House of Snakes

by flitterflutterfly

Summary

At 30 years old, divorced, and headmaster of Hogwarts, Harry Potter doesn't have the life he'd always dreamed would come after defeating Voldemort. A chance discovery in the Chamber of Secrets allows him an opportunity to go back in time and change some things. Wherein Harry—now Hadrian—raises his younger self, dances the political dance with Death Eaters and a resurrected Tom Marvolo Riddle, and searches for a way to stop the destruction of the magical world.

This story is now officially abandoned. Thank you to everyone who supported it and I apologize for leaving it unfinished.
"Alright there, Harry?"

Harry looked up from his plate to smile at his deputy headmaster. Neville Longbottom, the Herbology professor of Hogwarts, had become his best friend in the ten years they'd been working at Hogwarts together. "Fine, Nev."

Neville snorted, sensing the lie. Harry shrugged, moving his gaze to the sea of students sitting below the head table. There were so few students at Hogwarts now that they'd had to do away with house tables a few years ago. Now there were just two long tables in the Great Hall, and even they weren't completely full.

It was the end of term feast and the students seemed excited about the prospect of going home. Harry had to give a real smile at that. He loved his students—they were one of the few joys left in his life. He'd always wanted children of his own, but after three years of marriage to Ginny she'd proclaimed disgust at the thought of pregnancy. He'd thought they'd be able to work past that hurdle, but things built up one after another and soon enough they were getting divorced.

The move had served as a method that tore Harry from the rest of the Weasley family. Though Harry occasionally was able to drop by and see George at his shop, he was never again invited to the Burrow for Sunday brunches. Ron had stopped talking to him as well, though perhaps that friendship had broken up earlier when Harry had told the redhead of his plan to teach instead of joining him in auror training. With the loss of Ron came the loss of Hermione, though she tried to send him the occasional owl behind her husband's back.

"You're growing maudlin again," Neville said.

Harry ran a hand through his hair. He'd grown it out a bit, which helped with the messiness, but even shoulder length and tied back at the nape of his neck it still held more volume that he would like. "I know. It's a bad habit."

"Trust me, I remember fifth year."

Harry grinned at Neville. It had taken years for the reminder of that year, and the death of his godfather that came with it, to stop hurting. He'd always miss Sirius but it was the same way he'd miss Remus and Tonks and Fred and everyone else who'd lost their life. He knew mourning them any longer than he already had wouldn't help anyone, so instead he'd learned to celebrate the lives they'd had.

Teddy helped with that, he mused as he glanced at the Ravenclaw table where his thirteen-year-old godson sat. Teddy's hair was a dark black, probably reflecting his mood. Like Harry when he was a student at Hogwarts, Teddy's home was the castle and not his grandmother's house where he lived over the summer.

At least Andromeda was nicer than the Dursleys.

Harry stood and cleared his throat. He tapped his wand to his goblet and cast a silent *sonorus* on his voice. "Attention, please."

The students quieted down, turning to face him. Harry took a deep breath. "I want to thank you all for a wonderful year. Times have been hard lately, but I saw you all push past your troubles to work on learning as much magic as you can. I admire each and every one of you for that."
Harry looked over his students, noting with pride that houses were mixed together. Gryffindors sat next to Slytherins, debated with Ravenclaws, and laughed with Hufflepuffs. In a time where the British wizarding world was crumbling under their feet, house unity had finally been found at Hogwarts.

"I will miss you all and I hope to see most of you back here next year. For the graduating seventh years, I know many of you are hesitant to step out into the world. The market out there is tough. I can't guarantee you will find a job. I can't guarantee your safety from the muggle terrorist groups which seek the destruction of all things magical. I hope to, one day, be able to guarantee such things. Until then, I wish you luck. I hope your time at Hogwarts has prepared you as much as it can."

There was loud applause, though it was somber. Harry looked down at his plate for a moment and then raised his wand for silence. "So as to not end on such a low note, I will now announce the winners of the end of the year awards."

Once, the only award given out at the end of the year at Hogwarts was the House Cup. Harry had changed that his first year as Headmaster. "First, for the student who scored the most top marks on their OWLS last year. The Thinking Cap goes to Marian Moore."

A sixth year Hufflepuff stood, smiling shyly. Harry waved his wand and transformed her black witch hat into a large white cap with a spinning rainbow wheel on top. He wished the OWLS scores for the current year would come in before the end of year feast, but alas they didn't arrive until the middle of the summer so he was forced to giving the Thinking Cap award to the sixth year who'd earned it almost a full year before.

"Next, to the student who demonstrated the most selflessness in helping fellow students. The Shining Heart goes to a young first year for the first time. Victorie Weasley."

Harry held his emotions in check as the oldest daughter of Bill and Fleur stood. He waved his wand and a bright red heart appeared on the outside of her robes. She giggled and sat back down.

"To the student who went above and beyond in all of their classes, I award Perry Flint the Ever-working Quill." He waved his hand and a bright sparkling quill appeared in Perry's hand.

"And for the random student of the year." Harry did a quick bit of spellwork that rifled through all the names in the Hogwarts roster and randomly picked one. He spelled the results into the air above his chair. The words spun and jumbled and then finally settled to show one name. "Theodore Lupin."

Teddy stood, his black hair morphing into bright blue. Harry smiled at his godson and summoned him his prize, a shimmering goblet. "The Lucky Goblet." Teddy blushed and sat back down, holding his goblet to his chest.

"Finally, what I'm sure you're all anxious to hear. To the winner of the House Cup. This year that honor goes to Ravenclaw, with 334 house points. Congratulations." He transfigured the banners on the walls to show off the proud eagle of the Ravenclaw house as the other three houses cheered on the Ravenclaws, who were all standing to receive it.

Harry sat back down. Neville leaned over. "Great as always."

"They're good kids."

Neville gave him a look. Harry sipped the last of his pumpkin juice.

Several hours later, Harry wandered to the room that used to be known as the second floor girls'
bathroom. It had been warded off so that only professors could enter. Harry hadn't wanted anyone to accidentally stumble across the Chamber of Secrets, even if he was the only known parselmouth left.  

Harry walked up to the tap with the snake engraved on it. ::Open,:: he whispered in parseltongue. Few people knew he was a parselmouth. Many of the old Order members thought he'd lost the ability when he'd lost the horcrux inside him. He hadn't. If anything, the snake language felt more natural now than ever before.

The sink sank down, opening the pipe down to the chamber. ::Stairs,:: Harry requested. The opening creaked and then stairs appeared one by one. Harry walked down them.

The last time he'd come down into the chamber had been years ago. He'd taken Derrik Dolloger, the current Potions professor of Hogwarts, and together they'd harvested the basilisk's body. It had been far from fresh, but basilisk skin was durable and its venom never lost its potency.

Now, he walked through the winding corridors to the end chamber. He was feeling morose, and he figured an exploration through the half-flooded chamber of death was what he needed. He made it to the large antechamber where he'd killed the basilisk and rescued Ginny from Tom Riddle.

Harry looked up at the giant statue of Salazar Slytherin. He frowned. He knew the basilisk had been living in the statue. He wondered if there were more of them nestled there. He wondered how the first basilisk had survived. Surely it needed to eat more than once every fifty years? For that matter, the basilisk hadn't eaten anyone both times the chamber had been opened. It only killed or paralyzed its victims with its eyes.

Walking closer to the mouth of the statue, Harry noticed a door half hidden in the crook behind it to the right. He stepped closer to the door, ignoring the water squelching in his shoes. He supposed he should unflood the chamber, but he had other things on his mind.

The door was similar to the one that led to the antechamber. It was dark and circular, with metal snakes adorning it and locking it closed. Harry hissed at it to open and it did.

Harry walked through the doorway and stared. He was in a study of sorts. Bookshelves lined the wall, but they were bare with the exception of a few moldy tomes. Harry didn't even have to open them to know they'd be unreadable.

He wondered if there were once more books here. Perhaps Tom Riddle had taken them. He was curious. If that was so, would they be at Malfoy Manor or at the old Riddle house? Harry supposed he should send an owl to Draco.

"Who are you?"

Harry glanced up, just now noticing the portrait above the old desk. It depicted a man, perhaps in his fifties, with dark golden eyes and black hair. He had a neat goatee that framed a thin mouth.

"I'm the current headmaster of Hogwarts," Harry told the portrait.

"How old are you, boy?"

"Thirty."

"Awfully young to be headmaster."

Harry wondered what the man would say if he told him he'd become the headmaster of Hogwarts at twenty-five.
"What did you say your name was?"

"Harry Potter."

"Harry Potter." The man scratched his chin. "Was your mother a Naga, then?"

"Sorry?"

"Naga, boy. You've got Naga eyes." The man pinned Harry with a cool stare. "My daughter married the Naga heir. I know my own blood when I see it."

Harry blinked. "If you don't mind me asking, who are you?"

The man smirked. "Don't tell me you don't recognize one of the founders of the school you lead? My name is Salazar Slytherin."

Harry wished he could be surprised, but he was in the Chamber of Secrets. "My apologies, Lord Slytherin, but the only depiction of you I've seen is the large statue in your chamber."

Salazar chuckled. "That's not me. That's my eldest son. I've heard he made a few changes to this chamber after I died."

"Is it true he enclosed a basilisk in the mouth?"

"Yes, well. It's not there anymore." Harry shrugged. "I killed it, actually."

"Why?"

"It was a danger to the students." Harry wondered at this portrait. The story he'd learned said that Salazar had been the one to put the basilisk inside his chamber as a way of keeping the muggleborns in line.

Salazar scowled. "Then good. No harm should ever come to the student of Hogwarts. We built this school as a sanctuary."

Harry smiled. "I'm glad," he said, though he didn't elaborate. He wondered what Salazar would say if he knew that his image was so screwed. Not that he knew what Salazar's opinion on blood purity actually was—perhaps he was fervently pro-pureblood, but at least he protected the students of Hogwarts.

"Boy—"

"Harry. Or Potter, if you must."

Salazar considered Harry for a moment. "Lord Potter then. Or so I assume."

"You assume correctly." Harry fingered the lord ring on his finger. It had taken him years to learn the proper protocols of his station, but with Neville's help he'd learned to talk the talk and walk the walk of the pureblood side of their society.

"Go to Naga Manor. I have a feeling you have Naga blood and my feelings are rarely wrong. If you do and you're ignorant of such, then you should rectify that."

"How will going to the manor help me?"

Salazar huffed. "All manors hold tapestries depicting those of their line. At least, I assume it is still the case."
Harry thought about the Black tapestry and nodded. "Where is the manor?"

"There should be a portkey in my desk there."

Harry walked to the desk and began rifling through the drawers. Most were empty, though one held some old parchment that fell apart at his fingertips. Finally he uncovered a silver quill. He showed it to Salazar and the man nodded. "The passcode is Naga, in parseltongue. Do I need to speak it for you?"

"No," Harry said.

Salazar smirked. "Then you should go check on that tapestry."

Harry resisted the urge to roll his eyes. ::Naga:: he hissed at the quill.

The portkey activated, spinning him around. Like always, Harry felt nausea bubble up inside him. When the portkey landed, it dropped him unsteadily to his feet. He swayed for a moment, but thankfully stayed standing. At least his balance had improved from the first time he'd used this method of traveling.

Harry reached up as if to adjust his glasses, until he remembered that he'd gotten his eyes corrected. He dropped his hand. The manor around him was dusty and unlit.

"Lumos," Harry cast. He looked around. There wasn't too much damage that he could see. The stairs in front of him were marble. He began to walk up them, following his gut. It took him to the second floor and down the right of the hallway. On his right was a mahogany door. Harry opened it and stepped inside.

It was a study, not unlike the one in the chamber, though without any bookshelves. There were a few cabinets that Harry figured were to keep papers in. He shook his wand and the light at the end detached itself and floated up toward the ceiling to light up the whole room.

There, across from him was a tapestry. Harry started at the left side, tracing the small name of Cendrolo Naga, who married Gwendolin Naga née Pendragon. A daughter of Arthur Pendragon perhaps? A few lines down from them was Cenric Naga who married Adrianna Naga née Slytherin. Like Salazar had said, Cenric had been the last Naga, so all remaining Naga had Slytherin blood in their veins. Their only son was Hadrian Naga, who married… a Malfoy? Who would have guessed? This Malfoy couldn't have been related to Draco though, since she'd taken the Naga name.

Harry chuckled. He wandered down the tapestry until a name caught his eye. All the way down at the right end of the tapestry Lillian Naga married Borris Mark. Their daughter, Rose Mark, married Thomas Evans. They had two children: Petunia and Lily.

Harry stared. He traced Petunia's line, circling Dudley's name. And then he moved down slightly to where his name stood to the right of Lily and James Potter. He was a Naga.

What was it that Salazar said? He had Naga eyes? He had his mother's eyes, but apparently those bright green irises were hereditary far before her.

"Dudley's a squib," Harry murmured. "Petunia's a squib." Harry chuckled, and then he began to outright laugh. Who would have thought magic-hating Petunia had magic in her veins? He'd need to
keep an eye on Dudley's children. It was likely they'd have magic enough to get into Hogwarts.

Harry calmed down and went back to studying the tapestry. It seemed he and Dudley were the only two left from the line of Naga. There was a couple who'd lived not that long ago, Henrik Naga and Lycoris Naga née Black. Harry vaguely remembered seeing her on the Black family tree. Lycoris died in 1965, Henrik in 1975. They'd had one child, a son. Another Hadrian Naga, likely named after Salazar's grandson. The boy had lived only a year, or maybe not even that. His birth and death year were both listed as 1958.

He didn't see any mentions of the Gaunts, so he figured Tom Riddle came from a different line. Salazar must have had another child, probably the son he'd mentioned, who passed the Slytherin line down until eventually it reached Merope Gaunt, and then Tom.

Harry summoned his light back to the end of his wand and left the study. He didn't know the passcode for the portkey to take him back to Hogwarts, if it even could, so he'd have to apparate. As Harry walked back down the stairs and through the impressive front hall he considered the manor. Technically, it was his. He probably had some vaults in Gringotts he could lay claim to.

The house was dirty, but not so much so that it seemed like it had been abandoned as long as it had. If Henrik Naga had died in 1975, then there had been no one living here in thirty-five years. Long enough to ruin the house more than it was, at least. As evidenced by Grimmauld Place, even ten years without cleaning could lead to decay.

There must have been house elves, Harry figured. Ones that kept up their work, unlike Kreacher had. As headmaster of Hogwarts, Harry had learned so much more about how house elves functioned than he ever had before. When he'd been sworn into the office, the head house elf had surface bonded with him. House elves lived off the magic surrounding the place they worked. Hogwarts had enough magic to safely support a hundred elves, but no more.

