Harry- no, Potter. But it would be on his own terms. Draco Malfoy bowed to no one and, in his mind, certainly not his supposed destiny. If he was hacking out his own inelegant path away from his birthright, then he would not let its direction be swayed. Not even by Harry Freaking Potter.

X-X-X

Hagrid was huffing and puffing at himself. He hadn’t meant to go over to Harry. He had promised himself to stay put, and yet... seeing Harry abandoned by his snake and his lemur, sat all on his lonesome in the shadows just pulled at Hagrid’s heart too much. One moment they had been there - all four members of the little clique taking yet another break away from the sun; then next thing he knew - Hagrid was snorting tea from the big barrels of his nose as the one second he’d spent looking away from his charge had been enough to place the boy into a position of vulnerability.

Given the panic emerging from both the half-giant and the giant snake, it was unsurprising that neither noticed when they crossed paths - the wizard tumbling into an off-kilter step as he tripped over the invisible obstacle, and the serpent simply slithering on, unaffected by the collision.

X-X-X

Harry felt invigorated which was a relief, but he didn’t want to risk going back to the kind seamstress’ shop in case he had another panic attack. Instead, he wisely chose to make his next stop Scribbulus Writing Instruments. He made his purchases and then left swiftly, heading to a nearby bench tucked just into the shadows.
Nagini had been surprised by the several litres of multi-coloured ink and rolls and rolls of parchment which had been stuffed by her master into his bag. When Harry had first attempted to dump his purchases in, the snake had hissed out acridly: “Be careful, Potter!” The extra potions she had uprooted in her panicked dash had been instantly whisked out of the way and it was only then that Nagini had realised that even without being instructed to, Harry had simply willed an extension charm into existence in order to fit everything in.

Now the three familiars gathered around Harry as he awkwardly penned his first letter, beginning it with “Dear Madam Malkin.” If one peered, the scribble could be deciphered to say that Harry was getting really tired and had asked Hedwig to collect the robes in his stead.

“You’re sorry she couldn’t get to fulfil her ‘standard system’ of making you try the clothes on but you hope she doesn’t mind?! What sort of garbage are you writing, Potter?”

“Some waffle I hope she can read and just accepts blindly,” Harry murmured, his tongue peeking out between his lips in concentration.

At least he already knows his penmanship will need a complete overhaul, snorted Nagini.

When Hedwig floated off, proud to deliver her first letter and collect her first parcel, the remaining trio continued on to the two potion shops they would need to visit. Nagini couldn’t help turning possible ‘what if’s over in her head though, and as she began to assess Harry’s physical stature, his mental strength and spiritual power, as well as the huge volume of magic he’d conjured, in conjunction with the potions she’d given him, Nagini slowly came to the conclusion that Harry Potter was not only being influenced by the magic of his dead mother and the almighty power of love, but also something far more sinister - more ancient - more impossible to predict and control.

Blasphemy! No wonder he dropped and recovered so suddenly. It was the closing of the clasp of an ancient enchantment. When he created his first wand he accepted the warrior’s fate he must bear. Oh tooth-rotting hell!

Chapter End Notes

Did I over-do the sudden change to Draco's view of things? Or did I explain it away well enough?
His legs quivered and he felt fire rise in his loins to meet the cascading ice crashing down his spine. Pain spasmed through his knees as he collapsed into the marble floor of his office, the eacho scouring his ears for any sign of comfort it could rip from him. His blond waterfall of hair crowded over his eyes to hide his shame, the rare tears soaking into the long strands.

Lucius had grown used to being in such a position - one of pain. His last years serving the Dark Lord had been pitiful, as rising up the ranks only made him a closer target for his master’s anger rather than above it. The genius had gone insane and Dumbledore had driven him to it. The descendant of Salazar Slytherin was punished by the mighty fist of supposed Light for defending the ideals the wizarding world held so tightly onto.

*What right do Mudbloods have to come in and demand we change our ways?* Progressive. Positive. Liberal. Loving. Lucius would have spat in the faces of every Mudblood he had ever seen had he not been under the restrictions of his heritage and society’s acceptance. *For centuries you have hounded us to burn at the stake, and should we ever raise our heads today, we would be captured and pulled apart on an unfeeling slab by inhuman machines. Inch. By. Inch. And it would all be for the greater good. All in the name of science.*

Black was beginning to edge in on his vision. The pain which had suddenly begun ripping through him had been so very startling that he hadn’t even noticed it’s creeping clasp. He could only hope that the pain passed before he was demanded elsewhere.

As his torso crashed against his desk into unconsciousness, his dear friend, unbeknownst to him, had similarly sank his greasy hair into the emerald hearth rug opposite him, having just stepped out of the Floo, believing his friend may know more about why their black marks were no longer so dull, and why in the past few moments, they had come alive into a slithering flower of fire that made it impossible to resist the black relief of oblivion.

X-X-X

School would be starting soon and then he would have less time to act. He had always managed in the past. With Riddle. With Snape. Surely it would not be so difficult to manage the third and final piece with Potter. Potter *had* to be the final piece. When the boy had been born, the inky petals on his chest had begun to wither year by year rather than decade by decade. His beloved had been a true villain in cursing him with a rose to mark his heart. He had always thought that its purpose was to leave him without love, but it was clear to him now that the aim was to leave him without life instead, and that the only way to save himself was to prune the pests from its leaves and go on living to spite them.

Dumbledore was right about many things, but given that so many of his plans had been tweaked and changed and proven wrong, especially recently, it should be unsurprising to note that on this topic, of life and love, he was wrong once again.
Quirinus Quirrell was an odd sort of chap. Most would have said so because of a combination of his smirk that suggested he knew far more than anyone else, and the funny little turban he’d picked up from his wide-ranging travels.

Recently though, he had grown into a nervous man who jumped at shadows and always seemed to be whispering answers to questioned nobody asked. And then there was the fact he got migraines whenever he was around certain people - former Death Eaters mostly, but also Dumbledore.

Some concluded that he’d just cracked under pressure, that he’d heard about the curse on the position he was about to take up at Hogwarts and wanted nothing to do with it anymore. When questioned on the matter, the man would always deny the rumor, but his trembling feet and weak handshake convinced everyone that his over-eagerness to explore the Forbidden Forest and be on nightly patrols was all unbelievable falsification.

Quirinus Quirrell was a pathetic wizard now, but he would be the first in line to challenge Harry Potter and Dumbledore’s first offering to fate in order to resurrect the face of evil and prevent the final rose petal from falling.

Now that Harry had become acquainted with the half-giant, it was pretty difficult to not notice him. Why on earth the wizard thought that his bristly beard couldn’t be seen when it stuck out from behind the vase on both sides, Harry didn’t know, but if he was to use the word “cute” to describe something so obviously… not, then Hagrid was certainly it.

Due to the helpful nature of Mr Potage, Harry’s visit to his shop had been rather brief and it was actually Hedwig who had spent the longest amount of time in there, trying to find her master because she couldn’t believe that he’d already been and gone. Harry had purchased a total of fourteen cauldrons from the shopkeeper which had gone against his twitching desire to economise, but Nagini had insisted that Harry wouldn’t only have to be practicing out of lessons to improve his control, but also he would have to be brewing potions not on the syllabus in order to progress towards his aims. Harry had thankfully only felt wariness in a brief flicker when he realised that he still didn’t know what his aims actually were. “With the amount of cauldronss you’ll be ssure to blow up, be thankful I’m not making you buy more, Potter,” had been the final, irrefutable point which had made Harry stop arguing and move on.

Harry’s next stop at the tea shop that he had glanced at earlier had also been a breeze and, save some fawning from the young witch at the counter, Harry’s quest to buy tea to impress the Weasley matriarch had gone well, with the witch being more than willing to look into customer records for which flavour the ginger family bought most often. It was a simple case of rinse and repeat for Gambol and Japes Wizarding Joke Shop where the twins’ notorious nature allowed recommendations to be made from memory, and Sugarplum’s Sweets Shop was equally packed with employees who already knew the favourite treats of the poor pureblood family.
By the time Harry was swallowing down disgust and holding his breath before stepping foot into what Nagini had assured him was the most reputable Apothecary in Diagon Alley, the sun was beginning to tip into a shady grin.

X-X-X

The Rose had changed colours over the years - blooming sweetly as yellow and white, passionately in red and pink - but a few hours after the Boy Who Lived had finally connected with his new wand, it turned, with a finality, into a pitch black. There was no going back and no way to know how many petals were still left to fall. The only certainty would be revealed when the final one fell and only a single thorny stalk remained.

Dumbledore had been furthest away from Harry Potter and so the last to feel the effects of the ancient magic, but it had affected many others on its way. Dumbledore couldn’t avoid his fate, but there was only him to blame for it.

Chapter End Notes

The Dark Bat rises... or rather falls. Snape finally makes his first appearance!
The atmosphere was like a sponge of dust. Harry found it harder to breath here than was normal. Perhaps wizards should adopt health and safety policies. School books lined the shelves nearest the door but the huge expanse of space edging further and further away from the small windows at the front appeared to hold volumes of ancient knowledge that only masters of their craft would be able to appreciate.

Harry walked stiffly along the shelves, feeling more like he was in a library than a bookstore, trying his best to keep silent. He allowed Nagini to slip the books he would need from the shelves whilst he just gazed around him in awe. Charms. Transfiguration. Defence. Against what? Herbology. Astronomy. History of Magic. Muggle Studies. Potions…

Harry turned the corner and found himself in a maze of less organised literature and history. Quidditch Through the Ages was the first book Harry grabbed despite Nagini’s sneer. He glanced at the two piles she was balancing like a Victorian debutante, slipping them across her scales in a soft rhythm just like Muggle girls would bear them on their heads for the sake of poise. The coy mistress he had fashioned Nagini into in his imagination flashed briefly across his vision, her teasing laugh disappearing a moment later. Harry jerked his eyes away from his familiar’s and back to the books on her spine. He could recognise a few titles which had been listed in his Hogwarts letter, but parallel to those towered another stack of subjects and titles, many of which he was sure he wouldn’t be able to pronounce. She wasn’t kidding when she said that there would be extra-curricular reading and research to be done. Harry gulped.

“There’sss barely enough books in Hogwartssss to educate a gnome, even with the ressstricted sssection.”

Harry paused mid-step before continuing. There’s a restricted section? As in - books on sex or books that will eat you if you look at them wrong? While Harry was lost in his thoughts, a heavy text took the chance to snap at him, making his pinky finger its next attempt at dinner, having forgotten about the invisible barrier charm between it and the shop’s customers since the last time it had crashed into it in vain. That didn’t stop Harry from jumping at the unexpected attack though.

The Boy Who Lived continued walking further into the bowels of the gargantuan shop. Light faded even quicker here and soon Harry became aware of the faint glow of candles lining the tops of the bookshelves. It was difficult to see, but at least it was still possible. This must be where all the unwanted books end up. A silver glint caught his eye on the spine of a dusty cover and Harry reached for it, slipping it softly into his bag without reading the title. He would forget that he'd even picked it up until the next morning.

“Had we had more time today, I would have taken you to make your lesss… acceptable purchassses, but that ssshall have to wait for now. Let usss be off, Potter.”

Harry nodded, distractedly, and ended up taking a longer route around the labyrinth, ignoring Nagini’s directions otherwise. He just felt a pull inside him. As though there was a book he simply needed to read, as though there was a connection his mind had yet to make, as though there a missing piece that a single word would fill.

Harry kept taking lilting strides as he half stumbled in his daze until he found himself tripping over a
black shoe and falling to his knees on a plush burgundy carpet, trapping the foot below him at a surely very painful angle.

X-X-X

Draco Malfoy had not meant to end up in the Chesterfield, slipping his feet out in front of him with a book he hadn’t read since he was a child, but it had just felt right. The single lantern above the alcove lit enough of the pages to read and before he knew it, Draco was engrossed enough to forget why he had even chosen to visit the bookstore in the first place. That was until pain crucified him from his toes upwards and he let out an almighty shriek of pain, quite possibly accompanied by various “fuck”s, “flipperty”s and “for God’s sake”s as he scurried to dislodge the weight pressing his ankle into an unnatural position.

“What do you think you’re doing!? Don’t you know who I am? I’m the heir to the Malfoy-” Oh. Draco paused. “Potter!?”

Harry felt both bizarrely confused and concerned as he peered up at the waxed fridge above him. The boy had sounded so utterly self-entitled that Harry had instantly been pulled back to the compressed memories of his relatives, but the word, his name - the missing piece! - which had been uttered in conclusion sounded frank and without falsity.

Harry did his best to shuffle off the limb beneath him and reached out to it, pressing his thumbs lightly against the crusty bones. Draco’s muscles twitched in an attempt at evasion but Harry’s weak fingers held onto Draco tightly. The messy fringe hiding the famous lightning bolt scar was flicked backwards as the Boy Who Lived met the eyes of the pale fairy he had seen earlier that day. Confusion was drawing waves into the creamy skin of the blond till his forehead became a deformed copy of Harry's equally furrowed brows. Both were nervous. But as Harry’s thumbs rubbed gently against the bones in Draco’s joint, the pain slowly eased and vanished from the pureblood’s complexion. Nagini and Draco were both in awe at the mindless spell Harry had healed with, but the boy wonder remained naive, staring into the grey eyes in front of him and trying his best to reason out why on earth their meeting felt so... right.

X-X-X

“Unhand me, Potter.”

Harry dropped his hands instantly.

“You make it sound perverse.”

“The way you were touching me, it could have been.”

“How is touching someone’s ankle to make sure you haven’t broken it perverse?”

“You did break it, Scarface.”

“Well it’s not broken now, Ferretface.” Harry tugged on the boy’s ankle once more to prove his
“You think I look like a ferret?”

“Youh, a white one. All sharp lines but a fluffy little head.”

“Hah! Well then you look like a dormouse!”

“Really?”

“Absolutely!”

“Aw, how sweet of you. Thanks, Ferretface.”

“Thanks’?! That was meant to be an insult, Potter!”

“Well I didn’t take it that way,” Harry smiled overly sweetly.

“Well you should have done.”

“Oh. And why’s that?”

“Because dormice have fat faces and are lazy as all heck.”

“They get to sleep as much as they like and more people love them than hate them.”

“Well I hate them.”

“Well that’s a shame for you, because I quite like ferrets.”

Harry spied a drop of pink flush up the boy’s cheeks.

“So... I find myself at a disadvantage. You seem to know my name but I don’t yet know yours.”

“I’d have to be stupid not to know the name ‘Harry Potter’. Or dead. Or a hermit.”

“I’ve spent the last ten years of my life as a hermit or else I’m sure I would have heard more about the name ‘Malfoy’.”

“Well aren’t you a liar. You do know my name.”

“I know you were about to rant about being it’s heir before you saw who I was. But ‘Malfoy’ isn’t a first name.”

“Well spotted.”

“Are you going to tell me what yours is then? Or should I just remember you as ‘Ferretface’?”

“Fine. My name is Draco Malfoy. Happy now?”

Harry grinned up at him, still perched on the floor.

“Very.”

Draco gulped.

“It- It means dragon and I was given the name because everyone in the pure line of the Malfoy
family is destined to have an affinity with a certain creature—"

“You mean you can talk to dragons?”

“What? No. Barely anyone can talk to any sort of animal. It’s a skill only passed down to the most powerful descendants of the Hogwarts Founders themselves.”

Harry’s mind instantly zapped iron bars in front of his skills as a Parselmouth and remembered Nagini’s warning to always be careful before deciding on his allies.

“Having an affinity with dragons means that I’ll probably have one as my patronus and animagus form and—”

“And if you don’t?”

Draco didn’t like being interrupted.

“And if I don’t, Potter, then it would bring shame upon my name.”

There was a lull for a brief time and then Harry spoke again.

“What’s an animagus and patronus?”

“You don’t even know that much? That stupid Headmaster shouldn't have saddled you with those awful Muggles and actually taught you about your heritage!”

“Now that we agree on.”

“You’re not going to defend him?”

“I haven't even met him yet. All I know is that I hate being kept in the dark, and if I had the right to be a part of this world for the past eleven years of my life, then I can only be very upset that I missed out on it. Especially given what I had to trade it with.”

“I wouldn’t have wanted to stay with Muggles either, even if I was related to them.” Draco shivered whilst Harry fell silent a while.

“It wasn’t the fact they were Muggles that made me hate it.”

Draco met the green eyes below him and then jerked his chin away sharply.

“You don’t want to talk about it, I presume?”

“There you would be right.”

“That’s what I thought,” confirmed Draco, nodding to reassure himself. He couldn't let himself lose this chance.

“So, tell me you’ve at least heard of Hogwarts and the houses then.”

“How could I not have? I received my letter after all.”

Crap. *That was obvious. Stupid!*

“Do you think you’re going to fulfil your Gryffindor Golden Boy image then?”

“Do you? ”
“I’m here to try and persuade you otherwise,” Draco smirked.

Harry took the moment to get up and perch on the wide expanse of the chair’s arm. It was a perfectly respectable distance away from the blond, but it still made Draco flush enough to not have noticed the pause.

“I might be open to negotiation. But I’m not stupid enough to consider anything without a guarantee. You’re not afraid to swear, so would you swear me a vow of secrecy?”

Draco’s mind stuttered to a halt. A vow? As in an unbreakable vow? Did Potter even know what one of them was? About the consequences…?

“And… what would your vow entail?” The blond asked with hesitance.

“Nothing drastic. Just a little assurance, like I said. All I ask is that this meeting doesn’t make it to other people’s ears.”

“You think I’d tell anyone about this?”

“I don’t know you well enough, Draco. You imply that this carries weight for you too and isn’t just a casual meeting. I know I risk my image, but what do you risk, Mr Malfoy Heir?”

“...Enough. I risk enough. And we both know you risk far more than your image, Potter.”

“That may well be true. Does that mean you agree to my terms?”

“Something as simple as that? It’s easy to clear your mind, Potter. I’ll teach you if you like. Nobody needs to know anything you don’t want them to.”

Oh. Now that was of interest to Harry.

“So it’ll be no hardship on you?”

“None at all.”

And then there was a pause. One which stretched into minutes until Draco could no longer hold out.

“Well aren’t you going to make me take the vow, then?”

“Whyevever would I do that, Malfoy?” Harry smirked, enjoying the slight thrill of a power rush.

“Because-! Becuase you just-!”

Harry allowed his companion to rant half-heartedly in confusion for a few seconds longer before butting in.

“I might not trust you yet, Draco. But I trust my instincts and they’re telling me your word is more than enough.”

Another pause.

“Well you already have that, Scarface.”

“Good.”

“So... Gryffindor?”
“I said I could be persuaded.”

“But will you be?”

“No.”

“Why not? You could clearly fit in with the snakes with the way you talk.”

Harry giggled out a laugh so out of character with the power exchange which had come just before.

“Because, Draco, what would be the point of being a Slytherin if everyone knew you were one?”

X-X-X

Potter’s logic made sense to Draco. There was nothing more sensible than hiding in Gryffindor if hiding was indeed your goal. Which meant progressing wasn’t Potter’s...

“So you don’t plan to be claiming your rights and inheritance?”

Harry threw his mind back to Nagini telling him not to look at his inheritance test in Gringotts so answered simply: “Not yet.”

“Do you already have everything planned out?”

“As if I could. I only learned I was a wizard a few days ago.”

“So you’ve no idea what you’re doing then.”

“I wouldn’t say that.”

“But would it be true?”

“It wouldn’t be that either.”

“Huh.”

“I had assumed Malfoys were supposed to be eloquent.”

“You’ve heard me swear, you should know I’m an exception.”

“Mm.”

“That’s hardly eloquent either, Potter.”

“Harry.”

“What?”

“Call me ‘Harry’.”

“I think I prefer ‘Potter’.”

“Then I’ll be forced to call you ‘Malfoy’.”
“Perfect.”

Neither boy commented on the crease of disappointment which was evident on the blond’s face.

“As lovely as it has been to talk with you, Malfoy,” Harry said, getting up, “I really must be off.”

“‘Off’? Wherever to?”

“The Weasleys. I managed to get them to invite me to stay with them.”

“With those blood traitors?”

“Blood traitors’?”

“Purebloods who don’t follow wizarding traditions and don’t share our values.”

“Aren’t you one too, then?”

Draco smirked.

“Well done, Potter. But it wouldn’t do to advertise my views by ignoring the prejudices I’m expected to have.”

Harry smiled and nodded.

“No, I suppose it wouldn’t.”

“Will you take me up on my offer?”

“Remind me?”

“Teaching you how to clear your mind.”

Harry paused to consider. With Nagini by his side it would be simple enough to prevent harm from coming to him, even if Malfoy tried to enter his mind. Why not set up the first test to see if the blond could be trusted?

“I think I would like that.”

“When shall we meet?”

“I’d like to correspond with you first.”

“What purpose would that serve?”

“It’d allow me to change my mind.”

Draco paused. What did Potter mean by that?

“You know where I’ll be staying.”

“The Burrow,” Draco confirmed.

“Then I’ll wait for your letter,” Harry smiled.

Draco held out his hand and Harry glanced at it unsure. Draco didn’t budge though and eventually Harry did what he imagined could be the only thing Draco wanted from him - he grasped and shaked
his potential ally’s hand.

“It’s a promise. I give my word,” uttered Draco.

“I hope to trust you soon.”

And then Harry was gone, walking towards the exit, leaving Draco alone in the dull light of his rebellion with rapidly heating cheeks as he brought his hand to his lips and imagined Harry’s soft palm and sweet laugh.

*It won’t be difficult for him to hide in Gryffindor. Not at all.*

Chapter End Notes

So... they finally meet! Thoughts? Did I manage to meet your expectations. The chapter was longer than normal so if I end up not posting chapter number three today - forgive me, dear readers!
"What in GOD’S NAME was that, Potter!?"

It was nigh on dark now. Few lingered in the street and those who lived above their shops had mostly gone to bed. Harry felt sorry for the lot of them because the absurd shriek of his reptilian familiar was utterly horrifying. Harry knew that he had to calm her down, but if he stopped plowing on then he knew Nagini would think she had won their argument... and she hadn’t! Harry knew he was right, which was why he kept walking despite how much he felt sorry for the terrified toddler running away from him and the ceasing snores of shocked consciousness he heard from people’s bedrooms as he walked under their open windows.

“Nagini. Do you trust me?”

“It’sss not a matter of trusting you. It’sss a matter of who you’re trusssting!”

“Isn’t that the same thing?”

“No it’sss not! How many times have I told you to be careful around the people you’re trying to befriend?”

“Enough times for me to have a tumor from it.”

“It would be better if you did! Maybe then you’d remember what I was ssaying to you and the deadly consssequences of not lisstening!”

“I was listening and I handled the situation appropriately.”

“‘Appropriately’? ‘Appropriately’!? ”

Harry was doing his best to keep the vision of the emerald lady in his head to avoid slipping into Parseltongue. It was difficult though - plus he had to try and keep calm and his voice quiet too. The occasional passerby needed to know he was talking in English like anyone would do with a pet, but not the actual content of what he was saying.

“Yes, ‘appropriately’. This was a way for me to see what his intentions were and a way for me to back out of meeting him if he proved to be dangerous.”

“Why didn’t you make him ssswear a vow to you though? That would have been sssafer!”

“I don’t know what magic is fallible and infallible, but more importantly, if I’d made him swear loyalty to me then I would have instantly had the higher ground.”

“That’sss a good thing!”

“No it’s not. Not when you’re aiming for a partnership and not a mindless army. I still don’t know exactly where it is I’m heading and what I’m supposed to be doing, but I know for certain that a war on the scale you’ve told me about didn’t base itself on a team of people who collaborated and searched for a solution. I don’t want to be just another dictator. If I’m going to bring change then I have to be different.”
Nagini still hissed out her heaving breaths but at least she didn’t try to argue further. He was sure there were still many more points she had that she wanted to make, but either she was concerned about Harry keeping up his English or she was justifiably worried about him becoming exhausted again, and so she decided that it would be better to just safely deliver Harry to the Weasleys.

Harry had other plans though.

“Let’s go in here.”

Nagini followed him without question for all of about three seconds before she snapped out of her daze and took in a huge volume of air, about to begin lecturing again. Harry twisted instantly and produced the softest and most pleading look he could conjure, accompanying it with a soft “please”. Nagini visibly deflated.

“Alright. Fine. But quickly. I want you with the Weasleys before it getsss dark.”

“Of course,” replied Harry and hurried in.

The Junk Shop. By all measures this was not the place the boy hero should be, but Harry just felt as though he couldn’t resist his curiosity. It almost felt like the thrum he’d had when he was pulled towards Draco. Did he have some sort of secret sixth sense?

“Do you think there’s anything of value in here, Nagini?”

“I’d throw the quessstion back at you if I didn’t think that wasss your way of getting me to look.”

Resigned, the serpent slithered off to inspect all the isles, Harry following swiftly behind her. Harry had made a lot of purchases that day and as he looked at the bulging bag his familiar was carrying in addition to the weight of both a sleeping Louis and lazy Hedwig, he began to feel incredibly guilty. He suspected he would just be shot down if he made any offers to help and so could only hope that she had some sort of spell to make the load lighter. If she was strong enough to carry all that without some sort of charm though… Harry shuddered to think at her true power.

X-X-X

Tom?

No. Wait.

Not Tom. It couldn’t be. He had yet to be resurrected. Her former master was likely still floating without a home or his heart.

But she could still sense him. Nearby. An object of his he had imbued with a heavy dose of his magic, perhaps? It was the only thing which made sense. And yet all that laid in front of her was a plain book. With lined pages. One for writing in. She flicked the end of her tail over it but found she was instantly repelled by the magic it contained. She had thought that she would at least have some sort of privileged access given her former master had also formed a bond with her. And yet…

“What’s that, Nagini?” And then Harry was leaning towards it.

“No! HARRY!”
“What?” And his hand grasped around the leather binding.

What?

*What is God’s name…?*

“What is it, Nagini? You’re scaring me.”

“I- I- That book was Tom’sss… Voldemort’sss… Even I couldn’t touch it. I felt ccertain it was going to either rip you apart or curse you. Why can you touch it? Why aren’t you hurt by it? It ssshould be impossible!”

To that, Harry had no answer. He couldn’t open the notebook no matter how much force he applied to it though. But that was no consolation to the serpent.

Nagini’s head was buzzing. What exactly were the enchantments, then? Was the ancient magic she felt earlier a result of something her former master had done? Was Harry experiencing its effects today because he was in the same street as the book? Was the book dangerous? Or was it some sort of test - to see if Harry would become his ally? How did he know Harry would be the one to pick it up? He couldn’t. Or could he?

Nagini also lacked answers, so instead of doing nothing she forced Harry out of the shop, dumping a couple of coppers on the counter for the book before leaving.

The stars were about to peek through but Nagini was gong to manage to get Harry to the ginger menaces before nightfall. She would protect him from all that she could. He was her new master, after all.

Chapter End Notes

So somehow I did manage to push a third one out today! But because the Diagon Alley arc is now over, I will be dropping down to two. Here, I plan to have more interaction with Draco but in regards to plot for the entire month of August spent with the Weasleys... any ideas are welcome!
Harry felt more than a little bit chastised. First, there had been Nagini with her mostly valid points and worried hissing, and then there had been Mrs Weasley-Molly, who had fuss ed at his hair and tutted about it being dark by the time he returned to the Three Broomsticks. Both had agreed that he had been reckless and their agreement had been the only positive thing about the whole experience. Nevertheless, Molly had ensured Harry knew that she was proud of his initiative and that he would make a fine Gryffindor, whilst Nagini had told him she was waiting to be proven wrong in regards to their argument and that he had done a good job of persuading everyone (including her) of his foolishness and thus his supposed lionheart.

When Harry had arrived at the Burrow, he had instantly become concerned for the group’s mutual safety as the house towered ten stories high with each floor stacked like a crooked chocolate box on a pile of precariously positioned gifts at a birthday party. Dudley’s birthday party…

“Well we’re here, dear! It might not be as much as what some people have, but it’s enough for us, and what we don’t have in our pockets, we have in our hearts.”

Harry knew that there would surely be huge manors in the wizarding world, just as there were in the Muggle world, but he didn’t speak a word of a lie as he looked up at the house which shouted “home” and simply said: “It’s perfect.”

Commotion was a-buzz after that point, with Molly puttering about trying to make enough supper for ten mouths in only an hour and the four youngest Weasley children all trying to drag Harry to their respective bedrooms. Ginny was probably being nicest with her attention, just shyly pulling at his cuff and hoping he would follow her. She said something about a pet named Pudding that she wanted to show him and had it not been for Nagini’s hungry interest in having Pudding as her dessert, Harry might well have agreed to follow her. As it was, he ended up being dragged into the twins’ bedroom, with Ron running off, ears puffing steam, muttering something along the lines of “-come with me as soon as I’ve taken them down!” Harry might have tried to pay more attention or indeed analyse the events going on around him in more detail, but if he were to be honest with himself, all he really wanted to do was relax.

When Harry got to the slightly bigger room which was shared by the two ginger menaces, he sank into the floor as they began listing off their pranking prowess and displaying all the creations they’d made themselves. The floor was wooden and a little squeaky, but it seemed to absorb Harry, just like the whole atmosphere of family warmth. It was like a hug from Molly, or the absent silence - replaced by nine gingers rushing around.

“-and so we just couldn’t resist, you see!”

“His hair was really pretty pink-”

“-and even though we’re sure he knew it was us-”

“-he was in too much of a hurry to make a big deal of it-”

“-so he just sneered and stalked off.”

“We don’t even think he bothered telling Dad about it-”
“-maybe he thought he was scary enough-”
“-and that we just wouldn’t do it again-”
“-but oh how wrong he was-”
“I’m sorry,” Harry interrupted, “But who are you talking about?”
The twins looked and each other and pronounced in unison, “Why! Lucius Malfoy, of course!”
Malfoy?
“As in Draco Malfoy’s father?”
“You know that prat?”
Should he admit to it?
“Yeah… I ended up running into him earlier today.”
The twins looked suddenly stiff, as though they had forgotten all about their nature as tricksters and
has swallowed a pair of rusty steel poles.
“And… what did you think of him?” Asked Fred.
“Of Ferretface?”
Another pause.
“‘Ferretface’?!” They laughed madly at that. “Pahaha! Oh my God, that’s perfect. Wait till we tell
Ron about this.”
Harry laughed with them too, although not to the extreme of the older boys. Was there some sort of
inside joke he didn’t know about?
“Does Ron hate him then? I mean sure he looks like a tosser in a rat’s body-”
The twins cut him off by piquing their laughter even further.
“‘Tosser’ - Hah! I’d love to see you say that to his face,” cackled George.
“I called him ‘Ferretface’ to his face.”
“You did?!”
“Well yeah. He kept saying ‘Potter, this’ and ‘Potter, that’, and when he wouldn’t give me his name I
just asked him whether I should keep thinking of him as ‘Ferretface’ then.”
“Ha! I would have paid to see the experion on his face when you said that!”
“Oh it was worth it. His eyes were the size of Galleons and his mouth just dropped open. I probably
could have thrown an egg into it, his jaw was hanging so low down.”
“Oh my God-” Trailed off George as tears flooded from his eyes, “I think I’m going to die of
laughter.”
“Now we’ll finally have something to call him back in return!” laughed Fred merrily.
“‘In return’?”

“Yeah, he always sneers at us and calls us ‘Weasels’ - so now justice has finally come and we shall have our own back at him!”

Harry continued to laugh with the twins for the next half an hour until Ron firmly burst it, huffing and panting and demanding his right to “Harry time”, dragging the messy-haired half-blood over to the stairs and then to his room.

X-X-X

Harry had the distinct impression that all the chocolate boxes which made up the Burrow were added on with the birth of each child. Ginny had a room on the top floor and it seemed as though the logic continued down the floors and up the children.

Ron’s room looked a little bare, but remembering that he had said something about clearing some stuff before his new friend arrived, Harry thought that there was probably some sort of embarrassing collection which Ron didn’t yet trust Harry with. Perhaps he was afraid of being teased. Harry’s experiences with Dudley meant he knew he would be incapable of such a cruelty, but if Ron didn’t feel like he could be entirely open with him, then that at least made Harry feel less guilty about not being entirely open with him either.

“So, er, this is my room. Mum said she’d transfigure-

"Transfigure?” Harry cut in.

"Yeah - turn another object into a bed and you could stay in here with me. It might be a bit of a squeeze but-”

“But we’ll get to spend time together and that makes up for everything,” smarmed Harry with a blinding smile. His feet were touching one another in an unfinished cross of his legs, and he was rocking back and forth gently in the most innocent of ways he could imagine. With each rock he sank a little further into the mattress below him and with each laugh he felt himself grow closer to Ron despite his reservations.

Maybe Ron wasn’t hiding anything and was just being kind by freeing up space for Harry’s things. If that was the general attitude of Gryffindors, then Harry would surely benefit from staying with the Weasleys and getting to know their tricks and traits.

Initially, when Harry had first spoken, Ron had flushed a bright red but that hadn’t stopped him being extremely eager to tell Harry all about Hogwarts and Quidditch. Some of the facts Harry already knew, but he realised it was just easier to act as though he didn’t. Quidditch - a sport he had learned from Nagini was played on broomsticks - really did interest him though, and before he knew it, an hour had passed and the magnified voice of Molly Weasley was demanding their attendance for supper.

Chapter End Notes
Not sure how this chapter turned out. Opinions?
“Ferretface” had gone down a treat with everyone else at supper too. Molly may have tried to chide her children a little bit, but after a one-armed hug from her husband, she let go and produced her own motherly chuckling. It was clear from her eyes that she was already growing fond of Harry, and Arthur had to agree that he was a sweet boy and not at all the pompous boy hero that The Daily Prophet had suggested he might have become. Dumbledore had clearly made the right choice in sending Harry to stay with his Muggle relatives, but he didn’t fault the boy for running away from them the moment he heard about what wonders lay in store for him either.

Ron was incredibly happy too and even though he had spent half the day embarrassed to the tips of his ears once his brothers had started teasing him about his collection of Harry Potter memorabilia - he looked far brighter than Arthur had seen him for a while now. He knew full well the burden of being the youngest son, especially in a big family like theirs.

Harry was doing his best to glue a smile to his face but the corners of his happiness were peeling. He had been hoping to relax here but he found it was just as stressful keeping up appearances before the redheads as it was playing the game of “who knows what” with Draco - in fact, it was even more difficult to maintain his image here. Draco had known he wasn’t what everyone thought him to be, but the Weasleys wanted him to be the Gryffindor Golden Boy and so Harry couldn’t allow himself to be anything else. Was this what awaited him at Hogwarts? Stress and lies?

Although, Harry had to be fair - it wasn’t too bad. He could join in with the cheer and the merriment and the laughter, but he hadn’t been expecting the collective praise coming his way in response to a single teasing nickname. In fact, what has been a lighthearted joke between two equally lost boys had been twisted by this family into a form of revenge. Harry had got a sense of Draco’s true colours and he wanted so badly to stand up and defend him, but he knew that would get him nowhere. Had Draco personally done something against the Weasleys - to keep up his own appearances or otherwise? Or was the cruel face of his father the one that had scarred what would otherwise have been a totally loving family? Harry didn’t dare to ask.

The roasted bird was consumed relatively quickly and with the many delicious trimmings, Harry found himself full. An hour later, after chatting awhile with Ron once the lights had popped off, Harry felt his words getting slower and his eyes dropping closed and then the soft comfort of blankets enveloped him into a sweet well of darkness once more.

X-X-X

Albus Dumbledore was fuming. His life was supposed to be resolving itself, his luck taking a turn for the better - not for the worse! He had been changing into new robes after his latest potions experiment had burned irreparable holes in yet another set, when he had noticed the change to the Rose.

The hours which followed were of the rare kind in which Aberforth felt well and truly incapable. Normally he could either reason with or respond to his brother - limiting him or making notes on his
weaknesses - but when that blasted flower changed, he could do nothing. Nothing at all. The thing which had made the day a pinnacle of terror though, was the fact that the news kept getting worse and Albus’ normal spell of madness just refused to be quashed.

First, Hagrid had come to tell his brother that he hadn’t guided the boy like the bitter old fool had requested - or rather, ordered - and had instead just kept him company when he felt the boy was vulnerable without his snake. Hagrid, the naive man, completely missed the entirety of his brother’s rant about how the snake was the one which was dangerous. Instead, the half-giant remained in a haze of happiness at Harry already knowing his name despite never meeting the groundsman before.

His brother had thankfully managed to calm down after that, but only just. The peace wasn’t to last though because news from the Ministry about delayed plans came in, and then another seat on the powerful board which dealt justice being lost before his brother had had chance to snap it up became apparent - all of which culminated in Albus destroying his office beyond repair. The Headmaster was rarely as thankful for Aberforth as in the aftermath of such violent events when his precious memories and scriptures remained intact amongst the rubble of all that had been left without a charm. Albus never bothered to consider whether his brother had spent time learning a form of ancient magic which could overpower him or was actually the more powerful one out of the two. Aberforth supposed that his brother’s ugly pride meant he would only ever believe the first option anyway. Either way, the rinse and repeat of gratitude would inevitably come with the dawn, or so Aberforth had thought.

At midnight, Albus had received an owl from Hagrid. A simple apology from a simple man who couldn’t understand the vast consequences his actions had for the madman. Losing the dragon egg made Hagrid cry fat sloppy tears. Losing the dragon egg made Albus Dumbledore seethe ice cold glaciers. Aberforth was assured that gratitude would now be impossible for at least a week.

X-X-X

The first time it had happened, Harry had been about eight. A scrawny little boy, far smaller than he should have been for his age. His eyes were already failing him and if anyone decided to take his glasses then Harry felt himself get lost in a world of fog.

Cold. It had been cold. That much Harry had known from the moment it had begun. Being naked in the dirty playground on a Saturday evening during winter was cold. Whenever Harry shivered and tried to cover himself he’d find taunting voices cajoling him to be a “pretty boy” for them and telling him “don’t cover up”. Harry hated the words beautiful and pretty. At least when they were applied to him. If anyone could make him believe those words meant what others claimed they should, then that person would be a miracle-worker and Harry would worship them like Jesus Christ. They would be his savior.

“Open up.” Those two words had always made Harry shiver. Dudley made friends his own age and friends who were already in high school. Dudley’s friends would knock on the door and ask for Harry when the rest of the family were out.

“Knock knock. Open up.”

And then back to the playground for the boy wonder.

After a month of just taunting, Dudley’s fiends decided they wanted more. It only got worse from
then on. Worse and worse. And then “open up” meant another thing too. Harry hated his laugh and his body because he sounded and looked like a girl. But he hated his body all the more now because whenever puberty would flex its fist, he would feel the arousal he had come to hate with a mighty disgust, and when he would suffer from dreams which made Ron blush, Harry would wake up screaming with tears pouring down his face.

From the first night at the Burrow, Harry knew that no matter what secrets he kept from the Weasleys, they would all know his deep and dirty shame and their pity did nothing to make him feel better, in fact, when he was first woken up by the calming touch of Molly at an ungodly hour in the morning, he had actually thrown up.

Chapter End Notes

Does this chapter justify Harry's distancing from Draco earlier? But more importantly - thoughts on the nightmare?
Draco was on the verge of pulling up his hair out. Literally. He had been pacing his room for what felt like eons before finally gathering up his courage to sit down and pen a note to Potter. Or at least, that had been his intention. Instead, he was sitting in a room crowded with crumpled parchment and debating why on earth he had lost his fluent eloquence. No matter what he wrote, it just didn’t sound right! It was as though the very words themselves conveyed the same jauntiness that inkblots unavoidably did. Draco sighed. *Damnit, Potter!*

There were probably other things he could be doing. *Should* be doing. His father was sprawled across a couch in one their many reception rooms, entertaining Uncle Severus. Seemingly there had been something relating to their mutual interests which required utmost secrecy and many gallons of pain relief potions to be downed alongside their breakfast. Draco recognised the potential gold mine to be had in their meeting - he could learn so much through just a little bit of eavesdropping. Currently though, he had more persistent tasks which required his attention. Namely, finding a way to begin a letter to Potter which sounded neither overly pompous nor overly eager. Draco undeniably had ulterior motives in mind for their meetings, just as he was sure Potter did, but that didn’t mean he would allow himself to sink to the level of actually indicating what they were. It wouldn’t do for a Slytherin to sound less like one than a hopeful Gryffindor.

Draco began again.

*Dear Potter,*

Nope.

*Dear Harry Potter,*

Not that either.

*Dear Harry,*

Definitely not.

Buggering priests - this wasn’t supposed to be hard. The address was supposed to be the easiest bit! Maybe it was the “dear” which was wrong. There wasn’t nothing “dear” about Potter, or at least nothing he would admit.

*Potter,*

Yes! Okay. And now the hard part.