The house elves lived off the magic of the building, but they required the bond of the lord of the building to feed off that magic. In the case of Kreacher, when Lord Arcturus Black and the last of the free Blacks had died, he had suddenly been cut off from the magic of Grimmauld such that he'd slowly been starving to death by the time Sirius took up residence and reinstated the bond. In public institutions like Hogwarts or the Ministry, it was fairly easy for a new head of the building to be instated should the current one die or retire, but in family homes there was nothing anyone could do for the house elves whose family line had died out. Unless it was stated in the will of the last family member that upon their death the family magic was to transfer on to a non-family heir.

So although Harry had the blood of the Naga line, he hadn't come quick enough to save the house elves from starvation. He felt sick at the thought. He wished he'd explored the Chamber of Secrets sooner so that he could have learned of his heritage in time to save them.

Harry took a steadying breath and clutched his wand. He imagined the Shrieking Shack in his mind and apparated there. The anti-apparition wards around Hogwarts prevented him from apparating directly back to the chamber, but he could walk the passage from the shack to the base of the Whomping Willow and back to school.

A half hour later, Harry was back in the Chamber of Secrets. He made his way back to the study, ready to tell his ancestor the news. Except, Salazar Slytherin's portrait was empty.

Harry frowned. Where would Salazar go? He'd never seen the man in any portrait around Hogwarts. He didn't even know if the man could travel up to those portraits. He knew the ones on Hogwarts walls were all connected with a charm to allow them all to intermix, but he didn't think that charm included the chamber.
Stalling for time as he thought, Harry ran his hand along the dusty bookshelves. His finger caught on a notch. He drew his hand back and looked. There was a Hogwarts crest engraved in the wood. Acting on a whim, Harry pushed a bit of his magic into the crest.

The bookshelf groaned and shuddered before sinking into the wall to reveal a hallway. Bemused, Harry walked down the new corridor until it deposited him in a circular room. There were several ancient couches that were falling apart at the seams. The couches faced a wall that held four portraits.

"I can't believe no one knows about this," Harry muttered. He stared at the four people who could only be the founders of Hogwarts.

In the far left portrait, Salazar smirked at him. "Well, Lord Potter?"

"You were right. I thought my mother was a muggleborn, but it turns out her father was a squib and his mother was a Naga." He paused. "Or maybe Lillian Naga was the squib, which would explain how Thomas Evans didn't know about magic before my mother got her letter."

"What is this word? Squib?" To the right of Salazar was a woman with long black hair. She wore a set of blue robes and wore the diadem that had been destroyed as a horcrux.

"It's the term for children born without magic, though from magical parents, Lady Ravenclaw."

"How strange." That was Helga Hufflepuff, a slightly pudgy woman with curly blond hair.

"It is believed to be the result of too much inbreeding." Harry transfigured one of the old couches into a more useable chair and sat. He figured he might be here a while. "The earliest known squib was two centuries ago, around the same time muggleborn prejudice reached a peak. It was the only time in history when said children were banned from attending Hogwarts."

"How idiotic," Rowena said. "Muggleborn exist as gifted by magic to prevent exactly that problem."

"Is that still the case then? Prejudice against the muggleborn?" Godric Gryffindor had golden brown hair and broader shoulders than Salazar. His facial hair was as that of a full beard, though not too long.

"Not in the same way." Harry sighed, resting his elbows on his knees. "The inbreeding problem has been recognized, but it's almost too late. The wizarding population of the United Kingdoms is dying. The rest of the world isn't fairing much better, though many of them did better than us about the inbreeding."

Harry looked up at the ceiling. "The biggest problem with the muggleborns nowadays is their parents. Knowledge of magic is rising in the muggle world. Prejudice is spreading rampant there just as much as it used to here. Wizards are being required by the muggle governments to fight in muggle wars, however useless we are against bullets and bombs. There are terrorist camps that believe that the ability to control minds is too much of a risk, and so they have been attempting to wipe us out."

"How did the muggles find out about us?" Helga asked quietly.

"A combinations of things," Harry said. "The Ministry grew lax about charms placed to prevent the parents of muggleborns from spreading their knowledge. Wizards themselves have long underestimated the intelligence of muggles and muggle technology. There are these inventions, smartphones, which most muggles carry everywhere. They have the ability to record magic being performed and to send that recording to countless other muggles in a matter of seconds."

"Fascinating," Rowena murmured. "You did expect something like this, Salazar."
"I knew we wouldn't be able to keep the muggles in the dark forever, though I certainly didn't imagine anything like a… smartphone?" Salazar grimaced at the unfamiliar word. "Regardless, it is in human nature to fear the unknown."

"To be honest, I believe it was inevitable that we would be found out," Harry said. "Even if Britain could have controlled its population better, there are countless other countries with countless other wizards and witches who could have made that first mistake that started the spread." He sighed. "The societies which are faring best at the moment are the ones who remained completely isolated from their muggle community."

"How so?" Godric asked.

"Russia, for one, and China too. India I believe is fairly good about it as well. Their magical neighborhoods are completely separated from the muggles. In Britain, too many wizards and witches live in muggle neighborhoods. They were some of the first to find themselves terrorized."

The founders all look at each other. Harry now understood the purpose of the circular room. It allowed the portraits to see each other without having to move into their fellow's frame.

Harry sighed. "We've lost so many to the last two internal wars. Those that are left have begun falling prey to their inbreeding curse. Nowadays, winning the affections of a muggleborn is a blessing—because new blood is so rare. I fear muggleborns will begin to be prosecuted by the muggles before they ever get their first Hogwarts letter."

"What is this about two internal wars?" Salazar asked. "Civil wars?"

"Yes," Harry said. "I think if they hadn't happened, we might have been able to survive. At least, our population would have. Maybe we would have been able to rally together to find a way to pull away from the muggle communities. The fact of the matter is, the majority of people targeted in the wars were muggleborn and muggles. It served to speed up our discovery in Britain and for many it highlighted wizards as the enemy."

"In detail, explain these wars," Godric pressed.

Harry frowned. "The majority of the first war went on before I was born. It wasn't as destructive as the second war. It was led by a man named Tom Marvolo Riddle." He looked at Salazar. "Another of your descendants."

Salazar sneered. "Though I hold no love for muggles, killing muggleborns is not something I have ever practiced nor preached."

Harry nodded. "Tom hated muggles. I don't know if he actually disliked muggleborns himself, or if it was a cause he picked up because it was the cause of many purebloods he allied with."

Slowly, Harry explained for the founders what he knew of Tom Riddle's childhood and the first war. When he came to his own role in it, the founders seemed to sit up straighter. They pressed him to continue onto the second war.

Uncomfortable, but used to telling his story by now, Harry began to give a brief overview of the Dursleys and his discovery of the magical world. He went on to describe his first and second year at Hogwarts.

"Hold it, boy!" Salazar exclaimed. "You mean to tell me you killed that basilisk when you were twelve?"
"Yes," Harry said shortly. Rowena murmured something and Helga shook her head. Only Godric grinned at him, likely pleased that his sword was used to save the school.

Harry continued to explain on. He said very little about third year, just explained the basics of Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew. By the time he got to his fifth year, he was weary to the bone.

"That's when I learned about the prophecy." Harry took a deep breath.

"Call an elf, get yourself a snack and a drink," Helga admonished him. "We can wait for you to finish your story."

"What an epic story it is," Godric said.

Salazar glared at him. "One no child should have had to experience."

Harry called for Winky. He'd made her a Hogwarts elf when one of the elder elves died of old age five years ago. Winky appeared before him with a small pop. She looked around with wide eyes.

"Winky has never been here. It is so dirty. Oh, bad elves."

"It's okay Winky, I don't think anyone knew it existed," Harry reassured her. "Can I have some tea please? And maybe a few biscuits?"

"Of course Master Harry sir! Winky is getting those straight away."

Winky popped away and returned a minute later. Harry used the time to transfigure another couch into a small table so she could deposit those on it. Winky bowed and left. Harry was sure she was going to inform the head house elf about the room.

"Are there other ways to get in here?" Harry asked out of curiosity. "Or must you be a parslemouth?"

"You can get here through any of the four chambers." Rowena said. "The Chamber of Secrets, Salazar's chamber you came through. Or my chamber, the Chamber of Knowledge."

"Where's that?"

"Off of the library. Or where the library used to be anyway."

"I don't think it's moved." Harry chewed a biscuit. "I'll have to look for it. What about you two?"

"My Chamber of Faith can be found from the grounds. Near the back of the castle," Helga said.

"The Chamber of Strength's entrance is on the fourth floor. By the west staircase," Godric grinned. "I'm sure you'll find it."

"That is really cool." Harry sipped his tea. Shaking his head, he continued off where he'd left off. "So I learned about the prophecy finally. Dumbledore soon told me about Voldemort's horcruxes."

"He made more than one?" Salazar sounded horrified.

"No wonder the boy was insane," Helga muttered.

Harry nodded. "He made seven. Though he didn't know about the seventh. That was me."

"You? A living horcrux?" It was Godric's turn to be horrified.
Harry talked them through his sixth year of Hogwarts and then his year on the run. When he got to the part where he'd realized he had to die to get rid of the horcrux, Rowena began to shake her head.

"That is not right," she said. "I mean, I suppose it worked that way since you're here and alive, but that is not the way I would have gone about it."

"Let Lord Potter finish his story first," Godric said.

Harry did. He explained how he'd found himself in King's Cross station and meeting Dumbledore. Then he told them about the final duel and the aftermath of Death Eater arrests and repairing the society.

"So you see, we never really recovered from that." Harry rubbed his head, his fingers ghosting over the scar that had long since faded to a barely visible white mark. He never used to be able to glamor over it, but ever since the horcrux had vanished he'd been able to conceal it. "Tom did a lot of damage."

"Why do you call him Tom and Voldemort separately?" Helga asked.

Harry laughed at himself. "It's just how I separate him in my mind. Tom was the boy who wanted to help our society. He had a lot of bad ideas, but he had more good ones. He was twisted from the orphanage, yes, but I believe if he'd grown up with making a horcrux he might have turned out into a political advisor who could have helped save our world from itself."

"And Voldemort is what he became through his horcruxes," Salazar murmured.

"Exactly."

Rowena delicately cleared her throat. "There is a ritual. Perhaps the knowledge has been lost, else Dumbledore should have done it when he first learned of Voldemort's horcruxes. It requires the possession of one of them, but only one of them is needed."

"What does it do?" Harry asked.

"It merges them again. Into the dominant form."

Harry stared. "So we could have just done this ritual and Voldemort would have become Tom Riddle again? It would have just taken the horcrux from my scar?"

"I've never heard of the ritual done with live horcruxes, but yes it should work." Rowena frowned slightly. "It may have been painful. My only fear would be the ritual assuming that the live horcrux is the dominant form, but I don't believe it would make that mistake." She shook her head. "No, the magic would not be compatible that way. It would rip the horcrux from the live container and bring it back to the true owner."

"Pain I could have handled. I mean, I walked to my death." Harry sighed. "Regardless, it's too late now."

"Perhaps not," Salazar said. "If you do not wish it to be."

"What?" Harry looked from founder to founder, but they all seemed serious. "What do you mean?"

"It is a very old secret of Hogwarts," Godric explained. "Messing with time is not generally recommended, but in cases of extreme emergency. . . ."
"How? Time turners don't work that way. You can't change the future you know to be true."

"I'm not familiar with time turners," Rowena said.

"You can pick his brain later," Helga said. "Or rather, earlier. Assuming you'll come visit us in the past."

"It would be his present if he chose to undertake the challenge," Salazar said. "Will you? Will you save our future from what is has become."

Harry swallowed. He thought of his students, the two tables hardly ever full. He thought of the muggles with sneers on their faces as they bombed Diagon Alley. He thought of Tom Riddle with a gleam in his eyes as he talked of his plans.

"How does it work?" he asked. "Would there be two Harry Potters in the world."

"No, you would become someone different. Someone decided on by the magic," Godric said. "Someone who wouldn't have existed otherwise, so you're not killing them by coming back."

"It won't be easy," Helga warned. "You'll never be able to tell anyone you came from the future." She paused. "A future. It will not the same future the minute you come back. Your mere presence will change things. Magic itself will forbid you from talking about it and protect your mind from someone finding it from you."

"What about you four?" Harry asked. "Can I tell you?"

"It is our magic that will transport you back. We will remember this conversation, just as we have remember the two others who have undergone the same thing," Godric said.

"Two others?" Harry blinked. "I don't suppose you can tell me?"

"They were for different reasons than yours and from each other. Both just as dangerous as what you are facing though from magical sources not muggles," Rowena said. "Perhaps that makes yours more dangerous."

"Will you undergo this challenge, Lord Harry Potter?" Salazar asked.

Harry wanted to ask more. He wanted information, but judging by the look in his ancestor's eyes he would not get it. He spared a moment to think about the ones he would be leaving behind. Neville was at the forefront of his mind. Luna came next. The two friends he hadn't lost.

He could sacrifice those friendships for the rest of the magical world. They might be forever lost to him, but perhaps younger Harry would find them again.

"I'll do it."

.o.o.o.

Hadrian woke with an aching headache. He lay for a moment trying to figure out what the hell had happened.

Harry, his mind whispered.

Hadrian sat up. He felt a moment of severe confusion, wondering who he was. He had been Harry Potter, once upon a life. But Hadrian Naga knew Harry Potter to be the supposed savior of the British wizarding world.
Hadrian clutched his head and sorted through his memories. When he'd gone to the Naga manor, which felt forever ago, he'd seen Hadrian Naga's name. The boy had died before he'd even turned a year old. Whatever ritual the founders had done must have changed that, so that Harry Potter took the place of the dead boy.

He remembered his parents. His mother, Lycoris Naga née Black, had died when he was seven. His father, Henrik, had lasted another ten years, though they'd had to leave Britain. His father had home schooled Hadrian as they hopped from the United States to Russia to Brazil to France. Hadrian was a knowledgeable wizard, made even more so by his new memories of his life as Harry Potter.

"Have you sorted through everything?"

Hadrian looked up and realized he was in the circular chamber with the portraits of the founders of Hogwarts. He shakily got to his feet. "Enough," he told Salazar. "My name is Hadrian Naga."

The last thing he remembered as Hadrian was travelling from Japan to Britain. He'd gone directly to Hogwarts, alerting no one of his presence, and to this chamber before passing out. His robes were even different. Harry had been wearing black robes with a Hogwarts crest. Hadrian wore sturdy green travelling robes. In his pocket were several shrunken trunks that contained all his worldly possessions.

Even his wand was different. Gone was his holly wand, replaced with an ash wand just an inch longer. The core was the sliver of a basilisk fang. Hadrian found the grip at once both usual and strange. He supposed it would take him a while to get used to the dueling memories.

And his body, Hadrian thought. Hadrian Naga was several inches taller than Harry had been. He knew his hair to be the same color black, and held at about the same length, but it was straighter and less prone to being a terror. His eyes were the same emerald green that was indicative of the Naga line. He had no glasses, nor had he ever had to correct his eyes.

"The horcrux ritual," Hadrian said once he was sure he had his bearings. "What is it?"

Rowena told him. Hadrian nodded along. It sounded simple enough, though she warned him it would likely drain his magical core for a day or so. Hadrian hoped it wouldn't hurt Harry. Rowena figured it would be best to do the ritual using the boy's scar horcrux, to be sure that it wouldn't consider him the dominant form.

"You should leave," Salazar said once Hadrian was sure he had the ritual memorized. "Before anyone notices your presence."

Hadrian bowed to his ancestor, glad the man was still so. ::Farewell:: he hissed. "Until next time."

"Good luck," Godric said.

"We'll see you soon enough," Helga added.

Hadrian bowed again and then walked toward Salazar's study. He grabbed the portkey he'd used in his other life and hissed at it to take him home.
Chapter 2

Harry shook out his right hand. It was starting to hurt. He'd been weeding the garden for hours already and there was still so much work left to do. Tears prickled in the corners of his eyes. Harry took off his glasses and rubbed at them to make them go away. Tears never helped anything.

Footsteps sounded from just a little ways down the street. Harry quickly got back to work. Even just at seven years old, he'd learned that it was best to ignore strangers. They never helped him. Sometimes old ladies would coo at him for helping his mother garden, but they never stayed long enough for him to correct them.

His mom was dead. She died in a car crash. 'Cause his dad had been drunk driving.

"Hello, Harry."

Harry jumped, ripping his finger on the vine he'd been trying to yank out. He yelped, pulling his hand back. His finger was bleeding, the cut deep and painful. He grimaced and began to wrap it in his shirt.

"Let me see that."

Harry turned, looking up at the tall stranger. The man had bright green eyes and long black hair. He wore dark clothes with way more buttons than Harry was used to seeing down the front.

"Your hand, Harry."

Harry held out his hand hesitantly. The man smiled and drew out... a stick? He said something strange and then Harry's cut was closing by itself.

Harry gaped. "What?"

"It's magic, Harry." The man straightened. "I'm a wizard. So are you. So were your parents." He paused. "Well your mother was a witch, but that's just semantics."

Harry had no idea what the man was talking about. "My uncle says there's no such thing as magic."

The man chuckled, but it wasn't a nice sound. "He would." He began to walk toward the front door. Before reaching it, he paused. "Come on, Harry. You'll want to be here for this."

Harry had never had anyone call him by his name so many times. His aunt and uncle called him 'boy' or 'freak'. Even his teachers tended to just call him 'Mr. Potter'. He felt a bit of warmth tingling through him. He looked at his finger. The cut was completely closed. He wiped the remaining blood off on his shirt and followed the man.

Aunt Petunia answered the door after only a single knock. She looked up and down the man, a scowl on her face. "Yes?"

"Mrs. Dursley, if we could take this inside?" the man said politely.

Petunia sniffed, but she opened the door for him. She nearly closed it on Harry's face. "What are you doing, boy? Back to your chores."

Harry looked down. He'd wanted to hear what the man was going to say.
"Let him come in, Mrs. Dursley. It concerns him."

Harry slipped inside, making sure to stay out of his aunt's reach. Petunia closed the door with a heavy thump, glaring at the man. "And who are you?"

"Hadrian Naga," the man introduced himself. "I won't take too much of your time. Is Mr. Dursley home?"

"Not until five."

"Good." The man, Hadrian's, face darkened. Harry wondered what he had against Harry's uncle. "Let's cut to the chase. You already suspect that I'm a wizard."

Petunia's face paled and she glanced sharply at Harry.

Hadrian shook his head. "I already told Harry. Keeping him from his heritage like that, I have to wonder why Dumbledore thought you'd be a good guardian for him."

"I never wanted him, or his freakiness in my house." Petunia sniffed.

"I understand. You're a normal muggle." Hadrian's lips quirked, as if there was something funny about his statement. "As it were, I'm related to Harry."

"I thought he had no magic relatives left alive."

"Dumbledore doesn't know we're related." Hadrian shrugged. "But we are. I think it'd be best if I took Harry. I could raise him in the world he was always meant to be in, and you wouldn't have to see him ever again."

Petunia glared. "How do I know your telling the truth? You could be one of those… Death-what's-it."

"The wards wouldn't have let me through if I was." Hadrian pulled something out of his pocket and with a tap of his stick it grew. "All you have to do is sign these papers. It's perfectly legal. Dumbledore can't do anything about it."

Petunia grabbed the papers and headed to the dining table. She looked through them before grabbing a pen. Before she signed, she glanced at Harry. He held his breath. "You're sure he'll be safe with you?"

"Don't pretend like you care." Hadrian's voice sounded tired. "But yes. Safer than being under your husband's roof."

Petunia smiled at that, though it was a sad one. "I know." She signed the papers. They glowed and then disappeared, before two copies appeared on the table. Hadrian grabbed one, leaving the other for Petunia.

Hadrian turned to Harry. He could hardly believe what was happening. He was leaving the Dursleys! Going with someone who… who could perform magic.

"Is there anything you want before we go, Harry?" Hadrian asked kindly.

Harry shook his head. He didn't have any possessions. He paused and blushed. "Um, clothes. I can go grab—"

"No need. You'll be getting new clothes." Hadrian held out his hand. Harry stared at it, until he
realized the man, his new guardian, meant for him to take it. He did.

As Hadrian led him back to the front door, Harry looked back at his aunt. She was watching him with a strange expression on her face. Harry felt a lump in his throat. "Bye, Aunt Petunia."

Petunia turned away without saying anything and then Harry was out the door.

.o.o.o.

Hadrian walked with Harry to the park at the end of the street. He wondered if Arabella Figg had seen them. He hoped not. He wanted a bit of time before Dumbledore realized Harry had gone missing.

"Okay, Harry. I know this is all a lot to you right now. I promise things will start to make sense soon enough. The biggest thing to remember is magic is real, and it can do a lot of things."

Harry nodded. He looked like he had a question, but he didn't voice it. Hadrian sighed internally. He had hoped that he could have gotten to Harry earlier. At seven, Harry had already experienced most of the Dursleys' nasty rules.

Hadrian was thirty-one. His birthday was May 1st, 1958. He'd missed his own thirty-first birthday because of the nature of the travel back in time, but he couldn't be too upset. It was the first week of July. Hogwarts had closed for the summer just a week ago. Hadrian had used that week to prepare before going to collect Harry from the Dursleys.

Apparently the founders could send him back in time, but they couldn't change his age. Since magic had chosen him to be Hadrian Naga, he could only go back the twenty-three years he had. It would take work to break Harry from the shell he'd developed living with the Dursleys.

"If you have a question, Harry, I never want you to be afraid to ask it. If I can't answer you, I'll tell you, but I'll never punish you for asking."

Harry didn't look like he believed him. Hadrian knew that would change in time, but it would take just that—time. Finally, Harry cleared his throat. "You said we were related."

Hadrian blinked. He'd expected a question about magic. But of course, the only family Harry knew was the Dursleys. All he'd been told about his parents at this point was that they were drunks. He knelt down. "Yes, we are. I'm your cousin, though rather distantly. Once we get to our new home, I can show you a tapestry that has both of us."

There had been no question in his mind that he was going to raise Harry. He hadn't deserved living with the Dursleys, ignorant of his heritage and his place in society. Ignorant of love and what family really meant. It worked out well because Hadrian would be able to fix the horcrux problem at any point, but he wanted to get Harry settled into the magical world first before he gave Tom Riddle back his sanity.

It was risky, he knew. A sane Tom Riddle could do even more damage than the insane Voldemort had in Hadrian's old life. He only hoped that he was right about Tom and the good Tom could do. If not… well he'd killed him once. He could do it again.

"I'm going to apparate us to our new home. Apparition is a form of magical transportation. It feels a bit strange, but I promise you'll be fine. Okay?"

Harry nodded. Hadrian tucked the boy close to him and concentrated. They both were sucked through a tube and appeared in the front hallway of Naga Manor.
Harry looked around with wide eyes. Hadrian let him. He'd been living in the manor for the past week, but it was still impressive. His memories of the manor from his childhood were vague. He'd had to get the elves, all alive and well, to show him around again. He cleared his throat.

"This is Naga Manor. Would you like a tour?"

"Yes, sir," Harry said shyly.

"No need to call me sir. Hadrian is fine."

Harry didn't say anything to that. Hadrian hadn't expected him to. He walked Harry to the left. "Here's the sitting room. Beyond that you see the dining room." They walked through both rooms. Naga Manor was beautiful. Most of the furniture was done in rich mahogany, as well as the floors, and the walls were white marble.

"This door leads to the kitchen. There are stairs down from the kitchen that lead to the basement. That's where the house elves live."

"What are house elves?"

"They do all the cleaning and cooking around the manor. I'll introduce you to all of them in a bit."

"You mean I won't—" Harry cut himself off, a flush appearing on his cheeks.

"No, Harry. I won't expect you to cook or clean. I want you to keep your room clean. There's no need to give the elves extra work, but I won't work you like your aunt and uncle did," Hadrian said patiently.

Hadrian walked Harry back to the front hall. They walked past the marble staircase to the right side of the first floor. "Here is the parlor and the ballroom. We'll only be using them if we need to entertain guests."

Harry nodded. Hadrian figured he was questioning the use of 'we'. Hadrian would have time to explain that later. He didn't figure he'd invite many guests, especially the kind of guests who would expect those two rooms, until after it came out that Harry was living with him. If he was lucky, that might even stretch until Harry went off to Hogwarts, but he doubted it.

They walked up the stairs to the second floor. To the left, the stairs to the third floor ran in the opposite direction. Hadrian ignored those for now. He started on the right side this time. "Here is the study. Across from that you see is the library."

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Naga Manor had an impressive library. It was the only room in the house that had double doors. The bookshelves lined the entire room, with ladders to help reach the top shelves. There were several armchairs and tables scattered around the floor of the library for the residents to settle in while they read.

"Next to the library, this is a playroom." The playroom was empty save for an old rocking horse that Hadrian vaguely remembered playing on when he was a toddler. "And to the left of that is the classroom." The classroom was a small room with a chalkboard and a dozen desks. It was used for tutors to teach the children of the manor before they went off to Hogwarts.

"Across from that, this door leads to the potions room, and that one to the right of it to the dueling chamber." Those two doors were the only ones closed in the entire manor. Hadrian had instructed so of the house elves. "Harry, I need you to not go into either of those rooms without me. They can both be very dangerous."
Harry nodded, though Hadrian could see the curiosity in his eyes. He sighed. "I don't want you to get hurt," he said. "The dueling chamber is charmed to attack those who are in it, to help with spellwork. The potions chamber has many vials of potions ingredients that are toxic."

Harry looked down. "I understand."

"Good." As an added precaution, because he remembered the trouble he'd gotten up to at Hogwarts, Hadrian warded both rooms so that only he could enter into them. Well, him and the house elves, but they never really paid attention to wards anyway.

"Up here now." At the very end of the left side of the hallway was a set of narrow wooden stairs. Hadrian led Harry up them until they reach the top. The small owlery was even with the fourth, and top, floor of the manor though it was only accessible from the second floor. "This is the owlery. Magical folk like us don't use mailboxes and deliverymen. Our mail is delivered by owl."

As if on cue, the owl Hadrian had bought a few days ago swooped in through one of the many openings of the owlery. Hadrian held out his arm so that the owl could land on him. "This is Garnet, my owl." Garnet was a beautiful eagle owl with eyes the color of garnets, the reason Hadrian had named him such. Hadrian had looked for Hedwig, but he hadn't seen the snowy owl. He figured she wouldn't show up in the emporium until the summer Harry had bought her in the original time. Owls had a fairly quick turnabout rate.

"Hello, Garnet," Harry said. Hadrian bent down so that Harry could pet the owl. He did so hesitantly. Garnet wasn't nearly as affectionate as Hedwig, but he suffered through the petting in silence.

Hadrian chuckled. "Okay I think we should finish our tour." He held up his arm so Garnet could flap to one of the perches of the owlery.

They walked back down the spiral staircase until they were back on the second floor. Then Hadrian led them to the staircase that led to the third floor. He didn't bother showing Harry each room. "This is the guest floor. It has seven bedrooms. The Red Room, Orange Room, Yellow Room, Green Room, Blue Room, Indigo Room, and Purple Room."

Harry nodded, smiling. Hadrian was amused by the naming himself. Each room was decorate with a theme on the color by which it was named, which made it easy to distinguish between them he supposed.

"And finally, the fourth floor," Hadrian said. "The family floor." He herded Harry to the left. "This is the master bedroom. Across from it is the nursery and the nanny's room. Both empty, obviously."

Harry looked at Hadrian. "You're not married?"

Hadrian shook his head. "Maybe one day," he said dryly. He somehow doubted it. He wasn't sure he'd be able to find himself romantically attracted to people who, in his old life, had been his classmates' parents or uncles or aunts.

"Next to the master bedroom, these two bedrooms here share a bathroom. Then the room to the right of them has its own bathroom. Across from that room, there are another two rooms that share a bathroom." It was a similar set up to the guest floor, though slightly reversed because of the nature of the way the stairs alternated for each floor.

Harry nodded and then looked down at his hands. Hadrian knew the boy was wondering where he would be sleeping.
"Now, Harry. Choose a room."

Harry stared at him, wide-eyed. "What?"

"Choose a room." Hadrian smiled. "Any of them, except the master bedroom. That's my room. The nursery is too young for you and there's no need for you to sleep in the small nanny room attached. Any of the others on this floor are yours to choose from."

Harry pointed shyly at the room directly to the right of the master bedroom. "Can I have that one?"

"If you want." Hadrian was pleased that Harry didn't mind being so close to his room. He knew that if it were the Dursleys and he'd had a choice, he would have chosen the room farthest from them. "It shares a bathroom though."

"No one lives in the other room though, right?"

"That's true."

Hadrian and Harry walked into the room he'd chosen. It was fairly large, though not as large as the master bedroom. There was a large four-poster bed with an emerald green comforter and crème colored sheets. The curtains on the windows were also crème. A large wardrobe was made of mahogany. Next to the bed was a nightstand. In the corner of the room were a green armchair and a small table. There was a chest at the end of the bed. An open door showed a white marble bathroom with a full tub and a separate shower.

"The house elves will keep the bathroom stocked. Anything in it is yours to use." Hadrian explained. "Would you like to meet them now?"

Harry nodded.

"Bito!" Hadrian called. The head house elf, who was also his personal elf since Hadrian was the head of the family, appeared with a pop. Harry jumped backward, but recovered himself quickly. "Bito, this is my new ward, Harry Potter. Harry, this is Bito. He's the head house elf of the manor."