*I wish to invite you to Malfoy Manor-*

As if Potter would agree to that. Draco had almost been forced into a vow of secrecy. It would be foolish to propose something as inconsiderate as a blatant meeting with a supposed enemy on said enemy’s home turf. Draco Malfoy was no fool and he wouldn’t be made to look like one either. His flushed cheeks the evening before had been enough humiliation. His only saving grace was that Potter didn’t seem to have noticed.
I was glad when you agreed-
Better.

To our meetings.
No. Don’t mention the meetings at all.

To correspond with me.
Good!

I am certain that this is a good first step towards-
Towards what?

Developing our friendship further.
That seemed acceptable.

I hope you find your accommodation to be bearable-
No that would be insulting if any of the ginger Weasels were to see it.

Passable-
No.

Acceptable-
No.

Agreeable-
Better.

Satisfactory-
Not quite. Perhaps something longer.

I hope your accommodation issue was resolved in good time and without problems.
There. Brilliant, even if he did say so himself. Vague enough so that it couldn’t be used against him should it fall into the wrong hands and certainly not insulting.

I would very much like it if-
How to put it?

You would-
Yes…

Meet me in Diagon Alley again-
No. No no no. No specifics - remember?
Agree to meet with me once more.

Oh fucker. He was beginning to sound like some flirty French marionette - a doll-like pureblood daughter that did as the family patriarch demanded. This wasn’t some tentative beginning to an underage courtship! But wait- perhaps that was it! Boy meets girl. The boy is so enchanted by the girl’s charm and beauty that he agrees to correspond with her. The boy doesn’t reveal her identity though because a romance is something society allows people to be secretive and embarrassed about. Oh it was perfect! Why hadn’t he thought of that before? And if it gave him a chance to imagine what sort of nothings the girl might mail the boy in the future, then all the better.

Back to “Potter” then. “Potter” was replaced with “Dear Harry” and from that point onwards the writing flowed out seamlessly. Draco adapted to his role, slipping in light flirtations and suggestions and by the time he was done, Draco had a grin sprawling across his face as he imagined Potter’s reaction. Would he splutter out the Weasley breakfast over those awful twins that enjoyed taunting him all too much? Or would Potter have made it back to his room by the time his owl arrived? Undoubtedly he would be sharing a pokey little cell with the youngest boy - Ronald, was it? - which might well create an even more amusing situation should the unmannered blood traitor wrestle the letter off Potter without the watchful eye of the red-haired matriarch keeping him on a leash.

“Isaac,” Draco pronounced with finality. Not even two seconds later, a wide wingspan engulfed his window and a large eagle owl landed in front of him.

“Please deliver this to the Burrow. Be careful not to allow anyone to take it from you but Harry Potter, alright?”

Draco wasn’t his father. He requested. He didn’t order his loyal friends and companions.

“Thank you, strong one.”

It seemed an odd pet name, but the owl appreciated the praise and served Draco far better than the personal owls of the Malfoy patriarch attended to the older aristocrat.

X-X-X

“What other options remain if it is not to do with the Dark Lord?” Began the blond wizard.

“It could be linked to any one of the trio.”

“Dumbledore hasn’t taken any action recently. Or at least - nothing of great importance.”

“Yes. I heard Potter rather scuppered his nice neat plans.”

“Mm. I plan to see if Draco can befriend the boy and progress our cause.”

“I’m certain he shall succeed. The old fool has never been able to account for the differences between himself and others.”

“You would know, Severus. No sympathy. No empathy. Nothing but greed in that man.”

“I shall do my best to support Draco in his task, however, given my position, I cannot guarantee anything.”
“I don’t expect anything more from you than what you can give. You know that, Severus.”

“I do, yet I fear old age is creeping up on us and I find myself reminding you, lest I forget.”

“Oh, don’t talk about age! We are still young, Severus! And whilst the old fool is remains amongst the living, I have no desire to consider myself similar to him in any way, shape or form. And especially not in age.”

“You, at least, have always looked handsome, Lucius, and will continue to do so no matter your age.”

“Was that an attempt at fishing for compliments?”

“We both know it wasn’t.”

Lucius sighed.

“I wish you had more belief in yourself.”

“I have plenty of belief in myself, thank you.”

“Not as a scholar. And not as a soldier. And not even as a professor. I mean as a man.”

“What are you trying to say by that? My work is all that I am.”

“You and I both know that isn’t quite true. Hopefully you’ll come to see that I’m right soon enough.”

Severus huffed out a laugh of derision which only earned him a dark look.

“I’ll support Draco how I can Lucius, and should Potter prove to be worth more to us than a mere boy easy to persuade, then all the better.”

“Oh? And how would he prove that?”

“By recognising my position and coming to me before anyone has the chance to influence him enough to convince him of the supposed identity I possess under my snark.”

“I told you that he is undoubtedly being accompanied by Nagni, and should Draco—”

“Nagini won’t tell him anything. You know how she is and always has been. Even the Dark Lord had to work to get her advice and wisdom. Her knowledge came at the price of humbling yourself to learn without shame. And Draco… even if he were as persuasive as you have always been, he wouldn’t be able to convince Potter that I am anything but a cruel man. Not for many years at least, and especially not after the first lesson I intend to give them.”

“You never make it easy, do you?”

“Why would I? If I don’t practice resisting the easy path in life, I would be too tempted by Dumbledore’s offer of the Light.”

Lucius smirked and it reached his eyes. He gazed across at his dear friend and wondered softly if he would ever be as persuasive as his friend though him to be. He hoped that he would eventually be able to convince Severus of a few important things, including the fact that underneath the garment of sarcastic defense, there was much to be loved and much to be adored. Lucius’ smile turned self-mocking as he ran his functionless cane against the tip of Severus’ toes, enjoying the slight shiver it produced. He tilted the length so that the point which met the floor scurried up the raven’s leg in a
light caress. And then it was gone again, Lucius’ intentions drifting off with his breath as he retracted his desire. There were things to do and he couldn’t let himself indulge until they were done.

Chapter End Notes

Sadly, we had a storm last night which has made our Internet connection dodgy, meaning I've spent more time today trying to fix it that writing for this fic. I hope I'll be able to finish another chapter today - but apologies in advance if not. Anyway! I hope you enjoyed the chapter!
Hermione Granger had always had a complex about herself. Her parents were both extremely beautiful and, she had to admit, intelligent - they had to be in order to be dentists with medical degrees. Hermione was the opposite of them though - being incredibly clever but with few features which redeemed her appearance. Her face was too small around large teeth and her eyes always looked unsettled. The bullying she had encountered because of her looks had been made worse by the fact that everyone had expected her to be gorgeous. Instead, she had been gifted with cleverness which deserved equal superlatives to those her stunning parents always received - but none of that mattered because all anyone cared about was the fact she wasn’t pretty. She was supposed to be pretty, not smart. Because she was a girl and because she was a Granger. Hermione hated that.

Being arrogant and pompous had been the only defence she could conjure against her bullies. Self-knowledge of her own superiority had saved her from depression but it hadn’t worked entirely in her favour either. Instead of being praised for her book smarts, Hermione’s teachers had taken it upon themselves to chastise her for not being able to make friends. They didn’t do anything about the bullies. No. Instead, they said Hermione was the one being mean - making everyone feel like they weren’t worth anything. Well they weren’t! All they did was spend time making others feel horrible and crying to people more powerful than them as soon as the tables were turned. Hermione hated people like that. Hermione hated children. Hermione knew from the moment she turned eleven that she never wanted to have children and that she would do her utmost to make sure she never would.

Luna Lovegood was brilliant. She was fascinating and fortunate. She was a fighter and a flyer. She adored life and she adored love. She adored man, woman and child. She seemed fragile, but couldn’t be broken; she seemed scatter-brained, but knew more with a glance than anyone else could. Luna Lovegood had been the jewel in the crown of her parents, and to this day she was all her father cared about. He would make sure she would live happily and well.

The darling girl had once been the target of the Malfoy line. A betrothal from birth had been their intended move but her mother had always been strong in that gentle way of hers. Smiling yet unyielding. Her mother had simply said “no”. Thus, Luna had never been betrothed to Draco Malfoy and it was possible that his parents had never forgiven her family for it. It was also possible that they simply didn’t care. It had been Draco’s grandfather who had been so obsessed with the rare ability she possessed as well as the other formalities of their world. But now he was dead and the two generations left in their world were rebels. They - the Malfoys - were not the same.

Luna knew a great many things which was why she wasn’t scared - not by the Malfoys, nor by anything else. She had yet to see the famed Headmaster in person though. Maybe then she would feel the emotion of terror clambering up her throat for the first time. Hopefully Draco wouldn’t mind displaying the friendship which had grown between them should she need the rare solace of his company during her first night at Hogwarts. Hopefully Draco would stay quiet and just rock her to sleep. Hopefully he would ask her before giving her tears to his godfather for potion ingredients. The few times she was given the chance to control the events which made up the fate she could see
around her were precious. Luna would almost always say "yes" but was thankful for the question every time.

Severus Snape had loved Lily Evans. He had loved her dearly - but as a friend. Mostly. Severus Snape was not the traditional man his abusive father had always wanted him to be though, and as much as the ginger hair of his childhood friend had turned his head, so had the messy-fringe and snickering charm of a certain James Potter.

Painful history had torn possible reality away from romantic desires many years ago, but Severus hadn’t been stupid and had eventually turned his sentiments of injustice away from the pawns that had been used, and towards the real culprit. After long periods of observation, Severus had been left with no doubt that the man who should have been protecting him, had actually been the one instigating the attacks. Faith in an idea could make you believe it was your own, but that didn’t change the fact that a neck had tilted your head to look in that direction. Severus couldn’t let on with his position, but if he survived and the time came, he knew that he would be capable of forgiving those children who had made his life hell.

The Head of Slytherin was a loyal man who knew what life could throw at him. He knew that he had made mistakes and that he would do all that he could to make up for them. But Severus Snape was not a pawn. Nor was he a rook. At least, not on the white side of the chess board. He was his own colour. He was grey. He was a third side. He would fulfil the duty expected of him in order to cover his own intentions. And then he would carve his own path to satisfy the sense of duty he held within himself, and with that he would be able to restore his loyalty in the best way he knew - by swearing himself to the last totem of the Potter he had loved once long ago.

Narcissa Malfoy loved her husband dearly. As a friend. Rarely did pureblood couples love one another in any capacity. Love was beside the point. Heirs were the point. So Narcissa felt very lucky indeed that fortune had smiled on her and given her both a son she adored and a husband she loved. A man who understood her and who supported her but who expected nothing in return. The love they shared was perhaps purer than one romantic couples would experience. “I love you so don’t love anyone else.” “I’ll stay with you so don’t leave me.” Expectations. Lucius expected nothing from her but she gave him everything he needed without question, because he would always ask and never demand. She loved him impossibly. She loved him undeniably. The only person she loved more was her son.

Lucius and Narcissa had been considered the king and queen of Slytherin during their time at Hogwarts and their titles had been justified. Not only because of their looks and their wealth, but also because of their exemplary behavior as cunning and ambitious students who always managed to do well. It was how they had succeeded in getting so far in life without indecency, illness or impediment. It also explained how they had managed to fool their marriage contract. The demand for the wife not to take lovers to guarantee the purity of the Malfoy line had been replaced by Abraxas when the couple proffered their dedication to one another and offered up the far stronger clause of a
blood bond. Abraxus Malfoy had accepted the terms and had his son wed to the rule and line of ancient magic. Many had thought the youngsters foolish. Many had thoughts they would grow tired of one another and regret their eagerness. But Abraxas had died soon after their wedding. Conveniently. And the couple were free to do as they liked. A blood bond meant nothing to them because they were already prepared to gift each other loyalty and shed their blood for their best friend. A blood bond was perfect for them and allowed them the love they both needed.

Narcissa Malfoy ran a hand over her husband’s shoulder when she entered the room he was in and gave it a firm squeeze.

“Not yet, Cissy.”

“I know. But in time you will have your chance with him.”

“I can only hope I won’t be too late.”

Chapter End Notes

So I managed my second chapter for the day. More backstory and character development. Thoughts?
Breakfast the next morning was certainly... interesting, to say the least. Harry didn’t know if the Weasleys were afraid to ask him about last night to protect his feelings or if there was some other reason. Had he said something in his sleep? No - Nagini would have told him if he’d let slip something of an incriminating nature. Were they embarrassed for him then? Or maybe they just didn’t know how to start. In that case, it was only natural that he should. And if they were giving him the choice about whether he wanted to talk about last night or not, then that meant he could start with something innocent. He was getting good at this - reading people.

“Um, Mrs Weasley. I actually bought you some tea to say thank you…” Harry trailed off shyly from his full plate of cooked breakfast.

“Oh - it’s Molly, dear. And how sweet of you! You really didn’t have to- My goodness, this is our favorite, isn’t it Arthur? How darling of you…”

And so chatter resumed once more. Harry would have been right in thinking that he was not the only of heaving a sigh of relief at the eased the tension.

Knock.

Knock knock.

Ten minutes after Harry’s great maneuver, his eyes bulged in surprise as his gaze met a beady pair of amber staring at him through the window, his shock propelled him into a coughing fit. Holy Christ!

“Harry!”

And once he’d calmed down, he dared to glance at the yellow eyes again. And now everyone else turned too. For all of a moment, it was surreal. Nine gingers and one Boy Who Lived desperately trying to out-stare an owl who hadn't blinked in eight minutes. And then action resumed.

“Oh let the thing in would you, Charlie?”

“Why does Charlie always get to do it?”

“Because animals like him, dear. You and your brother just use them to test your pranks on.”

“We can’t help the fact our dear relatives don’t love us enough to help us.”

“You should be thankful we love you enough to keep you in one piece,” muttered Percy.

“Mum! Percy’s being a mea-nie!”

“We all know you deserve it, loves.”

The twins pouted and instantly began scheming about what they could conjured to get back at their brother that evening.

“It won’t give me the letter, mum.”
“How odd-” Molly began, only to be cut off by the flight of the winged beast. Harry wasn’t sure if she was actually scared or just shocked - her cut off squeak could have meant either. Harry also suspected that the Weasleys were about to hop into action to capture to bird - except it just gently plopped down with all the grace of the owner Harry was becoming certain it belonged to, and marched along the length of the breakfast table towards him, thrusting out his leg and preening at a job well done. Harry internally laughed. Like master, like familiar. *Except they likely don’t share a bond that strong, do they? Maybe that’s something I can offer in return? It’d certainly be useful and erase my debt.* Harry would tell Nagini of his plans later.

Harry swallowed visibly, afraid the Weasleys might demand to know who was sending Harry mail, their eager necks bent their curious faces towards him. It would be okay. He had enough time to read the letter and make something up for them. The red wax of an unidentifiable crest gave below his thumb and he gently swooped the parchment open, his eyes adjusting to the calligraphy:

> Dear Harry,

...Okay. Did that mean it wasn’t Draco?

> I was glad when you agreed to correspond with me.

So it was Draco. No, Malfoy. Draco wanted him to call him Malfoy and the Weasleys certainly would never call the boy by his honourable name.

> It has given me such pleasure to put quill to parchment and pen this note to you, knowing that you would read it.

Harry’s face of neutrality twitched. What on earth…

> In fact, I found myself wondering what I should write - I neither wanted to waste your time nor cause you to withhold your reply.

Hang on. Malfoy was acting like a girl trying to flirt. The only thing which made sense was a cover. Oh! The boy was brilliant. Harry’s cheeks resisted further as they desperately tried to crinkle into a grin.

> As it stands, though, I believe I shouldn’t hold back my thoughts from you when I was so intrigued by yours, and would find myself deploring my own actions should I cause you to censor what you say.

Was that supposed to be code for something? For what? Did it mean that Malfoy wouldn’t be afraid to communicate by letter and that Harry shouldn't be either? Should he be? If he adopted a style similar to Malfoy’s, maybe he shouldn’t.

> I wish to tell you that I am certain that this is a perfect first step towards developing our friendship further-

Harry barely held back a snort, wondering if Draco had floated into his role and written that line with ease, or if he had squawked in discontent at having to use the word “friends” to describe their relationship. Although perhaps this meant that there was hope yet and that Harry could persuade the blond to see their bond in such a light.

> -and that I can only hope to keep you entertained with my words.

Entertained? Was that a way of saying he hoped to continue to prove himself useful and not lose
their alliance? Harry wouldn’t tell the blond, but the aristocrat had already secured himself that.

*I hope your accommodation issue was resolved in good time and without problems.*

Malfoy knew he was staying with the Weasleys. Was that supposed to be a warning - telling him he needed to be careful? He already knew that. Or maybe, knowing Malfoy's attitude, it was a slight jab at the family offering him their home. Given the snide remarks and casual distaste towards the aristocratic family he had seen in the ginger household, Harry couldn't find it within himself to criticise the boy for his attitude.

*I would very much like it if you would agree to meet with me once more.*

Harry paused. He knew that Malfoy was supposed to be writing in a certain tone… but for some reason that line just made his facade finally shatter as a flush gathered on his cheekbones and across his nose. “Meet with me once more” made them sound like clandestine lovers. Harry shook his head. He could handle his body’s responses more often than not and sometimes the heat that came with arousal actually felt pleasant. *More than pleasant.* Harry could indulge and enjoy the warmth of happiness that bobbed in him. His mind was stable and not relaxing into the traitorous world of dreams. The drawer was snapped shut and his memories were tucked away. They wouldn’t hurt him. Not at the Weasleys’ dinner table. Harry glanced up and caught the nine pairs of eyes and rigidly swallowed. A pack of curious Weasleys, however, might.

Chapter End Notes

Did you enjoy the chapter? I hope I balanced out the hints of attraction quite well ^u^
A month ago, Hermione Granger’s world had changed. A tight-faced woman had appeared on her doorstep and brought her into a magical reality which her own logical mind had refused to believe existed. The woman had turned into a cat, she had turned the TV into a sofa and she had completed their extension in all of nine seconds. Magic did exist. After several minutes of tear-less consideration and resigned acceptance, she concluded that she simply had to believe that.

Her parents seemed even less bothered by the revelation than she was though, and that worried her. They were Muggles, apparently, whilst she was a Muggleborn. And yet it was as though they had already known and had been keeping this looming secret from her.

The magical world was surely full of immense opportunities, and yet Hermione had lowered her expectations so much that she simply didn’t believe anything would change. She would still be taunted for not being pretty and she would still be punished for the thing she knew was more important than anything else. Hermione Granger had been betrayed far too often to believe in “better”. She was a realist not an optimist. But on the second day of August, her world really did change. A month ago, when Professor McGonagall had visited her, the trees had become willows which tried to kill you and the mailmen had turned into owls which pecked at your fingers - the setting changed, but the narrative did not. On the second day of August though... Professor Dumbledore visited. He visited and he turned her world upside down, because for once he told her that she was right, that her brains were worth so much more - he had told her “well done”.

X-X-X

Draco was irritated, a tick growing vibrantly across his forehead. What was Potter doing? He had expected a reply from him an hour ago!

Draco liked to think he was patient. A cunning little snake who could lay in wait just perfectly calmly. Draco Malfoy wasn’t honest, even with himself, though, and it was a complete lie to say that he was patient. He just liked to tell everyone else that he was and that they needed to be too.

Had the Weasleys caused trouble for Potter? Draco had tried to cover his tracks but perhaps he had overdone it. Was Potter unable to defend himself? He knew the boy wonder wouldn't have admitted their relation but perhaps he had flushed and found himself blushing bright red at the tone of the letter and the inevitable questions Draco had predicted would stem from it.

The blond shifted, moving between pacing and plonking back down inelegantly into his chair, wondering whether or not he would regret what he had thought would be a fun little way to tease or whether he would be praised for his genius instead.

X-X-X
Malfoy was something special alright. Harry didn’t know anyone that he wanted to kiss, praise and punch all at the same time other than that blond ferret at right this moment. Harry Potter was about to die of embarrassment for something that didn’t even exist! The questions had started off tame - “Oh, so did you meet a girl whilst you were out yesterday, dear?” and “How old is she? Is she going to be joining with you this year?” and “Is she going to be a lion too?” Harry was fairly certain that he had answered none of these questions, but the tidal shifts from pink to red to steaming seemed to provide the family with all the answers they wished to believe. Harry could have at least dealt with that. But then a blond wizard, not his blond wizard, came knocking at the door, looking a little bedraggled and quirky, and so the parental figures of this ginger rabble ended up abandoning Harry to the wolves.

“Is she hot?”

“Is she a cougar?”

“What! No, she’s not a cat!”

“Not a cat! A cougar is a-”

“Younger then?”

“Erm-”

“Did she look like she was after your fame-”

“-and your wealth?”

“She looked perfectly normal-”

“Oh they all do! But what about her eyes - did she look crazy?”

“Not at all! She didn’t look to be anyone shady.”

“Mmm… none of them do.”

“But you can tell a lot about them by their family.”

“That’s true!”

“What about her parents - were they with her?”

“Er- no. She was alone, like me. I would have been too intimidated to talk to her otherwise.”

“No need to be shy! You’re a brave Gryffindor and you’re a hero! Anyone would be overjoyed to talk to you.”

“Yeah, Ron.”

“Shut up, Fred.”

“But I’m George!”

“No, I’m George!”

“Drat, so we can’t figure anything out from the parents…”

“Did she seem coy? Like she might have been hiding something?”
“Those girls are only trouble.”

“Just because you got led on-”

“She really seemed to be perfectly normal.”

“Did you give her anything?”

“Um… not… yet…”

“What about a promise? Did you agree to meet?”

“Or date her?”

“I-I didn’t promise her anything except that I’d write!”

“And here she is writing to you…”

“Shamful.”

“-Terrible-”

“-Awful-”

“Oh stop making him feel bad, you two.”

“You’re a man, Harry! You should have made the first move!”

“Just because you’re a hunk, Charlie, doesn’t mean we all are.”

“Hey! I’m not a-!”

“Don’t worry, Harry. Some girls are perfectly happy to make the first move and be seen on equal terms. In fact, it relaxes some of them.”

“See? Percy’s being logical about it.”

“Percy’s always logical.”

“So you haven’t agreed to go on a date with her?”

“What? No.”

“Not yet, you mean.”

“Huh?”

“Well if she's pretty-”

“-why not ask her out?”

“I’m sure mum would help you choose a spot for a nice date.”

“And a nice gift.”

“But I-”
“It looks like a fancy owl. Maybe she’s expecting something expensive.”

“If only we knew what family she was from.”

“Did you get her last name?”

“Did you get her first?”

“Of course I did!”

“Well, what is it?”

“I’m not telling you!”

“Mea-”

“-nie!”

“Did she look like a reporter?”

“What? No! Why?”

“Was she blonde? In a green suit? Was her name Rita?”

“No!”

“As if she’d tell him she was called Rita.”

“Yeah, then we’d all know what she was up to.”

“What’s so bad about her anyway?”

“Oh, it’s quite simple. That reporter is-”

“-one bitch of a woman!”

“FRED WEASLEY! YOU COME HERE RIGHT NOW. I WON’T HAVE YOU-”

It was just another typical morning in the Weasley household and, as ever, Molly’s ears never missed a single curse. The only difference was that Ginny sat quietly, eyes fighting the temptation to water, as she realised that her Harry Potter already had a girlfriend.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoy the banter in this chapter! I'd love your feedback on the layout of it.
Draco’s eyes were wide and his lunch was spewing out past his lips. His father was, thankfully, absent. “Dearest”? What the hell did Potter-?! Oh that ruddy bastard.

Dearest,

I’m afraid your letter has attracted rather more attention than you likely had been intending.

Hah! No. Potter deserved those awful Weasels breathing down his neck. He’d caused him quite enough irritation and embarrassment and thus he deserved it two-fold in return.

In fact, so much so that my current companions have cajoled me into bravery-

What the hell did that mean?

-and now here I am asking for your hand-

WHAT!? No!

-to accompany me-

Oh thank fucking God.

-for lunch.

Damn you, Potter.

Draco didn’t know if he was angry at the boy for teasing him or for making his letter all too innocent. Perhaps Draco’s growing strife was caused by both.

I have been informed that the establishment-

Hah. As if you’d ever say “establishment”, Potter.

-I propose we visit is of good quality-

Do the Weasleys even know what good quality actually is? Draco couldn’t help snorting at how preposterous the very notion was.

-and whilst I do not yet know if my adviser’s tastes should match yours,-

“Adviser”? Don’t you mean nine irritating “adviser _”. Hah! And as if my tastes would ever be as low as theirs!

-I hope that the conversation we should make will be enough to satisfy the mind, should the food not be enough to satisfy the flesh.

intentions, but are you abusing the privilege of such knowledge to get your vengeance for my prank? Damnit it, you. Draco was flushing head to toe as he pillaged his brain for vile thoughts to calm his racing heart and rising flesh. Flesh. Potter had meant “flesh” as in “hungry”. “Flesh” as in “stomach”... Flesh as in stomach. Draco nodded to confirm what Potter refused to on paper.

-the flesh.

Draco shivered again.

I have also come to read something which you might find of great interest.

Draco was certain he had read more books than Potter. There was undoubtedly nothing he could teach him- unless...

Consider it a little something to show I am just as voracious as you in my appetite for literary miracles and seek to learn how to weave together words on a page as flawlessly as the authors we both adore. I, personally, am assured that to authors, writing comes as naturally as magic. I wish to encapsulate their words and rewrite them with my own wand.

Draco had been worried. He had thought he had lost the threat of the code but no - there it was again, the meaning trailing slowly behind the words. Potter didn’t mean he had read of some sort of magic. Reading and writing were irrelevant here. Completely irrelevant! Damn. He had been hoping to keep Potter in his debt, but already he was claiming that he had something to repay him with. Taunting Potter into a daring escapade or his company or perhaps even... more, would need some other debt then. That meant Draco had to find something else of worth to offer.

The letter continued and finished and Draco was left wondering what in God’s name it was that Potter had figured out or been naturally born with and who the hell had been the one to teach him what to make of it. He spent the remaining day puzzling over the details written in cobbled and shaky letters at such odds with the style of language Potter had obvious had dictated to him - or mimicked from a book - whilst he desperately tried to chase away a persistent headache. By nine o’clock at night he had determined that his efforts had all been in vain and buckled under the migraine, rising up to get a pain relief potion from his godfather.

X-X-X

Aberforth was puzzling over the shaky handwriting which looked positively as though it had been quite literally dribbled over parchment. The letter had arrived a few hours before and given that the bird had flown off so quickly that the man hadn’t even managed to make out its breed, it was only natural that he had assumed the sender needed no reply. Now that he looked at it though, he wasn’t sure if the opposite was true. Yes, whoever it was that was writing to him was free to use his establishment for a meeting, and who the hell had been the one to teach him what to make of it. He spent the remaining day puzzling over the details written in cobbled and shaky letters at such odds with the style of language Potter had obvious had dictated to him - or mimicked from a book - whilst he desperately tried to chase away a persistent headache. By nine o’clock at night he had determined that his efforts had all been in vain and buckled under the migraine, rising up to get a pain relief potion from his godfather.
“Ressst now, Harry. It’s been a long day.”

Harry yawned.

“I couldn’t agree more.”

Her soft rocking of his feet in her hold lulled him to sleep, knowing that it was with these little gestures that she praised him. He had spent most of the day arguing with her about how to formulate sentences, using his decision to storm out of the kitchen that morning as an excuse to lock himself away in Ron’s room to get the needed privacy for their conversation. Whilst his handwriting had barely improved, he had still managed to pen two notes. One to his rival and one to the establishment that came well-insulted rather than well-recommended from the mouths of several fierce gingers. It was the best option according to Nagini though, and it was her that he trusted. Plus, he couldn’t wait for Malfoy’s reaction should the Hog’s Head prove to be as dingy and disgusting as both the Weasleys and his snake had agreed it was.

Chapter End Notes

Life's getting a little hectic so I might have to go down to one chapter a day - even so, I hope you enjoy!
Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin had lived long and fulfilling lives. They continued to do so, in their own special way, as animated portraits. The rivalry between houses had been preserved due to their encouragement of pranksters but had sadly been corrupted by the bullies the current Headmaster had created.

In theory, they were supposed to be loyal to the Headmaster, but when the time of the supposedly great and mighty Dumbledore came about, they simply turned up their noses and refused to cooperate. Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw had done something similar with their own feminine dismissal.

The pain was that they couldn't reveal the truth of the madman’s nature to those who didn’t already know it - such was the side effect of putting such strong enchantments on the post of Headmaster when they had all been alive. Despite this limitation, the four founders of Hogwarts truly believed that they could still have an effect on the world - their world. The one which the aging wizard was trying so desperately to control. They wouldn’t let the bastard rip up what they had worked so hard to create - they would defend it!

In the month of August, they had less than thirty days remaining to plan their first move. Harry Potter would be coming to Hogwarts, and through him, they would reverse all the damage to their beloved castle and they would cut out its rotting parasite - they would make the Headmaster fall.

X-X-X

“That girl is obsesssssed with you.”

“I struggle to believe that.”

“Anyone can become obsesssssssed with anything.”

Harry sighed.

“I don’t doubt that, but I still doubt your point.”

“I’m not following, Potter.”

“Well, I mean, what sort of girl would ever be interested in me?”

Nagini snorted derisively.

“Oh no. Of coursse there’sss never going to be a girl that likesss the famous Boy Who Lived. No, not Mr Powerful, not Mr Rich and Strong.”

“They might like the Boy Who Lived but they wouldn’t like just Harry.”

“Your fame will attract them to you, but jussst because you don’t meet their expectationssss, it doesssn’t mean they’ll give up.”
“Because of my fame.”

“Don’t forget your wealth and bloodline too.”

That just served to frustrate Harry even more. He didn’t understand why Draco seemed so preoccupied with lineage and heritage and thanks to Nagini he didn’t actually know how supposedly rich he was.

“I don’t want them to be attracted to any of that though!”

“You’re not going to be able to avoid it, Harry.”

“Gah!” Harry tugged violently at his hair, “I know that, but that doesn’t mean I can’t wish it wasn’t true though.”

“Harry.”

“What?”

“You’re an eleven year old boy who people only know because of the legend formed around you.”

“Exactly!”

“Which means, that once you begin to develop yourself and find your own place in the world, you’ll have other points which will draw people to you.”

“That doesn’t mean they’ll ever forget the Bow Who Lived.”

“No. But that won’t matter to true friendss. Or genuine love interestss.”

“So I basically have the narrow pool of my allies to choose from for my life partner?”

“Oh don’t be ssstupid Potter. Allies and friends aren’t the sssame thing. And whyever would you have to have jussst one partner?”

The only response Harry could give was a mental “What?!” before Nagini cut off his attempt to question her.

“And anyway, the Weasel likesss you because you were kind to her the other day, not jussst because you’re Mr Boy Wonder.”

Being attracted to girls or pretending he had a girlfriend was one thing, but believing that innocent little Ginny had a crush on him was another. He didn’t believe Nagini and it was normal for them to disagree, so Harry just concluded that he would make a special effort not to lead her on or make any suggestions towards any sort of promise.

What the hell did Nagini mean about allies not being friends though? Harry puffed out his annoyance. They were obviously different - he knew that well enough - but surely one became another...? The boy sighed and supposed that that was a question for another day.

X-X-X
Ginny Weasley was not generally shy. She was a boisterous girl who could keep up with the rest of her family despite being the youngest and could give as good as she got. With six brothers it was impossible for her not to demand she was treated equally and have the bite to back up her bark.

Over the last few years though, she had grown especially close with Ron - all because of Harry Potter. He was like an idol to them - no, not “like”, he was an idol to them. Deep down, Ginny knew that the boy wonder had actually done very little himself and there were plenty of articles which highlighted the flaws of his fame, but that didn’t change the way she saw him. He was protected by his mother’s magic, but the fact he was hunted by You-Know-Who meant that he had to be powerful. Maybe Harry wouldn’t use that power for good, but given that Dumbledore had made sure he grew up humble, Ginny highly doubted that. Her little naive crush would be a perfect Gryffindor and he would probably befriend her brother and then she would get to spend even more time with him… those had been her thoughts. But then Harry had arrived there in person and she had frozen up. Her brothers had teased her about it and she had hated them for it. They were supposed to be kind to her, protect her - not tear her down for the chinks in her armour. But Harry hadn’t been like that - he hadn’t laughed or snickered. He had just smiled at her and reassured her and told her she didn’t need to be afraid of his snake. Ginny didn’t know anything about the creature following Harry, but if he trusted it, then she supposed she could too. Her brothers were brilliant, and if Harry was even better than them - then he was undeniably good and the pinnacle of Light.

Following the incident, Ginny had thought things were going even better than predicted - she had managed to talk to him already and he was going to be staying with them for a whole month! But then the letter came. And that left Ginny wondering how on earth she had been pipped at the post when everything had been going so perfectly. She wanted Harry to pay attention to her! What was she lacking?

All these thoughts were hurting Ginny’s head and by the time her brothers called up to see if she would be joining them, she found herself saying that she didn’t feel well and that she would just go and visit Luna. Going to Luna’s was the only way she would ever persuade her mum to leave her alone. Her mum trusted Luna. Luna was amazing. Luna would know what to do.

X-X-X

“Don’t you think it’s time to open them?” Even as a painting the green-robed man still possessed a certain eerie bleeding of his words into a continuous slip much like a hiss.

“He’ll have the Room of Requirement. Is that not enough?” The man's partner never knew when to pipe down.

“Unless he wants voyeurss when he finally finds your balls of bravery and drags the little Malfoy dragon away for-”

“There’s no need to finish that sentence, Salazar.” The Ravenclaw founder had always been cutting towards the two men in her life.

“Oh don’t be cruel, Rowena, darling. My snake just likes to reminisce about all those times-”

“Shut up!”

“But you started it, my snake.”
“I’m also ending it, mutt!”
“T’m no mutt, I’m a lion!”

“Would both of you please just be quiet.” The pleas from the matron of the foursome would always be respected.
“Sorry, Helga.”

“I apologissse, my lady.” Salazar's lopsided glare at his partner was the only indication of his displeasure with the man's lack of formality.
“So we have decided not to open the chambers for him, then?”
“No, there is a great deal he must learn until he can handle the truth. Our chambers should be the support he needs during the time of the reveal, not an unnecessary luxury that he has access to before then.”
“Well said, Salazar.”

“Why thank you, wise one.” Rowena was always subtly suited when her qualities were praised and her three friends knew this well.
“So we are all in agreement then?”
“Yes.”

X-X-X

Luna knew that her friend was coming, even before she had arrived. The ginger's smile was etched into the ceiling of her room with a charm which let her know of their proximity, but... the smile had dipped - the girl was worried. Luna enjoyed helping her friends - it made her feel useful rather than just used - so even though Ginny appeared to be sad, Luna was guiltily finding in it her happiness. After a while, swinging her legs over the edge of her bed, she got up and started to get dressed.

Problems with Molly and Arthur? No - that was rare in itself and was always accompanied by a look of severe betrayal.

Her brothers then? - That also seemed unlikely. Ginny had been getting better at handling her emotions lately and didn't need Luna so much. The blonde wasn't sure whether that made her happy or sad, but she wouldn't do the cruel thing of creating more problems just to be needed - she simply didn't have it in her.

So that led her to the news that the Daily Prophet had been corrupting since yesterday - the fact that Harry Potter was staying with the Weasleys. Luna had yet to lay eyes on the flesh and blood of the boy wonder so she couldn't say for certain, but from the photos he looked as though he would in the very least think twice before acting - which meant he hadn't upset Ginny in the direct sense. Luna glanced back at her ceiling - Ginny didn't look betrayed but the tendrils of that self same emotion remained.

Ah. Now it was clear. Luna was about to have to sit down and explain the unfortunate thing known
as childhood romance.

Chapter End Notes

I got distracted half way through proof-reading so this chapter only just made it up tonight (my time)! I hope it was worth the wait! ^U^
Events happened altogether quite quickly. One moment Harry had been running away from the Weasleys and the next, he had already arrived at the Hog’s Head.

“As much as I appreciate you treating me as your equal I quite- simply- cannot run- as fast as- a big beast like you-!”

“What did you jussst call me!?”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! But please - for God’s sake just slow down a little, would you?”

“We can’t. If you want to get away - you have you have to get away quickly. Ssslow prey get eaten.”

“I’m not prey!”

“You might ass well be.”

Harry almost tripped as they passed a keeled over barrel.

“Bugger!”

“Oh do keep up, Potter.”

“Running at my pace is plenty quick enough!”

“Don’t be sssily, Potter. Any sort of rodent would be able to catch up with you.”

“Is that- Is that supposed to be a pun on Weasel?”

“Obviousssly, Potter. Usse that brain of yourssss for once.”

“If you didn’t make such weak links, I wouldn’t have to.”

“Wassss that sssupposed to be an insult?”

“Would you- Would you take it as one?”

Nagini sighed far too calmly for the zipping motion her scales propelled her with as they rattled across the flagstones beneath her.

“If I don’t test your brain, Potter, who will?”

“Ferretface.”

“You can’t trust him.”

“Why not? You said you’d support my choices if I base them on instinct.”

“I do. We’ve already been over this. But I’m telling you that you can’t trust him yet. It’sss not a matter of hisss intentions - it’sss a matter of whether he can withstand manipulation.”
Harry could only pant pitifully.

“Oh shut up, Potter, and keep running. It’s your fault you weren’t able to Apparate and had to take a portal to Ssscotland.”

“I don’t even know what that is!”

Two turns later and all protests died. They were there - they had arrived.

X-X-X

Aberforth didn’t know what he had been expecting. No, that was a lie. He knew exactly what he had been expecting. He had thought that today would be yet another day where he had to deal with posh and snobby purebloods, and yet, here he was, staring stock still in amazement at the last possible person he expected to see. Harry Blessed Potter.

The old wizard knew exactly what pains his brother had put the poor victim through. The handwriting wasn’t quite so surprising now. What he had assumed was an attempt at disguising identity was simply the work of an untrained hand, broken too many times to work a quill cleanly. A trip to St Mungo’s might be able to help the boy break the mental blockades and the connections between his old injuries and abuse, and that would certainly help him - not only with his handwriting, but also in resisting his brother.

But why was the boy here? By all rights, he shouldn’t even know who he was. He was just an old barman to the public eye - the failed brother of a noble line. Potter shouldn’t be coming to such a shady pub either. Was the boy foolish? Or was he smarter than he was letting on? Who was he speaking with? Who were his allies? Did Potter actually know his true loyalties?

The old wizard paused. His thoughts stuttering to a halt. From behind the scrawny body of the eleven year old peeked the hissing head of a serpent. If that was... If that was who he thought it was, then she would have certainly been the one to direct Potter, and she would most certainly be the answer to all his questions.

Aberforth eyed the Boy Who Lived with a steady caution and then uttered simply, “Come in.”

X-X-X

No. No. Surely not. Potter wouldn’t do this to him, no matter how vengeful he was feeling. Or, at least, Draco hoped not. He swallowed. It would be too cruel. What had he ever done to deserve this? And yet there seemed to be no other possibility. The Point Me charm Potter had secured to his letter with Nagini’s help wouldn’t lie. Draco had checked it over and it only held evidence of the standard spell and not some prankered device. Its direction was where Potter willed for them to meet - which meant that they would have to meet there. It wasn’t just directions to a random location.

That was another thing which rattled his brain - Potter couldn’t use his wand - not yet - so how on earth he had managed to cast a spell was puzzling beyond words. He’s done it before though. My mended leg will attest to that. How was he doing it? Draco’s steps slowed even further. Today it
seemed that all Dark wizards were occupied with politics or his father’s errands. It was safe to be out - be alone - be here. Although given his name, he would have been safe either way. But today made it safe for Potter. Damn Potter. He was doing his best to make sure that this was a safe and secure meeting and yet this was what he was being repaid with?! Here he was, on what was theoretically a date (Draco spat the word across his mind), being confronted with a telltale burning effect the charm possessed to indicate arrival, in front of the establishment best known as the most unsavoury place in all of the wizarding world. Why on earth was his first date with Harry Bloody Potter at the Hog’s Fucking Head?!

X-X-X

The boy had asked Aberforth for a protective ward with specifications which only that reptile could possibly have given him. He had requested a glass of butterbeer and pumpkin juice - why both, the old barman didn’t know. He had stated that he needed to be left alone and then paid Aberforth enough to guarantee the silence of even the greediest of wizards. The elderly man would have declined - he was loyal to his duty and would have kept the meeting secret even without payment - but instead he simply followed the boy’s orders, doing his best to keep his mind blank. The shock of seeing Potter would take more effort to erase before his brother’s pillaging than the mundane activities of daily necessity. Keeping his mind blank now would surely help ease the burden of erasing the rest of the meeting.