"Bito is pleased to meet the young master Harry." Bito bowed. "Would Master Hadrian like Bito to call the rest?"

"Yes please, thank you Bito."

Bito snapped his fingers and one by one the rest of the manor elves appeared. They all wore pillowcases, but the cases were of a finer quality than anything Dobby or Winky used to wear with their old—current now—families. The cases were a range of color, as suited the preference of the elf in question, though each held the crest of the Naga house: a black cobra with its hood flared on a green shield background. The Naga family colors were black and emerald green, something Hadrian found very appropriate.

"Harry, this is Peachy the chef and Dilly the gardener." The two elves bowed. "Then we have Demy, Brigger, Figger, and Sodder. Demy is a nanny elf, so if I ever have young children she'll be the first I call." Demy grinned and bowed, followed by the three male elves. "And lastly, this is Zesty. He's going to be your personal elf. If you ever need anything, all you need to do is call for him. He'll hear his name anywhere."

Zesty bowed. "Zesty is pleased to help Young Master. Does Young Master need anything from Zesty?"
"I, no not right now." Harry looked a bit stunned. "Thank you, Zesty."

"Young Master is so kind." Zesty looked excited. Hadrian wanted to laugh, but he kept it in.

"That's all for now, thank you," he told the elves. "Zesty, if you could supply Harry's bathroom with all the necessary things. Bito, could you grab that outfit on my bed?"

Both house elves disappeared with a pop. A moment later, Bito reappeared with one of Hardian's robes. He set it on Harry's new bed and left.

"Harry, I told you I would get you new clothes. You see, wizards and witches have a different dress style to muggles." He paused. "Muggles are non-magical folk." He waited for Harry to nod before continuing. "Wizards usually wear robes. Sometimes they'll wear something like what I'm wearing, which aren't quite full robes but have the same sort of style." Hadrian ran a hand down the buttons on his shirt. He'd chosen this outfit for today because it could blend in well enough in the muggle world, though it was technically a wizarding style.

"These are a pair of my robes. I'm going to shrink down the bottom layer for you. I have a tailor coming today to measure you and make you a full wardrobe, but you'll need to look presentable for her. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, I mean Hadrian."

Hadrian smiled. "Go take a bath or a shower. Take as long as you like. We'll have time for lunch before the tailor arrives."

Hadrian shrunk down the trousers and shirt of his robe set. He grabbed the top layer and left with it to leave Harry to his privacy.

.o.o.o.

Harry had been living with Hadrian at Naga Manor for three days. Hadrian was pleased with the tailor's work—Harry now looked the part of a wizard child. What was more, the tailor had included charms on all the outfits so they would grow as Harry did for at least four years. Long enough to last until they got Harry his Hogwarts robes at least.

Hadrian had invited a healer over yesterday. He'd made the man sign the same secrecy contract the tailor had before instructing him to run a full diagnostic scan on Harry. The healer had been furious and threatened Hadrian before he could reassure the man that the damage had come from living in a different home, one Hadrian had rescued Harry from. The man had calmed down and made a record of the scan. Hadrian figured it come in handy if he was taken to court over his custody of Harry. Technically it was fully legal for him to have Harry. His previous guardian had signed him over and Hadrian was family, but Dumbledore had been adamant about the wards in Hadrian's previous life.

Hadrian had shown Harry the tapestry. He'd found it fascinating and had asked all sorts of questions about the different families shown on it. Hadrian had explained parseltongue, the Slytherin ability they both shared, and that sparked a discussion of Hogwarts and the four founders.

Hadrian wanted to be able to answer all of Harry's questions about the magical world himself, but he had business to take care of. His father had left the Naga estate in chaos when he'd decided to leave Britain with young Hadrian and now that Hadrian was back he'd been getting owled daily by the goblins, his estate manager, and various pureblood families looking for gossip on the long lost Naga heir.

With that in mind, Hadrian came up with an idea. He didn't want Harry to become spoiled like
Dudley, but he also didn't want him to have to do any chores that the house elves would be more than happy to do. So, he figured he might as well start Harry's magical education.

After breakfast, Hadrian led Harry up to the library. He settled him in a chair and gave him a book. _A Basic Guide to the Magical World_ was a fairly simple book, but it would be a good place to start. A lot of the information in it Harry had already asked Hadrian about, but he figured the book would help him sort through it all.

"What's this?" Harry asked.

"You're not in muggle primary school anymore," Hadrian explained. "But that doesn't mean we're going to ignore your education." He pointed out the parchment on the table as well as the quill and inkbottle. "This is parchment. It's like muggle paper, but a bit different. It comes in foot long sheets. It can also come in longer scroll lengths. Wizards write with quills and ink. Here I'll show you how."

In his first life, no one had showed Hadrian how to properly use a quill. They'd assumed he would know how, he supposed. It had served to create horrible handwriting and far too many ink spots on his homework. Now, he showed Harry the proper way to hold the quill, dip it in the ink for minimal drip, and carefully write it on the parchment. He had Harry write his name across the parchment all the way down until it seemed like Harry had become comfortable enough with the method.

"Okay." Hadrian banished the parchment with a flick of his wand. Harry had been disappointed to learn he couldn't get his own wand until he got his Hogwarts letter. "Now, every day I'm going to give you a book. I want you to read it by the end of the day and write an essay summary of it. It should be at least six inches long, but no more than a single piece of parchment."

Harry nodded, but he seemed hesitant. Hadrian sighed. "Harry, I know the Dursleys didn't reward academic achievement. I want you to ignore that. I want you to try your best, okay? If you feel that you can't finish a book in the span of a day, I want you to tell me. As long as you tell me, I'll give you an extension. This book is an easy read, I have confidence you should be able to do it if you try."

"I'll try," Harry said. His eyes had hardened in determination.

Hadrian had asked the healer to check Harry's prescription and subscribe him magical contacts. The contacts were spelled onto his eyes where they stayed for up to sixth months before new ones were needed. Unfortunately Harry was too young to be eligible for full correction, but the boy seemed fond of the contacts. Hadrian knew his glasses had always been several prescriptions too blurry until he went to Hogwarts.

The rest of the day, Harry read his book while Hadrian went through all his various letters. He'd have a big load for Garnet to take once he was finished. Occasionally Harry would ask for clarification about something and Hadrian would be more than happy to answer him. They had lunch in the library and ended up staying in it for dinner as well.

At around seven, Harry set the book down and set about trying to write a summary. An hour later, he handed it to Hadrian.

Hadrian set aside the last of his letters and took out his own quill. He grabbed a bottle of red ink and began correcting Harry's essay. Even though he hadn't been a teaching professor in five years, some habits were hard to lose.

"Good job for a first try," he told Harry. "You need to watch your spelling, but that's something that will improve in time. Your biggest problem was that you tried to put too much information in. Next
time, I want you to think about what the main points of the book are and talk about those instead of just adding in random details."

Harry nodded and, acting on impulse, Hadrian reached over and ruffled his hair. Harry ducked away, a brief flash of fear in his eyes. Hadrian deliberately ignored it, fluffing up those black locks, before he pulled his hand back and went back to his last letter.

He knew Harry was watching him. He kept his eyes on the letter, finishing it with a flourish. He quickly sealed it and wrote the address. Gathering up the five letter replies he'd written over the day, he stood. "I'm going to head to the owlery real quick. Don't stay up too late."

That night, Hadrian lay awake in his large bed. He could hear Harry crying in the next room. He wanted to be surprised, but he wasn't. He knew life at Naga Manor was infinitely better than life at 4 Privet Drive, but that didn't mean the change wasn't hard on Harry. The boy was only seven and his world had been completely turned around.

Hadrian turned over, sighing deeply.

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Harry's birthday was in a week and Hadrian was busy planning what gifts he would get the boy. Harry was reading his book of the day, Dark Wizards of the Twentieth Century. Hadrian thought it might be the coward's way out. He hadn't been sure how he should approach the subject of Harry's scar.

"Hadrian?"

"Yes?"

"Why is dark magic evil?"

Hadrian looked over at his ward. "It's not. Many witches and wizards consider it so, but that's because of the propaganda that started running around at the beginning of the twentieth century. It's one of the reasons Grindelwald rose to power, because there were many unsatisfied with the discrimination against dark magic."

He paused, thinking. "It's not the type of magic that matters, but the intent behind it."

Harry nodded. He was only half way through the book. Hadrian knew he would get to Voldemort soon. Hadrian cleared his throat. "Harry, I want you to remember that not everything you read is automatically truth. Authors have their own biases. When you finish that book, we need to have a discussion. You won't have to write an essay today."

Harry looked suspicious at that and quickly flipped to the next page as if curious about what they would be talking about.

Hadrian went back to thinking about Harry's birthday. He knew the boy wanted to visit more of the magical world. While he still found Naga Manor to be fantastic and magical in its own right, the stuff he was reading about in the books Hadrian assigned him described even more fantastic sights.

Hadrian wondered if it would be too risky to take him to Diagon Alley. He'd be disguised, of course, but Hadrian was the talk of society at the moment because of his sudden reappearance in the British wizarding world. Which mean anyone with him would be under scrutiny.

They could perhaps both go in disguise. Hadrian scratched his chin. He picked up The Daily Prophet from where he'd set it earlier that day. He flipped through it idly. As expected, there was a
small article about him. Just a statement about his re-taking of Naga Manor and the Naga vaults. A
question about whether or not he'd take up his seat on the Wizengamot. Hadrian wasn't planning on
it. He had no love of politics himself, though he understood their importance.

Hadrian flipped to the sports sections. There was an article about the Montrose Magpies’ recent
defeat of the Chudley Cannons. He grinned and then blinked. Montrose was the closest magical
town to Naga Manor. Hadrian glanced at Harry. That could work.

Harry finished the book just before dinner. He was pale and his fingers shook slightly as he closed it.
Hadrian swallowed. "Come on, let's go to the dining room."

Peachy had dinner already set out for them once they sat down. Harry picked at his food and
Hadrian cleared his throat. Harry looked up at him.

"Is it true? Did I really... kill You-Know-Who?"

"Call him Voldemort. That was the name he took on when he became the dark lord." Hadrian ran a
hand through his hair. "You didn't kill him. It wasn't anything you did. The wizarding world lauds
you as their savior because you survived the killing curse. I personally think your mother was the
reason you did. A mother's sacrifice is powerful light magic."

Harry nodded, looking calmer. Hadrian knew the boy wanted nothing to do with fame. Not for
something he did as a baby. "So my mum killed him?"

"He's not actually dead."

"He's not?"

"No. Most of Britain thinks he is. It's best to let them think that way. I have a plan to prevent him
from ever coming back as Lord Voldemort."

Harry stared at him. Already, Hadrian could see the sharp cunning that would convince the sorting
hat that Harry was destined for Slytherin. "You're not going to kill him."

"No." Hadrian smiled. "I'm going to save him."

"How?"

"Before he became Lord Voldemort, he was a man named Tom Marvolo Riddle. He performed a
ritual, a bit of dark magic, that split his soul. It hurt him, though he didn't realize it. He did it five
more times." Hadrian reached over and lightly touched Harry's scar. "One of those times was the
night he killed your parents. When the killing curse backfired, it launched a bit of his soul into you—
making your scar."

"I have some of Lord Voldemort's soul in me?" Harry sounded distraught. Hadrian understood. He'd
just learned the man had killed his parents, after all.

"I'm going to get it out, I promise. We're going to do it on October 31st. Magic is strong on All
Hallows Eve and it was the night you got it in the first place. I'll perform the ritual to take the soul
piece out of you and out of the other items and send them back to Voldemort. If all goes well, he'll
cease to exist as Voldemort."

"He'll be Tom Marvolo Riddle."

"Exactly."
Harry was extremely intelligent. Hadrian was looking forward to how well the boy would do without years of training to not succeed in school drilled into him. Now though, he waited for the boy's approval. He wondered if Harry would rather he kill the man who killed his parents.

"Okay," Harry said finally. He still looked upset, but his voice was steady. "He won't be Voldemort then, right? He'll be a normal wizard."

"Voldemort will be no more."

Harry looked down. He ate the rest of his dinner in silence. Hadrian watched him, wondering what was going through the boy's head. He'd been much older when he'd learned all that he'd just told Harry, but he didn't believe in keeping it a secret. Not when they would be performing the ritual in a few months.

"My dad, he wasn't a drunk was he?" Harry asked as he finished his dinner.

"No Harry. He was a powerful wizard. The Lord of the Potter family. When you turn seventeen, you'll be able to take up that title. For now, you're the heir to the house." He paused. "If I never have children, you'll be the heir to the Naga family as well. But I'm not planning on dying anytime soon so you don't have to worry about that."

"Can you tell me about them? My mum and dad?"

Hadrian shook his head sadly. "I wish I could. I never really knew them. I'm sorry."

"That's okay."

Hadrian wanted to tell Harry what he did know, but people would ask how he came across that information and, regardless, he honestly didn't know that much. He wondered if he could contact Remus Lupin. He'd have to make sure the werewolf wouldn't go immediately to Dumbledore. It was something to consider.

So was freeing Sirius. Hadrian frowned. He didn't want to leave his—er, Harry's godfather in Azkaban for too long. He'd already been there nearly seven years. But he didn't want Sirius to take Harry from him as soon as he was released. He loved the man, but Sirius would hardly be a good guardian to a kid. He was much too unstable.

Maybe after Harry had been with him for a bit longer. He could invite Sirius to live with them at Naga Manor. He would have to think about it.

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Hadrian and Harry were both spelled with notice-me-not charms. Hadrian had made sure to get seats far up in the stands to help with their anonymity. Now that Harry knew about his fame, he was more than happy trying to blend in with the crowd.

The Montrose Magpies quidditch team took to the field followed shortly the visiting team, currently Puddlemere United. Hadrian bought them both a pair of omnioculars to watch the game. Harry was delighted, likely thinking them to be his birthday present. Hadrian thought of the gifts he'd had the elves stack on the sitting room table as soon as they'd left the house and smiled to himself.

Harry hadn't even known it was his eighth birthday until Hadrian wished him so that morning. He'd been happy enough though once Hadrian had informed him that they were going to a quidditch game after lunch. He'd made Harry read Quidditch Through the Ages the day before in preparation and the boy had been as enamored with the idea of the sport as Hadrian once had.
The game was fantastic. Both the Magpies and United were amazing teams and they played a brutally skilled game of quidditch. Harry was practically vibrating in his seat as the game went on.

The score was 250-270 in favor of Puddlemere when the Magpie seeker suddenly dived. She came up just before hitting the ground, the golden snitch in her hand. Hadrian and Harry both jumped to their feet to cheer along with the rest of the stadium. It was always exciting when the home team won.

Harry chatted eagerly about the match as Hadrian took them to one of the apparition circles by the pitch and apparated them home.

"Okay, Harry," Hadrian said, chuckling as he herded his ward to the sitting room. "You ready to open the rest of your presents?"

Harry gaped at the pile of gifts on the center table. "For me? I, I don't need this many presents. Really."

"I know you don't. But it's your birthday. I have a feeling you have a lot of birthdays to make up for. Forgive me for spoiling you a bit today."

Harry blushed and walked over the table. He seemed enthralled by the pile. "Can I open them?"

"Go ahead." Hadrian readied the magical camera he'd bought while he was out shopping for all the gifts. There weren't any portraits in the manor and the only picture there was seemed to be an old photo from Henrik and Lycoris' wedding. Hadrian had set the photo up on the mantle in the sitting room. He figured they needed some company.

He snapped a shot of Harry opening his first present and set the camera aside as Harry began to tear through his gifts one by one.

Harry was delighted at the dozen chocolate frogs. He'd expressed a desire to start collecting the cards when he'd read about them in *Popular Magical Items and Their Uses*. The chess set seemed cool once Hadrian explained that wizard chess sets moved on their own and he would be happy to teach Harry how to play whenever he wanted.

The biggest hit, though, was undoubtedly the quidditch set. A full chest of all the balls, the bludgers set to their gentlest mode and snitch to a radius of only a hundred feet, and a set of quidditch robes in black and green. That, combined with one of the top brooms on the market, a Cleansweep Six, seemed to make Harry's face set in a permanent grin. Hadrian included a broom cleaning kit and instructed Harry that he was to keep his new broom polished. It would be his responsibility, not the elves. Harry agreed readily.

He'd gotten himself a matching Cleansweep Six and a set of quidditch robes so that he and Harry could play together. They spent the rest of the day throwing the quaffle back and forth whilst dodging the lazy bludgers.

Peachy made Harry's favorite meal for dinner and a birthday cake for dessert. Hadrian tucked Harry in well past his bedtime and kissed the boy on the forehead almost nonchalantly.

"Hadrian?" Harry murmured as he started to leave.

"Yes, Harry?"

"Thank you. Today was the best day of my life."
Hadrian had to take a moment to gather himself. "Your welcome, Harry. I hope things will only get better."

Harry didn't answer that, already fast asleep. Hadrian closed the door softly and left him to his dreams.
Chapter 3

Hadrian handed Harry *The Daily Prophet*. It had become a daily ritual of there's. Hadrian had subscriptions both to that paper as well as *Montrose Daily*. In the morning over breakfast Harry would read *Montrose Daily* while Hadrian read the *Prophet* and then they'd switch.

Harry was always interested in the sports section of both newspapers. He'd become a huge fan of the Montrose Magpies. Hadrian wondered if he should be surprised. In his old life he'd been a fan of the Cannons, if only because Ron was, and as Hadrian he'd never followed quidditch teams because of how often he and his father travelled. But they lived near Montrose and Hadrian was finding himself impressed by the Magpies as much as Harry was. They were truly a spectacular team.

Hadrian had also subscribed to *The Quibbler* if only because he wanted Harry to know that not everyone in the wizarding world agreed on things. And because he wanted to support Luna's family. Alas, *The Quibbler* only came once a month, on the first of the month, and therefore they wouldn't be getting another copy until September 1st. The August edition had been pretty great though, with speculations on some creature called a Borrrrrrrin which caused people to fall asleep randomly and a crossword puzzle that Harry had delighted in trying to solve.

"Can we go to Diagon Alley?" Harry asked as he read through the article on parents and their children flocking to Diagon Alley for school supplies for the new term.

"I told you why we needed to keep your living here a secret."

"I know. I don't want Dumbledore to force me back to the Dursleys."

Hadrian smiled softly. "He won't. I promise. I'll take him to court over it and I'll win."

"'Cause your magical."

"And because the Dursleys were the worst sort of guardians."

Harry looked down. Hadrian let the moment slide. It had taken him years to come to terms with all the Dursleys put him through. He hadn't wanted to admit that his relatives were abusive, only that they were awful. In the end, it had been Poppy Pomfrey's insistence that he get a full medical diagnosis that broke through the realization that he'd been abused—emotionally and physically. She'd be horrified at the state his body was in and disgusted with herself for never having realized it before. Hadrian hadn't blamed her, knowing that she needed guardian approval for a full medical scan for underage wizards.

That was one blessing about being in a new body, Hadrian mused. Hadrian Naga had never dealt with severe starvation, broken bones healing incorrectly, head trauma, and countless other things that had piled up even before he'd gone to Hogwarts and only got worse after. Luckily the healer Hadrian had called for Harry had prescribed nutrient potions enough that Harry would be back to a normal size for his age group by the end of the year.

"We can go in disguise," Harry said finally. "There'll be a lot of people 'cause they have to get all their Hogwarts stuff. No one will notice us."

Hadrian considered the eight-year-old. "True."

Harry glanced at him. "Please."
Hadrian smiled. "Alright. We can't do notice-me-not charms if we want to buy anything, but I can do some glamour charms. We'll need to be careful not to use names, alright?"

"Can we have fake names?"

Hadrian chuckled. "Sure. Why don't you pick them out?"

Harry thought for a moment. "You can be my older brother, Luther. And I'll be Larry!"

"Luther and Larry." Hadrian wanted to laugh outright. "We can work with that. I want to stop by Gringotts while we're there. I have no idea what the state of the Potter estate is in or who's keeping up with it."

They finished their breakfast and Hadrian charmed both his and Harry's hair to a non-descript brown. He changed their eyes as well, because the Naga green was far too unique. Now 'Luther' had dark brown eyes and 'Larry' honey golden. As an added precaution, he charmed their skin colors darker. It would help disguise Harry's scar if his bang were to fly up with the wind.

They used the fireplace in the sitting room to floo to the Leaky Cauldron. As Harry had predicted, the Alley was packed with people. It was a Sunday at the beginning of August and as such a good day for parents to take their kids for supplies. Hadrian supposed the letters had arrived maybe a few weeks prior.

Hadrian had started sending the letters out earlier than McGonagall ever had when he was deputy and Neville had kept with his method. He'd figured that, especially for the muggleborns, having the whole summer to prepare was better than only have a month and a half. Unlike McGonagall, Hadrian himself had written all the letters to personalize them for each student and to check if anyone was living in something like the cupboard under the stairs.

Hadrian kept a tight hold of Harry's hand, which was almost unnecessary by how close Harry walked to him. The crowd was a bit intimidating. Hadrian knew it would be more so if anyone figured out that 'Larry' was actually Harry Potter. Most of the competent witches and wizards would be able to tell that Hadrian and Harry were both glamoured, but Hadrian hoped they'd respect their privacy and not cast the reversal charm.

The brick wall that led from the Leaky Cauldron to Diagon Alley was stuck open as hordes of witches and wizards went in and out of it. Harry seemed disappointed by that. Hadrian promised him quietly that they'd come back some time so Harry could tap the brick that caused the archway to open.

"Let's go to Gringotts first, okay?" Hadrian said once they were out in the Alley.

Harry smiled at him and agreed. He seemed awestruck by the sight, though perhaps not as stunned as Hadrian had been a lifetime ago. The difference, he thought, was that Hadrian had known nothing about magic before Hagrid had taken him to Diagon Alley, whilst Harry had collected quite a bit of theoretical knowledge from his daily book assignments.

The walk to Gringotts was slow, as they had to maneuver their way through the crowd. Harry didn't seem to mind as he looked from left to right at all the various shops. Hadrian knew he was making a mental checklist of ones he want to go inside once they'd stopped at the bank.

They made it to Gringotts finally. Hadrian made sure to nod at the goblin standing guard outside as the creature bowed to him. Harry did the same, either to copy Hadrian or because he'd taken the book *Respecting Intelligent Magical Creatures* to heart. Hadrian was pleased, reminding himself
about how Harry always made sure to treat their house elf staff kindly.

Making sure he had a book ready for Harry every day was also helping Hadrian, he mused. He made sure to read every one of the books he handed Harry first so as to make sure he could talk with the boy about them. He'd thought that he'd known almost everything there was to know about the magical world, but he was even now discovering that there were so many things he had yet to learn.

They approached an open teller. The goblin looked at them, sneering slightly. "What business have you?"

"If it pleases Gringotts, we would like an appointment with an inheritance worker on the nature of my ward's estate," Hadrian said politely.

The goblin lost his sneer at Hadrian's careful tone, though he didn't soften. "Bortag will take you. Bortag!"

A goblin appeared and bowed at Hadrian and Harry to follow him. Bortag led them through a side hallway and to an office labeled Inheritance Issues. He bowed them through the door and left.

The goblin behind the desk was busy writing something on a parchment. Hadrian recognized him as Krippki, the same goblin who'd helped him claim his inheritance of the Naga estate at the end of June.

Hadrian sat in one of the uncomfortable chairs. Harry did the same, his eyes curious and calculating. Hadrian loved the boy for it. Harry Potter would be a force to reckon with in the wizarding world as he matured.

Krippki glanced up. "Welcome back, Lord Naga."

"I shouldn't be surprised that you can see through my glamour," Hadrian remarked dryly. "Do you know who my charge is then?"

"Even if I didn't recognize Harry Potter, I would assume it to be him. I was, after all, the one who secured the adoption papers for you," Krippki said back, just as dryly.

Hadrian smirked. He liked this goblin.

"Thank you for helping him get me from the Dursleys, sir," Harry said.

Krippki stared down at Harry for a moment and then nodded. "As long as you are happy at your new home, Mr. Potter."

"I am, sir." A small blush stained Harry's cheeks, barely noticeable on his brown-charmed skin.

"We're here to sort through Harry's estate. Who is currently in charge of it?"

Krippki waved his fingers and a filing cabinet opened. Out flew a thick file with the Potter crest, a golden griffin over a dark blue background, engraved on the front of the folder. The goblin flipped the file open to the very end.

"Let's see," he murmured. "It seems that since Mr. Potter here is underage the estate has been charged to his magical guardian. That seems to be Albus Dumbledore." He paused. "It should be easy to revert that to you, Lord Naga, since you are both magical and officially Mr. Potter's guardian."
"Would Dumbledore be notified of the change?"

"He would, though not of who has taken charge of the estate."

Hadrian sighed and looked at Harry. The boy shrugged. Hadrian looked back at Krippki. "Am I allowed to ask how he's managed the estate?"

"Not normally, no, but considering you are Mr. Potter's guardian I will make an exception." The goblin scanned the documents. He began to tap his long fingers on the table. "He has made no new investments, nor has he managed any of the properties owned by the Potter estate." Krippki shook his head in disapproval. "He has attempted to withdrawal from the Potter vault, but he wasn't allowed."

"Why?" Hadrian asked.

"It is Gringotts rule that a non-family member can only withdrawal from family vaults in the presence of the underage family member or with written approval. It is to protect the family."

"A good rule," Hadrian stated. "Does he have any vault keys? Such as the key to Harry's trust vault?"

"I have a trust vault?" Harry asked.

"You do. It's your to use until you turn seventeen. You won't be allowed to withdraw anything from the main Potter vault until then," Hadrian explained. It had been the case when he used to be a Potter after all. He thought about the portraits and magical items that rested with in the main Potter vault. Harry would have a fun time sorting through them all when he came of age.

It was unfortunate that Harry's parents had been too young to get their portraits drawn. Witches and wizards had to be at least thirty for the magic to be able to settle around them and allow their memories to be imprinted on the canvas. A wizard's magic before they turned thirty was thought to be too unstable, still growing and changing. Considering that wizards lived for an average of a hundred years, a good twenty-five years more than the average muggle, thirty wasn't that old.

"To answer your question, Lord Naga, the key would have been issued to Dumbledore when Mr. Potter turned eleven to allow his guardian to withdrawal the school tuition fee and the money necessary for Mr. Potter's school supplies, if it was not requested by Mr. Potter at an earlier date," Krippki said. "As you will be more than able to take Mr. Potter through Diagon Alley, the vault key will be issued to you instead whenever Mr. Potter wishes it. You would not need to officially change the status of magical guardian for that."

"What are my limitations being considered solely Harry's non-magical guardian?"

"When Mr. Potter is at Hogwarts then any jurisdiction would fall under the duties of the magical guardian, not the muggle one. The magical guardian has the right to managing the Potter estate though he cannot directly steal gold from Mr. Potter, as we have already mentioned. He is also allowed to sit in the Potter seat at Wizengamot and assign an arranged marriage contract."

"What?" Harry sat up straighter in his seat. "I don't want an arranged marriage."

Hadrian scowled. "No, we won't let that happen to you."

He sat back and thought. If he let Dumbledore retain his magical guardianship, then Harry would be under his thumb even more than the normal relationship between headmaster and student during the Hogwarts term. It was entirely possible the man would arrange a marriage between Harry and a light
witch or wizard if he believed Harry to be too uncontrollable.

Hadrian didn't hate Dumbledore, but the more he learned about the man the more he fell in his mind. If what Krippki was saying was true, that meant that the person who could have asked for the full diagnosis from Pomfrey was Dumbledore, not Petunia, which meant the man was either willfully ignorant of Hadrian's physical state when he used to be Harry or purposefully kept the results from being had.

Add that to all the things Hadrian had discovered when he was headmaster of Hogwarts...
Dumbledore had been so biased, even when it came to his own students. His portrait had made all the excuses it wanted to, but Hadrian knew he had achieved in a year more than Dumbledore had in the many years he'd worked as the head of Hogwarts. More control over the teachers, the bias of the house system, the safety of the students—the list could go on.

Dumbledore was a manipulator of the worst kind. Hadrian knew manipulators, knew people like Tom Riddle and Lucius Malfoy also held that title, but then neither Tom nor Lucius made it a secret that they were manipulating situations for their own gain. It was expected of them. Dumbledore had people fancying him as a powerful Light Lord, someone who could do no wrong.

Well, he'd done a lot of wrong to Hadrian. And if Hadrian let him, he could do a lot of wrong to Harry too.

"Change it," Hadrian said finally. "Make me Harry's magical guardian."

"Are you sure?" Harry asked.

"It will alert Dumbledore, but since he won't know it's me we'll still have some time. I doubt Dumbledore will alert the wizarding world at large. He won't want it know that he lost Harry Potter."

Harry giggled and nodded. Krippki quickly drew up the paperwork and Hadrian signed it. "I shall have the Potter estate manager owl you. Never fear, the man will be contracted to secrecy as to your identity."

"Thank you, Krippki. Now Harry would like his trust vault key if you so please and we'll be on our way."

Krippki smirked. "I had a feeling you would be asking for it." He drew a small golden key from a drawer in his desk and handed it to Hadrian. "Griphook will take you down to your vault, Mr. Potter."