Theoretically, it was clear that Potter trusted him to some extent and even trusted him enough to see who his companion would be - but perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he believed the advice he was getting. He couldn’t know all this himself. He believed her. Every muscle in Potter’s lower back was twitching as he sat down. The boy couldn’t disguise his uneasiness, but at least this showed that he was willing to do what was necessary to fulfil his goals. Had he been told what they were? Had he figured them out?

Aberforth allowed the fleeting thought of his brother’s injured pride finally bringing about his end at the hands of a boy he had done nothing but underestimate all his life. Aberforth could only hope he lived to see the day his dream came true.

X-X-X

“What the hell is this supposed to be, Potter?”

“A meeting…”

“In the Hog’s Head!?"

“Well yes. I can list the reasons-”

“You could have chosen anywhere - anywhere at all! And yet you chose the most un-romantic place-”

“‘Un-romantic’? What does romance have to do with anything?”
“You made it sound like this was supposed to be a date, Potter.”

“You’re the one who wrote me a love letter in the first place!”

“I wrote you a letter to disguise my identity. You didn’t have to write back in that god-awful tone.”

“So you wanted to embarrass me but I don’t get to do the same to you?”

“You’ve already embarrassed me plenty. That was just my payback.”

“When on earth have I even had time to embarrass you?”

“I can’t help but feel sorry for whatever girl you choose. You truly are awful at wooing someone...”

“Off topic, Malfoy.”

“Don’t care. I’m too busy pitying your future fiance.”

“Would you shut up about that, already?”

“No. You obviously evaded the Weasels which means that even they weren’t so stupid as to recommend this place to you, so why did you bring me here?”

“For our ‘date’?”

“For our date.”

“Because yesterday evening I learned that one of our greatest allies resides here.”

“‘Our’, Potter?”

“Yes - ‘our’. You offered yourself to me, Malfoy. I’m not letting you get away from me now.” And that was the final straw before Draco’s face flooded with heat and the images he’s been suppressing and the sound of Potter’s heavy breath curled his ears into a fit of pink arousal.

Chapter End Notes

Phew! Soon you shall have the almighty date!
He had been a friend of Tom’s. Not the sort that people knew about. Nor the sort that ever did anything all that important. He wasn’t a warrior and didn’t bother getting involved in radical crusades. He had his wife and he had his career and that was enough. Some who had known both him and his friend at Hogwarts sneered at his cowardice and refusal to join the great wizard’s side but he didn’t care. He wanted a calm and quiet life. He would rather hide from persecution than fight it. That was just who he was.

If Mudbloods infected the wizarding world, he would just have to accept it, and if Muggles ever found out about them, then he would just have to cast enough charms to protect himself and those he cared about. Even in the unlikely instance that Muggles managed to enslave some wizards, they wouldn’t be powerful enough to do him any harm. He had been friends with Tom. He wasn’t a weakling. Any wizard worth their status would be able to protect themselves. But children would be vulnerable. And so would Mudbloods. It would be then, when the non-magic mutts turned, that they would curse ever revealing the truth. They would be punished for their sought of fame day in, day out - just like Prometheus for stealing fire from the gods. The vengeful birds of spite known as the jealous scum who formed the massive population of Muggles would peck out the organs of the Mudblood children in a quest to find out how a normal human could obtain the powers the wizarding world. This power they felt shouldn't be hidden and instead shared with all would be their cause for punishment. And they would have done it to themselves.

The irony of the wording “for the greater good” never failed to astound him. Muggles would torture, enslave and kill - all in the quest for magic. The magic cure to all the world’s illnesses - to all the world’s problems. Problems still existed in the wizarding world. Jeremiah knew that nothing would ever be achieved without action - problems had no magical solution. But he wouldn’t be the one to act. He’d live with the consequences of him not doing anything and that made him different from the typical politician. He’d live with the consequences of everything he did too and that was different from the Headmaster all the blind lambs had grown to love.

Jeremiah didn’t like to get involved but he could be persuaded to act when he was needed. Tom had always been able to persuade him. Nagini had gone with Potter, that much was certain. He had planted her where she and her former master had agreed he take her. The escape had gone perfectly. The boy and the serpent had been united. What had surprised him though, was the fact that Nagini had not been the only one. He had achieved the honoured title of Grand Master many years ago in the now nigh-forbidden field of Magical Bonding which meant that he should have been able to sense the lemur, and yet he hadn’t been able to detect the other former familiar - not until the moment when he had spied the boy with him. Whoever had been the previous owner of that creature was a mystery. He had to be stronger than Jeremiah to be able to disguise the lemur from him. Or maybe “had to have been” - maybe he had already passed on. But to be stronger than Jeremiah, an ally of the Dark Lord himself, presented not only a titillating puzzle but also the brink of murmuring fear.

Jeremiah was a Grand Master which meant he knew far more than most. He had attained enlightenment - he knew the Truth. Muggles would never obtain magic and he was strong enough to protect all that he cared about from a mutt’s revolution, but a mystery wizard who had yet to take a side in their chessboard of war might just cause a problem. The fact that Jeremiah didn’t recognise the magical signature surrounding the lemur meant that it was definitely a new player. If he, or indeed she, was so powerful but was only just getting involved now - that could only mean one
thing, and that was that the first round had just begun.

X-X-X

Louis was a quiet creature through choice, but that meant he had as many reasons for his subdued nature as if he had been sworn to silence by some looming threat. If his reptilian partner in crime had been ordered by her former master to represent the interests of one side, then his former master has similarly sent him - perhaps not to represent, but to watch. Watch and remember. Predict and guide. Those were his core abilities: memory and insight. He wondered if Nagini knew hers. Hedwig was certainly too new to her role as a familiar to know about the sum total of her abilities, nevermind her core one, but if she focused more on developing herself for her master rather than directing him like Nagini was, maybe she would be the first to bloom into her true form.

Louis knew that Harry had yet to even consider his primate body in human form as he had done with Nagini. The lemur would have felt the tug of the purelink he had grown so used to having if the boy wonder had begun to recognise their connection. But there was plenty of time to develop it. At least eight years before the connection would become essential. Harry had time. Louis’ job would be to prepare him from the shadows for the task which would inevitably follow the Headmaster's demise. He would have to do so carefully - so as not to become suspect. It wasn’t as though he would be working against Harry - but if he appeared to be preparing the boy for some other purpose, then perhaps Nagini might become an impediment and he would truly hate to have to deal with her. She would make a brilliant ally and, truth be told, he had already grown close with her - perhaps he even regarded her as a friend.

Louis appeared young and far weaker than the snake but the truth was far from that. He was much older and stronger than either of his two peers. Perhaps he was even as old as the dragon which lay in wait in Harry’s bag. What the boy planned to do with it had him curious. But he would wait and he would watch and he would remember. And when the day came, he would have it there in his mind, safely stored away, ready to present as proof that Harry was indeed the Rose Holder’s conqueror.

X-X-X

Jeremiah repeated to himself that he would have Tom’s nose for the amount of trouble the supposedly dead man was still causing him. The notebook he had been gifted by the man was charmed in an especially frustrating manner - on each page was written a task the Dark wizard wanted his friend to complete for him, but the pages would turn independently and there was no way to peek - Jeremiah could only know the next task by completing the first and he had no idea how many tasks there were in total. The near-hermit went back to cursing his friend. The bastard knew he hated to work and yet he never bothered to stop asking for favours! Of course he wouldn’t accept the money penned in as the reward at the bottom of each task - he was only using that as a guide on the difficulty of each stupid quest. The determined ink was met by his angry stare. What the hell was he supposed to do with this!?

Ascertain the current colour of the Rose on the old fool’s chest.
It would, in theory, be easy enough to do with a familiar. Tom’s additional subtext also indicated that it was unlikely that the Rose could be hidden with a seal (and Jeremiah doubted the man would ever even consider limiting his power), but there were other powerful charms that the Headmaster had access to and for all the man was a fool, he wasn’t stupid - he wouldn’t leave it unguarded. He wouldn’t leave it unguarded and that meant that Jeremiah would have to go with his familiars and either operate with the few loyal allies he had or insinuate himself into Dumbledore’s close circle. The most important thing with this task though, was the underlined phrase:

**You must not get caught.**

Whether that meant that the old fool couldn’t be allowed to know what he was doing, or whether that was to meant that Tom didn’t want to lose the Grand Master, Jeremiah didn’t know. He exhaled heavily and left his lab for the day, taking the notebook with him. Knowing Tom, the bastard probably meant both - a sneaky way for me to do even more things. Oh, you little- Such thoughts accompanied him for the rest of the day, but he thought them all sweetly. Tom would always be his friend, after all.

Chapter End Notes

Enjoy your new OC! And for those who were curious about Louis - there you go!

UPDATE: Jeremiah's appearance:
“But when the time comes, my chamber isss definitely the one he’s going to open first.” The original Slytherin was glaring daggers at the lion he had chosen as his lover.

“Would you please just drop it already, Sal?” Helga was losing her will to stay in her frame.

“No! He’ll be sorted into Gryffindor so it’s only fair he opens mine first!”

“Oh here we go again.” Helga desperately scanned the portraits down their current corridor for her own lover - she was the only one who could shut them up for longer than five minutes.

“But we all know he’s a Sslytherin at heart,” continued Salazar.

“Rowena, love - please come back. They’re bickering again.” Helga made her plea for help as loudly as she could above the sounds of arguments.

“Once we reinstate the original system of graduation then it won’t matter about additional houses - only the original will count,” huffed Godric.

“The whole point of that sssystem is that the original house doesn’t matter at all!” Retorted the snake.

“Calm down, you two - please!” Helga's foot had started a maniac tapping.

“Since when have you been so focused on equality?” Challenged Godric.

“Oh don’t pull that card on me.” Salazar had had quite enough of his lover using the rumors the foul Light side had made up about him. His lion was supposed to be on his side, bickering or not, and the snake hated when he did something as unthinking and hurtful as bring in a tidbit of the lie all four of them were working hard to reverse.

“Why not-?” Began Godic.

“You called, Helga?” Said Rowena, finally stepping into her nearby frame.

“Because I've had quite enough of you bringing up ssstupid legends in our arguments-!” Butted in Salazar.

“Silence!” Spat the sapphire eagle.

The two lovers fell silent but Rowena could already feel that the snake’s wounded pride would drag the lovers’ spat on for a few days yet. She sighed and could only eye Helga quietly. Sometimes both of them hated quite how hot-blooded their two companions were.

X-X-X

Nagini had told him that she could have just as easily taught him how to clear his mind, but Harry
had reposted that that was beside the point - the point was to form an exchange between himself and Malfoy. Harry didn’t know if the blond knew about familiars, but even if he did, then not much would be lost. Either Harry retracted his agreement to lessons and studied with Nagini instead, bringing him back to square one with Malfoy, or he was in the blond’s debt. At the moment, Harry was leaning towards the latter option - but that was if, and only if, it turned out to be necessary. Harry already had something else to pay with if it was needed, after all.

“Why did you even buy butterbeer?” Huffed Draco.

“I didn’t buy it, I asked for it.”

“You paid for silence so you paid for the drink.”

Harry sighed, knowing the blond was right.

“So, how do you want to do this?”

“Do what?”

“Well you’re the one supposed to be teaching me.”

Malfoy harrumphed and shuffled on his seat.

“Do you plan to ignore what you offered me?”

“No.”

“Well you’re certainly acting like you plan to.”

“What exactly is your problem, Malfoy?”

“I just deplore the way you behave.”

“Have I given you a reason to care? You’re not responsible for me.”

“I shan’t have my date acting like a mutt.”

“Can we drop the whole ‘date’ thing already, Malfoy?”

“No.” The blond pronounced resolutely.

Harry sighed.

“Fine. Fine. I want to know how you plan on teaching me to clear my mind before I reveal my offer. I’d have thought you would rather keep me waiting anyway - what with being in your debt and all.”

Draco snorted but didn’t disagree.

“So what do I do? Practice meditating? Is there some piece of knowledge I’m missing?”

“It’s too much to hope you’ve already read about the three-aspect truth isn’t it?”

“Not too much to hope at all. It’s pretty easy to get your head around.”

Now that made Malfoy pause. It was a longer pause than Harry had been expecting but he had no way of knowing what was going on in the blond head across from him and before he had chance to question his companion, the wicked mouth began forming syllables once more.
“Right. I see. So you’re not completely stupid then, Potter.”

Harry didn’t rise to the bait.

“I could teach you the steps to it, but more than anything it’s getting as much practice as you can.”

“Alright.”

“Explain to me what you understand to be the concept of a lie.”

Harry paused. That sounded far too simple but it was easier to be wrong and corrected than spend too long considering only to be wrong anyway.

“A lie is the opposite of the truth.”

“Wrong. You can tell many lies to replace the truth, thus it is not the opposite.”

“Okay, fine. A lie is omitting the truth.”

“Wrong again, Potter. Omitting the truth is what I’ll be teaching you to do. I won’t be teaching you how to lie.”

Gah! This was supposed to be simple. Hadn’t he already reached some sort of enlightenment by understanding the three aspects? Hang on - Nagini had said that that wasn’t even taught in Hogwarts, nevermind to people their age. How did Malfoy-? He would ponder that later.

“A lie is a falsification of events.”

“Finally! Give the boy a medal!”

“Don’t be a prick.”

“I wouldn’t be if you didn’t deserve it.”

A sneer curled across Harry’s features and suddenly a shift turned Malfoy’s stomach. Harry didn’t know, but in that moment, he had looked exactly like a certain blond’s godfather.

X-X-X

It was getting harder and harder to concentrate - Potter was so utterly distracting. He couldn’t afford distraction. There was work to do and even now he was desperately trying to suppress his ability to remember events to make it easier to forget the meeting. Why did Potter have to be so damn difficult? And then he had sneered and Draco’s heart had clamped into tightness. Oh. Oh fuck. No. No. You can’t think about him! You’ll never have him, Work! Focus on work! You have a greater chance with Potter. Distract yourself with him!

“If a lie requires you to create something, then it means that that creation can be broken by a strong enough witch or wizard if they enter your mind, especially if you haven’t removed the original memory. But if you clear your mind, it essentially means that you keep control of the power because you’ve already destroyed the memory in a sense. Like with everything - a trace of it will remain, but with this technique, no matter how strong a wizard enters your mind in search of the truth - they will never find it. You have to be the one to summon the memory from your inner mind. You are your
mind’s master and the moment you forget that is the moment you lose because that’s when your inner mind lets down its defences and all that you are is there for the world to see.”

Potter gulped. Good. That meant he could see how serious this was.

“The good thing about this technique though is that it’s undetectable. Nobody will suspect that you’re hiding anything because there won’t be any false memories which they might try and pull apart. Pulling apart memories is a painful thing and will almost certainly shatter your control - especially at this stage - so if you hide your memories rather than lying then you should be safe from such a brutal attack and are unlikely to have your mental defences broken.”

“But what if they try and enter my inner mind? Say they’ve figured out I’m hiding things.” Good. Potter was at least asking the right questions.

“They will have no reason to. Hiding the truth in this way is branded as Dark magic which means that few people dare to use it due to the nonsense legends surrounding it. If you are the Gryffindor Golden Boy then noone will suspect that you are hiding the truth. At most, if someone were to peek inside your mind, they would just think you were an airhead and little more than a puppet.”

“Which might invite its own problems?”

“For certain. But at least it would be nothing like the agony of being torn apart so utterly.”

“So I just have to pretend to be ignorant and hopefully by the time anyone suspects me I’ll be strong enough to weather a mental attack.”

“Exactly. And even if they try to get into your inner mind, all you have to do is remember that you’re in control.”

Potter seemed tentative for a moment and Draco was about to demand he just spit out his question. They were on an edge too sharp to be anything but honest with one another. But then Potter spoke.

“What- what happens if you end up collapsing in under a mental attack?”

Oh. Oh crap. Potter knew what to ask alright.

“I assure you, you are still a long way off being able to handle knowing that.”

Potters eyes fled down to the table and reached out for the butterbeer.

“Alright,” uttered his messy head before taking a large gulp and then pushing the cut glass over to Draco who proceeded to turn his nose up at the foul smell.

“You want to get me drunk on this, Potter?”

“You don’t have to.”

“It’ll weaken my mental control.”

“We’ll be here long enough for you to regain your capabilities if a couple of sips is enough to shake your defences.”

Draco could tell that the boy was riling him, but that was better than the grave turn the conversation had taken. He rose to the bait and then proceeded to spend a good five minutes ranting about his father’s wine cellar. It helped him clear his head of the murky consequences of truth and within a short period of time Draco found himself ogling Harry’s prone form as the boy took his shirt off,
“Are you ready to begin?”

“You bet, Malfoy.”

X-X-X

“Why must the two of them be so hard to work with?” Bemoaned Helga.


“Oh, don’t be too harsh on them now, love.”

“It’s because of them that we have so many problems.”

“True, eagle mine, but it’s not that bad.”

“The Potters and Weasleys are the lion’s descendants and the Malfoys are the snake’s.”

“Are you still wondering about how to get them to earn each other’s trust?” Questioned the Hufflepuff.

“I know that you said it will come in time-”

“And it will!”

“But unless we help move things along, it will all be too late.”

“Harry will certainly be able to join the two sides together. In fact, I’m quite impressed by his familiar.” Reassured the badger.

“As am I. But Potter alone can’t do everything.”

“So what do you propose?”

“I think the twins will be the easiest to manipulate - their minds are the most open out of all the seven siblings.”

Sometimes Helga wondered if her lover wasn’t the actual Slytherin out of the four of them - or if, in the very least, she was secretly related to Salazar. The blond woman sighed - if they were all related by blood, perhaps they wouldn’t have this issue and the houses would already be closer together.

“So what do you plan to do with them?” She was curious as her lover almost always made the right decision.

“Well they have the Marauder’s Map which might in itself cause problems.”

“That’s certainly true.”

“So either we allow them to see Potter and Malfoy meeting or we persuade them to give the map to Potter earlier than we had planned.”
Before Helga could make a comment to continue their conversation, the red-cloaked lover who had been so insensitive earlier burst into their currently shared frame.

“Roweeenaaa~ Sally is refusing to cuddle me.”

“I would too,” sneered the wise witch at the melodrama of the supposed Lionheart.

“Cruel!”

Chapter End Notes

More founders! I didn't signpost who was talking much - did it still make sense?
“Are you trying to get me naked, Malfoy?”

“So what if I am, Potter?”

Silence. Neither had been expecting that response - Harry had thought that Malfoy would flush prettily like he had been doing over the past several minutes whenever Harry made any sort of suggestive hint. Draco meanwhile couldn't believe he'd actually been driven past the bounds of his control and snapped out his honest thoughts. And at his crush, at that!

“Ah-hum. So.”

“Yes. Right. I just need your top half open to me.”

“Right.” Harry paused. “Why, again?”

“Weren’t you listening to me the first time?” Huffed Draco.

_No, I was watching your mouth form the bloody alphabet._ Not that Harry would admit that out loud. He wasn’t Malfoy and he could keep his feelings in check... he hoped. He hoped even more though that those earlier thoughts had been Malfoy’s honest words and not simply a quick retort.

“You might be familiar with the three aspects but you probably don’t know which elements you’re aligned to, do you?”

“No.”

“I thought not. You’ve already received your wand, haven’t you?”

“Well yeah.”

“Which means that you’ve already had someone study your elemental alignment before, so in theory what I’m about to do shouldn’t feel too odd.”

Harry cast his mind back. There had been so many steps to making his wand. First the tedious process of finding the right wood, and then there had been the magical experience of the three Supreme Cores choosing him... oh.

“Ollivander made me stand on some pedestal whilst holding some crystals.”

“Twenty-four of them.”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed. He'd had enough time to count them all. "Are they linked to the element-thingys you’re talking about?"

“‘Thingys’?”

“Yeah, ‘thingys’.”

“Eloquent as usual, I see.”
“Of course!”

Draco sighed. He knew it was fruitless to try and get Potter to say “yes” instead of “yeah” but in the very least he would attempt to educate the boy.

“Right. Now lie down on the bench, chest up.”

Harry shifted to follow his companion’s instructions. It was a good thing Malfoy had specified that he could face upwards or else he might have been more tentative, creating more friction between the two of them, and there was plenty of that as things were.

Draco meanwhile was doing his best to keep his eyes firmly glued to Potter’s clavicles. It was obscene how rosy his twin peaks were and Draco refused to get distracted my them again. Each and every gander his eyes took a little lower were met by a swift jerk of the chin upwards - back to those feminine collarbones.

The blond cleared his throat.

“Right. I’m going to put these stones on you,” he said, rattling a velvet pouch. “I need you, above all else, not to move.”

“Ollivander just made me hold them.”

“He needed to know different things from them. I’m looking for how to best build your Mind Palace, not make you a wand.”

“A what now?”

“A Mind Palace. A person who learns about their own mind enough to be able to manipulate their thoughts can build themselves a Mind Palace - they help you visualise your defences, making them easier to maintain and fortify. Your Palace will almost certainly have an ever increasing library as the one and only room within it to store all your memories, but the easiest way to craft one is to be in tune with your elemental affinities. If you have a strong affinity to Earth, for example, you might build your Palace as a stone castle or a huge cave. It all depends on who you are. The appearance of your Palace will change over time to reflect both the changes in you as a person and your changing affinities.”

“So in ten years time I might need to move out?”

“You don’t move out of your own mind, Potter.”

“Then I’ll just have to keep renovating.”

“A better metaphor - well done,” smirked out Draco with sarcasm.

Harry stuck his tongue out at the blond and allowed the snake to move his arms beside his torso. After a few minutes of both parties wondering if they ought to reignite the conversation, they instead fell into a comfortable silence. Harry almost felt lulled into sleep as Draco methodically placed the multi-coloured gems across his torso. They began to warm instantly and pinpricks of sensation ran across him. Oh - that felt nice. As did Malfoy’s delicate fingertips - they were so utterly aristocratic. The boy would probably sneer at him if he voiced his thoughts. No - the blond was the heir to the Malfoy line - all masculine and proud. Harry allowed a slow smile to melt onto his features. I’d let you be my proud dragon.
Granger was just another little Mudblood. What was so special about her? Why did Dumbledore think she needed special treatment? It’d be foolish to think he felt threatened by her and thus didn’t want to get her involved in their little scheme in case she brought everything down. Fudge was certainly no fool. There was also evidence to suggest the man actually wanted to involve her in their scheme more - the documents Fudge had drafted for the Headmaster involved far more limitations being placed on the girl. Whether this was to make up for the privileges she would get in return, he didn’t know. That was probably the most puzzling thing about all this and brought him back to the question - why was she so special? Did Dumbledore plan to make her more than just a pawn? Did he plan to grow her under his care until she was a woman and then…? Fudge found himself shivering against his will. He wasn’t a paedophile. He was the Minister of Magic and an upstanding citizen! He wouldn’t even dare to consider abusing the sacred notion of heirs. But if she’s a Mudblood… she’s no heir. And if she’s pretty…

Hermione wouldn’t meet Fudge for several years, and by then she would surely have grown into her features, but the seed had already been planted, and even before Hermione had become a woman worthy of note, the Minister’s beady eyes had already found themselves locked on her simple, prone form.

Xenophilius Lovegood was an upstanding father. A little quirky to the point some called him crazy, but given the blood that ran in his veins, that had never come as a surprise to anyone. He loved his daughter and treasured her above all else. She held the same gift as her mother had though, and because of that, he feared the day when she would come into her inheritance. His wife had loved him sweetly, dearly, and to the point of sacrifice. He had assured her that he didn’t need her monogamy - that he understood - but she had refused to do anything but stay by his side. She had loved him beyond what love should have been able to do and she suffered the burden of her inheritance for him. She had refused any man but him and for it she had paid dearly - she had died. But she had also given him a beautiful girl and he spent every day loving his daughter twice over - for the amazing girl she was, and for the wife he had lost and had sworn to never, ever replace. That didn’t stop the fear though. What would Luna decide to do with her life? She adored her mother and spent her every effort mimicking all that she knew about her. Would she mimic her even in this? Xenophilius didn’t know. He could do nothing - nothing but wish to the stars every night that his daughter would never ever fall in love.

Chapter End Notes

Not sure if I should continue with the Fudge/Hermione route -- if I do, then I'll get to have fun writing after Fudge creating his own downfall and Hermione being saved from a traumatic events by a certain someone, thereby making her stop listening quite so much to Dumbledore... on the other hand, the idea of this may way put people off this fic. So consider this a pilot! Tell me what you think! Should I continue that route or
erase that section?
This was just getting irritating now. Over half the crystals was receiving some sort of reading - it was as though they had been spread over the bodies of ten people rather than over just one. The fact this was happening should have been impossible - but the fact that it was indeed happening meant that Potter truly was powerful beyond comprehension. Well, that wasn’t quite true. Your power had nothing to do with your affinities. Affinities were linked to your soul which was most closely tied with your heart - your motivations. Power reflected the soul but was not intimately connected to it. Potter could be weak in terms of power but still have numerous affinities in his heart - numerous directions in which his emotions and desires may lead him. His mind was open, and that was perhaps the scariest thing about him. And the most important, thought Draco. He needed Potter to be open to his suggestions - it was the only way forward.

Draco inspected the crystals again. He hadn’t misread them the first time - it was truly incredible. It was the evidence his queasy worry had been demanding for the past few days. Potter could be trusted and he would surely work with him - this wasn’t just some huge ploy by the old fool to get the Malfoys on his side.

The drifting time allowed Draco to continue to ponder. Perhaps the affinities didn’t prove Potter’s power, but the fact he was so adept at wandless magic certainly did. Open-minded and powerful... Draco couldn’t suppress his shiver. It was of fear and awe and jealousy and arousal. Christ almighty. Upon reevaluation though, Draco didn’t know if he should feel jealous of Potter after all. The last time the Malfoy heir had assessed his own affinities, he still hadn’t totally so many as Potter did before him now - and he had enough trouble sustaining his Mind Palace as it was. He couldn’t even begin to grasp how difficult it would be for the boy under his fingertips. No - definitely not jealous. Instead - worried that now he would have to try and help Potter build a Mind Palace which incorporated all his elements. Fucking hell. You’re one big old witch wart, aren’t you Potter?

Louis had no trouble knowing the current state of the Rose. It was easy enough to find anything out if you knew where to look, and Louis did. Harry was eternally bound to a total of two brothers, two enemies and two allies and bore the mark of his bond on his forehead. The angry red which had marred his young skin for the past several years of his life had stopped pounding its flush of self-righteous anger in a matter of days and the swelling had died down. Now it lay almost dormant - a stagnant bolt of eternal lightning - frozen forever as a mark of the Truth. Harry’s scar was currently a dark pitch. It had dulled and turned to ash grey and now it was black. Louis knew exactly what colour the Rose was - he knew where to look for the Truth.

Harry thought he had a total of three bonding marks on his body, but in reality he had four, and ironically enough it was the most dangerous and most powerful which he hadn’t sealed. Nagini likely didn’t realise the true nature of Harry’s scar. She knew the truth of the human chessboard in this war and would surely educate Harry about it thoroughly, but she didn’t know the Truth. Once Nagini’s lessons were over - his would have to begin. Harry could fight five out of his six bondmates in ignorance, but once his first enemy fell, the second would be sure to rise, and then - then - H
would need to be at the point where he could embrace the Truth.

Harry was doing well so far. He was a long way off, but if sixteen of the crystals had already indicated a resonance as his affinities - then progress was certain to not only be great, but also rapid - both of which were essential to his survival.

X-X-X

“You’re a right bastard, aren’t you, Potter.” It wasn’t phrased as a question.

Well, that wasn’t very nice. Harry slipped his eyes open and pinched his lips into a question.

“You’re only getting that now?” He challenged with a smile. He had never thought insults would make him feel so free. With his uncle he had always felt imprisoned and Harry dearly hoped that Malfoy would never even think to call him a “freak”. Just thinking about that word made him shiver with a lingering unease.

Malfoy snorted a moment too late to have heard Harry the instant he spoke - it was clear that instead he had had to replay the message in his mind.

“Right. I need you to take the crystals off yourself and put them on the table.”

Harry shifted.

“Stop! You big idiot. You need to be careful. There’s two in each palm so put those on the table first.”

Harry did so.

“And now slowly and gently pick one up from your torso at a time and then put them down too.”

As the boy wonder was coming back to himself after the relaxing experience, he faintly remembered Ollivander explaining some sort of burning sensation if anyone else touched the crystals. Or was it stinging? Harry didn’t know for certain and he was left to assume that a bond had been created between the crystals and his magic during whatever ritual it was that Malfoy had performed. It was only a stab in the dark but an accurate one nevertheless. Harry’s lucky guess didn’t reassure him though. There was so much left unknown about magic that it truly still felt like a dream - as though in a few minutes he’s wake up to the screaming of his relatives and the typical hunger pains which had plagued him unceasingly from the time he had arrived at their house. He wouldn't call it a home. That hellhole would forever be cursed - it would never become a home for anyone after those devils had raised their spawn in it.

Harry shook his head and the next moment he had placed the last gem on the heavy wooden slab next to him. Malfoy meanwhile had slipped on some thick looking gloves, much like the ones Nagini had directed him to purchase only a few days before, and was picking up the first crystals Harry had placed down before dropping them back into the velvety pouch from which they had come. When the blond had tied closed the ribbon at the opening, he gave a heavy exhale of air and turned to eye Harry.

“Now the tricky part starts.”
Harry smirked at him.

“You going to be able to handle it, Princess? You’re already panting.”

What followed in the next few minutes could be roughly summarised as chaos. In it, Harry received the purple swelling whose soft blush of pain he would proudly enjoy for the next few days. Draco meanwhile didn’t know if his red face was more from rage or embarrassment, although it was undoubtedly a mixture of the two. Thankfully though, the little rough and tumble which had taken place had given Draco’s blood time to flow back around his body, evacuating its congregation where the blond had stiffened in response to indulging in the addiction beneath his fingertips whilst his crush had breathed softly in his daze.

Chapter End Notes

I didn't overload with lore, did I?
Planning a Mind Palace

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Earth. It seemed like an element which should come naturally to all beings. *We come from the Earth and are returned unto it in death. Why, then, is it so fucking hard to conquer?* Draco was no Hufflepuff and he certainly displayed few of their tendencies, so it should have been unsurprising that he had yet to gain an affinity with the element known to easily associate itself with that house’s members. That said, Draco found himself even more irritated than usual by the fact he had yet to master the fourth and final of the Core Elements, now that he knew that his partner has already found a balance between them all. Draco sneered at “partner” even in his own head. Rival. “Rival” was definitely better. Potter was his rival and that was perfect.

Draco drew his eyes over his rival’s still half-naked form. Potter was relaxing in a mellow state of happiness. He was sipping at that god-awful butterbeer and the pumpkin juice was left untouched on the table. Had Potter tried to make a powerplay with him and alcohol? Was his rival trying to show he could drink butterbeer and demean *him* by leaving him with childish juice? Draco might not have know Potter perfectly but somehow he doubted that. Potter seemed far too distracted to care about the outcome of such a preposterous suggestion - it wasn’t as though he was subtly attempting to watch the blond’s every move. It was because of this conclusion that Draco decided against throwing around any accusations or trying to rile Potter up. Instead, he returned his mind to work.

Earth. Water. Air. Fire. *From the Earth we possess the material of life. With Water we feed ourselves and give our bodies movement. With Air we rise to freedom of thought. With Fire we know the meaning of life and live with conscious recognition.* It was difficult to build a Mind Palace which included all four elements - it wasn’t as easy as focusing on just one and simply creating a place akin to Hell or furnishing a conjured cave. Draco sighed out with irritation but Potter didn’t so much as glance at him.

Right. If the culmination of the four Core Elements was developed life, then perhaps the simplest way to go about this was to allow the elements to be reflected by a person - a human would be easiest for Potter - which also helped with the other elements. Potter could build his Palace to reflect his other affinities and just keep a human statue in the grounds for the four Cores. Draco looked back down at the ink-decorated parchment he had inscribed Potter’s results on. What else could he come up with?

1. Void
2. Royal Red
3. Water
4. Air
5. Lightning
6. Fire
7. Ice
8. Dark
9. Earth
10. Gravity
11. Royal Yellow
12. Royal Indigo
13. Light
14. Royal White
15. Royal Green
16. Royal Orange

Bloody hell. Potter had already unlocked so many of the Royal Pinnacles. Royal White was something almost everyone had an affinity with when they were still a child, and whilst Draco knew that things hadn’t been as peachy with those awful Muggles as the Daily Prophet had claimed, he was glad that Potter hadn’t suffered enough to fully lose affinity with his Innocence. He was also incredibly relieved that there had been no reading for Royal Black.

Out of the other seven colours though, Potter had found an affinity with five, and given that only Grand Masters could unlock Royal Violet, the Crown, it would have been closer to observe that Potter had only one Royal Colour left sealed. Damn. Only one - just like Draco who had been studying the elements and trying to extend his own abilities since he had known how to. Except Draco had connected with Royal Blue, the Voice, and lacked Royal Red, the Root. The Root represented security, survival and self-assurance. Potter had managed to find at least one of those three in his turbulent position where Draco had not. Money and status meant nothing in reality. Draco had none of those three and was understandably jealous... but at least they were equal. Hopefully Potter would display the way in which he had found his Root and in exchange Draco would show the way in which he had found his Voice, and together they would be all the stronger for it.

But back to the Mind Palace. With so many of the Royal Pinnacles unlocked, rather than trying to build separate rooms for each colour, it would be simpler to mark the Royal Colours on the human statue. If Draco used the word “chaka” rather than “element” then Potter should be able to grasp where on the torso he had to imagine the Colours. It was one of the rare occasions where Draco even considered praising Muggles - for once they had been sensible enough to listen to the first Indian Grand Master, Buddha, and based their culture on some of the foundational elements of life. For all Draco hated Muggles, he felt sad to see the modern age attempting to erase the few points where the magical world had intersected with the Muggle.

That was all very well, but containing the four Core Elements and so many Pinnacles in one place was going to require a hell of a lot of mental strength. He’d seen how powerful Potter was thanks to his wandless magic and the number of affinities showed an exponential potential for his motivations… building such a statute would be nigh on impossible for his rival, especially given he hadn’t yet even begun developing his strength through wandwork.

In theory, it would have been easier to simply make Potter’s whole Palace an enormous statue like Draco had made his as it would require less condensing and thus less strength. The trouble was though, that unlike Draco, who had simply substituted his absent element of Earth with an affinity with Ice, Potter had numerous Secondary Elements which meant that he would have to keep the statue as only part of his Palace and find a way to reflect his remaining elements in the rest of the construction. Draco was ready to pull his hair out. You can’t just be straightforward, can you Potter?

Oh. Fuck. What if Potter had no strength at all? Then he would surely conjure an ever expanding Palace and that was dangerous beyond belief - especially for someone like him. It would distance Potter from his memories, just like Draco’s near-fatal first attempt had done, and even if Potter didn’t want to remember some of them, that was simply an unacceptable result. I can’t lose you now, Potter. Not when you’re the key to everything.

After a few more minutes of thinking, Darco concluded that in regards to his Secondary Elements, Potter would be on his own. Draco wouldn’t give him all the answers, he would only make sure that Potter didn’t do something stupid and get himself killed, or worse - forever trapped in his own mind and broken.
The only thing which still niggled at Draco was the fact that Potter had an almost unheard of affinity with Void. Draco gulped fiercely when he saw that it was also number one. Draco himself and his dear friend Luna were the only two people he knew of who had the affinity and this limitation meant that Draco remained frustratingly in the dark about most things to do with the element. The fact Potter had it though… it could only indicate that there was something tying the two of them together beyond simply their current situation. There was also the fact that those with an affinity to Void were tangled in the strings of Fate - meaning they had an incredible duty to the world. Potter would be unable to escape his role and it would be up to Draco to explain it to him. God - how on earth was he going to make Potter understand? Draco wasn’t even sure his rival would be able to comprehend the differences between elements - nevermind something as mind-bogglingly undeniable as an affinity to Void.

X-X-X

Perhaps it was a terrible of habit of his - this - drinking whenever he got the chance. He didn’t like the fact he did it, and he certainly didn’t have nearly as much reason to do it now - his guilt had dulled over the past decade and the events of his tragedy didn’t feel quite so piquant now. That didn’t mean he stopped drinking though - whether it was because it had become a habit too difficult to break or whether it was out of genuine remorse, only few could tell.

Severus had too many anniversaries of his faults and flaws to count, and today just happened to be one of them. Nothing out of the ordinary about it. Lucius had asked him to come over that evening though, which meant he had to get his drinking done early enough in the day to be relatively sober by the time he got to Malfoy Manor. He knew his friend knew about today and in that moment he hated how Lucius refused to give him any slack. No doubt the blond thought he was helping him try and break the habit - and he was! It was just that Severus didn’t really want to break it. It was his only source of comfort when all else failed him. He was responsible for his best friend's death - and also for that of his love’s. Severus had loved James. And he hated Dumbledore for all of it. And yet he had to play pretend and never, not even now, could he let his guard down because of that maniac.

Severus gazed down into the amber of his firewhisky. The blond had been the one to give him the alcohol. The mixed messages he got from the man made his head hurt. Not just in this - but also in other matters too. His head hurt and so did his heart.

His dearest friend, Lucius, stayed amongst the living - trying to help him. He wasn’t dead. Lily was dead. James was dead. But Lucius wasn’t. Severus didn’t want to be responsible for yet another death, and yet he feared that that would be what would happen. Lucius was his best friend but he loved him beyond that. He loved him like he loved James. He loved James even now, after death, and he had loved Lucius even when his dead love had been alive. Severus hated that about himself. Why could he not just choose one? Even now that one had passed from his reach.

Severus began to tremble as his mind whirled into the consequences of the truth. If Dumbledore had killed both his best friend and his love before, then what would he do to Lucius? Especially given that the blond was so clearly an enemy with power, status and money. He wasn’t just a pawn that could be ignored. Severus could only do all that he could to spy for Lucius and protect him - make sure he came out on top. But he would never tell him how he felt. No. Never. Even if Severus managed to protect him from Dumbledore, if he told his friend how he felt, then he would surely kill their bond. With three tiny words he would kill their friendship and that would be the final straw for him too. Lucius would leave him and when that happened, Severus had long decided, he would go
too. Malfoy to his beautiful manor, and he to the sweet eternity of death.

Chapter End Notes

Confusing or follow-able?
And did you enjoy Snapey?
That little bastard could have at least left him some sort of hint. Jeremiah could find no reference to the Rose in any text. He had thrown open the doors of his Mind Palace and scoured every passage he had ever read and yet he couldn’t find anything to do with it. Nothing about its purpose, it’s magical properties, its origin - nothing. Nothing, and definitely no mention of it changing colours.

After several days of this search driving the Grand Master steadily insane, he had finally concluded that the only option left was that it was a piece of Unique Magic, and that was a frightful thought in and of itself. Unique Magic was tied to the very nature of a person’s soul and couldn’t be replicated. It meant it was incredibly difficult to understand Unique Magic and even harder to undo the effects of it - which was why, he supposed, so many people feared the contents of ancient texts and the charms on pureblood artifacts. It was clear to see how easily they had been rebranded as simply “Dark”.

Jeremiah sighed. Tom had implied the Rose was likely a bond of some sort, which should have been his speciality and something he would have enjoyed researching. But the way he wrote about it made it seem as though the genius knew exactly what it was and had just decided not to tell the friend he was getting to do the dirty work for him. Now that irritated the Grand Master. Jeremiah thwacked his heavy palm down on the countertop and growled out a garbled insult. It was bloody typical of Tom.

X-X-X

Dumbledore had visited Fudge under the typical guise of concerns regarding education. He had met with him and fixed the bureaucratic problem relating to the Muggle-born contracts which his pawn had been unable to sort out. He’d even had plenty of time to peer inside the Minister’s mind to check on proceedings. He’d left before the politician had found his new obsession, but whether that would even matter to the Headmaster when he found out was another matter. If one of his pawns wanted to play with another, who would he be to interfere? All Dumbledore would care about was making sure they stayed on his side.

Now, Dumbledore was placed precariously over the edge of his Pensieve, his beard trailing on the floor as his crooked nose met the liquid in the basin. His back was aching lightly as he realised he’s been in that position for hours. Had he not been certain his wards would hold, he would have been discomforted by the vulnerability of it all. As it was though, he was only concerned about looking for clues - for any sort of hints! Riddle would be back soon enough and he had to be ready to manipulate his little figurehead of evil into doing as he wished. The key to that was undeniably in Riddle’s horcruxes. He’d put the Slytherin through enough trauma to be certain that there would be at least a handful in existence. The man would surely also create even more when he returned - driving him closer to madness and making him all the easier to manipulate.

Dumbledore rarely doubted himself, but in this case, regarding horcruxes, he might just have done so - they were both rare and dangerous. That was, had he not already found one of his former student’s - the diary Riddle had made the first time Dumbledore had driven the boy to murder. And not only had Dumbledore found it, but he also knew exactly where it was - in the dusty corner of a Junk
Shop, disguised by a spell designed to repel everyone but him, ready to be collected at the start of Potter’s second year. Well, that was if this year’s attempt at bringing Riddle back failed. Dumbledore rarely doubted himself - true - but he was also realistic - he considered this year’s trial to be a simple practice run - both for him and for Potter, and through the terrible event the two would grow closer, and Potter would trust him even more - he’d trust him with his life, and he’d trust him to make the world a better place. Potter would trust him and Dumbledore would suppress him - the only threat that had ever posed a challenge to the new world he was about to complete.

Dumbledore had it all perfectly planned out and he couldn’t wait for the day Potter would take his first steps in Hogwarts - the Headmaster’s lair which the boy would end up calling home.

X-X-X

1. Magical bond
2. Horcrux
3. Language of flowers
4. Royal Colours
5. Seal

That was the be all and end all of his ideas. Five items scrawled onto a piddly little piece of parchment. Had they had been five useful ideas, that would have been another matter entirely. As it was though, Jeremiah was getting past the point where his darling wife was able to calm him. This wasn’t just irritation - now, it was an unquenchable need to know.

If the Rose was a bond, then there had to be someone else it was bonded to. It wouldn’t be a creature because the Rose was seemingly solitary - there was no snake slipping around it, nor a lion bursting from its petals, as there would have been if it were indeed a bond with a creature. So that only left a magical being or a witch or wizard. It was unlikely to be a magical being though as not even Tom was irritating enough to leave out a detail like the other part of the bond mark which inevitably came when bonding to beings such as werewolves or mermen. So a witch or wizard then… if it was indeed a bond.

Jeremiah seemed to calm a little and found a place where he could put his feet up, reaching for a drop of firewhisky. Perhaps it would be prudent to start searching for the mystery figure who bore the mark as well - maybe glancing at theirs would be easier than trying to approach that embodiment of all evil. There were far too many illusions of Light protecting the old fool for such a plan to be practical and he hadn’t the time to infiltrate the Headmaster’s circle as had been his original idea.

The trouble was though, that if the Rose wasn’t a bond and was instead a horcrux, then Jeremiah would end up looking for eternity, for it would be nigh on impossible to find the object to which the aging madman had bound his soul.

X-X-X

Dumbledore wasn’t surprised when he saw a fallen petal, only a little dejected. He had been expecting another one to fall ever since the Rose had turned black. Potter had got his first wand so it
was only natural that such changes were to occur.

The Headmaster shrugged out of his violet robe and went about finding his cloak for brewing. He had been working on his latest creation for many years and believed he was getting close to creating the perfect potion. Perhaps things would have gone much quicker if he had simply enlisted Snape’s help, but the only man he had ever trusted was his brother - he couldn’t afford to trust anyone else.

Snape was undeniably a brilliant brewer though, and Dumbledore almost felt proud of him. The dark-haired man he had cultivated through abuse was well on the way to becoming a Grand Master of Potions despite his young age and Dumbledore felt genuinely upset that he would have to cut him down before he reached the final Pinnacle. It would be a shame to see such talent go to waste... but no matter - Dumbledore would make the world a perfect place to cultivate even more brilliant minds, except this time he would be able to do it without the thorny grip of age clamping down on his heart.

The rose petals would always linger as ash stains on his ribs until Dumbledore had seen them - perhaps as a way of reminding him of the countdown he had, or perhaps his former lover’s way of rubbing his misery in his face. Either way - it wouldn’t matter. Dumbledore had everything under control. The final petal wouldn’t fall, and all he would allow himself would be a sad smile whenever another one twinkled off, before very swiftly moving on.

Chapter End Notes

I hope this helps feed your imagination about the Rose! :D
I'll be updating the AN at the end of Ch 33 (Grand Master) to include a link to an image of Jeremiah today - so if you're interested - have a look!
Amelia Bones was saddened but not surprised that her efforts to impede proceedings had fallen through. She had been hoping to catch the puppet master dismantling the bureaucratic nonsense she had created, but she had been unfortunately called away by other duties. It was not beyond her to consider the fact that she had already made herself a target by doing this and it was possible that she had, in fact, been called away on a conjured pretense meant to distract her. On the other hand, she had to admit that she had done her best to make the blockage seem effortless and innocently ignorant - as far from malicious as possible. Perhaps she hadn’t thought things through properly but she just couldn’t stem her curiosity. She couldn’t just sit back and ignore a sneaky pureblood trying to pass legislation to suppress the innocent. She had her values to abide by, after all!

Amelia thought she was a moral person who fought for the Light and for the good. It was a shame, therefore, that her ultimate leader didn’t care about justice. Muggle-borns could be Mudbloods for all he cared. He wasn’t some pureblood who cared about blood purity either, but that hardly made him any better. All he cared about was power and revenge and he would have both. Dumbledore hadn’t even bothered looking into the blockage with paperwork during his visit - he simply hadn’t cared. There was nobody in the Minister’s cabinet who could stop him and they were all as incompetent as squibs. They hadn’t done anything to try and stop him - they hadn’t even noticed! They couldn’t have done! It was impossible for them to have even suspected anything amiss. It was just another ignorant and inconvenient cock-up on their part.

Dumbledore was wrong but Amelia had yet to be right.

X-X-X

“Did you even catch a single word of what I said, Potter?”

“Nope.”

If looks could kill, Harry would have been in his grave twice over.

“I’m sorry Ferretface-”

“Shut up, Scarface!”

“-but I just couldn’t stop looking at your adorable bedhead.”

“My what?”

“Your bedhead,” Harry repeated simply.

It took about two seconds for Malfoy to slowly drag his fingers hesitantly from their perch on the table to his cutting cheekbones and then his fluffy hair. Malfoy would most certainly deny it, but Harry would take great pleasure in replaying the snake’s squeak of horror as he felt the damning evidence of his soft turfs. They flew away from his skull at random angles thanks to the boy’s
frustrated ruffling. It truly was adorable.

“Were you being serious, Potter?”

“About it being adorable? - Of course.”

“No!” The boy hissed in irritation, his cheeks a lovely pink. “About you not listening!”

“You should know me better than that,” parried Harry.

Malfoy sighed and Harry almost felt sorry for him - it was just impossible not to tease him though.

“So is there anything you don’t understand?”

“When I come to actually try and envisage it, I’ll probably find an ant colony of problems, but for now let’s go with: ‘I think I get everything.’”

“Then repeat to me what you’re going to be doing until we next meet.”

“Meditating and practicing envisioning my Mind Palace.”

“And how are you going to do that?”


“And what exactly are you going to envisage?”

“The human statue with the colours marked on it.”

“Well done, Scarface.”

“Do you really need to be so mocking about it?”

“It’s a serious matter and if you joke around about not listening, I’ll treat you the age you are, rather than the age you have to be.”

That statement alone was very telling, both of their situation and how poorly Malfoy viewed his antics. Harry decided in that moment that he’d stop, or at least tone it down. The world of magic had given him so much... Taking his role - or Fate, as Malfoy insisted - seriously was the least he could do. Harry met Malfoy’s gaze evenly and tried to confer his new resolution to his partner. He almost shook his head as he realised Malfoy would probably scold him for using such a misleading word. Rival. Not partner. Malfoy was his rival. But as Harry saw the blond’s eyes crinkle in thanks, he couldn't help wondering what it would be like to be more than that.

X-X-X

“Was the lion being serious about trying to reinstate the old school system?”

“Why wouldn’t he have been? It’s something we’ve been trying to do for the longest time,” replied Rowena to her lover.
“That’s true enough, but people have forgotten the old ways and the current way would serve well enough once the old fool is removed.”

“We can’t afford to forget the past, Helga. All this awful nonsense is happening precisely because we have.”

“I’m not suggesting we forget the past, wise one. Nothing of the sort. But I think we need to remember that too much change is also a bad thing. People need security and comfort, even in times of revolution. That’s precisely why the old fool has got as far as he has.”

They would repeat this conversation many times over - sometimes with their fellow Founders, sometimes without - but in the end, they would still find themselves undecided, even when Dumbledore was long, long gone.

X-X-X

“You do know who runs this place, don’t you?”

“Of course I do, Ferretface.”

Draco just gave him a look.

“And you mean to tell me you can trust him?”

“I mean to tell you that the only person I trust entirely has reason to believe I should.”

Draco could feel a brief tremor in his heart as he was stonily reminded that he had yet to earn Potter’s trust. Or - thanks to a relieving correction - earn it fully. It was only a brief moment of weakness but it was enough to worry Draco - he couldn’t afford to let life get the better of him. And he certainly didn’t even dare to consider the notions of love and lust.

What could he do to earn Potter’s trust more thoroughly though? There had to be something... Oh. Well, logically, step one could only be one thing: freeing Potter from his stupidly self-imposed debt.

“I’ll relieve you of your burden now. You may tell me what it is you wish to offer in exchange for my knowledge.”

Potter’s eyebrows told the story of his amusement at the poncy phrasing. The boy wonder didn’t bother saying anything though. Instead, he simply got up from his perch opposite Draco and swung one foot in front of the other as he approached the boy. The blond gulped. Now this really did feel like a powerplay. He had been hoping Potter knew how he felt - it would be too infuriatingly awful if he didn’t - but abusing his weakness and romantic inclination was just cruel. Draco’s heart was starting to beat wildly and by the time Potter had slipped onto the same bench as Draco, straddling it to face him, the snake’s face was already spluttering out in a pink hue.

Potter smiled calmly and with a steely confidence that did nothing to un-inspire the condemning journey of the blond’s blood on its way south.

“What do you, Mr Malfoy, know about bonding?” Was all Potter hazily whispered out. A smirk tugged half-heartedly at his feminine cheeks and the look of lazy confidence stirred heat to the very edges of Draco’s consciousness.
Oh fuck.

Chapter End Notes

Not a lot happens but... did I bring Amelia back in smoothly enough? And did I manage to ease the skip past Draco explaining the details of elements smoothly enough or should I have added more in about it?
“My parents are bonded.”

That was not the response Harry had been expecting.


Harry had listened to the soft hissing of Nagini before he went to sleep the previous night - she had told him all about bonding. Apparently any two people could bond. Any two. Magic had no care for colour or race… or blood purity.

“Does that matter?” inquired Harry of his peer.

Blood bonds had been portrayed as the epitome of loyalty by his familiar - so wasn’t it only natural to have a blood bond in marriage?

“That is a matter of course,” hissed out Malfoy. The pained look on his face was enough to get Harry to drop it though. He would simply have to ask Nagini later. Harry swiftly moved on.

“What about familiars then?”

“Familiars?”

“Yes - what do you know about them?”

“What everyone else knows - that the bond is a piece of Dark magic so dangerous that even powerful purebloods are afraid to use now because of the risk of familiars taking over your soul.”

...Well that was something he hadn’t been informed of.

He glanced at Nagini who had silently been observing Harry all this time. He didn’t know whether she had been assessing his social abilities or acting as a guard dog, but either way he was thankful for her presence. And for both Louis’ and Hedwig’s too.

Now though, he was looking at her pointedly. Nagini’s near-silent hiss was bemused and her eyes took on that dull tone of mockery that they so often did as she arched the scaley browbone over the left eye. Harry hadn’t been questioning her loyalty - he had been curious was all. After all, if she was been planning to control him, she had no need to take over his soul - she was doing plenty well enough with just her high and mighty wisdom. Plus, Harry calmly realised, he was now tied to Nagini past a bond of any sort - she had been the first sign of friendship he had known, and for that she would always have his loyalty, whether she decided to take him to heaven or to hell. That didn’t scare him. The thought which made him shudder violently though, was the fact that if it hadn’t been her, it would have been someone so very much worse.

“Let’s suppose that’s a rumor.” It was the best he could do to forgive his silence and move on. Malfoy gave him a look but allowed the supposition. “What else do you know?”

Malfoy sighed dramatically, seemingly less wound up than he had first been when Harry had first positioned himself to share the blond’s bench.
“Familiars are creatures you bond to yourself with a bonding mark. You must earn their loyalty and trust because they won’t bond with you unless they are willing. You can’t force them within dipping into the realms of Forbidden Magic. It’s said to be a painful process but afterwards they gain access to magic similar to that which elves possess - they are only ever able to use it to in service of their master though.” Malfoy’s tone had dragged on in that tentative way it did whenever he was curious but also unsure.

Harry smiled at him brightly with a nod, to which Malfoy seemed to grow uncomfortable once more. Harry really would have to stop doing that, but until Malfoy told him to stop, it was impossible to resist teasing him. Malfoy wasn’t weak and Harry had no doubt he would speak his mind if he truly hated it. As it was though, the stiffening of the blond’s posture always seemed to be accompanied by a slight smile, so Harry was left to assume that the heir of be all and end all had actually lacked the same essential part of life as Harry had - friendship. Harry felt no reason to resist - not when a smile and nervous relief seemed to be the response he received.

“Do your parents have bonding marks?”

“Yes. Father’s is a rose and Mother’s is a sprig of vines… Familiar bonds have been recorded to sometimes have visible marks, sometimes not - it depends of the person - if that’s what you’re getting at.”

Oh. Oh this would be good. Harry chuckled softly and his eyes lit up. Malfoy seemed to find new curiosity and discomfort to arrange across his features in response.

“What is it, Potter?”

This was going to be fun. He couldn’t wait to see Malfoy’s face. He couldn’t wait to impress him.

“Gentei Kaijo.” uttered the messy-haired boy softly, and then three beams of light sprung from his body, nigh on blinding the blond. A rising pulsation of magical energy accompanied it, spewing out of Harry’s body encircled the two of them. So did a high-pitched squeak, as if a tiny bird was struggling to get free. In a way, it was - the metaphor reflecting Harry’s magic being freed as the chanted intention released the seals the boy wonder had placed on his body only days before. Nagini might tell him off for releasing them and there might well be consequences… but in that moment, Harry simply didn’t care.

A few minutes later, the dust settled and the sparkling essence of magic drifted off in the still currents of air, leaving Harry stunned at the feeling of sheer power inside him and Malfoy slack-jawed as he realised he might have just reached his limit - with arousal, and with belief.

X-X-X

The only logical people that could possibly be bonded to Dumbledore were few and far between. For starters, they would have to be capable of meeting Dumbledore as an equal in one way or another - the whole idea of magic allowing union between any two people was a whole load of dragon dung. The second thing was that if the Rose was indeed a bond between two people and was also a piece of Unique Magic, rather than just a generic contract, then it was either the side effect of a hideously Dark piece of magic which few had ever been powerful enough to cast, or the more likely option was that Dumbledore had known this witch or wizard. Personally. And possibly intimately.
Jesus fucking Christ. I have to go and undress the bastard’s bloody lovers!

X-X-X

Matilda was a Grand Mistress. She was also a wife. The wife of her very dear husband that she sometimes believed the world would crumble without. When she finally got her hands on Tom, she would be sure to give him a good talking to, and then the little sod would be responsible for taking Jerry out every Sunday for a whole year to play golf. Her dear husband would love it, Tom would absolutely abhor it, and she would get one day a week free from her really truly dear husband (that she only occasionally wanted to slap) and finally be able to meet up with the friends who had all thought her mad for going to live in seclusion with her really utterly maddening madman.

X-X-X

Isaac hadn’t been expecting his owner to be in need of his services today. The owl had also thought that it would be another day he spent lamenting that his only friends were other feather-brains and the fact that his owner had never spoken to anyone wise enough to persuade the blond to consider making him a familiar.

Isaac had been sleeping sweetly on the ivory pillow his owner had left out for him that morning. Now though, he was stunned awake by the charmed collar his aristocrat had slipped around his neck which demanded with an authoritative certainty that Isaac arrive at his side for service. The great eagle owl was up in a flash and swooping out from the window, following the location charm on the slim fabric around his neck. Draco had always been demanding but he had always been careful too. The blond wasn’t upset whenever his owl ruffled his feathers, hoping he would take the collar off for a short while. The green length was silk too - so it was soft to the touch. Isaac couldn’t complain. The collar bound him but it bound him gently. He never felt afraid and he always stayed loyal.

Isaac flew swiftly towards his owner’s call, wishing that he would be able to stop calling Draco his owner and start calling him his master; that the blond boy would remove the silk collar and bind him instead with a tightness near impossible to remove. Isaac was always disappointed by his desire for a bond, but perhaps, just perhaps, today would be different...

Chapter End Notes

Well finally we have the reveal ;D
Also - Who likes Matilda? Who pities Jeremiah? And is anyone liking Isaac yet?
“What even… is that?”

Draco was in awe. He couldn’t believe his eyes. His Harry- no. Potter wasn’t just Potter… he was now covered in the majestic wingspan of a pure white owl, the deadly swing of an emerald serpent’s tail and the comforting paws of a wide-eyed lemur. Harry Potter truly was the boy wonder. It wouldn’t have surprised Draco if Potter’s wand had been a vine one - the wood known to be wielded by people with the continued ability to surprise. The blond wasn’t a wandmaker but his family had once had a passion for the craft and had compiled various tomes that the current heir had taken great pleasure in reading. “Vine wands are among the less common types, and I have been intrigued to notice that their owners are nearly always those witches or wizards who seek a greater purpose, who have a vision beyond the ordinary and who frequently astound those who think they know them best.” This quote was but a well-known fact to him.

Draco had asked his question, mouth as agape as his eyes were wide. He repeated the query in his head. What the hell was that? Those creatures looked so vivid, vibrant - alive! Potter just smiled at him.

“Why, they’re my familiars, Malfoy.”

And then Draco felt his ability to breathe return to him. He sucked air in through his mouth as he snapped it shut. Proprietary alerting him to its renewed presence among his concerns. Oh buggering hell. The breath he drew in was stuttered. He remembered now. Potter was decorated in the the garb of a man both brave and bold - one who would face danger head on and wouldn’t flinch. Draco needed that man. He needed Harry- Potter! Oh fuck. Potter looked incredible, the creatures putting on a show for Draco on the pearly skin of their master, and ruffling their material bodies by his side, puffing out their chests. Impressive. All very impressive. The thing which was most impressive though, was the fact that the taste of power which lingered in Draco’s mouth was not his imagination - a phantom sensation from being overwhelmed by such a beautiful sight. No, it wasn’t that at all. Draco knew what he knew. He was clever and educated. He had read all about a great many things and learned as much as he could. This was power. True power. He could taste it. He had felt the thrill of it before as Potter had approached him, lingering beneath the surface, assuring Draco he was in safe hands. But this? This was electric - this was ecstasy! Draco’s head was pounding at the onslaught of sheer capability. The elements. The affinities. Harry - no, Potter - had an open mind. He was capable of dexterous wandless magic - but this was beyond even that. This wasn’t the evidence of a boy slightly more powerful than average who had gained control of his accidental magic. This is power. Sheer power. Draco was panting. He could taste it - tart and alive in his mouth. He was gulping for air but in reality he was gulping for more - more of Potter’s power. He needed it. He was hooked on it. Oh bloody Christ! Potter had undone a seal to reveal the sight of his familiars to him - but every seal locks away not only what you want but also part of your power. That was the sacrifice. Just like bonding is always a sacrifice. Oh fuck. How much had Potter sealed? What was the boy’s true power? Christ. Potter! Harry-!

And then the world went white.
Nagini liked to think she knew Harry. He was her master and she was loyal to him, not only because she believed in resolving this senseless war, but also because he had already proven he was worthy of her. That didn’t stop her wondering just how far his idiocy could possibly extend though.

Harry had decided to reveal one of the best cards he was holding to a Malfoy. Malfoys were traditionally hard to trust, and a boy of eleven was even harder to consider loyal. Nagini believed wholeheartedly that her master was a good judge of character - he had bonded to three loyal familiars, after all - but she also wondered if he truly appreciated the consequences of even one of these stages going wrong. Draco Malfoy had the potential to be a very deadly wizard and an alliance with him was a dangerous game to play. Especially if the two of them decided to get their feelings involved - then their union might just end up being explosive.

Nagini shook her head in sympathy for her future self that would likely have to deal with the many fallouts between the two of them. She also concluded that what was done was done and that the very least she could do to reward herself for putting up with the idiocy of her master was sitting right where she was, refusing to give him any advice save a raised eyebrow, as he ploughed on with his plan to reveal the three of them to Malfoy.

A few minutes later, Nagini was even happier when the blond fell unconscious at the shock of Harry unsealing his true power for it gave her the pleasure of staying silent whilst Harry panicked over what to do.

X-X-X

Matilda had thought that a helping hand might be welcome. After this morning’s run in with a foul-demon crumpled over a pile of books which she had sworn had still been her husband only a week ago, she had concluded that if she was still feeling nice enough to help after recovering from her morning trauma, she would have to do so from the shadows.

A simple rose had become the Rose - one her favorite man was obsessing over. Perhaps she was missing something obvious, but she had the same rank as her husband and, unlike him on days like this, she was no fool. Would it not be simpler to search for a witch or wizard with a bonding mark of a rose rather than searching through all the people who had ever known the Headmaster? Of course, if the other person knew about the mark, they could easily cover it up or even seal it. Well, unless they simply couldn’t. If they were bonded to the old fool but weren’t as mentally strong as him, perhaps they didn’t have the ability to seal their mark because of all the power it contained. But either way - her darling madman really didn’t need to worry so much about it - he wouldn’t have to undress “the whores and scum of an orphanage”. What he did need to do though, was break out of his of-course-very-manly strop already.

Matilda looked down at the list she had copied from him earlier and she found one entry catching her eye in particular.

**Language of flowers**

The Rose was a rose as good as any other, was it not? Depending on the colour, it had various meanings. If she was to take her thoughts down that path, then not only did the idea of the bond being unique suggest an intimacy between people, but also the symbolism of the flower, with
romance, friendship and love being the three most popular meanings. Was that why the colour mattered so much? Because Tom wanted to know the status between the old fool and the person he was bonded to? It was rare for a bond to change colours… so perhaps there really was something special about it.

But… the trouble was that roses were such a common symbol in society that Mother Magic repelled the very notion of it, ironically leaving few people to ever hold the mark when they bonded. Couples hoping for a rose to appear after marriage had once been saddened when one didn’t appear. Now though, it was accepted as a banal absence. If one did appear though… it was often said to be true love. Had the old fool once actually loved someone? She hadn’t thought that the foul being could have been capable of it. If he was as cold and heartless and she thought he was… then what if the mark of a rose didn’t mean true love at all? The association was a rumor at best so it was perfectly possible it was false. What if instead a rose was a brand of some sort - perhaps evidence of the fallout of Forbidden Magic? Mother Magic hated the symbol after all. Had the Headmaster actually done a deed she had feared he might have done but had never had any reason to believe he had? In that case - the mark was his damnation. Did Tom intend to take the man down legally? Or would the mark form an Achilles heel for the ancient wizard? How did Tom know about it in the first place though? Did he know the other person bonded by the mark? Was it maybe… him?

Matilda knew just how many utterly awful things Tom - that blessed force of supposed evil - had done - had been driven to doing. But if Tom was bonded to the old fool, he would surely be able to tell the colour as soon as he returned to a body. Why ask Jerry to help him? Did that mean that there was to be an ever greater fallout than she had feared? Was someone else as intimately involved with the Headmaster as Tom had always been? Was it Harry Potter? Oh God. How many people would feel their souls torn apart by the war that was about to find its climax? How many people would be sucked in by the effects of the Rose? Was it really the result of Forbidden Magic? Would it only affect those who had cast Forbidden Magic or would it affect others too? Millions of innocent lives decimated by tragedy - thousands of them too mentally weak to pull their soul together once more. Oh God. If she was right… what chance did anyone have? But if she was right… perhaps she finally had a lead. Perhaps there was hope. Jerry would benefit from hearing the name “Harry Potter” and if things were truly as bad as she suspected they might just be, she wouldn’t let his “no” be an answer - she’d help him every step of the way.

X-X-X

He didn’t want to do this. He didn’t, but it was the only way. Potter wouldn’t trust anyone who sided with the man who had tried to kill him. The only chance they had was if Potter was willing to consider “saving” the Malfoy heir from his fate of joining the ranks of the Dark Lord. It would be a story easy enough to keep and it came with the added benefit of nobody else having to know about it - it would only ever come into play when Draco was alone with Potter. They needed to earn Potter’s trust. He knew that the Dark Lord was more than willing to work with the boy to take down the old coot. Draco just had to do his duty of pretending to befriend Potter. Maybe, who knows, if his son was able to change the boy wonder’s perspective, they would actually become true friends. Like him and Severus. Severus…

He’d requested his friend come in the evening to help him pacify and discuss this plan with Draco. He only hoped that his son would be back early enough not to inconvenience the Potions Master. But Christ almighty. How he didn’t want to do this to Draco. He didn’t, but they needed Potter. Potter was their savior. Draco needed to befriend him under the pretence of being afraid of joining
the Dark Lord. Then change his message to being afraid of the war. Convert Potter’s views to anti-Dumbledore. Show him evidence that both sides were just as bad as each other. Forge a third side... But Lucius knew his son and his attitudes. He would have to make sure Draco approached Potter with an emphasis on not caring about blood supremacy. That would be another matter for later. For now though, Potter was unlikely to abide by their plans unless they made such a concession. And then when things had gone to plan and the two had grown closer, Draco would say that the Dark Lord was actually a victim, and then their plan would be complete. Potter would be theirs, Dumbledore would be gone, and the Dark Lord would be able to forge the world anew with the right morals at the forefront and Dumbledore’s pretty lies abolished forever.

Lucius looked down at his glass of firewhisky. He felt he needed the smooth burn of alcohol to equip him for the argument which was sure to come, but there was more to his action than that - he always tried to make a point of drinking whenever his friend believed he needed to too - out of habit or out of sorrow. Today was one of those days. He knew every single date when his dear friend was afflicted and he strongly believed he would never forget the rhythm of tragic anniversaries which came every year. Hopefully, one day, Severus would learn of the blond’s actions and then he would feel guilty enough to stop. Lucius was a Slytherin - he wouldn't be ashamed of using cunning to get his friend to cease. He wanted the best for the best man he knew.

He smiled down somberly before raising his free hand up to tug at the cream silk of his shirt. The rose over his heart had always been a source of mystery. A mystery Lucius thought he had figured out. It was stunningly beautiful but recently it had worried him more than it had ever done before - it had turned black. Black and yet still beautiful.

Bond marks were supposed to match - they were a pair. A vine should curl around his heart the way it did around Cissy’s. Not a rose. Lucius shifted in a breath of long-mulled thoughts. A solemn rope of green was there to be found but it was not the same. It wasn’t a perfect circle, instead it was wrapped around the rose he longed to hate and yet never could.

After many years with this traitorous mark, he had come to the conclusion that this was the way in which his blood bond showed the single form of infidelity it would allow. The rose could only be a mark of Severus - the man he loved with all his heart. The blood bond wouldn’t break so long as he loved Narcissa too. And he did, so it stayed. But now the rose was black. He believed that could only be a bad sign - perhaps even one of a tragedy to come. Would he die? Would Severus? Would the love he felt for his friend vanish into thin air? Lucius, in that moment there, truly had no clue which would be worse.

Chapter End Notes

Well this is double the length what it normally would be so I hope you enjoy. ;)
A little bit of Lucius as requested and a little more Drarry too. :D
The first glimpse Isaac had of the room when he arrived left him wondering whether he had flown into heaven or hell.

His master had his spindly fingers wrapped around the slim neck of the boy he professed to “most definitely, never in a million years” be obsessed with. Benches lay at odd angles strewn across the room and a lemur cowered beneath the puffy red armrest of one toppled armchair, the fraying edges of its cheap velvet cover torn further open and the stuffing softly thumping down onto the poor primate’s head. A fine serpent he believed to be Nagini was coiled softly on the floor too, but she was closer to the boys. Across from him though, perched on the other windowsill, was the most incredibly graceful halo of white he had ever seen. He disliked his fellow owls out of principle but he had never seen a bird quite so… gorgeous. She looked untarnished by the great troubles of war and yet smart enough to know all about them. Her eyes were clear as she looked on at her owner - unconcerned for the current state of the brawl. She was beautiful. She was incredible. She was mesmerising. He had to go and speak to her!

Isaac would have been about to begin his first encounter with the lovely white maiden had it not been for the fact that as he extended his humongous wingspan within the warded room, he caught not only the eyes of the ice queen, but also the attention of his master.

“Isaac!” The voice was joyous and Isaac should have been happy to hear his master’s mood so very much improved. He was, however, sorry to report that his mood was instead very much soured, especially when his darling owl gave him no more than a brief a once over and then sniffed derisively, striding away from her perch and closer towards her own wizard, leaving the poor eagle owl bereft and really far too sorrowful.

“Potter, this is my owl, Isaac. It is with him that I wish to bond.”

Wait. Did he really hear that right? Isaac glanced at Potter. He didn’t seem to exude falsity. Was it possible? Did this boy know? Potter nodded softly and smiled at the large bird and then relief poured into Isaac unlike any he had ever known before. There, on that day, he found evidence that heaven existed on earth and that it could exist for him - a mere owl in service. Potter had to know about familiars - he couldn’t not. The evidence was staring Isaac right in the face! Literally. Three familiars were represented by their marks as the figures bounced alive all over the scrawny body of the boy wonder and among them were three sets of vibrant eyes. Oh. Oh, by Jove…

“Isaac, will you become my familiar?”

Draco’s eyes were blue and radiant and a stranger would have never believed that the azure orbs were the rarer display - only flickering to life when the icy chill thawed out. The blue looked perfectly in place and Isaac could only hope to see them like that more often. Isaac cared impossibly greatly for his soon-to-be-master and Draco had his loyalty forevermore.

A second later, Potter was easing the blond down and gesturing for him to perch on his owner's shoulder. Isaac did, and as Potter pushed back fabric to reveal that aristocratic milkiness covering his master’s neck, Isaac steeled himself for this moment - one he had been waiting for and which had finally come. He lined his beak up, glanced back at the eyes of his beloved boy, and dived his length forwards, piercing the carcass of his master. Bonding was a sacrifice. Draco knew that. Isaac only
hoped his magic was enough to not only heal the bond but also take away the pain. Isaac held his position steadily and let his eyes drift shut. When his master awoke, Isaac would be able to do what he had always envied others for doing.

*I’ll speak a language you understand and I’ll finally be able to tell you how much I love you, my sire.*

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Rowena had caught Salazar summoning Betty that morning and had proceeded to have a severe chat with him. By severe she meant pacifying and curious. Or at least that’s how she perceived the conversation to have gone. Salazar on the other hand would have disagreed thoroughly and would have rather experienced the Spanish inquisition. He had every right to summon his basilisk - he needed no permission! He said that... but it was a well known fact that nobody was ever allowed to do anything without the eagle’s permission. Still though! He was feeling petulant and he was going to take the attitude he wanted to, which at this point in time was that of a toddler denied sweets.

He had promised not to open his chamber yet and had even promised to stop bringing the topic up - but that didn’t mean he couldn’t get it ready. Surely both his heirs would appreciate a little homecoming. Betty was the perfect person to greet them once they entered! She knew the place like the back of her scales and she would be a living point of contact for them. She as wise as Salazar himself and had the added benefit of being able to interact with the real world, unlike her master who was now imprisoned in portraits. She would be capable of saving his heirs if they decided to listen to his foolish lover’s house too much and take far more risks than were necessary. Nagini would be happy to see her grandmother too! They would all be one big happy family! He’d even let Godric in if he asked nicely.

Rowena just couldn’t resist spoiling his fun though, could she? He had allowed himself to indulge in a silent swearword as she turned to leave, but the raised eyebrow she gave him told him she knew not only his thoughts but also the very word he had chosen, which only serve to make Salazar all the more irritated. It seemed he would need to spend time reinforcing his Occlumency shields and reorganising his Mind Palace. Bleeding Godric, there was so very much to do, and so little time not spent reading or drinking in which he could do it!

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Louis was happy with where he was positioned - he could see the events taking place with ease and he was able to whisk his eyes around to the window as he felt the wards detect Isaac and allow him through. He knew Isaac - he had made a name for himself and the eagle owl seemed to be the only one that didn’t know it. Louis also knew just how powerful Aberforth was so was unsurprised that his wards could detect Isaac’s inner loyalty before a bond mark had even been forged. One was about to be created though and Louis almost smiled as he saw joy spread over the massive owl’s features. He watched the eagle owl line himself up and make his best effort to minimise the pain of bonding, his wingtip reaching out to linger over Draco’s heart.

Draco was so young and so was Harry. *They’re just boys and yet they must take on the world.* It
seemed an improbability and yet he was about to see its confirmation. Nagini hissed at Harry to remove Draco’s top once both the blond and the owl had fallen into unconsciousness. Harry did so without delay, and there was the truth revealed. The brazen eyes and flapping flutter of feathers spread in inky swirls over the boy’s left shoulder, one wing dipping to caress both shoulder blades and the blond’s upper back, the other slipping around to hold Draco’s heart. It looked so gentle and soft and intimate and yet in the furled grip around the throbbing organ lay the true mark of horror. In the cluster of malt feathers, Louis could see the undeniable evidence of a single, flowering rose. The evidence was there and so was the damnation. The rose was only just flowering and yet it was already a horrifically potent black.

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Severus didn’t know that his dear friend was mirroring his drinking habits, but he would discover it soon enough. Similarly, Severus didn’t know that his own hand had been copying the blond’s brazenly restless palm as it groped at the fabric splayed over his chest. After several rough tugs, the fixtures gave way and flew open. The Professor’s digits made contact with cold skin and he managed to calm the brief moment of hysteria he had found when he had reached the bottom of the bottle. It ebbed even more as Severus pushed his fingers heavily against the rose buried in thorns upon his heart. Unlike Lucius, he had layered his rose with as many enchantments as he could imagine and create - burying it from sight.

He didn’t know why he had it, but he had had it since he stepped into Hogwarts. He didn’t know what it represented beyond his own suspicions. Roses were the symbol of love, were they not? The rose had changed colour several times and so Severus had assumed that the behaviour simply reflected the moments when his own feelings had shifted. From friendship to lust to love - or something similar, at least. The rose was black now though. Black as could be. James had died but Lucius lived on. Was this some kind of sign? Was Lucius in danger? Or did it simply mean that Severus’ time was up? That he would need to move on? That final thought was true even without the Potion Master’s speculation. He needed to move on - and soon. There was a war to fight and he would protect the man he loved, but he would have to learn to do it out of duty, not out of a haunting obsession and desire for a wish that would never be fulfilled.

Severus slammed his empty bottle down next to the glass he had abandoned when formality had flown from his drunken stupor. He needed to get ready. Lucius would be expecting him in a matter of hours and he wouldn’t let his friend see him like this, even if the blond knew damn well the reality hidden in the Potion Master’s rooms.

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The moment Hedwig caught sight of the swooping gestures of the other owl, she had already been impressed. Hedwig had never seen an owl as majestic and powerful as him. He looked as though he might even have been able to take on Nagini in a brawl. She sighed out a chirp. He was unlikely to even spare her a glance.

Hedwig was wrong though. So very wrong. And the moment the eagle owl caught sight of her, he was besotted. His eyes pronounced with passionate aristocracy that she would be his. When they did
though… her whole attitude changed. Her dreamy eyes vanished and became the rogue cunning of every woman who had ever been considered a conquest. She wouldn’t be taken in by his attitude of an Olympian hero. She would be the one to take him and make him her own. And even better, she wouldn’t have to so much as lift a claw - he’d come to her and she would make him hers.

*Harry better find plenty of reasons to write to Malfoy.* There was something new at stake now - namely her future husband and their gorgeous, fluffy chicks.

X-X-X

Hedwig looked occupied which, Louis supposed, was probably a good thing. It wasn’t that she was in the way, but it would be easier to manipulate Harry with only Nagini there to try and give him contrary advice.

Louis turned to look at the snake in question and found her lapping at the air curiously, which give him momentary pause. He had always been able to sense the bond and the Rose, after all, so it had taken him a brief while to realise what she was so interested in. The Rose - of course. What else? With this bonding, all the members would finally be branded. The two allies, the two enemies and the three brothers. The bond would be potent enough for Nagini to feel now, although it was unlikely that she would be able to understand it.

Hedwig wouldn’t be able to sense it though - in part because she was less powerful than Nagini, but also because the flowers clustered around Harry’s heart had become part of the snake’s bondmark, not the owl’s. The connection between master and familiar didn’t make Nagini part of the bond of the Rose - she wasn’t one of the seven - but she was closer to the bond than most. Now that it had been completed and matured fully, perhaps the serpent would take greater interest in it and try to unravel the truth of it. If she thought to make the connection between Harry and the bondmark she had given her former master, perhaps she just might. Whether she would or not was as yet unknown though.

With this development, the flowers which had clustered around Harry’s heart would be sure to bloom, whether the snake recognised and acknowledged the change or not. They would not stay furled petals for longer than a day. Already, the discomfort on Harry’s face was indicating both confusion and the type of pain which came with such a change. The boy shifted to free one of the arms with which he was holding up the blond boy. A feminine hand raised up to unbutton his shirt whilst the other cradled Draco’s head in his mild slumber. As the thin fabric parted, the sweaty chest of the Boy Who Lived appeared, and on it was displayed the change and damning completion of a war about to reach its climax.

Louis’ job was about to begin.

Chapter End Notes

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Another longer chapter!
More founders as requested - a (kind of) new character in Betty. :P Nagini’s going to enjoy that surprise family reunion, isn’t she? Tee hee
Well - that's the bond complete. A kind of new mini-arc will begin now that that's out of
the way - I hope you continue to enjoy! :D
More on the roses will, of course, follow - but it'll be more of a drip feed. I'll tell you
now that their true nature won't be revealed until all 7 members are alive. *cough
cough* I'm looking at you, Voldemort.

For those who might have gotten confused about the Rose - here's a run down of what
you should know:
Dumbledore is responsible for the rose - you don't know how or why
You know Harry is the key member of the rose bond
You know there are seven people with the bond - Voldemort, Harry, Snape, Lucius,
Draco, Dumbledore, AND Mystery Man/Woman
The rose has changed colours over time and the colours symbolise something important
which Voldemort wants Jeremiah to find out for him by the time he gets back
The rose is black and everyone who knows about the rose (save Draco and Harry who
have only just got theirs) assumes this means that the end is in sight - for Lucy and Sev
who think it means their love, they fear about it being linked to that, whereas everyone
else thinks its linked to the war
The rose turned black as a result of Harry getting his wand because he took up the role
of a warrior in this war (you can sort of view this as him being old enough to fight etc)
so the "countdown" as such until the war is resolved has not begun
When Draco awoke, he had a brief moment of horror as his pounding headache brought him intimately close to memories of those times when he had done his best to copy his father. Draco knew better than to mimic him now though, coping with drink did nothing but worsen problems. But oh fucking Christ. Jesus. White flashes of sharp pain trilled across his eyelids as Draco heaved them open. New light flooded in, sending the sparks in his vision into overdrive - they turned magenta and chartreuse and cyan and then suddenly Harry was there-

“Malfoy. You okay? Look at me, Malfoy.”

Oh buggering hell… Potter… Stupid, lovely Potter.

“Malfoy?”

Draco groaning tearfully.

“Oh thank goodness - you’re okay.”

And then Draco’s senses were coming back to him. The blury muffling of his hearing released him into clarity; the taste of power which he had spent that past several hours gulping down like candy was still coating his tongue; the smell of sweat and tears was almost like sweet brine as Draco took in the position of his tear-stained face in the crook of Harry’s elbow; vision was finally restored and Draco had rarely been so happy as the moment he looked up and saw the Boy Who Lived gifting him his brilliance in a wide smile. What had he ever done to deserve this? He was a failure. And yet, as he shifted and felt the soft embrace of a trusted ally - no, friend - he couldn’t help feeling happiness swell in his heart. Yes, definitely “friend”. Draco returned the smile and then both boys dissolved into quiet and happy titters.

X-X-X

Nagini was certainly bemused. Draco Malfoy wasn’t weak and shouldn’t have had such a painful bonding session. The blond was too proud to let his emotions show, nevermind cry in front of his rival, so the fact he was doing both could only be reflective of immeasurable pain. But why? Of course, bonding to her for Harry had been incredibly painful - although thankfully he had been unconscious for most of it - but that was because she had a magical creature as an ancestor and was not a simple animal drawn into service for a wizard like, say, Hedwig was.

The only logical explanation would be if Isaac had some great ancestor from a magical bird. The owl certainly looked impressive enough for that to perchance be the case, however Isaac’s family had been serving the noble house of Malfoy for generations and she had yet to hear of any magical inheritance. Both of Isaac's parents had seemed to be as normal as any other Malfoy owl and he was highly unlikely to be either adopted or the result of a feathery affair - the Malfoys simply wouldn’t allow that.