Griphook appeared at the doorway. Hadrian stood and bowed to Krippki. Harry copied him and together they followed Griphook out of the office and down the hall toward the carts.

Harry seemed to enjoy the cart ride down to his trust vault. Hadrian liked it too, though the wow of it had faded after that time he'd been bucked out of the cart when he and Ron and Hermione had invaded Gringotts to steal from Bellatrix's vault.

Griphook deposited them on the landing for Harry's vault. He waited by the cart as Hadrian walked them up to the door and inserted the key. The vault door opened with a clink.

"Woah!" Harry gasped. "This is all mine?"

"You have much more than this in the main Potter vault, but yes this should last you until your seventeen." Hadrian chuckled. "Do you remember the conversion of galleons to sickles to knuts?"
Harry nodded, walking to the end of his vault. He fiddled with a couple gemstones that were littered among the gold and then paused.

"What's this?" Harry asked, picking up an iridescent piece of cloth from atop a pile of galleons.

Hadrian wanted to gape, but he had too much control over his outward emotions to let himself. "It's an invisibility cloak." Why was that in the trust vault? "Put it on."

Harry did. Suddenly only his head was visible. He looked down and squeaked. "Where did my body go?"

Hadrian laughed and after a moment Harry joined him. He took off the cloak. "Can I keep it?"

"Of course. Your father left it for you. Rumor has it that the Potters descended from Ignotus Peverell, the original owner of that cloak. It's very rare, perhaps one of the best of its kind. I've never heard of another invisibility cloak quite as powerful as that one."

"Who's Ignotus Peverell?" Harry asked. He stuffed the cloak in his pouch, which Hadrian had spelled with an extension charm to allow for all the purchases he'd figured they'd make in the Alley. He'd stolen the idea from Hermione's beaded handbag that she'd used during the war.

"Remind me when we get home that your book for the day should be The Tales of Beedle the Bard. It's a bit young for you, but you'll enjoy it and it'll be a quick read."

"Okay."

Hadrian looked at where Harry had found the cloak. There was an envelope underneath where it had been sitting. Curious, he picked it up. The outside was addressed to just Harry. He handed it to the boy.

Harry flipped it over in his hands. "Should I open it?"

Hadrian nodded.

Harry opened the envelope and pulled out a letter. He began to read it silently. Hadrian waited patiently, watching Harry's face. The boy was crying by the time he got to the end of the letter. He thrust it at Hadrian. "Here. You read it too."

"You sure?" Hadrian said, though he wanted nothing more than to do so.

Harry nodded.

Hadrian looked down at the letter, swallowing the lump that appeared in his throat at the first line.

Prongslet,

If you're reading this, then your mother and I have died. She hadn't wanted to write a letter, saying it would jinx things, but things are already jinxed and I hadn't wanted to chance not being able to say this to you.

I don't know whom you're with currently. I hope that it's Sirius, but if Padfoot isn't there than I hope whomever you are with is treating you well. Know that your mother and I never wanted to leave you. You are the light of our lives and a treasure of the Potter household.

I have so many things I want to say to you, but I find that I can't find the words. Times are rough and perhaps we were foolish to attempt to raise you in a world riddled with war. Though it is selfish of
me, I can't bring myself to regret it. Magic shines from you like a beacon of hope. I have faith that you will let your magic guide you as you grow older, even though I may not be there to help you.

Your mother and I love you, no matter where life takes you. In our eyes, the only wrong you can commit would be by turning your back on the gift that is your magic. You truly are a special child, full of life and happiness and intelligence beyond your years.

I've left for you a few Potter items that are yours by right. The invisibility cloak you will have already found. It's been in the family for centuries. Inside this envelope is a blank piece of parchment. Once you get a wand, you just have to tap it and say 'I solemnly swear that I am up to no good' and you will be in for a treat. Make sure to always wipe the parchment blank again after using it by saying 'Mischief managed'.

Also enclosed are two rings. They are your mother and I's wedding rings. We decided to take them off prematurely on the off chance that no one would be able to should we perish. You are in no way obliged to use them—your mother's ring is perhaps too girly should you wish to marry a man and I don't want you to think that I expect you to marry a witch. I would love you even if you married a muggle. Or a giant. Or a goblin. Well, maybe not a goblin.

I have more to say, but in the end I think nothing can make up for the fact that if you are reading this your mother and I abandoned you, however much we didn't want to. All we can say is that we're sorry for doing so. We're watching you now from beyond the veil of death and we love you very much.

All my love,

Your Father—James Potter

Lord of the House of Potter

Hadrian felt fury rage through him enough that it took him several minutes to calm himself. Dumbledore must have come to this vault in Hadrian's original time and taken the cloak and letter. Hadrian didn't know how the map had ended up in Filch's desk for Fred and George to find. They had said they'd nicked it their first year, which would mean Dumbledore had somehow found his way in the vault sometime in the next year or so. Hadrian wondered if the man had received 'written approval'. It might have been enough for the goblins, since the man had only wanted to go into the trust vault and not the main vault.

Assuming he hadn't somehow gotten into the main vault in Hadrian's original time. Hadrian wanted to scream.

At least, he consoled himself, Harry had gotten what was rightfully his this time around. Even though Hadrian had ended up receiving the cloak and map, he had no idea what had happened to the wedding rings and this letter from his father, his old father, was priceless.

"Can you do that spell?" Harry asked, holding out the Marauder's Map.

"It's not a spell, it's a passcode," Hadrian corrected gently, thinking of the time when Ron had though that the spell to turn Scabbers yellow was a poem. Thinking of Scabbers had him thinking of Sirius and he had to force his hands to stop shaking. He quickly tapped the parchment with his wand. "I solemnly swear I am up to no good."

The parchment came to life in a series of lines that slowly became a map of Hogwarts. "It's Hogwarts!" Harry exclaimed. "And look, you can see people moving around."
"That's pretty amazing," Hadrian said. It was an amazing item.

"Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs," Harry murmured. "They created this?"

"I suppose we can assume Prongs was your dad," Hadrian said. "Since he called you prongslet. And he called Sirius Black Padfoot, didn't he?"

Harry nodded. "Who's Sirius?"

"He's your godfather. He was supposed to take you in if your parents died." Hadrian rubbed a hand through his hair. "He's currently in Azkaban."

"In prison?" Harry gaped. "What for?"

"It's believed that he betrayed your parents' location to Voldemort."

Harry frowned. "You don't believe that."

"You're too smart, kid," Hadrian mused aloud. "No. I don't. I can't tell you why I don't though. Just know I'm working on figuring it out."

"Okay." Harry paused. He traced the map for a moment before coming to the name of Albus Dumbledore, pacing in his office. There weren't any students in the castle yet—the term hadn't started—but the staff was there. "If he's innocent and you get him freed, will that mean I'll have to move in with him?"

"Do you want to?"

Harry shook his head silently. He didn't look at Hadrian, staring at the map. "I like living with you," he said silently.

"Sirius was your dad's best friend."

"But you rescued me from the Dursleys. And we're family."

Hadrian smiled, just a bit bittersweet. "That's true." He looked up at the ceiling. "If I can get him freed, I'll invite him to live in the manor with us. Hopefully that will appease him."

Harry grinned. "Okay!"

Hadrian looked away. "Now, we should get to shopping. Mischief managed."

The map wiped itself clean. Harry placed the map, the letter, and the rings back in the envelope before putting it in his pouch.

"Grab yourself no more than twenty galleons. All this money is yours, but I don't want you to get used to spending whatever you want. That being said, you're allowed to use up to twenty galleons on anything you find interesting in the Alley today, provided to make sure the item is okay with me first," Hadrian said.

Harry agreed and counted out twenty galleons to put in the outer pocket of his pouch, so that it wouldn't get mixed up with his items.

Hadrian had a special pouch given to any lord or lady of a vault that held more than 100,000 galleons. It was bottomless and drew directly from the vault when a value was stated to it, allowing the richer witches and wizards to be able to easily deliver values of thousands of galleons to
shopkeepers. He'd already explained to Harry that he would receive a similar pouch when he turned seventeen, but until then he had to hand gather galleons from his trust vault.

They took the cart back up to the surface and made sure to thank Griphook before leaving. Griphook gave them both a crooked smile, which had Harry grinning back. Hadrian hid his own smile behind his hand.

The Alley was just as packed as it had been before they'd gone into Gringotts. Hadrian held out his hand for Harry, which his ward grabbed tightly.

"Where do you want to go first?" Hadrian asked.

They headed to Wisearce's Wizarding Equipment first. Hadrian ended up buying a set of two-way mirrors for him and Harry to use. He figured they'd be useful if they were ever separated, or if Hadrian had to go anywhere for business and left Harry at home as he'd done a few times already. He explained their function to Harry and the boy was excited, exclaiming it was like a portable phone but cooler.

Harry tucked his mirror in his pouch and after a bit of deliberation bought himself a set of runes. They didn't work unless a wizard had a wand to activate them, but they would allow Harry to practice the various combinations he'd read about in *A Basic Guide to Runic Magic*. Hadrian figured it couldn't hurt, though he made Harry promise not to try to activate the runes with wandless magic. He knew the boy might be capable of doing so.

At Quality Quidditch Supplies, Harry bought a Montrose Magpie banner to hang in his room. They dropped by the Junk Shop after, if only to explore the knick-knacks inside. Hadrian found a couple picture frames that were in good condition and bought them with the intent of filling them with the pictures he'd taken of Harry.

Hadrian treated Harry to some ice cream from Florean Fortescue's Parlour as a break from walking. After, they dropped by Scribbulus Writing Instruments to stock up on their quills, parchment, and ink. Harry pleaded to be allowed to buy the rainbow-colored ink and Hadrian agreed, though not without telling him that he wouldn't be allowed to use it on his daily essays, as it was unprofessional. Hadrian honestly didn't mind, but he figured it'd be good practice for Hogwarts.

Harry spent nearly an hour in Gambol and Japes Wizarding Joke Shop. Hadrian asked him who it was that he wanted to prank, but Harry just grinned mischievously. Hadrian resigned himself to dodging whatever Harry decided to throw his way. It would be good practice for his *constant vigilance*.

It was getting to lunchtime, so Hadrian and Harry dropped by a little café called Butter and Bread that Hadrian had never eaten at before. It turned out to be both delicious and cheap and they left it an hour later content.

Flourish and Blotts was next. Hadrian had worried that forcing Harry to read every day would dampen Harry's thirst for pleasure reading, but it turned out to be the opposite. Harry loaded book after book in his basket and Hadrian had a sudden flash to Hermione. He wondered if the two would become friends.

After approving all of Harry's choices and double-checking with the Naga library reference book—which usually sat on a table at the library ready to be inquired at, but which he'd taken with him today just for this reason—Hadrian let Harry buy the books and stick them in his pouch.

Flourish and Blotts was to be their last stop, but as they passed by the Magical Menagerie on their
way back to the Leaky Cauldron, Harry tugged at Hadrian's hand. "Can we look at the animals?"

"Sure," Hadrian agreed. They stepped inside the shop.

There were all sorts of creatures. Cats, crups, toads, kneazles, rats, even the occasional owl—though Eeylops Owl Emporium was the more popular shop for those. In the back corner were a couple salamanders and past them a few large tanks. Hadrian walked up to them, curious, as Harry ran over to look at the puppies on the other side of the shop.

They were snake tanks, he realized. One smaller tank held several corn snakes all curled up around each other. Another held a few ball pythons. They all seemed bored or asleep.

::I will kill you.:: a voice said from beyond the pythons' tank. Hadrian wandered over to it.

::You won't. You like me.:: a second, female snake voice answered. ::You think I'm pretty.::

::I do not.::

::Liar:::

Hadrian chuckled. He finally got to the tank that the snakes were hissing from. It turned out to be two tanks. In one was a shiny black king cobra. His hood was flared as he stared at the snake in the tank next to him. That tank held a gorgeous snake with shining silver and rainbow scales. Hadrian had never seen a snake so pretty.

"Whatcha looking at?" Harry asked, coming up to him.

Hadrian gestured to the two snakes. They ignored the humans, still staring at one another. A store clerk came up to them. "Do you need any help, sirs?"

"Just wondering as to the breed of that snake," Hadrian said.

"You're not the first to ask. She's an iridescent shieldtail. A very rare breed. I hear muggles think them near extinction, but it's just cause they're a magical breed and don't let themselves be seen often."

"How are they magical?"

"Well the usual all these animals have, longer memory than normal animals and the like. But shieldtails are actually a lesser relative of the basilisk. They hypnotize their prey with their eyes until it dies from asphyxiation."

"What's that?" Harry asked.

"It means the snake makes it so that its prey stops breathing," Hadrian explained.

The clerk nodded. "They're also immune to most spells. Very special, they are. This one here is a right find. They usually don't let themselves live in captivity too long—good escape artists they are, but she seems fascinated by that king cobra next to her."

"Why aren't they in the same tank?" Hadrian asked, curious.

The clerk shook his head. "Cobras are known to eat fellow snakes. The manager decided not to chance it. Can't tell if the king is trying to charm her or intimidate her half the time."

Hadrian laughed. "We'll take them. Both of them."
Harry bounced in place. "Yes!"

The clerk stared at them. "Are you sure? Both are hard breeds to care for."

"We'll be fine," Hadrian reassured him. "Here." He approached the tanks and hissed at them. ::I know you two can understand human tongue. Would you like to come with me and my ward?::

::A speaker!:: the shieldtail said. ::How interesting.::

::You're going to make me live with her, aren't you?:: The cobra seemed to sniff in contempt. ::She'll annoy me to death.::

::I think she's right. I think you do like her.::

The cobra spat a bit of venom at the glass of his tank and Hadrian laughed. Behind him, Harry laughed too. After a moment though, he asked seriously, ::Can you promise not to attack me or my ward? I would hate to have to deal with your venom.::

The king cobra swayed and then agreed. ::Alright. I'll come with you. Only because I need to watch over her.::

::I haven't even agreed yet!:: the shieldtail protested. ::But I'll come to. It sounds fun.::

Hadrian opened the top of the shieldtail's cage and stuck his hand in. She slithered up to meet it and hoisted herself up onto him. She twisted herself around his arm. Hadrian lifted her out. ::What's your name?:: he asked.

::We snakes don't have names until we're given them. You should know that, Speaker.:: the shieldtail said.

Hadrian turned and held her out for Harry. Harry giggled as she wrapped herself around his shoulders. She wasn't nearly as long as her cobra friend, but she was still a good three feet and she stood out on Harry's black robes.

The clerk made a soft noise as Hadrian turned to the cobra's tank. "Sir, you should wear dragonhide gloves before handling him. If he bites you—"

"He won't." Hadrian opened the top and reached down. He wondered if he was still immune to snake venom. Doubtful. In his other life, when he'd been bitten by the basilisk he'd gained immunity to any venom less toxic. Which were all venoms. In Hadrian's new body though he didn't have that immunity.