Nagini wondered if Isaac’s parents were still alive - they would have surely gone into service for
Lucius now that he had become the patriarch... if Harry ended up persuading both Malfoys to his cause, she wouldn’t mind speaking with those two again - it had been too long. As for the issue with Isaac, that would be something to ponder in her spare time - not that she would have much of that.

X-X-X

“Are you feeling alright now, Draco?”

“Everything fucking hurts, Scarface.”

“I bet it does.”

“Ugh. Was yours this painful?”

“Nagini’s was.”

“Fucking Christ.”

“Well, you know what they say: bonding is a-”

“Sacrifice. Yes, I know, Potter.”

Back to Potter, then, thought Harry wistfully.

Isaac was nestling near Malfoy’s neck and rubbing his soft feathers over the initial point of entry sadly.

“It’s not your fault, Isaac,” said the blond reassuringly.

“If oonly I was stonger, you wouldn’t be in soo much pain,” murmured the owl, not reassured in the slightest.

“FUCK!” Draco, in all his wisdom, had apparently not been expecting that. He spun his wide eyes over to his new familiar, his jaw dropping unashamedly.

“You can talk now, Isaac!?”

“Well, yes, my sire.”

“Potter! Why didn’t you tell me about this!?”

“You ssshould have known - you’re a Malfoy,” retorted Nagini with distaste.

“Jesus! You can talk too!?”

“I thought you’d already read about bonds, Malfoy,” teased Harry.

“Well yes, but-”

“And in there they didn’t happen to mention the beauty of being able to talk with your loyal sservants? Mm?” Nagini’s scaly left eyebrow arched pointedly as she slithered over to the half-deranged blond.
“Yes! But I assumed-!”

“Asssume nothing! You sssoooolder never assssume anything. In your possssition, especially, I would have expected more from you.”

Draco looked both ashamed and on the brink of trauma.

“Hey now, Nagini. Give him a break.”

“Why ssshould I? Giving you a break never improved your idioccccy.”

“I- I- I though only… Parselmouths could talk to snakes.”

“Oh do keep up, Malfoy.”

It stung to know that not only Potter but also his snake use that name. He shouldn't have suggested it. He regretted it. Now that was the norm between them and yet he didn’t want to be a Malfoy. He wanted to be-

“Unless an extremely weak witch or wizard bondsss to a familiar, then they will be able to understand each other. I would have expected you to have realissed that any referencesss to such a thing would only exisssst to reassure weak pureblooods that it is perfectly normal to be a failure and a ssshameful soot stain on their family line. There have certainly been enough of them for sssome to have written books to act as bedtime ssstories for adults who can’t sssleep at night for fear of being weak and-”

“That’s enough, Nagini.”

The serpent looked at Harry with force but after a moment of challenge, acquiesced and fell silent.

Draco didn’t know what to do.

“Look, Malfoy. I don’t fully get it either, but think of things this way - once you bond, both you and your familiar have additional magic because you each have a part of the other person’s soul in you. I have no idea how the familiar obtains part of your soul but I assume they absorb it during the bonding process when they are also giving you part of their soul.”

Harry was looking pointedly down at Draco’ chest where Isaac’s inky wing swung over Draco’s heart. It would have looked like a brand had it not been so beautiful, but more than that, it was evidence of Isaac being an integral part of the blond now.

“When that happens, you can talk to them. If, however, a familiar leaves their master - and don’t give me that look, I don’t know why they would and neither Nagini nor Louis will tell me anything more about it - but anyway, they will retain their ability to talk and their other magical powers. If they bond with a new master after that then they will logically become even more powerful.”

“So, in theory, cunning animals could go around, growing more and more powerful like that.”

“Leaving a maaassster is not as simple as you might think,” Draco looked as though he was about to question Nagini on it but she beat him to it, “And that’s all I ssshall say on the matter.”

Draco gulped audibly. The threat in her eyes hadn’t diminished.

“So,” Harry cleared his throat awkwardly, “As I was saying, there’s a third group of people who can talk to animals. Parselmouths are part of this group but seemingly the same exists with other animals
and a few rare people who can talk to them. I could talk to Nagini before we bonded because she had been a familiar before me, but she also told me that I was able to talk to animals in general—although she still won’t expand upon that throwaway comment,” Harry finished, close to glaring at his familiar. She didn’t so much as flinch though which led Draco to believe that there was no malice behind the potency of the look, but rather it simply indicated that it took great lengths to communicate with the snake and persuade Nagini to consider anything that her stubborn demeanor hadn’t already laid out as a neat plan before her.

“Okay… okay,” Draco sipped in air, “I think I get it…”

“I feel a but coming.”

“So very well done, Potter - really.”

Harry stuck his tongue out at Draco.

“But, why in frickery-dick can I understand your familiars too?”

Oh. Now that did give Harry pause.

“That, sssire, is the first good question you have asssked so far. I am afraid, however, that to that I don’t have an anssswer.”

Harry’s brow furrowed strangely and Draco suddenly realised just how dependant the Boy Who Lived was on his snake - he wasn’t as innately wise or stupidly confident as Draco had first assumed. That taught him not to assume things, he supposed. Harry Potter was a powerful boy who knew how to stand up to people but he was also just an orphaned wizard who was relying on his best friend for answers, and who was now growing worried at the realisation that she didn’t know everything, after all.

Draco should have been ashamed, but in that moment he thought with relief: You’re not invincible, Potter. I’ll be of use to you yet.

Chapter End Notes

Not much from Isaac here - I'll probably do more on him next chapter!
Did you enjoy the Draco/Nagini dynamic?
Isaac wasn’t sure what was happening. One moment, the bonding process had been going well, the next - pain began to infect him too. He was instantly terrified - had he gone about it wrong? And then Draco was whimpering and shouting and crying and Isaac began to panic and was on the verge of pulling his beak out, when suddenly he felt the smallest of touches from a tiny hand and instantly he felt settled.

When the feeling of terror had passed and Isaac had felt the bond curdle into completion, he pulled out and looked around for the source of sudden comfort. The only possibility he could find was in the soft features of a lemur he had never seen before, but within the next few moments would learn was called Louis. He was on the other side of the room though and didn’t looked like he’d moved. He looked both shy and worried, but also the stereotypical Hufflepuff - too afraid to act.

Quiet human wimpers drove nails into his skull as he heard Potter comfort his new master. Master - how good it felt to think of Draco like that. But, by Jove, this was painful! Oh... yes - the calming touch again. But nobody was there... How odd.

Conversation bubbled and he felt it was his cue to speak. He did. And then the boys were looking at him. So was Ngaini. Oh - and so was Hedwig too. His ice queen. She at least looked impressed - she knew what a painful bonding meant. Isaac was obviously strong but that brought back the shame. He wasn’t strong enough... A touch - and calm once more. What on earth was going on?

Nagini started talking then - her venom visible in her words. Isaac hoped she wouldn’t try to stir trouble for his master. She didn’t seem the sort and he hoped this was only some sort of test - for all he know, perhaps she had treated Potter similarly when she had first met him.

Oh fucking hellish Jove-!

Calm.

It was a moment later that he started to feel a reverberating thrum in his bones - in his mind. It didn’t exist in reality - there wasn’t a single sense which could detect it - and yet, it was there - real, alive, vibrant. What was that? Isaac shut his beak firmly in an attempt to listen closer. What was it? And then he heard Nagini talking, her hissing grounding him in reality. Had it passed? Had the painful tremors in his body been bad enough to cause hallucination? Hang on. Nagini had just said that, hadn’t she? Why was he hearing it again? So it hadn’t passed. Oh God. His senses were lagging behind and he felt his body start to swerve. He nestled onto the table as best he could without looking like he was collapsing. Nagini again, except now the repeat of words was chasing the tail of the first, and then it was a slightly shifted double tone. Oh God. Oh God. Jove. What was this!? Sleep.

Calm.

You need to sleep, Isaac.

Oh. Who was that?

Calm.
You’ll be alright. It’s just the effects of the Rose and the beginnings of a purelink.

A-A what?

Shh - sleep now.

And then Isaac did.

X-X-X

Betty had been asleep for long enough to be considered in a coma by most medical professionals - the truth, however, was simply that she hadn’t been needed and that, sadly enough, she was getting into her old age now and didn't have as much energy nor desire to frolick around anymore. That said, she would always serve her master until her final days, and when she felt the tug of their purelink and felt for the freshly lain summoning circle, she easily gave in and allowed her massive body to leave the realm in which she had resided for the past fifty years, travelling over worlds and dimensions and into the heart of her master’s chamber.

When Betty’s eyes opened, they found the soft eyes of Salazar and the comforting embrace of her favorite velvet quilt.

What isss it you need me for, Salazar?

She heard the echo of her own voice as her thoughts reverberated across to her master.

My next two heirs shall be attending Hogwarts this year.

His lips hadn’t moved but she’d heard her master perfectly. The purelink was as stable as ever.

Two this time?

Yes.

A Malfoy?

Yes.

And a Prince?

The current one has yet to bear children.

A Nott?

You know I don’t care about the less prominent lines.

o you intend to tell me or keep me guesssing forever?

Well…

Salazar rarely felt intimidated, but the only two people in his life who could force him to be cautious about his words were both equally deadly women.

I’m waiting, Sssalazar.
The second heir is the heir we’ve been waiting for.

You don’t mean…?

I do. He’s here and he’s from Godric’s bloody spawn.

X-X-X

Peter Pettigrew was weak, wily and currently whimpering at the cold. He’d been told to take refuge with the Weasleys in his animagus form by Dumbledore, and that if he served them well enough, he would surely be forgiven by Harry and then there would be no reason for him to be seen as a villain by anyone - not even those who knew the truth.

Dumbledore was amazing - he’d managed to make it seem like Sirius had done the deed and whilst he didn’t want to be happy that his friend was in Azkaban… Peter shivered again… if he couldn’t handle the cold here, he would most certainly have died in the prison. Mind you, he wasn’t much better off being here at the moment.

He’d thought he’d be fine trying to get the dropped food under the Weasley fridge. Why on earth the blood traitors decided to use the awful Muggle contraction, he didn’t know. Getting under it hadn’t been too much of a squeeze. Getting out though, now that was harder - especially now that he’d just stuffed himself with his own weight in food. Every time he tried to wiggle out, he’d brush his nose up against the only burning hot part of the fridge which, ironically enough, did the cooling, but if he stayed still, he was left to shiver and shrivel. Was there no end in sight?

The obese rat flopped and it was only hours later, thanks to Fred and George accidently finding him, that he was rescued. The twins hadn’t been looking for him - they didn’t care about their brother’s scrawny pet. It always ate all the delicious cheese their mother made, so it was more accurate to say they hated him rather than loved him. Ron had been whining about showing him off to their resident celebrity though, so they were more lenient to the rodent when they found him than usual - just throwing him at his owner rather than thwacking him over the head in an ineffective measure to try and preserve the contents of their fridge.

Instead of looking for the rat, the twins had actually been looking at a map of Hogwarts they had obtained a few years ago. Unlike most of the things their family owned, this map was magical and showed the location of both people and rooms. It was due to this quality that they had been so successful with their pranks and also why they were studying it now. They had found the expected presence of professors milling about the castle but they had yet to find anything amiss which might be a curiosity to investigate the moment they got back to school for another year.

Just as they were about to close the map though, they noticed another wing of parchment appear. It took them far longer than it should have done to realise that the new leaf detailed in ink the many floors of the Burrow as well as its inhabitants. Their combined screech of happiness made Ginny rush into their room out of worry, but in reality the supposed sound of fright was just the featherlight result of sheer joy. It was thanks to this new leaf that they realised that their rat had a name and that he was under their fridge. The twins had decided they wouldn’t bother telling Ron about that though - or, at least, not at first. Such knowledge might well prove to be excellent bribery material in the future, after all.

The map would soon leave their hands though, and they wouldn't get to make use of the extra leaf of
the Burrow for nearly as much time as they had hoped. Rowena had always been excellent at persuading people and given that it was thanks to her portrait that they had obtained this treasure, they would be willing enough to relinquish it - especially to the new owner once they knew who that would be.

Peter, meanwhile, was softly huffing in relief now that he was back in the lap of his owner. He wasn’t perceptive enough to notice that said owner was a touch put out though. Ron was home with the rest of his irritating brothers. They had been too clingy and Harry obviously hadn’t wanted them knowing who he was meeting. Ron wasn’t surprised that Harry had decided to run off and instead of being upset by what some might have considered rudeness, he was instead huffing as hard as the rat in his lap, seething with all the might a sulky eleven year old could summon. Brilliant Harry had been chased away and now Ron was alone again. He could only hope Harry came back. It wasn’t late yet - or at least not as late as the first time Harry had stepped foot in the Burrow - but Ron was worried that his new friend just wouldn’t return at all. Ron sighed again angrily. Did his brothers want him to be miserable? They never let him shine in anything and now he couldn't even keep the first good thing to happen to him in ages.

Ron was tense and Peter was relaxed. Had anyone seen the pair in Ron’s room, their juxtaposed postures would have made quite a sight indeed.

X-X-X

Hedwig had been watching out of the corner of her eye and concern had begun to flood her mind in a steady stream. Isaac was clearly in pain. Had nobody else realised? Nagini was bickering with Harry and Malfoy and Louis was looking exhausted. He’d climbed up onto the back of the armchair he’d been cowering under and now seemed to be shielding his ears from the argument going on a few meters away from him.

Then Isaac collapsed.

“Isaac!”

She was over at his side in an instant and she was the last thing the eagle owl saw before his eyes went dull and his breathing evened out.

Chapter End Notes

Opinions on the purelink? As interesting as the Rose? :P
Also - who cares enough about Peter to miss him if he just so happens to end up in a dangerous situation he doesn’t get out of in time? :P

I’ve also been wondering if there are any tags I should consider removing and/or adding. Any help deciding would be very much appreciated. ^u^
“He’ll be alright.”

“Since when did you perk up?”

“No need to take that attitude, Hedwig. Louis is trying to help,” chided Harry.

The bird huffed out in irritation and went back to her pacing.

“Why do you say that, Louis?” continued the boy wonder.

“M-My former master was a healer…” trailed off the lemur.

“Was”. That meant he or she was dead then. Nagini had been wondering about the curious primate. He seemed far too shy and yet the air that surrounded him wasn’t wholly innocent in its mystery. A moment later, said creature turned to look at her.

“I-I assume you’ve experienced a purelink before, Nagini?”

Oh. He knew about those? Of course she’d had one with Tom - they had been inseparable. But purelinks could only develop between a strong wizard and a strong familiar… it took great mental control to maintain such a connection. This proved Louis was far stronger than she had first assumed - or rather, than he had been letting on.

“I-I had to deal with a lot of people whose purelinks had weakened and they had suffered the backlash…”

But you couldn’t even sense a purelink unless you’d had one before. Louis wouldn’t have been able to heal anyone unless he had had a purelink at least once in his life. He couldn't pass off his knowledge that easily-

“I-I have had a purelink before too, b-but most of what I know comes from what I saw working by my master’s side…”

So he wasn’t going to deny it then? Interesting. Interesting but also incredibly confusing. Nagini just couldn't quite pin him down. Her first impression of him as a Hufflepuff was now edging toward being wrong, and yet there wasn’t anything forming to take its place. Nagini felt disorientated and more than a little lost.

“Ssso, you’re saying Isssaac has begun to form a purelink with Malfoy already?”

The fact that Malfoy was beginning to get one already whilst she only just felt the tug of the connection occasionally when Harry imagined her as a human, saddened Nagini. True, Malfoy had likely already developed a deep bond with Isaac, whereas the reality of things was that Harry had only just met his familiars a few days ago. But still - Malfoy shouldn’t be on the verge of completing his already! Nagini spared a glance at the blond - he looked to be in pain and perhaps the most confused out of all of them. Her venom melted a little and she almost pitied him - his beloved familiar was in agony and he had no idea what was going on. He certainly looked to be beyond conjuring an image of Isaac as a human in his mind. That set Nagini thinking again. By all rights, Malfoy
shouldn’t have enough mental strength to try and forge a purelink immediately, and yet... forging one forcefully was the only possible explanation for Isaac’s immense pain. But Malfoy didn’t even have the knowledge to know where to begin! It was a sacred process familiars taught their masters and the masters all inevitably concluded to never record it on parchment. Witches and wizards had to earn the right to a purelink bond - the secret knowledge would stay secret. That was just the way it was. So Malfoy couldn’t possibly know! Why then was-?

“No.” pronounced Louis with certainty.

What?

“I-It’s not a purelink between Draco and Isaac-”

Why was Louis calling Malfoy “Draco”? Did the lemur have a history with the Malfoys? Nagini supposed it was possible-

“It’s a purelink between us familiars.”

“Can that even happen?” interrupted Harry.

Could it?

“I-It’s rare, but I know it’s possible for it to happen a-and that’s the only explanation-”

“Oh?” questioned Nagini, her browbone raising.

“W-Well yes. I could hear him talking in my head a-and I could talk to him. I told him to go to sleep because that-”

“You’re the reason why he collapsed?!” shrieked the white owl.

“Listen to him, Hedwig. Isaac was obviously in pain-” interrupted Harry.

“Ssso telling him to sleep through it wasss only logical,” finished Nagini.

The snake could tell that her fellow familiar had already made herself overly concerned about the other bird. She couldn’t blame Hedwig, but if it made her this sharp and interrogative, then Nagini might be forced to have a discussion with her…

“So… this isn’t normal?” tentatively inquired Malfoy, speaking up for the first time in a while.

“Correct. Were you not lisssstening, Malfoy?” Nagini drawled.

The blond pinked a little but didn’t otherwise react. He was getting used to her - good.

“No, it’sss not normal…” muttered Ngaini quietly.

Why did Louis feel the purelink and not her? Was he the one forcing it? Was he responsible for Isaac’s pain? The snake eyed the primate warily. He seemed to be purposely diverting his gaze as his whispered out.

“I-I could hear you too, Nagini.”

Was he just saying that or was that the truth?

“It was like a double voice - it was so disorienting that I could barely hear Isaac whimpering by the
time I finally figured out what was going on.”

“And that’sss when you told him to sssleep?”

“Y-Yes.”

Nagini paused. What was that? She thought she’d just heard- No. That couldn’t be!

“Did you hear that?” Nagini asked tentatively.

“Yes.”

“Y-yes.” confirmed Louis again.

Now the overtone was coming first. The thought being transferred before the words were formed. How was this possible? If the order was already correct, then that meant that the purelink between her and Louis was already almost complete. What was going on?

“Nagini? Are you alright?” asked Harry with growing worry.

“Yesss...I’m quite alright, Harry. I… jussst realised that I haven’t felt like thisss is a very long time.”

“What? In pain?” asked Harry in concern.

“No. Unsssure.”

X-X-X

Draco was panicking. He was concerned for Isaac, of course! But there was something else which left him utterly petrified. He hadn’t noticed when Isaac had been drooped over him, but now it was clear as could be. There, right on his heart, was the foul curse of his father. Draco was a Malfoy but at least he could defy that by being a blood traitor. This though? This was impossible to avoid now that he had been branded!

Draco was doing all he could to rebel, to forget about Severus, to fight against all that he knew - had it all been futile? He’d done so much and yet he hadn't been able to escape it... Not fully - not enough! Severus was his godfather and could be nothing more. Draco knew that this was the point of his damnation. He had failed. He hadn’t had enough time! Isaac’s inky wing curled along his heart, but in the seams of the feathers were the thorns and the petals of a black rose that burned his heart. The countdown to prepare had ended and Draco now held onto the loser’s brand.

Draco liked Harry - he would admit that in his head. He had to because there was no way he would ever admit the older man's appeal. He was like his awful father in every way - no matter how hard he had tried. Draco was unable to be normal - to love only one person at a time! Why? He wanted to love Harry and he thought that given enough time he just might - but his father had cursed him - now giving Harry all his heart would be impossible.

The blond’s fingers trembled as they grasped at the centre of his torso. Just like how his father’s rose had bloomed when he bonded to his mother, Draco’s own rose had bloomed as he had undertaken his first bond. The mark of honest love which would never - could never - be fulfilled. Draco had
been trying to move on and yet here was the damning evidence that he couldn’t. He couldn’t forget the man he wasn’t supposed to love - not only because he was his godfather, but also because the Malfoy patriarch had loved him first.

Chapter End Notes

Well Louis is under suspicion. Aaand you finally get the Sev x Draco that has so far had only one hint. :P
I’d love to know what you enjoyed.
Harry was worried about Malfoy. He had been watching the blonde for the past half an hour and even though he’d managed to calm the heir down after his panic attack, every now and then a tremor would cause his rival to flinch. It almost made Harry believe there was something else wrong, but without proof Harry refused to make assumptions. He knew how wrong those could be.

Louis had taken great care to explain the purelink to everyone and Harry had been impressed by the little primate - not only because of the sheer amount of knowledge stored away in his brain, but also because of his ability to stand his ground against Nagini. His voice had trembled every time he’d spoken, yes - but he hadn’t stopped and that was truly a miraculous feat in itself.

Nagini worried him though. She had said she was unsure which, Harry supposed, explained her more cutting attitude towards everyone. But more than simply being unsure, she seemed a frightening combination of confused and suspicious. Harry didn’t even bother giving the notion of not trusting her anymore a moment’s thought - but Harry felt almost as though the rug had been pulled from under his feet. Before, Harry had been following Nagini nigh on blindly, but her reaction earlier forced him to realise the brutal truth that no matter how informed and clever Nagini was, Harry couldn’t rely on her for everything. Her former master and his designated enemy flashed before his eyes but the ghoulish shadow was repressed immediately. No. Not because of him - Voldemort would not control his life anymore than he already had. If Harry had to lead a third side as he had concluded he must, then it would do him no good to be a king led by a regent - Harry had to be a king who led his people and did no more, no less, than listen to his advisors - to Nagini.

Draco jerked beside him, bringing Harry back down to earth and to their current problem. It wasn’t getting dark per say, but Harry didn’t want to inconvenience the Weasleys - and by that he meant he didn’t want to give them an excuse to be more persistent than normal in their interrogations of him. He was also feeling quite frankly exhausted, and Draco looked as though, if anything, he was doing even worse for wear. Malfoy. Malfoy not Draco. Malfoy wanted to keep the distance between them and if those absurd insistence on surnames helped, then so be it.

Isaac hooted softly from Malfoy’s embrace. He would waken soon enough and it looked as though, if nothing else, the pain had passed. Louis had said that the purelink which had formed between the familiars had to have been suddenly forced today because no one had felt even the slightest tug between them before now. Given it had started to form when Isaac was already in the process of creating one bond, it was unsurprising that he had ended up taking on all the pain from the process rather than it being split evenly between the four of them in the room.

“Louis, I think it would be best if you went with Malfoy for tonight to watch over Isaac.” suggested Harry.

“What? Potter, you can’t just-”

“Do what you want? It’s only logical and Louis will be more of a help than a hindrance to you. Plus if he and Nagini can already navigate their purelink then it’ll be a good way for us to stay in touch. After what happened today, we might well have some side effects and two- I mean, six brains are better than one.”

“You’re making assumptions that I’ll be ssstaying with you, Potter.” It had been awhile since
Nagini had used that tone with him, but with Harry’s newly acquired source of will, he resisted inviting her to have her way with a question like: “Aren’t you?” Instead, he denied her statement-like request. He was her master, after all. Not the other way around.

“Yes, I am because you will be. I need you, whom I can trust to know about the effects of the purelink, by my side, just as much as Isaac needs Louis.”

Nagini sneered as he brought up the lemur and Harry could only imagine that the poor familiar was currently being imagined in every form of torture device in Nagini’s head - either out of irritation, or because she believed he was hiding something she could torture out of him. Harry wasn’t stupid enough to not wonder about Louis’ true nature, but if he had found himself trusting Nagini, despite her former master being who he was, then he was sure that he would be able to make an informed conclusion about how much of Louis’ advice to take too. He was the master, after all, and he would be the one to lead the third side into war. He would do everything he could to make sure that they came out of it alive too.

X-X-X

Severus had arrived an hour ago and Lucius was getting just a little bit frustrated. Normally he didn’t keep a tight watch on his son. The supposed Light were too cowardly to harm Draco and the boy held the privileged and protected position of being the son of the current head of the Dark side. Unless there was a rebellious fiend of whom Lucius hadn’t already heard, Draco would be safe, even if he had taken a trip to Knockturn Alley. Now though, as Severus was beginning to get a touch agitated, Lucius was cursing himself for not giving the boy a curfew, or rather demanding he was back at the Manor by five. Five which was the current time, already an hour too late for courtesy.

Lucius sighed heavily and knocked his head back against the armchair he was in. He watched Severus pacing, taking time to inspect various book titles he hadn’t seen before. Lucius wouldn’t tell him, but he made sure to rotate the books whenever his friend was coming. The light of curiosity which filled Severus’ eyes whenever he spotted something of interest never failed to bloom heat in Lucius’ stomach.

The flush which had lain like a rash across his friend’s face was dying now. Lucius would have been sad to see the pretty colour fade had he not known that it was a result of the drink, and its disappearance an indicator of Severus’ growing sobriety.

Severus had promised to spend a few hours bonding with Draco and himself, have dinner with them and Narcissa, and then help him with the talk he had to give Draco. Now though, it looked as though perhaps the first item on that list would need to be taken off. Lucius huffed out a breath again and closed his eyes - it wouldn’t do to get distracted by the hard lines of his friend’s gaunt body as it shifted from one side of the room to the other.

Lucius was generally pretty accurate about everything. Today, for example, the only thing he had gotten wrong was the fact that Severus was pacing to get away from the blond’s pale skin and powerful body, rather than out of frustration with Draco. Well, that and the fact that his flush which was only just beginning to die off now was a result of his thoughts gradually calming down and filtering out the obscene images which Lucius’ tight green robes had conjured when he had first greeted his friend an hour ago. Lucius pushing him across the supple chair he was currently sitting in and breathing into his ear all the proper names for the improper things the blond wanted to do to him. *Fuck. Christ. Stop this!*
And then Severus gazed back at the books.

X-X-X

Hedwig felt ashamed of herself. She knew logically that it was likely because she was the least powerful out of the four of them and also the least experienced that she was the only one who hadn’t felt the purelink. The hot burn of embarrassment had prevented her from voicing this but Nagini would figure out the reason behind the white bird’s strange behavior within the next hour anyway. Nagini would pity Hedwig though, and wouldn’t tell Harry. White lies didn’t have to hurt anyone so long as you kept track of them and revealed the truth before something corrupt was born.

Hedwig didn’t end up volunteering to go with Louis to look after Isaac due to the complications in her swirling emotions, but the two other creatures serving Harry easily forgave her what might have been called either coldness or insensitivity. They had no intention of telling Isaac why she wasn’t there though, knowing full well that Hedwig’s distance would only serve to increase the passion of the eagle owl in his quest to make the snowy owl his - and that would only ever be a good thing.

Chapter End Notes

Phew! I almost thought I wouldn't make it in time! I have twenty minutes left of "today" where I am - so yippee! :D  
What do you think of the development between Louis and Nagini, and also Hedwig's exclusion? So far I felt Hewig and Louis paled in contract to Nagini in terms of characterisation and were almost ignorable, so I hope in recent chapters I've given them enough development to start making them interesting. ^u^
“Oh Harry, dear. I’m so glad you’re okay. I’ve already told the boys off. I should have known they would be up to no good.”

“Oh- Oh no. I-It’s quite alright, Mrs Weasley.”

“Molly, dear. And there’s no need to be shy. I know those rascals. Poor dear… those boys chasing you away. Where did you end up going?”

“Um. Um-”

“Oh and now I’m behaving just like my sons. No need to tell me, dear. I promise I’ll keep my mouth shut. I’ll let my sons be curious in my place but if you ever just need a place to run to… I’ll be here, dear.”

Perhaps it was because Harry was already exhausted, or perhaps because he felt genuinely touched by Molly’s words, that he felt his eyes water as he squeaked out a “thank you” and fled slowly up the stairs.

His first stop was the bathroom and his first action was to splash cold water over his face. It helped to clear his mind and remind him of the morning’s events which already felt a world away. Molly and Arthur had dropped him off at a perfectly respectable storefront but it had been the younger members of the Weasley family which had made getting away so difficult. At least it gave him an excuse for why he fled, he supposed.

A knock on the open bathroom door and Harry found himself garbling out a “yeah?” as he reached for a fluffy towel with which to wipe his face.

“Er- Hey, Harry,” came the double tone of the twins.

Their unusual nervousness should have reassured Harry that he had the upper hand in the conversation but instead the layered effect reminded him of the tumultuous events he had just escaped. The Burrow which he was trying to make his sanctuary of calm was instead haunting him and it made Harry feel queasy.

“We guess mum already told you she’d had a go at us-”

“-but that doesn’t mean we mean it any less-”

“-when we say that we really are sorry.”

“We’ll probably still pester you-”

“We’re curious, alright?”

“-but we’re sorry we kinda chased you like a hellhound today.”

“So yeah… we’re sorry.”

The voice had split into two and whilst Harry had yet to be able to distinguish the twins from one
another, the separation had eased his nerves. The fact the final line was said in unison had raised his
hackles a touch though, which was why he seemed an odd mixture of gruff and nervous when he
replied.

“I-It’s fine. I forgive you. There’s just so much going on that I think I need a little calm.”

Calm was the opposite of the twins’ personalities and probably sounded like an insult Harry didn’t
mean. But still, Harry did forgive them and the twins thankfully backed off for the rest of the
evening. The only other ginger he had to face before supper was Ron, and somehow that boy had an
air about him that made him seem just as unsure as Harry was deep down inside. It was partly
because of exhaustion and partly because of sensing such a connection that Harry didn’t feel stressed
when he saw that Ron was sitting on his bed when Harry entered their shared bedroom.

“Oh! Harry! I-!” Ron looked lost and Harry felt pity overtake him. The Weasleys had apologised
enough. They weren’t the source of his stress so it would be unfair to keep Ron in suspense.

“It’s fine, Ron. Really.”

The ginger still kept his eyes diverted but at least had more confidence when he spoke.

“Did everything go alright at least? I mean after we…”

“Yeah. We… we ended up having a debate over something I’d read and something she knew all
about…and then the tables turned and we ended up discussing something she didn’t know much
about.”

“Something… Muggle?”

“Yeah,” agreed Harry easily, gladly latching onto the suggestion.

“Well at least that means she’s not a stuck up noble.”

That statement couldn’t have been further from the truth and drew Harry’s mouth into a small smile.
Ron happened to catch a glimpse and clearly misunderstood but it helped shift the tone of the
conversation and soon the two were laughing easily, if a little more quietly and more subdued than
they otherwise would have been.

Before long, Ron was teaching Harry about Quidditch and all that the game entailed. Two teams of
seven people: three Chasers, two Beaters, one Keeper, and one Seeker. Four balls: a Quaffle, two
Bludgers, and a Golden Snitch. Oh - and of course it was all played in mid-air on broomsticks. When
broken into those simple terms it seemed easy enough. It was almost like rugby with Beaters hitting
Bludgers at players in an attempt to dislodge them from their brooms, Chasers attempting to pass the
Quaffle between one another to get it into the goal, and of course Keepers doing their best to keep
said Quaffle out of their goal. Or goals - the sport seemed to require three a side.

The only thing which managed to bemuse him though, was the whole idea of the Golden Snitch. If
one goal with a Quaffle was worth ten points, it seemed ridiculously disproportionate to make
catching the Snitch worth a hundred and fifty. Seekers must certainly be held above all the other
positions.

Harry had been perched on his newly erected bed and Nagini made use of the echo of her crisp
scales as she slid over to him, her hissed words being disguised to Ron’s ears but still clear to Harry’s
- she told him that his father had always wanted to be a Seeker but had never held the post. Harry
wondered if perhaps he might end up playing Quidditch and which position he’d end up in. On one
hand, it would drain his time, but on the other it would be a good way to boost his popularity and
make friends with the upper years. Another question to ponder and another thing to lay as a weight on his mind. His mind which was currently without a Mind Palace. Yet another issue that needed to be rectified.

An hour after Harry had slipped into Ron’s - or rather their - room, Molly was calling the family to the table for supper. Harry’s stomach growled as the boy wonder was reminded that he hadn’t eaten with Draco. Instead, he had decided to try Butterbeer on an impulse to see what it was about it that made his uncle drink beer whenever he felt stressed - or at least more stressed than normal. Haziness seemed to evolve Harry alongside his exhaustion, but the lack of control and worry which grew as a result of that confirmed to Harry what he had thought before - he didn’t like alcohol and he would never try it again. Not out of free will, at least.

X-X-X

“Ah, Draco. Finally.”

Draco paused. Dobby had appeared in front of him as he had walked through the front door and half-heartedly conveyed his father’s message to him - to meet him in his study. Draco pitied the house elf - he was clearly an exception to his species and was not one that wished to serve.

Within a few moments, Draco was knocking and entering his father’s study. The atmosphere seemed tense though and Draco was immediately regretting not taking longer than the walk over to file things away in his Mind Palace. Now he was rushing through the remaining memories of this afternoon whilst doing his best to keep a straight face.

“I wasn’t aware you were waiting for me, father.”

“I admit I should have informed you this morning that I required your presence tonight.” Tonight? That could only mean a long discussion. “I assure you I shan’t make the same mistake again.”

It was then that the lanky form of his godfather rounded the corner of the vast study and Draco saw him for the first time. The blond’s breathing hitched and his re-sorting of memories paused for just a moment. I can’t forget him but I shan’t let that stand in my way.

“We have a lot to discuss tonight, Draco. We have already kept Severus waiting long enough.”

The doors of his Mind Palace suddenly - finally - slammed shut and Draco’s resolve crystallized into determined resistance just in time. His father was inviting him to take a seat. Dinner would be served in an hour, but it looked as though the three of them would be discussing whatever awful turn was about to be enforced upon him both before and after the meal. Had Draco been Harry - he would have gulped.

Chapter End Notes

We are finally done with the “date” and back to the Weasleys! I know some of you were hoping I’d focus on them more and so back into the frame they come. Both Harry and Draco have things to be working on but their perspectives will be split up for now.
I'm thankful for all the lovely comments I've been getting so far, and I hope that those of you who have been waiting for the Weasleys will help me mold their characters with your comments in the coming chapters. ^u^
In the confusing meander to a form of elitist transport and the remaining journey to Malfoy Manor, Louis had successfully awoken Isaac and instructed him on how to move his bonding mark around Draco’s body to hide it. The lemur had given the heir several long looks in hope of detecting a change to his mood, but the boy’s confusion remained resolutely in place. It simply hadn’t been the time to try and teach Draco how to seal his mark.

When the trio had arrived at the manor, Draco had summoned an elf to take his things and the two familiars to his rooms. Louis didn’t have to have lived with the Malfoys to detect the loyalty within the elf - he was undoubtedly the boy’s personal house elf and thus gave no retort when Draco made a gesture to indicate secrecy. Louis’ presence and Isaac’s nature would remain safely hidden for now.

Supper with the Weasleys was as lively as it had been the previous night. There was the general agreement that everyone had made up and so even if the twins were still edging on being sorry and Harry on the verge of exhaustion, happy smiles still lit the table.

Harry watched with a gaping mouth as slice after slice of beautifully roasted pork slid onto his plate. He quickly chomped his way through the golden trimmings of the traditional meal and felt the magic within him start to be restored. He hadn’t thought that he had expended any today and had simply put his tiredness down to the confusion of events and worrying turn Nagini’s commentary had taken, but it was seeming more and more like the ritual-thing that Draco had performed on him had actually drained him quite severely.

“Eat up, dear. Otherwise Ron will start sucking it off your plate!”

Molly’s words and merry laugh drew Harry out of his reverie. For all that he was supposed to be controlling his thoughts, he was getting lost in them far too easily. Harry glanced at Ron and could see that the boy truly was eyeing up Harry’s potatoes. Had it been another day, Harry might have shared them, but instead he decided to participate in the teasing spirit of the family and he dove his fork into the spud, and then stuffed it into his mouth, moaning at the taste of it. Once he had swallowed, he couldn’t resist sticking his tongue out just a little at his ginger-haired peer. To that he was met by happy cackles which signalled the twins’ amusement and Ron’s face fell into the world’s mightiest pout. Chatter continued and soon the conversation managed to take yet another really rather predictable turn towards the resident celebrity.

“So, Harry. Why do you wear glasses?”

The question threw Harry. Why did he wear glasses? Wasn’t that obvious?

“What do you… mean?” Harry asked tentatively.

“Well, you know. You haven’t even started at Hogwarts yet so there’s no way you have any idea
how to use magical lenses. So why do you wear glasses?"

Magical lenses? Harry’s forehead developed its cease once more.

“Well… I can’t see without them. Isn’t that why everyone wears glasses?”

Molly and Arthur looked at each other whilst the twins tried to keep their sniggering quiet enough to be passibly polite.

“Don’t magical lenses or whatever they are correct your vision too?”

“No, dear, they don’t. Magical lenses enhance vision - they don’t correct it. Some help people magnify things whilst others filter out light. Generally people who work with magic at an advanced level like Masters use them.”

Harry got the impression that Masters were probably the magical equivalent of university students.

“So what do people who can’t see properly use?” asked Harry with all the naivety in the world.

“Why they go to St Mungo’s and get their eyes fixed, of course!”

Fixed?

“As in healed?”

“Yes, dear! We might not be able to cure every ailment, especially if it’s caused by magic - but something as simple as eyesight can be easily corrected!”

And that was how it was decided that in a few days time the Weasley family would go for their yearly check up at what Harry later learned was a hospital, and that Harry would come with them to get his eyesight fixed.

X-X-X

“You still awake, Harry?”

“…yeah.”

“Ah. Good.”

“Good?”

“Yeah. It’s bloody brilliant having you here, you know?”

“Yeah?”

“Having siblings is great and all but it’s not the same as being friends with someone your age.”

So Ron already thought of them as friends? That warmed Harry’s heart and the boy wonder couldn’t help indulging in the feeling.

“Fred and George are really lucky then, I guess.”
“Yeah, they’ve been together since they were born... o-obviously. I’ve always been jealous of how close they are.”

Harry chuckled lightly, his high-pitched voice bothering him less and less.

The conversation continued softly until Harry heard Ron’s telltale snores drifting over from his bed. That’s when Harry finally closed his eyes and went to sleep.

X-X-X

Draco would have been panicking if not for the time and effort he had spent fortifying his Mind Palace. The similarity between what he was already planning and what his father was demanding he did was scarily unreal. It would have been so easy to let the truth of his actions slip either in words or in thoughts. Draco had no doubts that both his father and his godfather had been observing his thoughts to control and calm him. It would have been so easy… with one thought just leading to another. Draco had remained impressively blank though and that had been his savior.

The talk had begun, and then dinner had interrupted along with the breezy entrance of his mother, and then the talk had resumed. By the time Draco was slipping into bed he was entirely exhausted and barely had the energy to pet Isaac goodnight.

What was he to do? He wouldn't be stopped - he would pursue Potter in the many forms that would take. But now... now instead of leading a double life in befriending Potter and hiding their connection, he would have to lead a triple one in protecting the boy wonder from his father’s advances. It would be hell on earth and in the final moments before darkness engulfed the heir, he realised he would need to spend just as much time as Potter reconstructing his Mind Palace. He had thought he was prepared for anything he would face, but now he doubted whether playing three different roles would be beyond him. He could only hope it wasn’t.

X-X-X

Severus was a man who knew all about living a triple life. The loyalty he held for Dumbledore was entirely false and it was only that fact he was an Occlumency Master which prevented the old fool from detecting such a clear disparity between wishful thinking and reality. As for the Dark Lord... Severus, of course, held James’ death against him, but he knew that the supposed embodiment of evil was just as much a pawn and victim of Dumbledore’s scheming and thus somewhat allowed forgiveness to overtake his hatred. He refused to put either of the Death Eaters’ ideals first though - neither the notion of Dumbledore falling nor the surface motivation of blood purity called out to him.

Severus, all told, was not a soldier. He wasn’t even a vengeful harpy. All he wanted for to protect what he had left, and that was Lucius and his family. Lucius whom he loved with all his heart, Cissy who was the dearest woman alive, and of course the son these two perfect people had raised.

Severus fought for three sides but he knew exactly which held his true loyalty. There had never been a doubt and there never would be.
He was running away from the green bolt of light. Faster. Faster. A woman’s voice he didn’t recognise was shouting at him.

“Run! Run faster!!”

Harry didn’t know where he was running but as he kept tripping and scraping his knees he became more obsessed with the desperate action of heaving one blooded leg in front of the other.

“Run! Harry! You have to run!”

Harry began to hyperventilate, his chest feeling tight and constricted as he heaved out his panic. His vision of a torn up house faded into nothingness and then all that was left was the fear. The fear and the sheer panic. The blackness, the green light chasing him and the woman’s voice.

“HARRY! RUN!”

He wasn’t going to make it! He wasn’t! He was going to trip and then the light would be upon him and it would all be over-!

“Harry. Harry. You need to wake up, Harry. Can you hear me? Harry, dear. Come on. Wake up. It’s only a dream. It’s only a dream...”

And so, once again, Harry found himself in the warm arms of Molly and he sobbed himself into silence and then into a more peaceful sleep.

Severus was determined he wasn’t going to drink again today. The discussion had gone over far more smoothly than he had been expecting which was likely the only reason for his control. But, unlike Lucius who had just accepted the unexpected reaction with relief, Severus wasn’t so easily pacified. And so, whilst Lucius had been flirting with Cissy over their meal, Severus had gloomily glared at his plate to disguise the fact he was poking around Draco’s mind.

There was little to be found but that didn’t stop Severus poking at the walls of Draco’s mind. What Lucius might have assumed was simply Draco’s youth limiting his mind, was obviously something completely different. Severus was a Occlumency Master which meant he knew more than most about the delicate construction. Draco was hiding something and the fact he had poor Occlumency defending his surface mind meant that the only possibility left was a Mind Palace, and a strong one at that. The walls of Draco’s mind didn’t give no matter how hard Severus pushed - Draco wouldn’t be giving up his secrets any time soon.

Severus took a moment to remind himself of his loyalties - to Lucius and to his family. Draco was the son of his two most beloved people on earth - he would let the boy keep his secrets. If Draco proved wise enough to be able to stand on equal ground with his father - being able to hide the truth and be as cunning as the patriarch, then perhaps Severus would allow the boy to know of his true loyalties... And perhaps he would even be able to enlist the help of the boy in protecting Lucius and the Malfoy name. It would be a miracle if Draco said yes, but there was time and it was still a possibility.
Severus could hope.

The Occlumency Master withdrew from Draco’s mind slowly, but caught the tail end of desire as he did so. Oh. Severus glanced up at the heir sitting across from him. The boy was flushing heavily and Severus realised that the boy had been aware of his peering. The desire though. How could he forget? Draco was a young boy with a poorly placed crush. Severus could only hope it didn’t grow to be more than that. He wouldn’t be able to handle it. He loved Lucius and Cissy. He loved Draco. But he couldn't afford to love him like that.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed! Quite a bit happened, didn't it? Thoughts on Severus' reaction to Draco?
Just as he had predicted, even with a few hiccups, things were running as smoothly as could be expected. Hagrid had failed to bring him the dragon, but at least the Philosopher’s Stone was safe and secured. There may have been a slight delay in the Ministry, but the paperwork was now sitting on his desk, waiting for the students’ signatures. Even Fudge seemed to be proving more competent than before, helping rush through the special document that needed to be prepared for Miss Granger. Oh, and as the cherry on top - Miss Granger’s eagerness hadn’t diminished even slightly. That Muggle-born would be perfect.

Dumbledore had various plans in place to make her his own. It would be draining on his power to perform the mass memory charm which would undoubtedly be needed on the night of the Sorting Ceremony, but it would be worth it. Miss Granger was more than willing to do all he requested of her and would be the perfect pawn. Naive enough to counterbalance her brains. Brains - her great commodity of value. She would be the perfect little puppet and a stoic little soldier, bearing all the pain he put her through in the name of greater good. She would be his to do what he wished with.

Dumbledore didn’t know that the grin he made in that moment was eerily identical to the one produced by his highest ranking puppet in the Minister’s office when he had found his latest obsession.

X-X-X

When Matilda had told him to try and use Harry Potter as a starting point, he might have had a moment of frightful pity. His mind had been buzzing with the thoughts of Dumbledore’s previous lovers, and he knew exactly what that embodiment of evil had done to Tom whilst he was still at the orphanage. Despite this though, there was no evidence that Dumbledore had laid his hands on the Boy Who Lived - or at least, not in that way.

Another of Tom’s requests from the grave in the form of his frustrating notebook had led Jeremiah to set up a constant stream of information, carried by some of his most loyal familiars, in regards to the boy wonder. It was due to this that the Grand Master was privy to so much information regarding the boy. Potter had undoubtedly suffered at the hands of the Dursleys and Jeremiah believed that the boy had also been raped. Detestable. Vile. Horrific. It all sounded awful but, in truth, Jeremiah could only be relieved that the victim’s virginity hadn’t been taken by the ruthless Headmaster.

X-X-X

It was now a hideously early hour in the morning. Not only had Peter been dragged out for a boring round of show and tell the night before whilst he was sleeping, but he had also been woken during the night by the screaming voice of Potter. James and Lily had always been so strong… had stood up to so much. Peter sneered. And yet their son was a little weakling. No wonder Dumbledore was so
eager to guide the Light side rather than giving the pathetic boy the reigns.

Peter sighed heavily - he couldn’t relax and go back to sleep and so, after a moment of debate, he found himself wandering back over to the fridge. He had never been able to learn his lesson and so it shouldn’t have been at all unexpected to find his portly body crawling back towards yesterday’s prison. This habit of his would change from today onwards though, because whilst Nagini had been comforting Harry all night long, she was now curled up in the kitchen, soaking up the growing morning light, right in the middle of Peter’s path.

Nagini didn’t know the identity of the rat. Had she, his fate would have been far different. As it was, she was perfectly willing to play the game of cat and mouse - or rather, snake and rat - with her new toy. Suffice to say, Nagini was kept entertained for the remaining time Harry and his familiars spent at the Burrow, meanwhile Peter lost a great deal of weight, doing his best to not only avoid the fridge, but also run for his life.

X-X-X

The new Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor existed no more. His mind was infected with the tendrils of possession. Voldemort was a madman determined to come back to life. He would do all he could to fulfil his destiny of crushing the man who had raped him, driven him insane, and torn his soul apart. He would crush Dumbledore as well as anyone who stood in his way.

In the brief passes of sanity which sometimes graced the Dark Lord, he remembered his loyal men - Severus… Lucius… - and what they were willing to do for his cause. He remembered the end goal and their plans about how to get there. But insanity was paramount. Voldemort rarely thought clearly. Unless his soul could be healed, it would almost certainly result in a win for the Light.

You could split your soul and keep a balance when you bonded - trading fragments between different people - but you could never keep your sanity if you refused to make an exchange. Giving part of your soul in exchange for another worked… but splitting it into objects? There was no exchange there - just pure and utter agony as you were forced to give what should never be given. Your innocence, your mind, your soul… all would be torn apart and that was a recipe for ruin. The ruin which Voldemort had slowly been forced to embrace.

Soon Voldemort would be back and his loyal Death Eaters would be in for a surprise when they saw his transformation - his broken soul and his lifeless eyes. Fixing the madman would become their utmost priority as well as an almost impossible task. Whether they would succeed would ultimately be decided by Harry Potter.

X-X-X

Minerva believed in doing what was right. It was a shame, therefore, that she had no idea what sort of breeding ground for evil her beloved Gryffindor house had become. She was the Deputy Headmistress, the Head of Gryffindor house, a Transfiguration Mistress… she really should have known the truth behind every incident and event she had witnessed. And yet… she was almost entirely in the dark. She was not naive - not at all - but the old fool, Dumbledore, was not actually
foolish and could deceive even witches as wise as Minerva incredibly easily. The poor woman stood no chance.

The Marauders had been the greatest crime to have ever taken place under Minerva but, as ever, fate had been cruel enough to let her ignore it. Poor Snape. I'll have to tell Black off again. That was the simple and easy mantra by which the deceived witch had lived for seven years. By God, she was wise and yet she had been unable to detect the falsehood of the foursome’s hero status - the meddling behind their eager bullying.

Minerva viewed Snape as her own son and she did all she could now to make up for how she had wronged him. She knew he had been wronged. She knew it. She knew it! But in truth she knew nothing at all. That was her norm and would continue to be - at least until another side thought it was prudent she knew the truth... That reveal wouldn’t be happening for a while though. At the moment, she could barely help anyone. She would have to wait in blissful ignorance until that fateful day and that knock on her office door.

X-X-X

Gryffindor had changed and Minerva was one of the few left alive who remembered its original form. She was a good pawn though - nice and gullible - and so the Headmaster let her stay.

It had not been in the nature of the lion den to weaken others in order to grasp at the podium of fame - but that was what Dumbledore had made it, and that was now the norm. When the norm is horrifying, nobody cares. Everyone accepts the norm. Hagrid does, Minerva does, and Potter surely will too.

Dumbledore had planted the seed and now it was blooming into beautiful corruption - as dastardly and freakish as the fool’s own actions. The Headmaster had been personally involved in corrupting a young boy into playing the opposition and had learned how to shuffle pawns in the great game of the Marauder era. Now the final stretch had begun and three generations would collide in the final match. It would be a bloody and brutal war, but in the end Riddle, Snape and Potter would all fall, and he would be the one left standing. He would finally look his former lover in the eyes and utter a well-deserved “Checkmate.”

Chapter End Notes

Not much happens but I hope this chapter gives you some insight into characters’ motivations and current positions in the war.
Harry awoke to the joyous sounds of laughter. Fred and George’s double tone stood out amongst the rest of the humming happiness. They promised trouble with a smile of their faces and soon the terrible twosome were bursting into Harry’s shared room and ushering him out of bed. Harry thought they might even try to strip him of his pyjamas and stuff him into a shower, which, like most other appliances in the house, was reassuringly Muggle. Perhaps Molly had said something to the boys or perhaps they just knew not to mess with Harry’s personal space, but they refrained from completing the plan of action Harry had imagined they would take. Similarly thankfully, the boy wonder was again met with no uncomfortable praying about his night terrors, with the occasional jab at Harry’s “date” being the only trap Harry had to dodge.

“Come on, Harry!”

“Mum’s waiting for you to come down before she serves breakfast!”

“You know you could have started without me, right?”

“Nonsense!”

“You’re part of the family now—”

Harry felt warmth bloom in him anew.

“—which means no one gets to eat until you’re at the table.”

“It also means you’ll be responsible for Ron’s death—”

“.by starvation—”

“.if you don’t get there soon!”

Despite the twins’ dramatics, Harry did try and hurry up and soon he was being met with a lovely, steaming plate of eggs and bacon and some vegetables he didn’t quite recognise. He licked his lips and dived in. He quickly found himself feeling full through - a sharp contrast to yesterday where he felt he just couldn’t get enough. The difference between the two meals was all the evidence anyone needed to prove the link between magical drainage and food consumption. By God - if there wasn’t such a link, Harry would easily have stuffed himself with feasts for days on end and become as fat as his detested relatives.


Harry had obviously tuned out.

“T-to what?”

“Why, a game of Quidditch, of course!” answered Charlie.

The two eldest brothers seemed to compliment each other surprisingly well. Harry had learned that Bill worked in Gringotts and so was quite clearly very clever, meanwhile Charlie was more of a roguish character that spent most of the year working with dragons in Romania. Despite their
seemingly clashing personalities though, they seemed to be almost as in sync as the twins. This realisation brought back the haunting loneliness of being an only child for the boy wonder but the familial love surrounding him quickly chased the cold cloud away.

Breakfast was quickly scoffed up and finished and before Harry knew it, he was being dragged out to a vast plain of grass just outside the higgledy piggledy building. Harry could only assume this was the Weasley garden. He didn’t know if he had actually given Charlie a response but it looked like he was about to learn how to fly. Was he prepared? Hell no. But that didn’t stop him. He should have felt nervous in the very least, and Nagini’s warning hiss as he was geared up in several layers of protective gear and saddled onto a broomstick should have made him feel queasy as the list of possible injuries he might incur by doing this grew more and more horrifying the longer Nagini went on. None of this stopped him though, and soon he was up!

Up. He was up! Up in the air! He could see everything! The tiny faces of the Wesley family pushed a thrill of adrenaline through him. He couldn't believe it. One moment he had been trying his best to remember everything to do with the process of getting ready... the next, he was being told “now push off with your foot”... and now he was here! He was hovering. He was steady. He was in awe. He had thought there would be more to it all - that there would be more warning! But this was incredible!

“You alright there, Harry?”

Harry zipped his head around to see that to his right was the stocky form of Charlie. His thick thighs gripped around his own broom with ease and Harry could vividly imagine the scaled body of a dragon in place of the flimsy piece of wood.

“Yes!” Harry responded eagerly.

A chuckle met him from his left. Gosh - he was so disorientated. He hadn’t noticed Charlie, and now as he caught the gaze of Bill he realised he hadn’t noticed him either. Of course the Weasleys wouldn’t just let him go up alone - they knew what they were doing - it was only Harry who felt so utterly lost.

“You think you can control it?”

“I… think so.”

Harry hated being proven wrong but it seemed to happen all too often. He adjusted his body in accordance with the way he had seen on the horse riding shows that he’d watched whilst the Dursleys were out. A broom was not a horse though, and disliked being treated as if he’d spurred it with the spiked metal of days gone by. The broom whooshed off into the distance!

“Harry!”

“Harry!”

The double shout was almost equal in its pitch. They matched just like the twins. Both boys had deep voices to match their typically masculine image and they wielded the heavy comfort their presence brought with ease. Harry might have felt intimidated if not for their charm and their gentle kindness, but in that moment, right then, it was their quick agility and determination to go careening after him that made relief quash down the panic within his heart. Harry was dashing off in the sky and then suddenly he plummeted, swooshing over centuary old trees and threatening to dive straight into the rooftop of some poor, unsuspecting neighbour.
“AHHHH!”

Harry couldn’t help it. He gave a shout. His mind was already lagging behind reality; now fear threw it back even further. He didn't' know if he was shouting out of terror or exhilaration. Maybe he was shouting just for the sake of it - because that was the only natural reaction of someone about to meet their end! He gave another shout and then the air was forced out of him, his scrawny body careening into hardness and then a soft landing.

There was a moment of huffed breaths in general silence.

“Hah… hah… you alright, Harry?” panted out Charlie from in front of him.

Harry dared to open his eyes. He hadn’t even realised he’d shut them.

“Y-yes?”

The deep chuckle of Bill rumbled from under him. Oh.

“You don’t sound too sure, Harry.”

“Well… have I broken anything?”

Charlie smirked from his spot on his broom.

“Shouldn’t you be the ones telling us that?”

Harry flushed from embarrassment.

“I… don’t think I’ve broken anything.” Harry took a few seconds to twist his limbs to see if anything hurt, but instead he was brought to reality - to the hard chest beneath him and the the trunk-like arms around him and the heavy breaths in his hair. Harry shuffled his feet as he bloomed pink, his soles failing to find purchase in the weak twigs of the apple tree where the two of them had landed.

“Well! That’s good then,” said Charlie, reaching out to offer the messy-haired boy a hand. The grip around his waist weakened and then four steady palms were helping him wobble into a standing position.

“Oopsie. Yeah, that’s it Harry. To the left a bit, Bill”

A moment later and Harry had his small body tucked in front of Charlie’s as they shared his broom. Harry looked around confused.

“Where are the other brooms?” he asked curiously.

“Well, one’s here…” said Bill, heaving himself up and shaking off the leaves from his own straggly mode of transport. “I’ll go look for the other one and then meet you two back in the garden.”

Charlie gave his brother a thumbs up and slowly pulled away from his position of rest.

The flight back to the Weasley garden wasn’t at all long, but it all felt like slow-motion to Harry as the blurs of trees he had whooshed past just a moment ago now became clear outlines and the journey felt less like a dream and more like the magical reality it was.

“…so you see, you have to guide a broom gently. It will feel your intention and respond to it. If you become one with it, then you will be able to work together to be the best you two can be. It’s the same principle as working with animals…”
Charlie was making use of their alone time to explain the in’s and out’s of flying to Harry and the boy could only feel immensely grateful. He didn’t want another embarrassing incident if he tried flying again and ended up barreling into the same neighbour’s garden. Oh - that was a point.

“Those people whose roof I almost destroyed…” Harry began, assuming that the washing he had seen drying in the sun was evidence enough to suggest that the house wasn’t abandoned.

“Yeah,” chuckled Charlie from behind him.

“Are they also wizards?”

“Yup.” Charlie popped the “p” which made Harry giggle a little. “They’re the Lovegoods. We’re quite good friends with them, actually. You’ll probably meet them before you go off to Hogwarts - they come around quite often and mum almost always manages to persuade them to stay for supper. I’m sure you’ll like them.”

If they didn’t mind the fact Harry had resisted destroying their roof and instead been diverted by Bill to dive bomb their tree, then Harry was pretty sure they would be lovely and that he’d like them very much. Harry did, however, realise that they probably didn’t know about the damage he had caused... yet. He gulped slightly and drew his bottom lip between his teeth to worry it.

“Hey, hey. None of that now.”

And then Charlie was pulling that lip out from it’s vice softly and Harry froze. Oh. Oh shit.

It wasn’t long between then and the moment when Charlie began helping him dismount back into the vast Weasley garden and Molly’s loving hug, but in that time, Harry realised with a strangely traitorous bloom of arousal that the two older Weasley boys were both completely and utterly charming, and that they had already made it onto a certain list of people that Harry’s mind would soon begin conjuring fantasies about.

Harry had yet to have a Sex Ed class. When he would walk into his first lesson of it he would be hugely embarrassed, but in the very least it would explain to him the difference between love and lust and what he could expect at his age. The explanation wouldn’t help suppress the performances that damn list would put on in his dreams though and it would surely drive the boy wonder insane with lust until he finally found an outlet for his desires.

Harry glanced back over at Charlie and then flushed at the heroic entrance of Bill. The eldest brother had swooped in and was now deeply bowing as he presented Harry with his broom for a second time.

In that moment, nowhere in Harry’s mind was the name “Draco Malfoy”.

Chapter End Notes

I was pushing it a bit with this one. It's also all one passage, which is rare! I lacked inspiration most of the day, but then a thought struck me. Tell me what you think of this development! ;)
It would be accurate enough to say that about twenty minutes after the first “incident”, Harry was already flying smoothly. Almost all the Weasley family had taken to the skies on their brooms and whilst there weren’t enough people to have a proper game of Quidditch, the twins had easily persuaded Molly, who was the only ginger left on the ground, to let them play the “Weasley Special” which was seemingly a game with one Keeper, Beater, Chaser and Seeker per side. It didn’t really matter what it was called though - all that mattered was the fact that Harry was overjoyed that Molly had let them play despite his inexperience and her tendency to fret. He felt free and more exhilarated than ever before and he just couldn’t do anything but grin as the air pushed past his face every time he dived down. It was brilliant!

Harry’s mind flashed up the thought of his father. He knew so little about the man but his history with Quidditch made the boy wonder feel a greater connection bloom to life. In that moment, Harry set himself a new target: to learn all that he could about his parents and their demise. But the resolution was quickly buried by lighter feelings. How could it not have been? Harry felt as light as a feather! I can definitely see the appeal, thought Harry with a smile, and then dashed out of the way as a Bludger barrelled towards him.

The game went on for many hours and Harry was rotated through the positions. His first stint as a Beater didn’t really suit his form - he was anything but burly. A Keeper was a closer shot, but again, Harry’s small body wasn’t going to be blocking anything anytime soon. It was only his nimble and deft turns which saved the few goals he managed to reach in time. Agility brought him into the position of a Chaser. It had seemed like a good idea, except the moment a Bludger started racing at him, Harry dive bombed behind Charlie who was nearest, but also playing for the other team. It brought laughter to the pitch and a one-armed hug from the dragon tamer. It was Charlie who suggested Harry try out the final post.

“How about being a Seeker, Harry?”

Harry wanted to say yes. He really did, but-

“I-Isn’t that kind of the most important position?”

“You bet!” winked Charlie.

Harry flushed and found himself getting restless on his broom. Then Ron flew over to join them with a big grin on his face.

“You’re our celebrity, Harry! Why not give it a go?”

Harry glanced over at Charlie who still had a heavy arm around his shoulders. The cheerful smirk and thumbs up was all the reason he needed. Harry’s eyes lit up and he turned back to look at Ron.

“Sure!”

And so Harry swapped for the final time and ended up getting a quick run through of what he could and couldn't do as a Seeker. The ginger telling him the rules was none other than Charlie who surprisingly enough would be his opponent in this one-on-one game. Harry hadn’t expected Charlie to be a Seeker - he seemed to fit the image of a bulky Beater instead. Perhaps it was all that time the
boy—no, young man spent with dragons which made him so agile and suited to the post. After the quick 101, Fred easily gave up his ratty over-cloak labelled with the golden letters of “Seeker” to Harry, Arthur, who was acting as referee, blew his very Muggle whistle, and the game was once again afoot.

X-X-X

Betty didn’t think there would be much for her to do when she had first been summoned. Salazar had always had a bad habit of preparing things way too far in advance. The basilisk supposed it was a necessary trait to have when the man had to act as the counterbalance to his lover’s brashness, but at the same time it often left Salazar’s familiars, including Betty, living “in readiness” long enough to tire and then be taken by surprise when the moment to strike came.

It seemed, however, that this occasion would be different. The heir everyone had been waiting for was finally going to be here - in Hogwarts! And that meant that, for once, Salazar was perfectly justified in beginning preparations early. The process of surrendering to your inheritance was a painful one and if the heir was powerful enough to accept his, the most weighty of all, then he would need all the help he could get. Rowena, for all her wisdom, had always underestimated the effects that an inheritance had on someone. Betty couldn't blame her - given she was the only Founder without one of her own - but that meant that, in this instance, it was perfectly natural that the wise eagle was wrong and that Salazar was right. Preparations would need to be made for the heir and that was that.

Betty’s master had said that the heir was coming from Godric’s line which meant that the basilisk needed to only consider the lion’s Yule Lovers and the inheritances they would offer the heir. The Yule Lovers had been a point of debate amongst the historians who had come and gone over the centuries. At first, taking additional lovers had been accepted - it had been seen as the norm for powerful witches and wizards, but later, when the notion of heirs and blood purity had come into popularity, historians had tried to cover up that singular season of love and lust. The lion and the snake had loved each other and so had the eagle and the badger. They shouldn’t have taken any other lovers and any heirs should have been sired by these couples together. None of the four had an omega inheritance which would have allowed them to sire heirs in same sex couples though, which meant that they would have had to use ancient magic and the Founders knew better than to mess with the almighty power of that.

The point of the Yule Lovers had been quite different to what anyone had ever concluded though. Each of the Lovers, as per the agreement made between the four, were magical beings such as vampires and mermaids, and the purpose of the lustful season had been to encourage witches and wizards to recognise their heritage. The Gods had created three races: humans, magical beings and animals. When humans and magical beings mated, their children were witches and wizards; when magical beings mated with animals, their offspring were magical creatures; when humans and animals mated, it was very rare for the child to be anything other than hideous, after all - it was magic which allowed the boundaries made by the Gods to be crossed in the other two instances. Every witch and wizard descended from both magical beings and humans - or Muggles, as they were now categorised. The notion of blood purity was well and truly stupid.

It was the tragedy of the ages that wizarding folk wished to deny their heritage and slather the Truth with lies. The Yule Lovers gave birth to powerful witches and wizards and those wishing to bring the blood of the Founders into their family lines would be forced to acknowledge the Truth. The
Lovers had done their job for centuries, but now the final shreds of evidence were being threatened by the current Headmaster, and only the heir to it all would be able to carry forth the Truth.

Betty knew her job: to be there to explain as much as she could about inheritance to the heir when he stepped foot into the Chambers. Those powerful enough would be able to claim their inheritance so long as they accepted the Truth and acceptance would give them immense power and insight. There were so many tragic losses of potential as ignorance was bred by the figurehead of the Light. The heir had to be taught about his inheritance and his duty, and he would have to spread the word.

All that could possibly be done to support the heir had to be done, and Betty would do it. Now all she had to do was figure out which creatures were more likely to offer up their attributes to the heir. Whichever had greatest presence in his blood would be the dominant one which presented once the heir accepted the Truth. Betty had to equip the Chambers accordingly. If the heir presented as dragon, he would need different things in comparison to if he presented as a nymph. Godric had taken most Lovers out of all the Founders, so Betty’s list of most likely beings to dominate was quite long. But she would observe and she would deduce and she would do it in time. The transition of acceptance would likely be the most pain the heir had ever experienced. After all, bonding was a sacrifice.

Chapter End Notes

I didn't get as much time to proof read this chapter so please tell me if there's an especially annoying typo etc. A pretty big piece of lore gets revealed here. I hope I made it flow smoothly enough! Tell me what you think of the lore and if you have any deductions whirring around your head.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Everything had been going so well. Charlie was proving an excellent opponent and Harry had been right not to have underestimated the man’s skills. What agility he lost with his bulk, he made up for with the smooth operation of his broom. That said, Harry was putting up a good fight too. The boy wonder dashed across the air, desperately chasing after the little fleck of gold which spelled victory. The slight buzzing of the Snitch’s wings was as sharp in the air as Harry’s panted breaths. Magic trailed behind Harry as he did his best not to lose sight of the metal miscreant. Up. Down. Past a weeping elm tree. He ducked and dived and zipped past Charlie as they duelled in and out of the main game. It was like the clashing of two titans in the middle of a battle royale. It was incredible and death-defying and-

BAM! Harry cartwheeled straight into Percy, his small torso cracking up as it hit the lean body of the ginger teen. Pain. Sudden, immediate pain. And then the freefall.

White light cut across the closed eyes of both boys as darkness embraced them and they toppled towards the ground. Molly had long gone indoors and the others were too far away to stop their fall.

X-X-X

Lucius had always looked shockingly like his father. Disgustingly similar, even. True, he had had the feminine lines of his mother until the awful period of transition during his last year at Hogwarts, but now he firmly embodied the same gallant grace and undeniable confidence his father had always conveyed with every step he took. Perhaps though, Lucius was even more of an aristocrat than his father had ever been. That man had used fear and terror and manipulation to get what he wanted and to tear his name into the new world, defying the law the Dumbledore had tried to resolutely pin across the nation. It was thanks to that man that Dumbledore had yet to succeed. It was also thanks to that man that Lucius could convey his power and elegance with a single look and a whispered rumor. The rumors did the part of threatening without Lucius ever having to get involved, and the current patriarch was by far the better smoothtalker of the two Malfoys - winning him favours everywhere in just the drop of a hat. Lucius’ father had been an incredible man who had left the wizarding world changed - in some ways for the better, but to Lucius - mostly for the worse.

“He won’t even look at me, Cissy. Last night, when he wasn’t talking, he just sealed himself away. He didn’t used to be like this.”

“He’ll change and he’ll see you for who you truly are, darling. Lucy, love, you can’t blame him-”

“I don’t.”

“.you just have to be patient and wait.”

The ghost of Abraxas Malfoy was one which made an entire generation of witches and wizards want to tear their minds apart should he visit them in a nightmare, and Lucius was the man who knew that better than anyone else.
Harry found himself blinking before he had even realised he had awoken. His first thought was not for his own safety, but for Percy’s. The Weasleys were becoming the family he had never known - of course Percy was his first priority! Up until a few days ago, he knew that nobody would have cared if he had suddenly suffered from a fatal injury. Percy though - he had eight other people to call family and they would be distraught if he was anything other than perfectly fine.

Harry’s trembling fingers made contact with freckled skin and the small digits pinched violently at all they could. Percy wasn’t responding. He wasn’t- He couldn’t be! A pained whine and then Harry heaved out a whimper of relief. Not dead. Not. Dead. But in pain. Ow! In pain - both of them were. Percy was possibly in more pain than him - he had hit the ground first… or at least, Harry thought he had. Ow! Christ. Oh Jesus Christ! Harry’s grip tightened. The pinching should have hurt the ginger - it should have done! Why wasn't he reacting to it? Was Harry just so weak after the fall…? Or was the older boy in so much pain that a little extra didn’t matter at all? It could be either. It could so easily be either...

Harry had been suppressing the deafening shrieks and shouting from all around him to focus on the heartbeat and the breaths of the boy beside him. Now those two irregular rhythms were circling Harry’s mind as he was reaching out for the boy beside him. He traced his own breathing, his own heartbeat - and then he followed the blood from that essential organ of life. From the pumping centre to his arms and then across the void of nothingness and into the sphere of the living, breathing, wizard beside him. The connection was driven together, the snicket was closed, the circle complete. More and more pain ricocheted up Harry’s body as he took upon himself the burden which came with his actions - with who he was. He had to shoulder the pain and the danger because everyone else was too precious to lose. They couldn’t go! Not when he had only just found them. Harry took it! He took the pain. He embraced it like he had been eager to embrace death every time his uncle had beaten him. He would suffer it - for Percy. He would and he did. His breaths were now horrifyingly raged and it was getting harder and harder to suck in oxygen. And then there was calm.

Harry had and always would be good at wandless magic. Draco Malfoy would attest to that. He had seen and felt the boy wonder heal what had surely been his broken leg. “Surely” because within a blink of an eye, it was fixed and he felt pain no more. Percy Weasley would now also be added to that list and it would be sure to grow again soon too.

X-X-X

Percy knew that something wasn't quite right. He felt blank. He knew who he was and what had happened and so he concluded that he didn't have amnesia - Muggle or magical. That said - he was still blank. One minute he had been sure he was about to die - either from the fall or from the pain, the next - he was lying there, wide-eyed and staring into the blur of his family above him. He had no idea what they were saying but he clicked with the idea of their worry. They must be worried. So Percy did the only thing he could do: reassure them with what would make sense - what should have been the truth.

“I-” he coughed jerkily. “I’m fine.”
Percy’s head didn’t hurt and neither did his neck. The phantom puncture and seeping blood from his skull and the remembered splinters of bone from his spine were unwelcome hauntings though. The ginger looked at Harry. The boy seemed fine too. Was it all in his imagination?

“Harry should be fine too,” continued Percy, shuffling into a sitting position. Act unaffected. From this angle, he could get a better look at the boy wonder’s face. There was a tiny line of pink running down his forehead - a barely present trace of damning evidence. The boy had been scowling - almost certainly from pain. And truly dreadful, horrific pain at that if he had managed to scowl firmly enough for the imprint to have remained. Now his features were lax though. Not in pain at all.

“I managed a wandless cushioning charm as we fell.”

Percy had managed nothing of the sort. Harry hadn’t either. But the third son was known for being both clever and skilled - it was within the realms of possibility. Soon his mum was hugging the ginger boy, barreling her arms around him and squeezing tightly. Percy felt undeserving of it. He had saved noone and yet been denied the pain of victimhood. Had someone interfered? ...No. Or at least, it was highly unlikely. Percy glanced over his mum’s shoulder at Harry again. The Boy Who Lived was full of secrets and Percy’s thirst for knowledge piqued as he realised he had found a new source to fuel his addiction for knowledge. Percy needed to know more.

X-X-X

Harry had received the first and only telling off that had actually risen shame like bile over his features. Molly knew that it had only been an accident so her message had been lighter than if she had been ranting at the twins. “Just be a bit more careful, dear. Think what might have happened if Percy hadn’t cast that cushioning charm-” The words were kind and evidenced worry and Harry had never felt more wanted than in that moment. Molly didn’t just care about Percy. The tears in her eyes were for him - him! The trouble was, though, that he also felt utterly worthless. He didn’t deserve all this. He might be Harry Potter, the “Chosen One”, but he still felt like “just Harry”. It was a complex place to be in and when Nagini had tried to comfort him she had found herself batted away.

Despite rejection, the snake managed to make some accidental headway though. She had been watching the events and had a vague idea of what had happened, as well as what was causing Harry’s mood. The fact Percy Weasley had chosen to lie was interesting. Headway, or at least possible headway, was definitely opening up. Would the third son prove useful? He had lied... but why? To protect Harry? Out of all the Weasleys, he seemed to be the one least invested in her master. Had it been out of shock? ...Perhaps. In fact - it seemed like a likely explanation. But Percy would surely end up becoming curious when the sensation dissolved and then he would likely be driven to asking questions.

The only question which mattered to Nagini was would he pose a problem and prove an impediment… or would he be the first pawn her master could bring to his service? She had the rest of the summer to find out.

Chapter End Notes

Probably an unexpected turn for Percy - you might have been expected him to go in the
complete opposite direction. Thoughts on both him and Abraxas?
Harry sat on his bed that morning. Last night had surprisingly been nightmare-free. Perhaps the emotional upheaval which had forced him to confront his true feelings before sleep had helped. Although if it was considered from another angle, the trauma of the fall should have left Harry vulnerable to the ghosts which had haunted him from the cupboard under the stairs.

Ron had yet to awaken, but both Herwig and Nagini were looking at him with a mixture of curiosity and worry. What to do? He didn’t want to just sit there, doing nothing, until the rest of the family woke up - in fact, he was afraid that if he did, other thoughts would start creeping in… Harry was used to them, but right now he didn’t want to ruin what had been the first good night’s sleep he’d had in a long while.

“Nagini?” Harry ventured quietly.

“Yesss, Harry?”

“I want to do some reading before I go to Hogwarts. Where should I start?”

The crease of worry which the snake had been trying to disguise eased along her forehead. Harry would be fine.

“Why, I thought you would never asssk.”

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If anyone deserved the evil title of the Dark Lord more than Dumbledore himself, it was not Tom Riddle. That man was a genius, true; he was a Grand Master of the Dark Arts and had even been driven to using ancient magic which was considered an evil beyond all others... But the notion of him being the typical figure of evil couldn’t have been further from the truth.

Torture was sometimes necessary, but cruelty without purpose had never been Tom’s habit. Only insanity could possibly force him to cross that line. The fallen Malfoy, though... He had defeated Dumbledore in all but the final game - prevented the Headmaster from having his way - but that hadn’t made him a figure of goodness or honest intent. That man had tortured and controlled and blackmailed and murdered with a perfectly sane mind and a crystal clear conscience. Abraxas Malfoy deserved the title of the Dark Lord - even now that he was dead, he was a man to be feared more than Tom should ever have been. Tom should have been leading the revolutionary movement - a movement to be praised! Instead, the memories of Abraxas had been erased with his “convenient” death and Dumbledore had rewritten reality to cast Tom as a figure beyond evils anyone could ever imagine - beyond those Abraxas had committed without stopping for breath throughout the entirety of the shortened period of his life.

Jeremiah had never liked Abraxas all that much but, nevertheless, the three boys had been inseparable and Dumbledore had tried to tar them all with a single, sweeping stroke. Jeremiah had escaped to isolation though, and he had also escaped death. He would carry on the will of his peers
and he would do all he needed to to make sure that Dumbledore fell. *I need to know the colour of that blasted Rose.* And so it wasn’t long before he flung open the spread of the most recent Daily Prophet and discovered that Harry Potter was staying with the Weasleys.

X-X-X

Harry truly couldn’t believe that he’d managed to buy as much as he had. Flourish and Blotts had been a mystical place to him where he had just sunk into the dull desire to *know* and felt himself led from shelf to shelf. Yes, there had been numerous purchases, but between the hazy recollection he had of the journey and the surprise of encountering Draco… After he’d left Malfoy it almost seemed irrelevant what he was buying. Now though, he was looking at all the titles in front of him and taking in the details. What on earth did he need all of these for!?

“Nagini…”

“Yesss, Harry?”

“Why, *exactly,* did we need to buy a copy of ‘Teaching Your Child To Read and Write’?” Harry raised his eyebrow at his familiar in a way he could have only picked up from her. She smiled as she recognised her own gesture and mirrored him with humor.

“Oh? You mean you already know how to write? The ssscribble I saw you pen down didn’t look like letters at all.”

Harry gave Nagini a deadpan look.

“But ssseriously, Harry. Penmanship is a very important ssskill in the wizarding world. The old fool removed it from the curriculum but it hasss remained ingrained in people’s idealsss and behaviors. You need to learn how to write properly.”

“I *know* how to write properly.”

“Then why don’t you?” The retort was simple and short.

“Well… you know. Because…” Harry trailed off, struggling to admit the truth and put reality into words. Given the previous day’s events, the serpent took pity on him where she otherwise might not have done.

“Your injuriesss have all been physically healed as a ressult of our bonding, Harry. Now all we have left to do is break down the mental connection you have between the ssskill and your ssuffering. After that, you should be able to relearn the ability fairly quickly. It might seem ss silly or humiliating but it *is* important, and if you can’t overcome the ss simple matter of pride, I’m afraid everything will become exponentially more difficult for you.”

Nagini sneered at the word “pride” as though the notion of it and its connotations offended her very being. Harry almost flinched at the disparity between her acidic emphasis and her own high head and lofty belief in herself. The peace which had been surrounding Harry threatened to shatter but, after a brief moment, he found the comforting reassurance that defending *false* pride was the thing she abhorred. After all, Harry already knew that his familiar had achieved by far enough for her own pride to be as stable and valid as steel. The disparity vanished along with his worries into thin air.
“Harry? Are you listening to me.”

The boy wonder nodded, tuning back to engage with Nagini’s words.

“You’re already going to be working on your Mind Palace over the next few weekssss, and whilst nothing ssshort of a miracle will allow you to finish building it by the time you’re confronted by the old fool, the defences you do manage to irrigate may well sssave your life.” Harry swallowed audibly but his familiar ploughed on regardless. “In doing so, you will have to fully underssstand your mind and who you are, and along the way you will ssurely ssucceed in severing the connections which are limiting you.” Nagini took a moment to look Harry up and down before lightening the mood. “Oh, and then there’s that quaint trip to St Mungo’ssss which should fix up your eyes enough to be able to tell whether you’re writing or illustrating a warzone.”

“Hey!”

But by then, Nagini had already convinced her master to work hard, and Ron’s breaths were shifting to suggest that the family of gingers would soon be up. The only thing left dangling as a curiosity Harry wanted to press, was the notion of wealth. Was St Mungo’s free? Was it for everyone? Could rich nobles afford better healthcare like the wealthy could in the Muggle world? And why were the Weasleys to poor, anyway?

X-X-X

Nagini wasn’t sure why she felt as though she was about to shed her skin. It was an uncomfortable sensation but she knew it was most certainly a phantom feeling. She wasn’t due to shed for a good long while, which could only mean that the discomfort instead stemmed from her emotional state. Why? She was as powerful and wise as ever. But, upon consideration, the answer was obvious. The mystery of Louis and who the lemur’s former master had been were points of not only curiosity, but also hung as potential threats. It would do neither Nagini nor Harry any good to try and exclude the familiar on the basis of doubted loyalties, but at the same time, Nagini couldn’t just let the creature go unobserved.

The purelink felt alien despite the familiar grip it had on her. Why would a purelink exist between familiars when it had been designed to connect creatures with witches and wizards? It seemed most bizarre - bizarre enough that it left Nagini wondering if it might have been the occasionally seen phenomenon of collateral damage and an unintended effect of ancient magic somewhere in the world.

Just as Harry was getting dressed and saying his first words to Ron, Nagini felt the nervous thoughts of Louis across the mental connection of which she was so distrustful. Not everything you thought would be carried through - it was a matter of choosing to send the thought across, after all. Louis could easily be pre-considering his words to convey an image, but Nagini remembered her decision to trust him in a general manner and took his words at face value. Isaac was fine. Draco, though, had looked shattered before he went to bed - there had been a discussion last night which had tested his resolve. It would have been a potential sinkhole for their plans had the news not been followed with the reassurance that with the break of the morning light, the blond heir had looked as determined and resolute as he had always been - strong enough to serve as a trusty ally. The news of a conquered trial and the fact Harry’s choice in Malfoy had proven as true as a bull’s eye was just the news Nagini needed to reassure her that things were still going to plan.
The serpent was right to a good degree, but she had yet to make the connection between the alien familiarity of the purelink and the enhanced sensation it made her shiver with when she slithered past the hidden form of one cowering Peter Pettigrew.

Chapter End Notes

Oooo - I barely made it in time for this chapter too! I hope you enjoy~
Is Abraxus starting to jump out at you more? Did you enjoy the revival of snide Nagini's words?
The Weasleys seemed to have magically forgiven Harry for the fright of the previous day - all but Percy, that was. Harry knew this because the brother who had been an equal victim of the event was staring at him intermittently as though he was trying to pierce Harry’s skull and find out the truth. Harry almost wished he knew what had actually happened so that he could give the boy an answer and relieve himself of the uncomfortable attention. Harry didn’t know the truth though - the pain that had spasm into him blurred his memory of events and left him just as confused as the ginger. The boy wonder didn’t let that show on his face though and the confident facade was what made Percy stare at him all the more intently.

Curiosity was pushing the Weasley to find out more and whilst knowledge was rarely ever a bad thing, what could be done in search of it was not so often as fortunately virtuous. If Percy didn’t learn how to contain his interest and soon… then it would most definitely deserve to be labelled as a deadly sin. It was a good thing Nagini was already aware of this development.

Harry did his best to eat at a steady pace but he couldn’t help feeling increasingly worried about the boy sitting across from him. Was Percy actually able to read his mind? Was that why the stare seemed so penetrating?

God, I’m going to have to learn so much about my mind, aren’t I? It seemed complicated enough in the Muggle world with all the parts of the brain - but to think a mind is something like a soul. How will I ever manage to learn all the in’s and out’s and how on earth can I be expected to build a whole bleeding Mind Palace when I didn’t even know what to answer Ron when he asked me what my favourite colour was!?