Regardless, the cobra didn't strike him. Instead, he easily curled himself up Hadrian's arm and to his shoulders. He was nearly ten feet long and in the end he had to wrap most of his body around Hadrian's middle with his upper body resting around Hadrian's neck.

The clerk was pale when Hadrian turned to look at him. Hadrian smiled politely. "So, how much?"

"Uh, for both snakes, ninety-five. That'll be thirty galleons for the king cobra and sixty-five for the shieldtail. Will you need the tanks? Or, um, an order of mice?"

Hadrian shook his head. "They can hunt through the grounds." He reached his hand in his pouch and mentally thought of a hundred galleons. The requested amount appeared in a small pouch. Hadrian pulled it out of the outer pouch and handed to the clerk. "That's a hundred. The extra amount is for you. You can keep your gossip to yourself, can't you?"
The clerk nodded readily, greed in his eyes at the thought of a five-galleon tip. Hadrian figured the man would probably keep quiet about Hadrian's pareseltongue abilities, but if he didn't then at least he'd be describing Hadrian as a dark-skinned man with brown hair and eyes.

Hadrian cast a notice-me-not charm and him and Harry once the clerk left, so as not to draw attention to themselves with the snakes they were carrying. He grabbed Harry's hand.

::Ready to go home?: he asked.

::Yes:: Harry hissed back.

::Oh, the boy is a speaker too!: the shieldtail hissed in excitement. ::I will like this new home::

::You're too loud:: the cobra griped.

Harry giggled. "What will we name them?" he asked in English.

"What do you think?" Hadrian countered.

They debated back and forth as they walked to the Leaky Cauldron and flooed back to Naga Manor. In the end, they decided on Faeda for the shieldtail, because Harry said she looked like she could be related to the fae. The king cobra they called Kiran, after an old emperor of the Indian wizarding world.

Hadrian introduced the snakes to Bito and the rest of the house elves, instructing both parties to be kind to each other. He also made sure to introduce them to Garnet. He figured both snakes were too large for Garnet to consider them meals and Garnet too large for even Kiran to eat, but either way he didn't want them to hurt each other over some territorial dispute.

Faeda and Kiran were content to detach themselves from their new owners after the introductions were done and set about exploring the manor and the lands surrounding it. Hadrian told them both to inform him or Harry if they ever had trouble finding enough to eat in the grass.

::If Faeda steals all the rats, I will just have to eat her instead:: Kiran remarked.

::You can try:: Faeda retorted.

"They're like a married couple, aren't they?" Harry whispered to Hadrian.

Hadrian chuckled. "They really are."

Both snakes glared at the humans before slithering off—in separate directions of course. That had Hadrian and Harry set off in a new round of laughter. The cheer lasted them throughout the rest of the day and night.

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Hadrian considered the problem of Sirius Black as he lay in bed that night. Harry had only been with him for a few months, much earlier than he would have liked before freeing that man. Perhaps that made him a bad person. After all, Sirius didn't deserve to spend any time in Azkaban.

Hadrian sighed, throwing an arm over his forehead. Already it was far too late. He'd have a rough time waking up in the morning.

The fact of the matter was, he couldn't not free Sirius. He'd never forgive himself. What was more, it was entirely possible that Dumbledore would manipulate Sirius' freedom himself to take Harry away
from Hadrian, though he didn't know yet that it was Hadrian who had the boy.

Hadrian couldn't let Dumbledore take the credit for Sirius' release when it was the man's fault in the first place that he didn't get a trial. As head of the Wizengamot, Dumbledore could have forced a trial even though martial law was instated in the Ministry. He hadn't. Hadrian didn't know why, though he had his suspicions.

That settled it, Hadrian thought. Dumbledore wouldn't free Sirius until he exhausted all other avenues of trying to find Harry. Since Naga Manor was unplottable, he wouldn't get far. Hadrian figured he had at least until Yule before the wizard began to consider Harry's godfather.

If Hadrian were the one to free Sirius, he'd probably be able to convince the man to let him keep Harry. Sirius would owe him a great debt after all and his trust would only be cemented when Hadrian offered to let the man live in Naga Manor with them. That was the best he could do.

In November, Hadrian decided. He wanted to do the ritual on Harry's scar first so that Sirius wouldn't be there to ask questions. As long as he made sure to get the trial started before Tom Riddle had time to really recover and step back into the wizarding world, he should be all set.

That decided, Hadrian took a deep breath and cleared his thoughts. Sleep came shortly after.
Chapter 4

"Lord Naga."

Hadrian turned and smiled politely at Lord Blishwick. He was an older man, balding and with rough age lines across his face. Like many purebloods, he was distantly related to Hadrian—the closet link being through the Black family.

"I'm surprised to see you here, Lord Blishwick," Hadrian commented. He turned back to his perusal of the shelves. He was in a dusty apothecary deep inside Knockturn Alley, looking for some of the more uncommon ingredients he would need to complete Rowena's ritual. It was September 1st and Harry was back at the manor eagerly reading through *Hogwarts, A History*.

"I could say the same of you," Lord Blishwick noted. He reached past Hadrian and grabbed a jar of pixie eyeballs.

"Unfortunately, Slug & Jiggers only carries the more common potion ingredients."

"I believe it is to prevent the students who shop there from… experimenting." Lord Blishwick smirked.

Hadrian had never encountered the man in his previous life. He didn't believe him to be a Death Eater, but he knew the lord ran in the same social circles as the Malfoy, Black, and Greengrass families. He only recognized the man because of the lord ring on his finger. It was lucky that Hadrian Naga had been drilled to memorize all the family crests of Britain.

"What is it that you're looking for?" Lord Blishwick asked. "Perhaps I can be of assistance?"

Hadrian considered the man for a moment. "I need limax slime and venom from the tail of a manticore."

"It is illegal to kill manticores," Lord Blishwick said calmly.

"I'm aware. I do not wish to kill one, merely for some of its venom."

Lord Blishwick tapped his fingers against the glass of the jar he held. After a moment, he nodded. "There should be limax slime around here somewhere." He walked over to the other side of the shop. Hadrian followed him. "Ah, here."

A small jug of limax slime was deposited in his hands. Hadrian smiled. "My thanks."

"I might be able to procure you some of that manticore venom. I have family living in Greece."

"I would owe you," Hadrian said, though he was wary of debts.

Lord Blishwick's mouth curled upward in one corner. "My lovely wife is putting together a small gathering for the first of October. She wasn't sure of sending you an invitation, since you have replied to all letters with your wish to have time to settle into Britain. Is that still the case?"

Yes, Hadrian wanted to say, but he didn't. "I suppose it might be time for me to venture out into society. I would be delighted should your wife send me an invitation."

"Quite right." Lord Blishwick handed the silent store clerk the galleons for his pixie eyes. "I shall see you then, Lord Naga."
Hadrian bowed his head. As he paid for his linax slime, he considered the ramifications of the gathering. There was no doubt in his mind that it would be pureblood only and likely ancient houses to boot.

The Blishwicks would get quite a societal boon being the first to have the reclusive new Lord Naga in their home, but for Hadrian it would spark a wave of invitations to other galas and gatherings. Hadrian would have to be careful who he rejected and how. He'd never been a fan of the type of high class balls that he would be expected to attend, but if he wanted to start spreading ideas about the good qualities of muggleborn witches and wizards then he needed to get an in with those elite.

Merlin, he hated politics. All Hadrian wanted to do was go back to teaching at Hogwarts. That was where he knew how to do the most good. He loved the students—they were so young and easy in comparison to their parents. But Hadrian couldn't leave Harry alone at Naga Manor, even if he did manage to secure a teaching position from Dumbledore.

No, that would have to wait until Harry went to Hogwarts. Assuming Hadrian didn't decide that he would have to dive fully into politics instead. He didn't want to consider taking up his Wizengamot seat, but he might not be able to afford leaving it empty.

Sighing to himself, Hadrian walked out into Diagon Alley and apparated back to Naga Manor. He headed up to the second floor. A look into the library showed Harry a third of the way through his book, happily munching on sandwiches as he read.

Hadrian walked left down the hall to the potions room. He opened the door and set the jar of linax slime on a corner table. Already on it were a bowl of vampire fangs and the tattered remains of a dementor's cloak. Once he got the manticore venom, he would have all the necessary ingredients for the ritual.

Well, no, he should probably also make sure to have some pepper up and dreamless sleep potions. Both he and Harry would be exhausted afterward.

Hadrian closed the door to the potions room and headed back to the library. Harry looked up as he entered, smiling widely. "Welcome back!"

"Thanks." Hadrian sat. "How are you liking your book?"

"It's interesting." Harry smiled. "Sure I have to wait three more years for Hogwarts?"

"I'm sure." Hadrian chuckled.

Harry pouted. "I want to go now."

For some reason, that made Hadrian think of young Ginny the first time he'd met her on platform nine and three quarters, upset because she had to wait another year for Hogwarts. All that had happened between them as adults didn't change the fact that she'd been a pretty cute kid.

Of course, thinking of Ginny had him thinking of the Weasleys, which made him think of Wormtail. The rat would still be Percy's pet Scabbers at this point.

Any time he thought of Wormtail he felt a pain in his chest at the idea he was willingly leaving Sirius in Azkaban even though he had the means to get the man out. He could tell himself all he liked that it would be better to wait until after Halloween… but that didn't stop him from feeling like Dumbledore. After all, he was manipulating situations for the greater good and in doing so hurting the individuals affected by it.
"You okay?" Harry asked.

Hadrian looked up from where he'd been glaring at his hands. "Sorry?"

Harry shrugged. "You just looked kind of upset."

Hadrian took a calming breath. "I'll be fine. Don't worry."

Harry didn't look convinced, but he went back to his reading. Hadrian looked at his ward. Harry was the reason he was doing this. Harry and the rest of the children who would be affected by declining population of the wizarding world and the coming muggle realization.

The fact of the matter was, he couldn't see himself letting Harry go. Not after he'd come to care for the boy as much as he had in the months they'd been living together.

He supposed it was strange. In another life, he had been Harry Potter, but already this Harry was a different person than he'd ever been. Being taken from the Dursleys, told that magic was real and that his parents were heroes, all those things had shaped Harry into a different boy than Hadrian had been. If he added that to the fact that now, as Hadrian Naga, he had a whole new set of memories that had shaped him away from who he was as Headmaster Potter of Hogwarts, then they were perhaps not alike at all.

There were parts of Hadrian Naga that he wouldn't have liked as his old self. Naga would most certainly have been a Slytherin had he gone to Hogwarts and while Hadrian almost ended up in that house, a lot of his formative years were in Gryffindor. Hadrian was still struggling with it, trying to balance that cold calculation with his hero complex and his willingness to stop and help anyone who needed it.

He thought that it might make him a better person in the end. It might also make him another Dumbledore.

No, Hadrian told himself. He wouldn't let himself go down that road. He would rescue Sirius. It would be another couple of months, but it was better than a couple of years. He would rescue Sirius and he would find Remus and maybe Tonks and Kingsley and try to reconnect with those people he'd once cared for—at least the ones that were old enough now that he wouldn't be too weird for seeking out their friendship.

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"Hey, Hadrian?"

"Yes, Harry?"

They were sitting at the breakfast table. It was the last week of September and Hadrian had just sent off his RSVP for the Blishwick gathering.

"Do you need a wand to make potions?" Harry asked. Hadrian looked over at him and saw that he was reading that small blurb in The Daily Prophet about Severus Snape taking over for the retiring Horace Slughorn as the potions professor at Hogwarts.

Hadrian thought of Snape's first lesson, how he had commanded them to put their wands away, and then he thought of all the self-taught lessons in potions he taken in the many years after Snape's death and the many lessons his father, Henrik, had given him in this life. "No," he said. "Not for most potions. There are some that require spells at certain stages, but they're all rather advanced."
"Can you teach me some?"

"Potions?"

Harry gave him a 'duh' look. "Please?"

Hadrian blinked. "I don't suppose why not." Henrik certainly had started him on it before he'd turned eleven. Now that he was thinking about it, he wouldn't be surprised to learn that most of the Slytherins had been taught at least the basics before Hogwarts. That certainly would give some credence to why Snape favored them. As a whole, they did seem more comfortable with the method then Hadrian ever used to be.

Snape would probably still be biased against Harry in this timeline. It would be good to give Harry some of the skills he needed to get through potions.

"I have to make some dreamless sleep and pepper up potions for the Halloween ritual. They're both too complicated for you to try on your own, but you can help me with cutting ingredients and the like, if you want."

"Yes!" Harry grinned. He reached across the table and half-hugged Hadrian around the middle. "Thank you!"

Hadrian smiled down at his charge and carefully hugged him back. He wasn't used to giving or receiving much physical contact, but he knew when he'd been younger that he'd craved hugs. He never had received them from the Dursleys. "We won't be making them until a week or so before the ritual so they'll be fresh. I'll make sure to include some potions books in your readings so you can get an idea as to the theory."

"Okay." Harry pulled back. "Hadrian?"

"Yes?"

"Can I take Sundays off? From my reading and essays."

Hadrian opened his mouth and then closed it. He looked down at the date on *Montrose Daily*. It was currently Sunday. "What would you do on Sundays?"

Harry shrugged. "Play Quidditch. Read my other books." He scowled at his plate, before his expression cleared. "I like most of the books you give me, but whenever I finish reading them for the day I don't usually want to read much more, you know? And I have a lot of other books I want to read."

Hadrian nodded slowly. "I don't want to work you too hard. You are still a kid."

"I am not," Harry protested. "I can work Sundays, I just don't want to!" Hadrian smiled and after a moment Harry blushed. "I mean… ugh don't do that."

"Don't do what?"

"You know… be sneaky like that. At Hogwarts there are only classes five days a week, right?"

"Some adults work seven days."

"Not most of them. I won't have to if I don't want to."

"That is true."
"So?"

Hadrian laughed. "Okay. You can have Sundays off. Provided you work well the week before. At Hogwarts, if you slack off over the week then you'll end up having to do homework on Sundays."

"I wouldn't." Harry scrunched his nose at the thought. "I'll do all my homework the day I get it."

Hermione used to do that, Hadrian mused. He'd always followed Ron's example of waiting to the last minute. He was glad at least that Harry was planning on being a better student than he'd been.

"Good. Now, what do you want to do today?"

"Flying!"

Harry had certainly become as obsessed as Hadrian used to be. Not that he didn't still love flying, but it had lost its thrall as he'd grown. "Finish your breakfast then, and go change into your flying robes."

Fifteen minutes later, Hadrian was sitting out on the back patio as Harry zoomed across the impressive grassland that stretched back behind Naga Manor. It was a nice day and the sun was shining merrily down on him as he sat, keeping one eye on Harry but otherwise letting himself relax.