Harry was admittedly a touch worried about what was to come. He’d of course told Ron that he liked Gryffindor red most of all which earned him an unexpected tackle hug on his bed. Harry was noticing how clingy Ron was being around him and could only conclude that living with such a big family and being the youngest of so many brothers was a hard task in and of itself. Harry could probably make use of that... Such a tiny piece of possible progress did nothing to alleviate the burden of unresolved problems which still lay in wait for the boy though. Harry sighed into his morning tea and found he had already developed an automatic response to Ron’s sneaky hands, flicking his peer across the wrist whenever he approached his toast.

X-X-X

Lucius refused to drink. He had to be strong - for Severus. He would drink with the man on his pointless anniversaries for the sake of persuasion through guilt, but he quite simply would not let himself crumble to the pressures which were ricocheting up his tension. No - Lucius was stronger than that. He had to be. He had to give a good example to the man he loved and show him how to live without that retched crutch in his life.

That said... the desire to drink remained firmly rooted in place. Last night had seemingly gone to plan - better than to plan - but Draco was still busy being the heir he thought he had to be, not the son
Lucius had wanted him to remain. Draco was his beloved son - not just a mindless pawn! He hated having to do this to him - burdening him beyond what should have been his education as an heir. If only there was another way…

Draco’s hatred of him had started long ago - before he had even begun discussing with him the Dark Lord and the only side that was worth fighting for. Something had broken in the beautiful blond he had sired and yet... he had been too busy caring about others to notice. It all happened in what seemed like the blink of an eye, but to Draco what probably felt like an eternity - the point of no return gradually slipping into existence in the eyes of the darling boy.

Draco… I love you beyond belief. Why won’t you listen to my words when in them I try and show you my heart?

X-X-X

With breakfast having been consumed, another day at the Burrow began. There seemed to be no concrete plans which meant all the siblings were vying for Harry’s attention. Ginny seemed more relaxed around him than she had been at first and made use of the chaos her brothers were creating in their play-fight over Harry’s attention to sneak away with the boy wonder. Out of the kitchen and up the stairs to the top floor, she tiptoed with Harry. Only Percy noticed their departure but mentioned nothing.

When the duo entered the girl’s room, Harry laid eyes on what he imaged must have been some strange variant of either a fox or rabbit.

“This is Pudding!” Ginny pronounced cheerfully and skipped over to the curled up bundle of fur.

The creature gave a yap that sounded like it might have been a yawn and Harry quickly shut the door behind him, hoping that the rest of the family hadn’t heard the sound. The creature unravelled from it’s evident nap and allowed itself to be picked up by the ginger who then patted the bed next to her, suggesting that Harry should take a seat. Harry did, but tentatively. He had never been in a girl’s bedroom before and somehow he felt the growing pressure that had so far been alien to him. The whispers and rumors about relationships had all been pointless to an abused boy with no care for others and no belief in himself. Now though, he couldn’t help feeling a touch awkward. He… he wasn’t attracted to Ginny. He’d had to accept that it was indeed possible for him to find others attractive with first Draco and then the eldest Weasley boys both catching his eye… but this was different. He hated this - this wasn’t normal. He shouldn’t be feeling so awkward when he wasn’t even experiencing the emotions which would have justified the sensation. Was this how Ginny had felt when she had first met Harry? Was that why she had been so quiet and shy? Harry found himself getting lost in his own thoughts and his mind was whizzing around in circles.

“Harry?”

Harry paused. And then Ginny’s hand was reaching out for his and pressing the fingers of his right hand into the thick fur in her lap. Ginny caught his eye and smiled at him.

“It must be a pretty stressful time for you, huh.”

Harry’s head jerked into a nod which made Ginny smile prettily at him. There was a comfortable silence after that as both of them drew their fingers through the thick slog of fluff in their grasp.
Harry coughed a little awkwardly and finally grasped at his courage to say something.

“I- Er- Nagini actually threatened to eat Pudding if she couldn’t find anything else to snack on!”

As the words barreled out of his mouth, Harry instantly realised his error with such a statement and began spluttering, trying to backtrack. Ginny didn’t look aghast though, instead she looked merry.

“Oh, I don’t know if that would work,” the ginger said with a grin. “After all, Pudding’s teeth are just as long as your snake’s, plus she has claws!”

Ginny was right - Harry could see two saber teeth pointing out of the creature’s cream coloured mouth and when the ginger reached for one of the four paws stretched over her freckled thighs and pushed at the pink pad amongst the fur, from between five little toes poked razor sharp claws. Predictably, Harry found himself gulping and ended up wondering if there was anything at all in the wizarding world that didn’t have the potential to kill him. He was starting to think not.

“Anyway, if you ask mum, she’ll find a good way of keeping Nagini fed in addition to the pet food she’s been feeding her so far.”

“Pet food” was underselling the gourmet feast that Hedwig had ranted to Harry about when she had first tried it.

“Oh?” asked Harry with genuine curiosity.

It was nice to see the girl who had been so afraid of his familiar at first already being comfortable enough to consider her needs.

“We have a huge gnome problem. I’m sure Nagini would have a feast!”

X-X-X

Narcissa had hated Abraxas. That beast of a man had been a foul creation. She had watched Lucius grow into the man she loved dearly and had been there every step of the way, reminding him to never falter and never fall - to never become the man who had terrorised his childhood - and hers. She had helped him grow away from destiny, but fate had been cruel enough to spit at their efforts, giving both father and son the same face with few exceptions.

Whilst this sometimes worked in her husband’s favour, Narcissa knew that he could only see the problems it brought about. Her beloved brother-in-arms couldn't bear to look in a mirror unless he was forced to and it was either her gentle hands or the house elves which addressed his appearance each morning. She could love the face she knew to be kind and forget the one which had caused such trauma - but she was not named Lucius and her strength was not shared by him. She loved him dearly no matter what, but she knew she was nigh on alone in this.

Chapter End Notes

Yet another OC I suppose. I don’t know if Pudding will have a big role but hopefully I used them well enough to illustrate the progress in Ginny's character. Also - more on the
dysfunctional family of Malfoys.
By the time some sort of hierarchy had been decided by the Weasley roughhousing, Harry and Ginny had already moved onto playing exploding snap which had caused a few more yelps of pain than Harry had been expecting. The boys burst into the girl’s bedroom and Ginny gave them all a high pitched telling off about keeping everything tidy. “Unlike your rooms” was very heavily implied. Sadly for the girl, both Ron and the twins ignored her and ploughed straight for the bouncy bed Harry was balancing on. Thankfully Bill and Charlie just leant against the bedposts and Percy hovered by the door. Whether the relief was because the bed was only so big and thus could only hold so many Weasleys before Harry was inevitably pushed off, or whether it was because Harry didn’t want his face heating up if he got closer of the two eldest brothers, he didn’t know.

“Why don’t we play wizarding chess, Harry?” asked Ron eagerly.

“Because you can only play with two people, Ron.” chided Ginny.

Ron looked down slightly ashamed. Harry could tell he was a good person, even if slightly excitable - he certainly wasn’t intentionally selfish. Harry liked about the Weasleys. Molly had been right as rain when she had told Harry that they didn’t have much but what they had they shared.

“Ron’s real good at chess, y’know, Harry. Later you two should definitely have a game together.” Charlie’s voice was jolly and almost made Harry jump at its sudden introduction. The words were warm and there was no teasing or shaming following Ginny’s retort. Instead, Charlie was building his brother’s pride back up with his praise, and in a few moments Harry saw Ron smile at him awkwardly. It was almost enough to make the boy wonder jealous. “Almost” because Harry truly felt he was in a magical world where he was entitled to similar affection.

“How’s wizarding chess any different to normal chess?” Harry asked, curious.

“You mean Muggle chess?”

Harry nodded.

“Well it’s practically the same thing, except all the pieces are alive and actually fight.”

That sounded… deadly.

“So! Does everyone want to play snap, then?” Interrupted Ginny.

“I’ll just watch, thanks,” said Percy whilst the others crowded into a circle, half on the bed, half on the floor.

“Oh don’t be a meanie, Perce. Come on!” cajoled Charlie.

“No, really. I’ll just watch, thanks.”

Percy. Again. Harry looked over at the boy. He couldn’t help feeling slightly uneasy around him but he wasn’t sure whether his nerves were justified. Should he approach the boy? Should he try to ignore him? Harry chewed on his lip until a pair of hands smacked him on his back, loudly informing him that it was his go. Harry gave one last look at Percy who, this time, met his eyes, sending a
shiver down his spine. What to do?

The game quickly swept Harry up and it was only a flickering thought which reminded Harry about the ginger watching him intently. By the time Molly was calling them down for lunch, Harry was beginning to realise that if he wanted any alone time to speak with Percy, it would have to be early in the morning or late at night. Harry decided that he would ask Nagini for advice as to how to approach him.

X-X-X

Lucius had not always been paired with Narcissa. Before he had grown so very close with her, there had been other girls with whom Abraxas had considered pairing him. Lucius had been betrothed to a sweet and wilful woman named Pandora who had eventually married to become a Lovegood, but also a Greengrass, a Nott, a Zabini, and a very ginger Prewitt.

The girls had been chosen in part for the blood line they carried - blood purity had meant everything, after all - but also for their looks. Oh yes, the heirs they would produce had to be beautiful, but so did the whores. Abraxas' whores. Well - they were Lucius' women in theory. They would have to marry his son, after all. But until then, they could be his. And even if both the contraception and abortion potions failed, a brother or sellable sister for Lucius wouldn’t be a bad thing - even if they were a bastard. It was the wizarding world not the Muggle world - bastards were forbidden from claiming their titles on the grounds of the morality their parents surely raised them with, but otherwise could live quite successful lives. One just had to look at the Evergreens.

X-X-X

Arthur Weasley was a pureblood and yet he was not a noble. He wasn’t even a member of the gentry. The fact this could happen in their society was good enough indication for him that blood purity was a whole load of codswallop.

The Weasley patriarch rarely found himself mulling over the details of their class system - he tried to stay away from it as much as possible, after all. That said, he now had Harry Potter under his roof, and that meant that he might possibly have to get involved when Harry came of age and had to go through the procedure of claiming his inheritance. James Potter had been a Lord - the highest class of their society - and he had thankfully done nothing abuse his power, unlike many of his peers. Harry surely wouldn’t be able to turn down the offer of the position - be it for the status or the power or the contacts or the wealth that came with it. Arthur could only hope to raise the boy to be as honest and true as his father had been and teach Harry how to use his inheritance just as wisely.

Arthur sighed. Lords and Ladies were the only two titles considered nobility and the titles were given to the living first-born of the current holder. Gentry titles had a more complex system and the lower ranks had even more complicated configurations. Arthur tried to remember what the procedures would be if it turned out Harry would also inherit some of the lower titles - Arthur had only ever known James by his primary title, after all.

Oh. Molly probably knew more about titles than he did. Maybe he should ask her... She had
inherited the title of Lady Prewitt when she had first been of age, and after the traumatic incident which they rarely talked about anymore, Dumbledore had helped her regain at least the title of Countess. Maybe it would be prudent to get the Headmaster’s help with Harry too. And whilst he was chatting with the man, maybe he could ask about Harry’s relatives and whether the boy would be able to stay with them from now on. Molly was already in love with the boy. It would be cruel to try and part his wonderful wife from the boy wonder now.

Arthur was a lovely man - he truly was. He was a brave soldier who had fought in the First Wizarding War against Voldemort and he was someone who would willingly give his life to protect his family and in service of the Headmaster’s cause. It was a terrifying shame, therefore, that Dumbledore was anything but deserving of such a sacrifice.

Chapter End Notes

A slightly shorter chapter but I'm glad the wifi was good enough to post anyway. :D
Who's making the connections now thanks to this chapter? :P
Luna loved her talents. She was a very bright and insightful witch - not a seer like most people thought, but rather a Mother of Earth. There were always three people with her talent at any one time. Technically, it wasn’t passed on from parent to child, but rather onto the most suited bearer of such a power. It was just logical that often the child of the former holder of such a power would have similar potential. The criteria for a bearer was to never seek to abuse the power gifted to them, and so they never did. Those that had gone through enough trauma since obtaining the power to consider using it for personal gain rather than the guidance of others suddenly found themselves without it - simple as that. Luna was her mother’s daughter and a perfectly selfless creature and so that was how she ended up obtaining the ability which had brought about her mother’s demise.

Luna could easily have hated the power because of the pain it had caused her, but instead she endeavoured to do it justice. Her mother had loved the talents it gave her, after all - so why shouldn’t she? Luna could see the reality of people and things - sometimes she could just look at them and know, other times she had to touch them. It all depended on how good they were at hiding their true selves. But no matter how good they were, they could never hide from a Mother of Earth. Mothers knew everything - be they material or metaphorical - and the Mothers of Earth were the vessels of Mother Nature and Mother Magic - their knowledge of the truth and the Truth couldn’t be denied - nothing could be hidden from their eyes.

The power came with downsides, of course. For one, there was the fact that it was often hard to sleep at night when you knew the truths of the world rather than the pretty lies - this was especially difficult for those who inherited the power as children like Luna had done. But more than that, a connection with such a power was a form of bonding, and bonding was a sacrifice. A price had to be paid and the nature of the bond meant that the price was predetermined. A Mother had to do the expected thing that all mothers did - bear children. But not just any children, otherwise Pandora Lovegood would have been saved from her fate with the birth of Luna - no, the children had to be those of the Blessed Heroes.

Luna’s mother had refused to fulfil the necessary sacrifice in her choice of unyielding monogamy, and thus had met her end. She had been given a Rose on her chest to mark her countdown to death, and now Luna bore it instead. It had unfurled at her mother’s funeral and changed through an array of colours before settling on black. It was the mark of her bonding and it would stay stable until she was of age, and then her countdown would begin. The only way to stop it would be to find all the Blessed Heroes fate had made her responsible for and to fulfil her duty with each of them.

Would she find love and have to treasure her days as she followed in her mother’s footsteps? Or would she find her heart open enough to love beyond measure and paint her friends as her lovers? Luna wasn’t a seer - she knew the present but not the future. That said, she was a Mother of Earth... maybe only Fate and those who could peek at it could know the future, but she knew the Truth! She knew that death was not the end and thus she knew not to fear it at all.

X-X-X
Abraxas had been a cruel man more focused on suppressing Dumbledore because he had posed him a political threat than because he wanted to do the right thing. True, he hadn’t been able to stand the notion of blood purity being overturned, but ideology would always come second to power.

Those at the top were selfish - had always been and always would be. It was rare to find exceptions to the rule for it was the very trait of selfishness which allowed power to thrive. Without selfishness, only incredible willpower and mental strength would allow a witch or wizard to rise to the top. There were some that managed it - true - but it was a rarity, and usually they were those who had had immediate experience of how damaging selfishness could be. These miracles of people were know as the Blessed Heroes because the refused to conform to history’s hold of tragedy and farce. They gave their all to protect others and through the pure bonds they forged, they had the potential to reach even greater heights than those who had risen on a pedestal of selfishness.

Abraxas hated political enemies. It was therefore completely understandable why he had tried to obtain a Mother of Earth for his whore and his son’s wife. Those women were always beautiful and were the only way he could think of controlling the Blessed Heroes which posed him such a threat. Abraxas was cunning but Mothers of Earth knew the truth - they would not be fooled - and so both Pandora Lovegood and Metis Zabini had escaped the man’s hold unharmed. The third, however, had been less fortunate.

X-X-X

Molly hadn’t been thinking of Harry’s position in society until Arthur brought it up with her. Harry was just a sweet, young, innocent little boy who needed a place to call home. She didn’t know why Harry had run away from his relatives but if he had found his home in the Burrow then she would be all too glad to care for him. Molly had thought that Dumbledore had made the right decision in sending the messy-haired boy to stay with his Muggle family, but now she was beginning to think differently. She had been there for Harry every night when he had woken up screaming - he was no longer a pure boy - he knew heart-wrenching pain. What was it that so terrorised his dreams? What had Harry been though? Only trauma could cause that sort of reaction. Trauma. Molly knew all about trauma...

The nightmares which had plagued Molly in her younger life, and occasionally continued to do so even now, had been difficult to handle. First her parents, and then Arthur when they had begun sleeping together, had been unable to touch her or comfort her through her night terrors. Touch made her sick when she was already weak. That was what haunted her above all else - the fact that the comfort of humanity was ripped away from her every time she needed it most.

Harry had reacted to her like he had been stung by her fingertips during the first night he’d stayed at the Burrow and Molly could only think that meant one thing. She had been sixteen when Abraxas had invited her to Malfoy Manor on a pretense. Harry had only just turned eleven, and yet at some point in his short, innocent life - he had already been sexually assaulted, or even raped.

Molly was a good woman and thanks to the trauma she had lived through, she had become a great one too. She was far off realising the truth of the war, but at least she had a foothold in unravelling the corruption she had thus far been so utterly blind to. There had been a point at which she had known the Truth, but when she had lost her gift, she had lost any memory she had had of its insights too.
Luna already had a good idea of who some of the Blessed Heroes were.

Her mother’s association with the Malfoys had meant that Luna had grown close with both Lucius and Draco - grown close enough to know them and their problems. It wasn’t her place to step up and help though - not for another year, at least. She had to give them a chance to resolve their problems by themselves first.

Growing closer with them had had another effect too though - she now felt a tugging on her heart, on the Rose, whenever she was around them. She could sense that she was destined to be by their side in some capacity - it was the only explanation which made an ounce of sense. She was close with other people - with the Weasleys, for example - but she didn’t feel the same sort of longing tug on her heart around anyone other than those two blonds. Not yet, at least.

Between the sensation and the belief that she was destined to aid them, the only reasoning Luna could come up with was that they quite simply had to be two of the Blessed Heros for which she was responsible. That had to be the truth - her truth! She had gone through all the possibilities and deduced it! She had had to deduce it… she hadn’t just known.

It was unsettling for Luna to discover holes in her knowledge but she had to bear with it because this was the only truth that her ability would not let her know. This was the trial in which she would have to prove her worth. Luna had long ago formed the determination necessary to pursue her own personal quest - to find the Blessed Heroes and convince herself to love them all.

Chapter End Notes

Pheeeewie~ One more big bomb dropped in terms of lore. Thoughts? :D
“But how do I manage to get him on his own? They move like a pack!”

Harry had managed to get a little bit of alone time after lunch. Molly had come to his rescue and insisted that the flock she called her children needed to let their adoptive sibling recover from their company. Of course everyone had tried to plead for a repeal of her declaration, but Molly hadn’t budged.

“Well, you’re alone now, aren’t you? Ssso sssurely the third son will also find himself alone at sssome point in the coming days.”

Harry had decided to ask Nagini for advice about approaching Percy. She wasn’t being terribly helpful though…

“But how will I know without sneaking out from whichever hiding spot I manage to find and risking being bombarded?”

“Oh don’t be ssso dramatic about it, Potter.”

Harry snorted. He wasn’t being dramatic, he was being perfectly realistic-

“Percy Weasley ssseems to be the ssstudious type, does he not?”

“...Yes.”

“Almost every bookworm inssists on ssscurrying away to read at sssome point during the day. You just have to observe him and sssee when he vanishes from the crowd.”

That… actually wasn’t a terrible idea.

“He’s been watching me so intently though. What if he’s decided I’m more interesting than his books right now?”

Nagini raised the scales which formed her eyebrows.

“Booksss are an escape from the mad world around us. Given that now he has not only sssix ssssiblings but also your massive ego to contend with, he’ll be needing their support more than ever.”

“Hey-!”

They both knew the accusation was unfair, but nevertheless, Harry enjoyed lunging for Nagini for her snark and the warmth of her loving scales when in only a few seconds she had managed to wrap herself around him. She was powerful and strong. Harry trusted her to protect him - that didn’t mean she wasn’t a threat of another sort though, as she soon proved when she began tickling him into oblivion.

Harry was a believer. Magic did exist. Harry, who could now feel love all around him, knew that that emotion alone was the single most powerful and beautiful thing he knew - and if that wasn’t magic, he didn’t know what was. It could conquer isolation and sadness and fear and hatred and treachery and trauma and even death. Harry knew his parents had died in his place, but Nagini had
also saved him - from a half-life spent barely surviving with a predictable end of a forgettable suicide. Magic had to exist - if not, what else could love possibly be?

X-X-X

Molly had made up her mind. Harry was just a boy. He was already balancing on a precarious edge and he still had so much to learn. It wouldn’t be fair to set off the avalanche of his inheritance. Perhaps when Harry was more used to the wizarding world… but not now.

The ginger woman sat at one end of the table and observed the matching ginger heads that lined both sides of the feast-laden wood. One little head of black stood out, but he was chomping down his supper like everyone around him and he was enjoying the food just as much as her own boys. He fit in. He might have been the Chosen One, but he wasn’t arrogant or selfish. He was just a boy who enjoyed the teasing comments the twins were riling him up with and the bright smiles Ginny was offering him.

No - it wouldn’t be right to tell the boy. She’d need to have a talk with Arthur about it- she knew he was already getting ready to send an owl to the Headmaster. She had questions for Dumbledore but she was willing to wait for the answers if it meant she could avoid bringing up the topic of Harry’s future. She would be his guardian in his parents’ stead. Bless Lily and James. Those two had made a lovely couple. It had been such a tragedy when He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named came after them. She had known the pair quite well - they had been like a younger brother and sister to her. James had always been begging for help with homework when neither Lily nor Severus would help meanwhile Lily-

Oh, yes... Severus. Few had known the boy well enough to realise that what most people believed about him nowadays wasn’t true at all. Even fewer people shared her views on the man and the sacrifices he made for the side of the Light, but Molly didn’t want to rock the boat by challenging the precarious balance that had been formed. Instead, she just remained resolute in her support of the man and promised herself that she would do all she could to help him. He deserved better than his awful lot.

Molly took another sweeping glance at the table in front of her to make sure that everyone was well on their way with food but hadn’t yet reached the point of needing seconds before she too settled into her padded seat and dug in.

X-X-X

Between defending his plate and trying his best to respond to the twins’ teasing when his mouth wasn’t full, Harry was letting his thoughts drift between Percy and another boy who determinedly remained a mystery.

Harry felt he knew enough about Draco to trust him - his instincts were screaming that the two had mutual goals. But the reality was that Harry barely knew the boy at all. He knew he was snarky and sweet and blushed and was haughty and made Harry grin whenever his parrying remarks were extra dry or witty. But Draco had to have a reason for why he acted the way he did and wanted to oppose
what was expected of him. Harry didn’t want to pry - Draco had extended him the same courtesy, after all - but that didn’t mean Harry wasn’t curious as all heck.

What was it about Lucius Malfoy that made Draco hate him so much? What was it about the Malfoys in general that made the Weasleys hate the whole family so much? Harry began to feel a nagging need to see the blond bloom in his belly. Should he send him another letter? What would he say though...? Oh - St. Mungo’s! Of course! It might be possible for Draco to meet him for another “date” after the Weasleys take him to St Mungo’s.

Harry didn’t know what reason he could possibly give for wanting to meet up. Perhaps he would manage to stay awake for the next few nights and try practising imagining a Mind Palace into existence. If he had some sort of progress to report - then surely a meeting would be worthwhile in the heir’s eyes!

Harry sighed - he knew he was fooling himself. Draco probably wouldn’t buy it - he’d say that Nagini should have just used her purelink with Louis to update him instead of dragging him away from much more important tasks. But... none of that mattered. Harry just wanted to see Draco. He felt he was on the point of a change - things were sliding into place and he needed the boy he knew he could trust to be there for him and keep him on the straight and narrow-

“Ha! It’s mine now!” shouted Ron in his ear as he managed to grab a chicken leg from Harry’s plate.

“Ronald Weasley. You put that back right now-!”

Harry was decided. He would write to Draco in the morning when he saw the first glimpse of light. The boy wonder hadn’t noticed that he had forgotten his other resolve and had quite easily slipped back into the habit of calling Malfoy “Draco”.

X-X-X

“Alright everyone! Arthur and I need to have a chat so the kitchen is off limits until further notice!”

“But mu-u-um!” whined the twins in unison.

“No ‘but’s,” she said firmly.

“Can’t Bill-”

“-and Charlie-”

“-join you at least?”

“They’re of age!”

Molly gave the twins a look.

“This isn’t just an ‘adult’ chat. It’s a ‘parent’ chat. And don’t you try playing the innocent card on me. I know full well that you two would just try and wheedle any information you could out of the darling brothers of yours.”

“Oh, we’re ‘darling’ are we, mum?” asked Charlie, placing a sloppy kiss on her cheek.
“Well in that case we can’t do anything but help get our pesky brothers out of your way as quickly as possible,” continued Bill, winking charmingly at his mother.

Molly chuckled warmly and waved them off. Her two eldest boys truly were far too much like the twins for their own good. At least they’d both managed to make good careers for themselves, but she was genuinely worried that her two ginger devils believed that being professional pranksters was a viable career path.

Molly sighed and grabbed a chair to sit down next to Arthur. Her husband patted her hand and Molly smiled at him fondly, thinking that he was surely the one to blame for the mischievous gene that all but Percy had managed to inherit.

Chapter End Notes

Now much happens - but perhaps more insight into Molly? Thoughts? ^u^  
I think next chapter should have some good dialogue and progress in it though!
Another Ally?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

With evaporated motivation after being banned from the kitchen which they had been planning to inhabit for post-supper games, the Weasleys dispersed into sad little puddles of ginger hair with only the twins leaving together. All the boys gave Harry either a one-armed hug or slap on the back as they passed by him. Seemingly the decision to get ready for bed had swooped over the family and Harry rapidly found himself being directed to Ron’s room.

Harry didn’t know what they would do - chat maybe? Or perhaps Ron wanted Harry to play with Scabbers again. Harry didn’t mind the little rat that had evidently spent far too much of its life stealing food, but he felt sorry for the critter - he looked like he was about to have a heart attack every time Ron forced him into Nagini’s company. Harry also thought that perhaps there would be a better way to spend the next few hours than just aimless conversation with Ron.

Everyone was going their separate ways… Bill - to the study; Charlie - outside; Percy to the library; the twi- Harry cut his inner listing off. Percy. This would be the perfect opportunity to try and speak with the boy! But how? He was walking past him right now. Ron was a stairway ahead of him already, running to his room with enthusiasm; the twins had just said their goodbye and Percy was taking a turn for the library-

“Hey, Percy.”

The boy in question paused and hastily turned on his heel. The speed at which he had moved stunned Harry for a brief moment but he quickly recovered.

“Um - might you be free?”

Percy raised one eyebrow curiously and looked more than simply interested - his eyes held a combination of glee and determination. Percy nudged his glasses up his nose, making the glass glint in the warm light they were bathed in.

“Why yes. For you, of course I am.”

Harry knew that the boys were overly fond of him but he hadn’t been expecting Percy to give him that sort of reply. It almost sounded…

“I-I’ll see you in the upstairs bathroom in ten minutes then!” Harry rushed the words out before dashing up the stairs, a blush firmly in place, to inform Ron that he felt he needed a little quiet time and thought he might just have a bath.

X-X-X

Betty could feel a tick forming from agitation. She had been trying to narrow down the list of possible inheritances that the heir would have. She was making progress but incredibly slowly - attempting to cross them off one by one. The heir was the successor to all four Founders, but if he belonged to a bloodline closely tied to Gryffindor, then inheritances such as that of a dragon or a
veela were dead-ends for her given they belonged almost exclusively to the Malfoys - a Slytherin family. For the sake of her sanity, after a while she concluded to would be simpler to just discount inheritances that would have come from the other Founders and focus only on those for which Godric could have been responsible.

What magical being was it going to be though? A nymph? A merman? A vampire? Why had Godric taken so many lovers? It was doing her head in! She had attempted to force a purelink on the boy by going through one of her own descendants, but instead she had managed to link Nagini to another familiar. Blast! She had wanted to have a nosy around the heir's mind in search of clues but after that failure she hadn't dared try again for fear something worse may happen. Nothing was going to plan and she was getting increasingly frustrated. Two of Salazar's less liked vases had already suffered the wrath of her tail and she had been comfort-eating voles for the past three hours now.

The heir was feminine - he could be a nymph. The heir was changeable and had an elemental affinity with water - he could be a merman. The heir was only just warming up to the notion of a life being anything other than solitary - he could be a vampire. Blast it all to hell, thought Betty miserably. She threw down the quill she had had grasped in her tail and slithered off to the kitchen to demand Salazar brought in a new load of voles - it wasn’t like she was going to be allowed out to hunt them herself any time soon.

X-X-X

By the time Harry had managed to persuade his effective room-mate that a bath really was necessary and had tumbled his way to the blue-tiled room, he found the older boy already waiting for him. Harry felt his breaths stutter. He hadn’t had time to consider what he was going to say. He had just been going on instincts. This - talking with Percy - hadn’t been part of any sort of plan. What should he say!?

Harry finally concluded that the only answer he could come up with in response to his own question was “zilch”, and so the two boys ended up holding each other's gaze for an extremely uncomfortable length of time. Harry looked away first and as he blinked to try and dissolve his growing embarrassment, Percy took a deep breath of preparation and took the reigns instead.

“I assume you want to talk about the incident, Harry?”

Harry nodded.

“May I ask why?”

Harry paused but concluded that being honest would likely get him furthest.

“Because you keep staring at me.”

“Is that a problem?”

“No. Well, yes. I mean what if someone notices and asks?”

“Oh? When do you suppose that will happen? In that split second separating mealtimes and the rest of the day when their eyes are glued on you?”

When he said it like that, Harry couldn’t help feeling even more embarrassed - this wasn’t helping
him get rid of the stupid flush! Percy heaved a sigh and continued.

“I don’t know if you remember the exact events of the fall, Harry, but something very strange happened and I was hoping you would be able to tell me more about it - if you can, that is.”

Harry risked a glance up at Percy and found the boy’s eyes eager and ripe. His very self seemed to be pleading for the knowledge.

“I-I don’t know what to tell you, Percy. I don’t think it’s a secret that I’m supposed to be powerful so I guess it’s pretty predictable that I can control my wandless magic so well and-”

“That wasn’t just wandless magic, Harry! Dear God - for a boy your age, you should be able to make a book levitate - not knit together flesh and bone and vanish all traces of pain! It felt bloody alien! I thought I was going to die and then I was just… fine. I thought it was all going on inside my head…”

Harry took a moment to appreciate that whilst everyone in the Weasley family indulged in swearing every now and then, much to Molly’s irritation, Percy rarely did. It seemed though, that his word of choice was the same as Ron’s, which indicated exactly which brother his peer saw as his favourite role model.

Harry gulped.

“So… you’ve been watching me because you wanted to be reassured…?” ventured Harry.

“No.”

“No?”

“No. I don’t want to be reassured - I want to know. Harry, there is so much the world thinks it knows about you. You are the wizard who defeated Voldemort once and the boy who is going to have to defeat him again - the prophecy said so - everyone knows it! I want to be there when you do - I want to observe and learn and know - and then I want to write it into textbooks and teach the students of the next generation! Harry, I want to know everything about you and help you on your journey however I can. You were born to make history and I want to be the man that writes your story.”

Harry was… stunned. Well and truly stunned. He knew he was famous - heck, Ron made a point of reminding him about it every few minutes - but it hadn’t really sunk in - not until now…

Should he believe the boy? Yes. Should he trust him? … That was another matter entirely. He needed to speak with Nagini. He had to find out why the Weasleys hated the Malfoys so much. If he was to add a third ally to his list alongside his blond dragon and the Headmaster’s backstabbing brother, then he needed to know that there wouldn’t be any conflict between them - otherwise he would have to make plans to keep them apart.

That was how Harry ended up giving a vague promise to consider everything and talk with Percy again soon as he half rushed, half lolloped up the stairs. It wasn’t like he would be able to avoid the ginger anyway, was it?

Chapter End Notes

Phew! Barely got this chapter done on time! :D I hope you enjoy both Betty and Percy
with their characterisation. Are they different enough to Nagini and the other Weasleys, respectively?
“Oh, Harry, dear!”

Molly had caught the boy wonder slinking away from the bathroom and was now fussing over his hair. Harry had been startled and jumped up two steps instead of one, causing him to almost trip and fall back against the woman coming up behind him.

“Oh- Hi, Molly,” said Harry awkwardly. He wasn’t sure what she had heard from his conversation - surely not much, given that she had been occupied downstairs…

“Arthur and I have just decided that we’ll be going to St Mungo’s on Monday, so you have a couple of days to put together any questions you might have about wizarding glasses if you want to consider getting them - I know that it helps a lot of Muggleborns to have the familiarity of their old frames even once they’ve had their vision corrected. And if you can think of any old injuries you may have…” Molly trialed off and Harry thought for one dreadfully searing moment that she knew all about his past... That she knew everything - the insults, the injuries, the abuse, the assault, the rape-! Everything-!

“So that’s your heads-up, dear. It’ll be Saturday tomorrow so Arthur won’t be going out to the Ministry for work unless he gets called in on an emergency. He’ll probably end up pottering in the garden shed so if you fancy helping him with that Muggle passion of his, that’d be great, dear - I’ll still be here in the house though to keep the boys under control if you’d rather just stay in.”

Molly patted Harry cheerfully on the cheek and tottered off as slightly portly mothers tended to do. After the moment of panic as Harry’s mind raced to consider the possibilities of what Molly might possibly know… he found himself stuck stock still, gazing after the retreating form of the closest thing he had to a mother. She had patted his cheek... and her warm hand print had felt like both fire and ice. ...What did she know? What could she possibly know?

“-rry? Harry?”

Ron was stood a few feet away from him. Harry jerked back to reality, piecing together a mask of vague emotions and slippery defences. Ron couldn’t know. Ron couldn’t know. Ron couldn’t know....

“Hey, you okay, mate?”

Harry nodded briskly and walked over to him, clapping him on the shoulder and moving past him to their shared room. Hopefully the few seconds it would take to get there would be enough for him to compose himself - he certainly hoped so... Ron couldn’t know. Ron can’t know!

Harry didn’t know that he had just made his first draft of a Mind Palace in that evening’s flash of panic. He had gone to protect his thoughts and his mind as a first priority - for the first time in his life, protecting his thoughts before his body. Ron can’t know! The call to action had been sharp and tart but his soul had listened! It had strutted up an ice fortress with the necessary statue of a human swinging a broadsword in front of it. The scale of the man had been huge - his shoulders alone spanning twice the width of the rest of the Palace.

By the time Harry had stepped into Ron’s room, the draft of a Mind Palace had shattered to pieces -
it had only been ice, after all.

It wouldn’t be until the boy wonder entered dreamland that he would be able to realise what had happened, and in exchange he would finally unlock the ability to control his own dreams and protect himself from nightmares. Harry had found himself - he had discovered a foothold in victory! He remembered fragments of the speech Nagini had given him before she had explained sealing to him… “What makes you angry? What makes you happy? What motivates you? What ssscares you? What is it that makes you you?” Harry had found what he feared - what he truly feared! He had connected his fear with his mental defences and had come to one of the truths personal to him - he was most afraid of people tearing apart his mind... They had already tarnished his body and stained his very soul. Harry Potter’s greatest fear was losing the one thing he had always believed belonged exclusively to him - his mind.

When Harry awoke the next morning to the sounds of sleepy kisses between the Weasley parents and the groan of the back door which signalled Arthur sneaking out to his shed, Harry was disorientated but nevertheless amazed by what he had driven himself to do. He had progress to report! To Nagini, when she awoke, and to Draco, when he wrote!

X-X-X

Draco woke to the irritating preening to which he feared he would be forced to get very used to in the coming months. Hedwig, likely unbeknown to her master, had been flying over every evening to fret over Isaac. Somehow, the Malfoy wards had been letting her through, but Draco had too many other problems to worry about… he had mickle time to consider that simple mystery in addition to the far more burdensome tasks he had been saddled with. At least the lovebirds were enviably adorable - unlike his father’s bloody irritating demands on him.

Draco glanced over at the snowy owl who had been visiting at midnight. Currently though… it was not nighttime - it was stretching on into the early morning already. Potter would surely be up, thus Hedwig had no reason to be nestling up to Isaac...No. No. Surely not! He’d only just sent Potter on his merry way! Was his rival already sending him yet another awkwardly-coded letter!? That blush-inducing irritation known as Potter simply couldn’t have made any progress already - even if he was the Chosen One! I bet Potter’s just wanting attention - but I suppose with company like the Weasels that no surprise at all!

“Can you please not snog on my windowsill!? I thought I taught you better than that, Isaac!”

Draco’s personal owl looked ashamed of himself meanwhile Hedwig’s white down seemed to be turning a flushed blossom. The blond was glad for the distraction and a target to shout at - between the pain of waking up before midday and the fact Hedwig’s presence meant Potter was wanting to put him through another round of embarrassing arousal, Draco could tell his day was already going to go terribly.

“Alright...Hedwig.” Draco said her same in a particular way which indicated both irritation and caution. “What does your dear master want to bother me about today then?” The blond reached for the letter tied to the white owl’s leg however Hedwig pecked at him snappily. Draco just rolled his eyes, giving her a fuss around the feathers circling her neck, which worked like a key in a lock in regards to granting him access to Potter’s letter.

Draco glanced down at Hedwig one final time before moving to his desk. She truly was beautiful…
just like her master.

X-X-X

Jeremiah saw the name “Weasley” pop up in the St Mungo appointment book almost the moment the request had been processed.

The Grand Master often worked with healers in the hospital, although few saw him without the glamours he wore to hide his true identity, and only a handful of the higher-ups and occasional Death Eaters knew of his contribution to this sector in particular.

When the wizard saw the name pop up though, he found that the headache which had been coming over him during the past few days had begun to ease. If the Weasleys were coming for their yearly check up, then surely they would being Harry with them. It wouldn't take much to investigate whether there was indeed a Rose on the boy’s chest, and if there was... what colour currently dyed its petals. Jeremiah could ask one of his few loyal subordinates to examine the boy… or he could do the check up himself. Perhaps the boy was hiding it with glamours or seals… in that case doing it himself would be the best option, given his experience in detecting them.

Jeremiah sighed and rubbed at his eyes. With the family of gingers it was perfectly possible that the boy wonder had been forced to learn how to seal his own power and bondmarks. Had Jeremiah been anyone else, he would have been impressed by the boy’s rapid growth… the Grand Master, however, pitied the boy - such a display of power reminded the healer that is was a young boy who would have to be the one to take down the true Dark Lord of their era...

Jeremiah stalked the echoing hallways of the hospital and weighed up his options - he had less than two days to decide. It would be best to ask Matilda for her opinion - the witch was a genius.

Chapter End Notes

In theory, date-wise, Harry's birthday should have been on a Wednesday, but to follow narrative I changed it to a Monday in order to follow the "No Post on Sundays" passage. I only realised this when writing this chapter though. You know why? - Because I have now written over 90,000 words and only a WEEK has passed in fic-time! Harry escaped from his family at the zoo on a Saturday, and this chapter only just finishes off Friday and begins cataloging the following Saturday. Holy bleep! A big thank you to my slow-burn-loving readers who have supported me thus far with lovely comments and kudos and bookmarks! I appreciate you all! :D

Right - questions! Do you think Harry's first bit of progress with his Mind Palace is justified in terms of a power crawl? What do you think to Hedwig's change of heart? And the fact Jeremiah is a healer of sorts?

Also! I'm interested in your ideas for surnames for the lovely couple Jeremiah and Matilda - so if you have any, just drop me a comment down below. ^U^
Dear,

Not this shit again…

Whilst I am nigh on certain that our letters stand a lesser chance of being read now, I felt it would be safer to share my more private thoughts with you in person to avoid bringing shame upon your name.

Draco had to give it to him, Potter was a very good scribe for Nagini.

In short, I had intended to write to you even before I made any progress with the books you directed me to read-

See! Potter was just wasting his time, yet again!

-but I surprisingly succeeded in finding enough time to not only consider the concepts you introduced me to, but also begin attempting to utilise the skills you advised me to develop. Thanks to your advice, I have found myself with more time on my hands and believe I could say I have both read and mastered chapter one.

...That sounded very convoluted. Potter looked like a diehard tryhard. Draco sniggered quietly as he remembered how Severus had puzzled his father when he had used that particular combination of Muggle slang.

So Potter has had some progress with his Mind Palace? Already? Draco had thought that it would have been impossible to have even summoned a small Palace in only a few days time - especially given that the mind had to rest in between attempts or else it would collapse in on itself. The other trouble was that whilst your could “renovate” the Place once it had been created, its initial conception had to be instantaneous - one room couldn’t be built everyday - otherwise the Palace would only be as strong as its weakest point. It had to be created in one massive jerk of will. Had Potter found himself a reason to fight so passionately already? Or had the Weasleys let something dangerous happened to him under their watch? Draco’s lip curled with the hint of a threat.

Despite my progress, though, I had initially planned to put pen to paper for another purpose - that being that I find myself able to meet with you once again in the near future - on Monday, in fact. I have been informed that the wizarding world is able to correct my vision and thus I have made the decision to proceed down that path. Should you find yourself free to meet with me at any point during that day, then I would be eager to hear from you…

The letter continued on but Draco’s thoughts failed to keep up. Instead, his mind was elsewhere - racing, considering how to arrange his schedule during the next few days: whether he should attempt to make some progress on the subject of bonding and purelinks, what Potter might have achieved, whether he was going to tell his rival about the conversation he had had with his father and-

Love, Harry.
Oh.

Draco’s thoughts slowed and the boy himself paused. He knew it was a tease. The idiotic lion should have stuck with propriety and finished with a form of “dearest” or praise - not “love”! Potter was teasing him about the suggestion to begin letter writing - even now! He was teasing Draco Malfoy - heir to the Malfoy name! And he was doing it through his weakness of emotion and desire to make Potter his and-

Draco knew it would take a miracle to make Potter see him as anything but a rival and a friend, but he had time and he believed gods walked the earth and that they were those who believed they could make miracles happen - and did.

X-X-X

Dumbledore was arranging another meeting with Fudge. Three weeks remained until the start of yet another school year and although so much had already been done, other tasks remained incomplete. Hermione Granger was nigh on completely under his thumb - he’d begin training her soon enough; Potter was in the company of the Weasleys who owed him enough to never doubt the purity of the Light side; Hagrid was now finding another magical beast to replace the dragon he had lost; Snape was showing no signs of resistance and was continuing to work on collecting the ingredients he needed for his potion…

It was all going smoothly and Dumbledore couldn’t be happier. What was the next step though? He had to keep moving. Lessons for Miss Granger? Yes, that would probably be best. And probably yet another inquiry into what exactly happened to Metis Zabini… if he could find concrete evidence denying the existence of Mothers of Earth once and for all, he’d be able to sleep easier at night.

Dumbledore sighed and began to pen a note to Minerva - she would be the one to relay the news to Miss Granger on Monday, after all.

X-X-X

“Do I look fat, Ssalazar?”

The Founder didn’t know what he had done to deserve this, but he sure as hell was regretting it now.

“You’re a basssilisk, Betty. Even if you grew in size, you would only become even more impressive.”

“Oh don’t try and play it sssmart with me-!”

Salazar raised his hands in what he hoped was a pacifying manner.

“I’m not playing anything-”

“Yesss, you are. You’ve been fattening me up-”

“You’re the one who wanted more and more volesss!”
“-day in, day out-”

“You can’t blame me if now you feel paranoid about your sssilly-”

“Oh, don’t you dare!” Betty was hissing at her master vividly. “Don’t you try and avoid the blame! I would be looking sstunning right now if I had been able to hunt my own ssnacks rather than having to rely on you as a failure of a house elf.”

Salazar didn’t know whether he should be offended that he was being treated as a servant or whether he should be offended that his best efforts to please his dear familiar weren’t good enough!

“You look perfectly fine, Betty,” the wizard repeated again with patience. “You know you can’t leave-”

“Yesss! Of courssse I know that! But it doesn’t change the fact I’ve put on weight and I need to be making an effort, now more than ever, because of my age!”

“You’re still in your prime!”

“Oh don’t lie to me, Sssalazar. I’m not Godric.”

“I don’t lie to Godric that often.”

“If he hasss no idea how absurd the truth is, of course he’ll have no ssstarting point for you to have to counter.”

“Look, Betty. I know you’re upset-”

“Oh, well ssspotted. Really.” The serpent rolled her eyes dramatically in a way she would deny ever doing when she regained her aristocratic spirit following her current hissy fit.

“-but you need to stop bothering yourself with these sssilly little-”

“There you go with ‘sssilly’ again! ‘Sssilly’!? I’ll show you ‘sssilly’-!”

Betty then proceeded to turn over tables and chairs and work off the extra kilos by chasing her master around the magically repairing chambers, destroying them room by room in an effort to find things to throw at her beloved wizard.

Truly, what had he done to deserve this?

Chapter End Notes

A bit of humour and a bit of hinting. Another scene which will probably span about 10-15 chapters is coming up in St Mungo’s so that’s something to look forward to.

In other news, I am about to spend two weeks on holiday with family. Sadly this means I will likely be going down to one update every two days. I hope you continue to enjoy this fic though and as always I am incredibly thankful for all your lovely comments - they have really helped to keep me motivated! :D
She couldn’t do it. She just couldn’t do it to the little fella. The doe stared at her wide-eyed, frozen in its place. It obviously hadn’t been taught or hadn’t yet realised that it would be his end if he looked a basilisk in the eye. She couldn't do it. She just couldn't.

Salazar had brought her live prey as an offering following their earlier conversation - be it out of mockery or because he was genuinely trying to be nice - she didn’t know - but it didn’t matter either way - she didn’t care - that was just the kind of relationship they had.

The current problem was more pressing than any debate over their arguments though. Amongst the voles and rats and gnomes that her master had brought her, he had also brought her a fawn. He probably thought he had done well - a bigger “snack” and one which could probably run away from her more efficiently. The trouble was though, that at heart Betty was the most soft-hearted snake alive, and as she looked into the tearful eyes of the little deer in front of her, she just couldn't bring herself to make it her meal. She reached out the tip of her tail and smoothed the hairs down on its back. It flinched visibly, but after several hours of trying to calm it down, the fawn finally collapsed from exhaustion and Betty wrapped it up in her scales, keeping it warm and protected.

Suffice to say, when Salazar returned to the chambers to pay his familiar a visit and saw that she had decided to go further than simply playing with her food, Salazar wondered if he was about to be verbally torn apart yet again, and what other heinous deed he had done to deserve it.

X-X-X

Draco felt like he hadn’t so much as had chance to breath for the past few hours. It had been a tight squeeze to get a hold of her before she left her shift, but he’d managed it. The witch loved dashing off to bizarre parts of the world every weekend without telling anyone where she was going and had the blond missed her, he would have had to try a far more difficult route to get what he wanted. Draco honestly didn’t know why he hadn’t found another loyal contact within St Mungo’s - he could certainly use another… but that was a lie - he knew exactly why he hadn’t. The reason was simple - it was because Melissa was a wonderfully understanding woman and one whom he knew was loyal to him because of their closeness and nothing else - not for status nor wealth nor fame - only for for friendship and history - and for Draco, nothing could ever match up to that.

X-X-X

Melissa had been planning her trip to Egypt for all of two hours, but she still felt put out that she would now be unable to go. True, Draco hadn’t explicitly asked her to stay in the country, but if she wanted to have everything organised in time for Harry and still manage to get at least an hour’s sleep for every twenty-three she busied herself with work, she would quite simply have to make some sacrifices.
She knew that Harry was supposed to be seen to by their superior, Master Carmichael, so that was her starting point. Probably there was some worry that the boy had yet to have a proper medical exam which should have been the first thing to happen after his tragic run-in with You-Know-Who. Rebounding spells don’t always rebound properly, after all. But still, Melissa was sure she would be able to distract and engage the Weasleys long enough for Draco to meet with Harry.

The healer pottered around her dining room, pulling out rolls of parchment to begin filling out paperwork to fabricate the requirement for and sign off extra tests to take up the gingers’ time. If all else failed though, she could always tell them that Harry was taking a long time because he had to have safety tests done on him too. It’s not as though it was strictly a lie…

Melissa turned her thoughts briefly to why Draco was already so close with Harry, but she felt it wasn’t her place to pry - or rather, she fully believed that when she saw the dynamic between the two of them, she would have her answer without her curiosity seeping out beyond the limits of her mind. How very Slytherin of her, Severus would surely have said had he been privy to her thoughts.

Alright… Practice. “Harry is taking longer than usual because he has some extra tests to do. We’ve also devised some additional spells we’d like to use on you if you wouldn’t mind - they should be able to predict any ailments you may suffer from in the near future, allowing us to nip it in the bud, as it were.” Under that front I can give the two boys a minimum of quarter of an hour to discuss whatever they must… And what shall I ask of Draco in return? I like the brat too much to leave him in my debt… Oh!

Melissa had just had the bright idea of asking whether the two had kissed yet and taking the blond’s blush as her reward. She smiled widely as she imagined the rage she would see explode at her inquiry and got back to work.

X-X-X

Peter’s true identity had been discovered. Not by Nagini or some other terrifying threat - but by the twins in their pervasive scouring of the new Burrow branch of the magical map they possessed. Of course they had seen he had a name before, but now they were using the power that such information brought. On one hand, this meant that Peter was safe for another day… on the other, he was now in the tight grasp of those two devils and being used as an object with which to tease his theoretical owner.

“Come on Ronniekins-”

“-don’t you want to know?”

“His name is Scabbers!”

“Uh uh uh u-uh~!” teased Fred, waggling his winger at his brother tauntingly.

“You might think he’s called Scabbers-”

“.but we know the truth!”

It was then that Harry swung the bathroom door open and tried his best to demonstrate just how frustrated he was at the noise they were making so early in the morning despite his mouth being full of toothpaste.
Ron’s attention was naturally diverted! Traitor! He should have used the moment to save him - his precious pet! Peter sneered at the term “pet”, but had it saved him from the devils, he would have embraced it for all of a minute. Oh. But now the twins was laughing too! Peter took his chance and jumped! ...And landed into the open mouth of Nagini mid-yawn.

Shrieks echoed around the narrow corridor and within moments the entirety of the the ginger family had gathered to witness the scene as a hysterical Harry choked on toothpaste and an even more hysterical Ron tried to save his precious pet from the jaws of one very sleepy and very confused serpent. Nagini, still-half asleep despite having helped Harry write his letter a few hours before, couldn’t tell if she was more put out by the fact that she hadn’t been allowed to hunt whatever had landed in her mouth, or whether she was more annoyed that it was now being delicately removed from her jaws. Even more frustrating was the ginger blur she noticed vaguely which indicated that she was not allowed to snap at the intrusive fingers either. The slowly-waking snake could already tell that it was going to be an exhausting day - for her, if not for anyone else.

Chapter End Notes

Well - looks like every other day is going to be the schedule for now. I hope you don't mind too much and are still enjoying the fic! ^u^  
Thoughts on your new OC? And the little bit of humour at the end?
The Sorting Hat had felt both tortured and helpless for the longest time. First, the current Headmaster had revoked the ancient and celebrated graduation, and then he had begun altering the initial results the Hat gave too.

Perhaps it was a hundred years ago that Dumbledore had managed to sit down with the Board of Governors and persuade them that the heirs which were supposed to be taking on the duties of their families were abusing the current schooling system. Whilst this might have been true for some, given that beforehand you were only able to graduate when the Sorting Hat believed you embodied qualities of all four houses, this did not apply to more than a handful of the craftiest of witches and wizards who purposefully avoided cultivating certain traits.

The idea of the initial Sorting Ceremony had been to give students a family to belong to away from home and their years of schooling were to not only imbue them with knowledge of their world, but also to broaden their mind and help them accept the Truth. The idea that school should be a place to develop your understanding and help push all students towards the heights of being Grand Masters and Mistresses to continue to treasured gift of enlightenment… was all erased overnight.

The jealousy of Dumbledore was horrific. He never succeeded in reaching the title of Grand Master of the Light Arts and he had crumbled the school he was supposed to protect because of it. Now, few in Britain ever fulfilled their potential, and instead of encouraging heirs to build and progress their family lines, so many noble names were falling into the dust - in part because fewer witches and wizards developed the strength necessary to bring healthy and powerful new generations from their wombs, and in part because in the absence of knowledge, holes were filled with the ignorance of preserving blood purity.

The Sorting Hat hated the Headmaster he had been forced to serve for so long and found his only joy in life to be the gossip of the four founding portraits and the promise of the reversal of all the wrongs which had gone on.

X-X-X

Nagini had recovered from her central role in this morning’s melodrama rather rapidly. Her thoughts were buzzing with inconsistencies and she hardly had the free time to allow herself offence at being denied chomping down Ron’s rat Scabbers for... “snackers”, as the twins had put it. No, instead Nagini was slithering along side Harry as he tiptoed away from the hectic stage of ginger chaos into Arthur Weasley’s potting shed whilst running through her expanding list of concerns.
What exactly was the nature of the purelink she held with Louis? And if the primate said he could hear Isaac through it, why could she not?

What were Harry’s plans in regards to that studious weasel? Nagini doubted that the messy-haired boy was intentionally closing off and hiding information from her, so she believed he was still mulling ideas over in his head rather than plotting—not that that was any more reassuring. On one hand it meant her new master was learning how to think for himself, a very important thing, especially for a Slytherin… but there was also the possibility that Harry would run off and act rashly on his formed conclusions without informing her or anyone else who had the ability to save his skin. What a foolish Gryffindor he would be indeed if he did just that.

And then… there was the diary. Tom had torn his soul to shreds in the grasp of the Headmaster—both literally and figuratively. He had been driven to deeds so damaging to his soul that it had fled from its holder and flown into the objects he held most dear. That diary held the first fracture and largest fragment of Lord Voldemort’s soul. It had been the first he had made… how could Nagini have forgotten its importance until she had seen it? It had been so precious to her former master… Nagini had been surprised when she had seen it and terrified when she realised that it rejected her presence but embraced Harry’s. It had taken her until that evening to remember the true nature of that diary, and until the following morning to consider what could have led to her forgetting its existence… and its lost willingness to embrace her.

Nagini had considered many options in the passing hours of the night, but her theories always led to a single idea... Dumbledore must have taken it from Tom and put strong enough enchantments on them both so that they forgot about its existence. After all, it wasn’t as though Tom would have thought it even slightly logical to try and hide the truth from her - his beloved familiar. And as for why it rejected Nagini’s magic… it hurt her like a hacking hex to remember that it was likely because she simply was not Tom’s familiar anymore.

X-X-X

Harry didn’t want to say that he was already getting tired of the attention which the Weasleys were lavishing him with, but he was being forced to admit that he definitely belonged to the category of people who needed time alone.

After the boy’s progress with his Mind Palace, he felt he deserved a little bit of a break from the chaos of the household and decided he would escape to the garden where Molly had assured him her husband would be tinkering with one thing or another.

“Mr Weasley…” The words were already on the boy wonder’s lips as he nudged the shed door further open. He ignored Nagini’s hiss which he assumed was her admonishment for not knocking, but he felt that if he was surely about to be corrected-

“It’s Arthur, my dear boy! No need to be so formal-”

-as he just had been, there was no need to knock.

“-come in, come in! I have so very many questions for you. Why, we really are so very lucky that you grew up with Muggles - or else we would never have been able to fix that darned fellyfone-”

“Telephone,” blurted out in Harry before he could stop himself.
“-ah, yes of course! Tele fone. We’ve been promising the Lovegoods that we really will get it fixed soon enough and then we can chat over that piece of Muggle genius again! The Lovegood family really are lovely, Harry. I’m sure you’ll like them. And Luna is Ginny’s age so you should be able to get on quite well. She won’t be in your year but one year as an age gap really isn’t anything in the face of friendship!”

Harry allowed himself to drift in and out of a state of attention around his adoptive father figure, commenting here and there and parroting back all the random facts he had learned from his secret indulgence of documentaries. It wasn’t that he was being bored by the man’s enthusiasm - no, in fact, if anything, the opposite was the case! But the voice and the words were so soothing and peaceful and honest and open… Harry just felt so reassured by them.

There were occasions where he was forced to hide unpleasant flinches, thinking that the Weasleys really wouldn’t have been happy (or at least Harry hoped they wouldn’t be) if they knew the truth behind his abuse in that foul house three beasts called home. Despite this though, Harry remained by Mr Weasley’s side, leaning over a worktop and watching the overgrown child of a man profess his passion to his tiny audience.

“I-I just hope you don’t get overly enamoured with all these wizarding gimmicks and toys when you come into your inheritance, Harry. It truly would be a waste to lose your keen and obviously very broad knowledge of the Muggle world!”

“I-I hate to butt in Mr Weas-Arthur, sorry. But why does my inheritance matter?”

This was the first thing which had given the ginger man pause in the time the two had been cramped into an enormous shed filled with far too many things.

“Well… you stand to inherit so many titles, Harry. It’s only natural that you will be inheriting an array of ancient and mystical objects prized beyond belief which are held in your family vaults… Surely you must have seen some of them when you visited Gringotts…” Arthur trailed off.

It was at this moment that Nagini chose to twist out of her own reverie and snap at Harry with agitation. Harry knew he had to backtrack.

“Well, it’s more that I didn’t really know what i was looking at…”

Harry hoped that he had successfully arranged his features into innocent ignorance and frustration with himself. It seemed to have worked given that a second later his hair was being ruffle by a fatherly paw.

“There’s no shame in that, Harry. And whilst I would advise against telling too many people about your inheritance, as the goblins surely will have told you, if you ever feel like you need advice - there always Molly or myself. We’ll always be on your side.”

Their conversation had to be cut short for a moment later, the Weasley matriarch was calling them through to the kitchen for lunch and the two inhabitants of the shed moved to leave. Harry did a good job of resisting his desire to admit he knew nothing and that he wanted to know everything, but that didn’t mean he wouldn’t be having a long conversation with Nagini that evening.

She had kept his inheritance hidden from him for some reason - and while he did indeed trust her, he felt that there shouldn’t be any secrets pertinent to him between them. After all, they were a team and he couldn't let himself be a pawn if his final role would be a king leading his troops into battle. More so, if he had access to certain powers, rights or abilities… would it not be sensible to know what he had at his disposal - to learn how to wield them before he came of age… and to learn how to protect
it from anyone who may well want to steal it right from underneath his nose before then too.
Arthur had to admit that he was worried. Before, he had been prepared to brush off his dear wife’s comments as just her typical fretting. Not that that trait of hers was a bad thing - no, in fact, he thought the world would do well to have more people like her in it. But Arthur was not a blind fool and he wouldn't be led on. He had hoped in a perverse sense that Harry's dreams had been about Voldemort. The boy had seemed disorientated by the night terrors, as if he hadn't had them before, so it was a natural assumption to make that perhaps magic had restored some of his early infant memories - and that now he was watching the mad murder kill his parents.

What Arthur had seen in the shed though… it sounded cruel to say he's been baiting the boy, but he had wanted to see how he reacted to thoughts of his Muggle family. Arthur had to give it to him, the boy had incredible self control and would surely prove to have great mental strength because of it… but Harry was still only a boy and he couldn't quite hide his flinches and grimaces behind a mask of contentment. Not yet, anyway. The ginger patriarch would have to admit his error to his wife… and discuss what would need to be done about it.

X-X-X

No matter how hard Tom tried to confused his dear friend, from the grave or otherwise, Jeremiah was rarely confronted with the completely unexpected. True, he didn't know what lay in wait for him in inky scrawl across the future pages of Tom’s malevolent list of tasks, but with Tom he knew to expect the unexpected. When, however, one of his vast menagerie of familiars flew in through the door to his office to report what he had witnessed of Harry Potter's actions over the past few days, Jeremiah truly was left confounded.

“Why did you not just maintain a purelink, Jerry? If you had been following his progress rather than having it flung at you, you most certainly wouldn't have been feeling this out of the loop.”

Jeremiah grouched but he knew his wife was right. He had valid reasons for doing what he had done though!

“If I had, I would have been distracted from Tom's fanciful request,” he admitted half-heartedly under his breath.

“We both know you would have persevered with it no matter what, but that's neither here nor there.”

Jeremiah was feeling the implied nudge that she had been the one to give him the clue he had needed, but, as ever, she was incredibly dear and kind about it.

“What exactly is it that's got you so worked up, anyway? You knew the boy was powerful. So what if he is one of a fortunate few who are also mentally strong enough to control it? It just means he’s not as vulnerable to the fool he’s destined to conquer as we had first feared.”

Jeremiah made a funny, gravelly noise in his throat and pronounced carefully.
“The thing is, my dear, I don't think that straining his mental strength as he has been doing was the right thing to do…”

Matilda hopped onto the side of her husband's desk with as much youthfulness as she had always had, but now it was tapered with the gallant nature of aging womanhood.

“When you first exercise,” Jeremiah continued, certain that his wife was still following him attentively, “You feel all powerful and on top of the world. You aim for higher and higher targets, but if and when you stop for even just a moment… the dream falls away and you are overcome by the blazing pain of shot limbs and torn muscles.

“I thought that out of everyone I would be able to trust Nagini to keep the boy in line and teach him the meaning of moderation. She held Tom to account more than once and everyone knew that only she could ever truly persuade him away from doing something that he had fully set his heart on. I hate to say it, but I think I'm disappointed in her… I never even paused to think that might be possible! So much relies on Potter and she's acting as though she doesn't appreciate just how much of a responsibility she has.

“Tilly, we have to stop the boy. If we don't, he'll burn out before he so much as gets past the Hogwarts gates! He mastered the understanding of a three-part soul in the blink of an eye and if he is indeed trying to build a Mind Palace, then he is certain of drop within a week. He might be powerful but we can't afford to forget that he is still only a young boy... He accepted the nature of his soul because he'd been to hell and back often enough to throw away his pride. He was capable of being humble - of realising he was only one part of a greater whole. He has yearned to belong for so long, so of course he was about to discard any notion that he is superior to the elements which make up his mind, body and soul.

“But any form of enlightenment is a draining, as you well know… Your magical reserves are heavily depleted in the process of furthering yourself… By learning about who you are you are bonding with yourself - and bonding is a sacrifice! No matter if you reach enlightenment in a day or a decade, no matter if you master it with ease or with difficulty, no matter the how or the why - you will still find yourself exhausted of your magic… and if you don't take breaks from your quest for it to regenerate… Do you understand, Matilda? If he doesn't stop, he’ll turn into a Squib at best or die at worst!”

Matilda’s mind had been racing from the moment Jerry opened his mouth to make his point. It took her mere moments to recognise what he was trying to put across, she was a Grand Mistress, after all, and had pushed herself to attain the greatest enlightenment of all - knowing the Truth. She knew exactly what risks there were and by the time Jeremiah had finished, his brave pronouncement turning into a plea for her help with finding a resolution... she knew what to tell him. She took a deep breath in and stated clearly.

“Well, you now have two jobs to do on Monday then, don't you? Forget about secrecy. Be honest with the boy about who you are, and make sure he understands the importance of every single world you tell him.”

Jeremiah took a settling breath and exhaled out a single word.

“If you were to stop, Matilda? If he doesn't stop, he’ll turn into a Squib at best or die at worst!”

Matilda’s mind had been racing from the moment Jerry opened his mouth to make his point. It took her mere moments to recognise what he was trying to put across, she was a Grand Mistress, after all, and had pushed herself to attain the greatest enlightenment of all - knowing the Truth. She knew exactly what risks there were and by the time Jeremiah had finished, his brave pronouncement turning into a plea for her help with finding a resolution... she knew what to tell him. She took a deep breath in and stated clearly.

“Understood.”

“Understood.”
Nagini was worried. More so than she had been whilst running through the list of threats to the progression of their plans. Arthur had not been the only one to notice Harry's poorly hidden responses in the hideaway of Muggle trinkets. Unlike the red-haired wizard though, Nagini was not concerned by the tragedies they reflected, but rather by the fact Harry had shown any involuntary reaction at all. He had always been able to keep better control of himself. Were the nightmares weakening him? Or… perhaps, was the boy overworking himself? Had she not been watching him closely enough? Had she not been fulfilling her duty of guarding him - even from himself?

The snake’s previous concerns died from her mind. This simply would not do. She was a descendant of Slytherin’s own familiar - she knew the meaning of loyalty in the service of ambition. She couldn’t allow herself to be sidetracked. She needed to be aware of the present before she could consider the what ifs and problems which would litter their journey in the future. She would give her all to focus on the boy who truly was a wonder. He would deserve every praise he received, but she would have to teach him to beware of the cost.

Nagini felt shame welling up within her - an almost alien sensation she had not felt in years. She could only be thankful that she had caught herself now, before it was too late and before there was a looming figure of evil against which defences would need to be maintained for every hour of every day and under every inch of blackened sky.

Nagini concluded that they must talk that night.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed! In part I wanted to try and show just how fallible Nagini really is, but I also wanted to begin to differentiate her from Betty. Did I succeed? As always - I'm thankful for any feedback you might have for me. :}


It was like a burning itch under his skin. It was like a fever which took its kindling from his emotions, and Harry certainly had a lot of those right now. He had been jumpy through all three meals of the day and now every time a ginger so much as nudged him, he felt strokes of fear and anger and confusion beginning to overtake him.

How dare they touch him? He was the Boy Who Lived. He had worked harder in the past few days than any of them had in their entire lives!

No! He don't mean that! *Please don't let them know I thought something so horrible. I didn't mean it! I swear!*

*What's wrong with me? This is the first good thing I've had in my life and I'm ruining it! I need to focus. I need to stay on task. Draco said that if I can develop my mental strength I can lock away certain memories and control my emotions. And I felt it last night! I escaped my dreams! I know I can do it! What's wrong - why can't I imagine it?*

“Harry?”

*A big statue and a palace.*

“Harry, are you alright dear?”

*A big statue and a palace.*

“Poor dear, you haven't seemed yourself all day. Do you think you're maybe coming down with something?”

*A big statue and a palace!*

“Harry!”

Molly rushed to cushion the small boy's fall as his blurry eyes screwed shut and his scar sent golden sparks into the space in front of him, the rest of his body dropping lifelessly sideways like a puppet who had had its strings cut.

*A BIG STATUE AND A PALACE!*

And then his world went black.

X-X-X

Ginny could feel that something was wrong.

She had been making an effort not to keep looking at Harry. After her talk with Luna, she has deflated like a balloon before having some sense stuffed into her now empty ambitions of romance.
True, her feelings towards Harry couldn't be so easily tampered, but at least now she was able to take a step back and see the bigger picture.

She hadn't even left the protection of the Burrow for Hogwarts and was far from being anything along the lines equal to Harry. If she had a future with him, she would work hard to reach his level, and if fate didn't bring the two of them together... she would be able to leave her childhood whimsy behind her, and she would be a better person for her efforts.

Luna always managed to make her see sense. That girl seemed to know what fate would and would not allow as thought she could predict the future and it left her ginger friend in awe of her.

Despite her resolutions, Ginny still felt justified in keeping her eyes on the boy wonder. *If I don't watch him, how will I ever be able to follow in his footsteps?*

It was because she had been watching him over the past few days that she had noticed a change in him today. She knew her mother had been concerned rather than relieved by his lack of nightmares... so naturally she was being especially vigilant today. It was because of this shared attentiveness that both Weasley women were there, their eyes peeled ready for any sign of danger, when Harry’s last resistance snapped and he showed the true extent of his weakness to the loving family around him, toppling almost on slow motion.

Two sets of arms joined into a net of limbs which wrapped around the scrawny boy of the boy wonder. He never hit the floor.

X-X-X

He wouldn't deny that it could be difficult at times to maintain a balance. He'd had practice with his wife of course - but it wasn't the same. With Pandora, her insight was reassuring, and he knew that whilst she might know his problems, he could still talk to her about them; with Luna though... he would feel guilty burdening her with even more than that which was already her due.

Xenophilius also felt a bizarre sort of shame around his daughter. He was her father - he had given his life to knowledge and enlightenment - and yet he was unable to share any of his hard work with her. He was unable to encourage her to grow as a person and to study diligently in order to learn of the Truth as he had done many years ago... because she already knew. She had no reason to learn anything - not really. There was no reward for her if she decided to dedicate her life to something he valued so much.

Luna could never understand his complex feelings - never give him the sympathy he so dearly wanted... she could only know the names of the emotions which afflicted him and what caused them... she was selfless and would never put her concerns and feelings above the reality of life - she could never understand his daily desire to be selfish. But... there was just one thing that he longed for above all else... and if he could have it, he would be able to forget every other pain life brought him. The blond eccentric needed most desperately to feel his daughter’s eyes warm as she looked upon him - and for her gaze to be alive and full of wonder and love.

Xenophilius sighed. As much as he would be willing to trade so much for that single thing, he wasn't selfish and he knew that those sort of thoughts would lead to ruin. He had kept his feelings on the matter to himself and would continue to do so - it was the least he could do. He was determined to let Luna carry only the smallest possible burden. She would know the problems of the world, but at
least she would not have to be the one to find the answers.

Thus, just as he did every then he came to reminisce about this particular area of his life, he concluded that he would continue on and stay strong - for him, for her, and for the world she had to protect too.

X-X-X

This wasn't supposed to happen. She had recognised her mistake and was about to put it right. She had been about to make amends! She'd waited patiently though the day and yet it seemed as though even that had been pressing her luck.

This wasn't supposed to happen. She wouldn't let it happen. Harry had to live! He had a destiny he couldn't afford to fall short of! The wizarding world needed him! She needed him! He had to be alright. It would be her fault if he wasn't! She had to do something - and quick! Her beastly body flexed into rapid action and her mind focused on the singularity of saving Harry Potter.

It was all over in an instant and her world went white.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the chapter! Did you think I fed the sections into each other well or was it disjoined? As always - I look forward to reading any feedback you might have for me in the comments :)
She was cold. She could feel the audacious touch of winter with its crisp foothold folding into her skin with every snowflake its winds seemed to carry. Her fingers were bitten by the hounds snow demons called frost and her nose was-

Wait. Fingers?!

*What in God's name isss thisss?!*

Nagini flinched. Her thoughts echoed around and endless sky of nothingness above her, being parroted back to her in a looming curse. Where was she? Who was she? Or rather - whose body was this? It wasn't hers! She was a majestic serpent whose green scales caught the light as she warned herself in the sun each and every morning - not a human!

Nagini paused mid stride, the alien sensation of burning thighs alerting her to the fact she had been walking aimlessly for far longer than she should have been. Truly - where was she? Why had it taken her this long to come to her senses? Nagini ran her hands up the gorgeous gown the stranger’s body was enveloped in, its sequins comforting her with their scaly nature. If only she could catch her reflection - that might provide her with some sort of clue.

Nagini glanced around her, peering through the snowstorm and trying in vain to cover her ears firmly enough to silence to hideous echo. She felt sick to her stomach. What was this piece of magic? Who had trapped her?

Taking another step forwards, the serpent realised just how unstable her legs were underneath her. That's when she looked down. She had wanted to see if she could get a better foothold in the snowy landscape only to have the mirage of rationalising the impossible drawn away from her eyes. For, as the snake looked down, she realised that the snow was black as the sky above her - that it was so deep and inky that it was almost as though it wasn't there at all. Nagini put another foot forwards… and shrieked!

Down! Down she plummeted. Her mind raced, her heart, hooked on her terror, spiking higher in its beat by the second. She was going to fall into the void and never return! This was going to be her end! She had failed! She wasn't going to be able to fulfil her duty! Tom-! Harry-!

... *Harry! I have to sssave Harry! I can't fail him! He has no one else-*!

And just like that - she stopped falling. Nagini froze, her flailing limbs motionless at jaunty angles. She lowered them slowly. Then, believing she may have cracked the code, she kept two thoughts in her mind as she took another falsely confident step forwards. Then another. Then another.

*I will sssave Harry and I will walk across both time and ssspace to do so. Nothing ssshall stop me from getting to him.*

After a minute of what seemed like eternity, the emerald lady was rewarded for her efforts when she saw the foggy outline of an unspeakably massive empire rising rapidly out of the tempest of white. She peered, her eyes still unused to the human lens they had been forced to adopt. There, frozen mid-march like a titan charging from the depths of Tartarus, was an enormous statue of a faceless man, and reaching up even higher and mightier behind it was the proud pinnacle of an icy palace with its
turrets challenging the very boundaries of the sky. Nagini flinched at the crack of glass which resonated above her as a silver spark flew away from the tallest tower like a strike of lightning across the sky. The snake gulped, terrified. The structure was threatening to expand beyond what already stood at an audacious size. Was this a Mind Palace? Was she in someone else's head? How could she be? Was it the woman's whose body she was in... or perhaps...

"Harry!"

How could she have been so slow? Nagini’s eyes pulled away from the overwhelming display before her and in an instant they were drawn to the crumpled body of a little boy, frozen on the ground outside the gates to his own Palace. He was shivering and weak and-

"HARRY!"

Nagini was running over to the boy at the speed of light, her motivation seeming to push her further, her mental strength allowing her to cover distance faster. She dashed towards the boy who was her charge and gathered him up into her arms before she let go and simply... wept. Her tears were silent and froze the moment they hit the air, solidifying into proof of her feelings towards the boy, as she gave him every inch of warmth from the body she knew was her own and the one she would readily sacrifice for her master.

"Come on now, Harry. It'sss alright now. I've got you."

Nagini may not have believed that what she was currently experiencing was possible, but she was well aware of the risk and the consequences should someone allow their Mind Palace to expend for eternity. She couldn't let that happen. She had to protect the boy’s last vestiges of strength and self-control. Her embrace tightened.

"I can't lossse you, Harry. Not now, not ever. The world needssss you, I need you. It's all alright, Harry. I'm here for you. I love you, you gorgeous boy."

And at that, the messy fringe of the boy in her arms twitched with the fist promise of hope. His eyes were still screwed shut, his lips still quivering in anguish, but the snowstorm around her eased and she knew that that meant that Harry was feeling even just slightly better. Good. She could save him yet

X-X-X

She had felt it. Just then. She knew she had. Had Nagini felt her try to establish the purelink a few days ago? Was she helping her dear ancestor fulfill her duties as a familiar? Betty felt a little cruel in saying she doubted that that was the case. Nagini had always been a little too self-absorbed and self-centered to consider any quests to be more worthy of her attention than her own. It was likely just an incredibly lucky coincidence that her descendent had succeeded in forming an advanced purelink with the young boy where she had failed to do so with her previous master.

Betty smirked. Now she would be able to access the boys mind unhindered. A basic purelink would have sufficed, but she would be a fool to look a gift horse in the mouth. This would be exactly what she needed to help her progress.

Betty closed her eyes and allowed herself to reach out through the the bonds born by blood, her conscious self seeping into Nagini and using her granddaughter’s purelink with the boy to orientate
herself. She paused. Oh.

Was this… the Heir’s? She hadn't known what she had been expecting - but this was not it. Perhaps she had expected to find nothing but the first few bricks of a failed attempt; perhaps she had been waiting to step through into a field of shattered fragments of an experiment gone wrong; perhaps, even, she had expected to see the vast expanse of an ever rising Palace which threatened to break the boy’s mind. She had not been expecting this.

Chapter End Notes

Well - thoughts, anyone? Do you like how the dynamic if forming between the two snakes? And do you think about being dragged into Harry's inner world?
Looks like Luna won’t be coming over tonight. Not that I don’t understand why…

Ginny felt guilty. She was down about things which did not matter a single ounce in the grand scheme of things. The Lovegoods and the Weasleys took turns hosting Sunday roasts, although admittedly the ginger family usually grabbed at the chance to do so more often than their blond neighbours. This weekend, though, it looked as if neither family would be taking part.

Harry had been sobbing up a storm all through the night and whilst the coming of morning light had settled him to mere sniffling, her mum was still coddling him. The nightmares she’d only heard through the Burrow’s walls until yesterday evening now haunted her as surely as they haunted Ron who had stayed with both Harry and their mum over the past few nights, no matter how draining it must have been to witness.

Ginny thought she would go and offer to sit with Harry after she had finished her breakfast. She had a newfound appreciation for the boy she had idolised in a fanatical way only days before. She felt like she’d been forced to swallow the very bitter medicine of the truth - that strength was difficult to attain and that there was always a sacrifice.

Ginny’s eyes were glazed as she chewed through the food her mum has whisked up with a rabid fixation on speed whilst Ron looked after the comatose boy. The Weasley matriarch had dashed back up as soon as possible, as if it physically pained her to be away from her newly adopted son for even a moment. That was all very well… but she couldn’t be the one to shoulder all the burden - she couldn’t do everything - no matter how much she wanted to.

Ginny concluded that she would go up and insist that her mother got some sleep whilst she shared Ron’s duty of guarding Harry’s vulnerable sleeping form. She could only hope that her mum had enough sense not to argue with her - in part because the woman needed to rest, and in part because shouting around Harry was the last thing the poor boy needed. Ginny was mature enough to know that.

X-X-X

Betty slipped and slithered quietly through the eternity of a hauntingly silent void.

She had seen the inner workings of the proud man know as Salazar Slytherin - one of the strongest, most motivated and most powerful wizards that history had ever seen. He had conquered all twenty-four elements and a balance of them all could be found within his mental landscape. She had seen the void represented before in his Mind Palace… a place which still stood strong, even now when her master’s soul could only be captured in the streaks of a painting.

From the slow panning looks with which the great snake absorbed her surroundings, Betty could clearly see that the Heir had come to the same conclusion as the Founder regarding how best to capture the essence of nothingness. The vicious-seeming grin which enveloped her face told a story quite alien to the truth - she was impressed by the young boy. She could not wait to meet him. He
had to be around here somewhere...

Betty took a moment to peer into the darkness which seemed to envelop her. She could see no Mind Palace, she could see no boy and, given she had been able to come here through Nagini’s purelink, it was similarly illogical that her granddaughter was not here either.

Betty paused a moment.

She had been avoiding the temptation to look down, knowing that in order to conquer the void she quite simply had to believe that she had the ability to cross it - and that she would. If she looked down she might lose the tight grip on her control which age and experience afforded her. As much as she was mighty, she was still a snake and held onto an instinctual fear of flight or any other form of suspension in mid-air. The notion of essentially floating on nothing had the possibility to stun her into submitting to terror.

Betty took a steadying breath.

They weren’t in front of her; they weren’t behind her; neither boy nor descendent were left nor right; there was no place breathing down towards her from the sky… Betty steeled herself, and down she looked.

X-X-X

It was a bizarre sort of conflict Ron was suffering from. He just felt so … disconnected. He was weak and powerless. He had watched, frozen still, as Harry had suffered through the trials his demons set for him night upon night and yet… Ron sensed that rather than growing closer to the boy because of the privileged glances he had been given, he was instead being alienated from his hero.

The Boy Who Lived. The Chosen One. The Boy Wonder... None of those titles did his new friend justice. Harry Potter was a broken boy, stuck in a coma with tears pouring down his face. Harry Potter was a mighty wizard who had clearly suffered through so much and who was refusing to shy away from the pain his cruel fate had doled out in a whimsical moment of irrationality.

Ron didn’t understand why he felt like he did - he should be rising to the challenge of helping the boy whom he had welcomed as a guest into his room - into his only means he had of escape. He should be acting as a friend for Harry. Instead he was… useless. More than anything, Ron wanted to be able to stay friends with Harry when they got to Hogwarts - he didn't want to lose this bond. Not because he wanted to be friends to the famous hero he had idolised like the twins kept teasing him was the case - but because Harry had shown him respect… He’d shown him that he could see him for his own person - not as just another Weasley son who paled in comparison to the brothers who had come before.

He would have to work hard to keep up if he wanted to stay friends - he would have to try his utmost to be strong, to grow, and to find his own direction in life. For friendship. For Harry!

X-X-X
Betty’s resolve was the twanging miracle of a very close shave. Her mental strength had dwindled to a thread sparking on the point of being torn in two. But she held. She held on because she had to. Because the miracle of the Heir compelled her to stay motionless. She would not fall nor falter. She would not disturb the sight which was laid out before her. She would watch as a privileged onlooker in awe.

Betty didn’t know how she had missed it. Below her stretched out a statue at least a mile in all directions. It took her less than an instant to recognise it as the image of the first Indian Grand Master - Buddha - but thanks to the colossal scale of the creation, it would have been impossible to recognise had Betty's perspective been stationed anywhere else. The wizard’s features were composed by creases of marble which had clearly been crumbled away by age. Betty trailed her eyes lower. She could see that his limbs were crossed in the epitome of peace, of enlightenment and of calm…

This wasn’t what she was looking for though and so her nifty glance began to rush down the length of the monument, Betty’s desire to see further and further into the abyss being conveyed to her movements as she plummeted. She flung herself first down to the level of the statue’s chin, and then its breastbone and then the midriff of the marble man.

The statue truly was a work of art - a miracle even - painted colours from red to white in seemingly random strokes and patterns. But this was not the real miracle to be found here. Instead, it was the little boy whose black fringe twinkled with childlike wonder despite his ruined posture. He sat between the two sequin covered thighs and on the dip of a formal dress, the woman behind him whispering words of comfort into his ear.

Betty knew the woman’s identity - she was already well aware of exactly how these sorts of advanced purelinks worked. Instead, her eyes were drawn to the tiny doll's house with which precisely two hands and ten fingers were playing.

Betty truly was stunned.

*What in Sssalazar's name has happened here?*

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Was it what you expected or did I manage to catch you off guard? As always - any feedback is appreciated - thank you! ^U^
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!