::You should take a nap, you look tired.:: Faeda said as she slithered up to his chair. Hadrian leaned down and lifted her up so she could curl up in his lap.

::I'm just relaxing.:: he told her. ::How has your day been?:

::Good. I bit Kiran while he was sleeping.:: Faeda seemed to laugh. ::He doesn't know it was me.::

::Now I do.::

Kiran approached them from the opposite direction. He looked grumpy. Hadrian hid a smile behind his hand.

::That wasn't very nice of you, Faeda.:: he admonished before a fight could start with him in the middle.

::He deserved it. He stole my breakfast.::

::You were being too slow.::

::It was dying! You can't rush these things.::

::My venom works faster.::

::Your venom is as weak as a hognose snake's.::

::You want to test that?:: Kiran raised himself up, hood flared.

::None of that.:: Hadrian told them. ::It's a nice day. Let's be peaceful.::

Kiran grumbled, but settled down. In Hadrian's lap, Faeda curled up into a tangled ball, resting her head on Hadrian's stomach.

Hadrian looked at Harry. The boy seemed to be chasing his practice snitch around. Hadrian wondered if he'd try for seeker at Hogwarts. Though, he seemed to like playing with the quaffle too, and he'd make an afternoon of hitting around the bludgers before.
Whatever Harry wanted, Hadrian mused. He'd support him. It might even depend on what openings there were in whatever house team he ended up on. Hadrian honestly had no idea if his ward would end up a Gryffindor, Slytherin, or Ravenclaw. Even a Hufflepuff, for how loyal he seemed to Hadrian, but that was most likely a byproduct of Hadrian rescuing him.

::See, you are falling asleep.:: Faeda said.

::No I'm not.:: Hadrian protested, even as he felt himself begin to drift. ::Both of you, keep an eye on Harry. Wake me up if he does anything stupid.::

::I'm not a babysitter::, Kiran said. Hadrian chuckled; sure the snake would do as asked.

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Hadrian stepped out of the fireplace at Blishwick Manor. The green fire of the floo died down behind him as Lord and Lady Blishwick both came to greet him.

"Welcome to our home," Lady Blishwick said. "Let Harper take your cloak. Harper!"

A house elf appeared with a pop and bowed. Hadrian was pleased to not that she wore a clean pillowcase and looked vibrant as house elves did when they were happy with their home life. He unclasped his outer travelling cloak—he thought it a bit silly to have to wear one even though all the travelling he'd done was through his fireplace at home and out this one, but it was tradition—and handed it to Harper. The house elf disappeared with it.

"Thank you for having me," Hadrian said. He nodded his head to Lord Blishwick and kissed the air above the back of Lady Blishwick's hand.

"It is our pleasure," Lord Blishwick said.

Hadrian was sure it was. He smiled politely.

"We're just waiting on one more. If you'll walk through those doors right there, the rest of our party is partaking in some tea before dinner."

"Sounds delightful," Hadrian said, though it really didn't. He wasn't looking forward to keeping his pureblood mask up all night.

As Lady Blishwick had told him, everyone else was indeed all sitting along the couches and chaises of the Blishwicks' parlor. Hadrian recognized Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy, as well the lords and ladies of the Greengrass, Parkinson, and Nott families.

It would indeed be a fun night, he mused to himself dryly.

"Ah, if it isn't the illustrious Lord Naga," Lucius murmured. "Please, come sit."

Hadrian had wondered if Lucius Malfoy would be the ringleader of this group of purebloods as his son had been, in a different life and likely in this one as well, for his Slytherin yearmates.

He nodded to the lord and took a seat on an empty armchair across from the Notts. Lord Nott wasn't as hunched over as Hadrian remembered him to be. Hadrian wondered if the man who'd been called to Voldemort's circle his fourth year had been in fact Theodore Nott's grandfather or uncle, for this man before him looked healthy and in his prime.

"How are you liking Britain, Lord Naga?" Lady Parkinson asked. Her voice was as shrill as her
daughter's. Hadrian disliked it immediately.

"I am enjoying myself tremendously, Lady Parkinson. I've taken a couple trips to Diagon Alley and I have to say, few markets can match it." That was a lie. Hadrian had memories of marketplaces in China, India, and even Brazil that had been greater than Diagon Alley. But there was something to say about familiarity and he would always love the Alley.

"You haven't been back before?" Lord Greengrass asked. "Your father took you and left when you were quite young, isn't that right?"

"Right after my mother passed away. I was seven," Hadrian said. "We spent many years in France, but we also travelled around."

"Did you go to Beauxbatons then?" Now Narcissa seemed interested. Hadrian suddenly remembered some rumor about how she'd wanted Draco to go to the French magical school, but Lucius had gotten his way in the end.

"I didn't, no. My father and several tutors taught me all I know." Hadrian held his expression at the spark that lit in all their eyes. He knew they would underestimate him for that. They would think him gullible and greedy for power they thought he would feel denied of because of his education background.

If only they knew.

Before anyone could say anything, Lord and Lady Blishwick entered the room. Behind them came their final guest, the beautiful dark-skinned Lady Zabini. She didn't appear to have anyone with her. Hadrian supposed she was in between husbands.

Lady Zabini caught his look and gave him a blatant, by high societal standards, once over. Hadrian looked away. He had no desire to be caught in her web.

"If you will please join us, the house elves have prepared quite a meal for this evening," Lady Blishwick said.

Everyone stood and followed their hosts into the formal dining room. Hadrian made sure he was the last to enter. He didn't want to offend anyone by choosing an improper seat but he wasn't sure if he'd be placed at the right of Lord Blishwick as the guest of honor, or across from Lady Zabini as the only other unmarried guest.

It seemed across from the lady it was. Lord Blishwick sat at the head of the table, with his wife at the other end. To his right was Lucius, and Narcissa sat across from him. The only empty seat was next to Lucius, Lady Zabini across. To Hadrian's right were Lord Nott, then Lord Greengrass, and finally Lord Parkinson.

The first course, a salad, appeared on the table with a small pop. Hadrian made sure to grab the smaller, outermost fork to eat it.

"So, Lord Naga, are we to assume you've taken up again in your ancestral home?" Lady Greengrass asked.

"I have," Hadrian acknowledged. "I barely remembered the place, but the elves maintained it whilst my father and I were out of the country."

"Our condolences on his passing," Lord Nott said.
"You must have been so lost," Lady Blishwick remarked. "You were just barely seventeen, were you not? Seventeen and already lord of such a prestigious family."

"I was in China at the time. When I returned, they'd already buried him on the property in France."
Hadrian looked down at his goblet. Remarkably, it did hurt to think about Henrik's passing. Hadrian had memories of the man, his father, and most of them were good. The former Lord Naga had been a broken man since his wife's death but he'd tried so hard to rear Hadrian into a man the Naga family could be proud of.

The subject was dropped as salad made way into the first entrée. Lord Blishwick took up attention, talking about his business prospects in the Americas. Hadrian told the man what he could about the places he'd visited there, but in fact it seemed that Lady Nott, being from Venezuela originally, was the most helpful to him.

Lord Nott turned the attention back to Hadrian when the first entrée finished and the second appeared. "To have lost your family so young, and to have been raised outside of our fair country, I have to wonder if you feel prepared to take up your responsibilities as Head of the Ancient House of Naga."

Hadrian deliberately set his fork down. He'd been expecting the question and it truly didn't bother him, but he let some offense show on his face. "I am thirty-one. I didn't return to Britain immediately upon my father's death because at the time I didn't feel ready. But I have travelled the world and learned all I could. I had more than one reason for choosing to return to Britain now, but certainly I feel prepared to take up the responsibilities of my title."

"You're unmarried," Lady Zabini stated slowly. "I wonder if perhaps that settling down may have been one of your reasons for returning now as you have."

Hadrian considered her. "Perhaps," he said. Not for her, he added silently, but it was true that he'd always wanted a large family.

However unlikely it would be that he would get it.

There was silence as dinner made way for dessert. The meal certainly had been lavish. Hadrian found he preferred Peachy's more home-cooking style of food. It reminded him of Hogwarts, but with the house elf's own personalized flair.

"We'll be having a ball at Malfoy Manor for All Hallows Eve," Narcissa began, speaking to Hadrian. "I'll send you a written invitation of course, but Lucius and I would truly be pleased if you would join our guest list."

Hadrian was so glad he had an excuse to get out of that. "I am truly sorry, Lady Malfoy. I wish I could, but I have a prior arrangement."

"Prior arrangement?" Lady Parkinson pressed, squinting her small eyes at him. "The Malfoys' gala will be the only one of worth to go to over Halloween."

Hadrian really didn't like her, or her husband. The man seemed already on his fourth glass of brandy and his cheeks were becoming pink. "Not a gala, unfortunately. The wards at my manor have deteriorated over the years. I hate to feel unsafe in my own home."

"Harvesting the magic of souls to strengthen them?" Lord Nott nodded. "Impressive. Are you doing it alone?"

"I am."
"That's dangerous," Lady Zabini said. "Surely you wish for someone to help watch over you. What if you drained yourself?" She paused, a smile stretching across her bright red lips. "I'm sure Lord and Lady Malfoy would not mind if I came to their gala a bit late."

How had this woman ever caught her however many husbands? She was as unsubtle Hagrid used to be when talking to Maxime. Hadrian supposed she was quite the beauty, but he knew her reputation. He would hate to end up another tombstone in her yard, his fortune adorning her as gemstones on her jewelry.

"Oh no, Lady Zabini." Hadrian smiled. "I would hate to have you miss it. I have heard only wonderful things from any gala to take place at Malfoy Manor." Like Death Eater meetings. "You mustn't worry. I'll have my trusted companions watching over me. Should I seem too ill, they'll be instructed to have my house elves call for a healer."

"Trusted companions?" Now Lucius was curious.

Hadrian let his smile sharpen. "My snakes, of course. There are few creatures smarter. I find them witty conversationalists and fitting company."

Everyone at the table seemed to take a collective breath.

"Snakes?" Lady Nott asked, her voice barely above a murmur.

Lord Greengrass cleared his throat. "Is it true then. I had heard the Naga line was descended of…"

"Slytherin?" Hadrian completed for him. "Why yes, that is true. Salazar Slytherin's only daughter married the last heir to the Naga family, so many generations ago. For myself, at least, the ability to speak parseltongue has carried through."

"That is truly fascinating," Lucius said. "It is a shame you were not able to go to Hogwarts, Lord Naga. Slytherin house would have benefited from your presence, I do believe."

Hadrian wanted to laugh. "Alas, we shall never know."

The conversation turned to politics. Hadrian forced himself only to listen for the rest of the night, giving ambiguous statements whenever his opinion was asked. Hadrian did have a lot of opinions, especially when the topic turned to the eligibility of muggleborns working in the ministry, but he forced himself to keep them to himself for now. He knew that was noted. Lucius Malfoy and Lord Nott were among the two who seemed to eye him most often, though Lady Greengrass was a close second. None of them seemed fooled by his silence.

The men and women here either had been or had connections to Voldemort's entire inner circle. When Tom Riddle returned, it would be interesting to see how they reported his presence and what Tom would make of it.

As Hadrian was leaving much later that night, Lord Blishwick called him aside and handed him a bottle of some dark liquid.

"The manticore venom," he said.

"You have my gratitude," Hadrian told him.

Lord Blishwick nodded. "I'm sure I'll be seeing you again, Lord Naga."

"I look forward to it, Lord Blishwick."
He floored away before he could get caught up in any more conversation. It had been the longest he'd been away from his manor since taking Harry in.

The house was silent, only a few lamps lit in the halls. Hadrian went first up the potions room to set the manticore venom down. As he walked toward the stairs, he noticed Harry's essay sitting on a table in the library. It was late, very late, but Hadrian wasn't quite ready to sleep. He sat down on a chair and picked up the essay.

Half an hour later, he put it down. He'd reread it three times, and still he was dissatisfied. It was by far the worst essay Harry had done since the first few. Not in terms of the grammar or spelling or even sentence structure, but in content….

How had Harry completely missed the point of *On the Nature of Potions*? Sure, Hadrian had never been a good potions student in school, but that was Snape's fault as much as his. And Harry had a brilliant mind, for all that he was only eight.

Beside, the conclusion of the book was very clearly laid out in the later chapters. How had Harry missed that?

Unless…

"Zesty!" Hadrian called.

Zesty appeared with a pop. "Yes, Master Hadrian?"

"Where's Harry?"

"In his bed, Master Hadrian."

"Tell me what he did after I left."

"Young Master Harry read his book for little time. Then he went outside and flew on his broomstick, he did."

"For how long?"

"All evening. Peachy had to call him for dinner, she did. He went back to reading his book, but Zesty reminded him that he had a bedtime, like Master Hadrian asked." Zesty looked down, wringing his hands. "Young Master Harry didn't go to bed when Zesty said. He stayed up another hour. Zesty couldn't order him. Zesty is sorry."

"I don't blame you, Zesty. You did what you were supposed to do." Hadrian rubbed a hand across his face. It was too late to deal with this. "Next time, if he tries to go flying without an adult present, I want you to take his broom away. Can you do that?"

"Zesty is remembering, Master Hadrian."

"Good."

.o.o.o.

The next morning, Hadrian went down to breakfast to find Harry reading through *Montrose Daily* with careful ease. It didn't fool him.

"Morning, Harry," he said. He didn't want to drag this out, but neither did he want to let the boy off immediately.
"Good morning."

Hadrian hummed. "Tell me, why are some potions ingredients crushed and others grinded?"

A flash of guilt appeared in Harry's eyes. "Um, isn't that the same thing?"

"No, it isn't." Hadrian lay his cheek on his hand, studying his charge. "A fact which is detailed in the second to last chapter of the book you were supposed to read yesterday."

"I did read it!"

Hadrian continued to stare.

"Most of it," Harry muttered. "Half of it."

"I could tell." Hadrian sighed. "What were you doing all evening instead of reading, then?"

Harry gulped. "I just wanted to fly for a little bit."

Hadrian had to reel in his anger, but that didn't stop it from seeping into his voice. "You broke three rules yesterday. Can you tell me what they are?"

Harry stayed silent. Hadrian knew he knew the rules, but refusing to answer wasn't helping his case.

Hadrian growled. "First, you stayed up past your bedtime. For that, I'm shortening it by an hour for the rest of the week." Harry still didn't look up from his plate. "Second, you went flying without me there. You know you're not supposed to do that. For that, no flying for two weeks."

Harry's head came up, his eyes wide as he stared at Hadrian with an open mouth.

"Third," Hadrian continued. "You didn't finish your assigned reading and you tried to lie about it by writing an incomplete essay. Since you obviously don't appreciate the art of potion making, you won't be helping me make the potions for the ritual on All Hallows Eve."

"But you promised!"

"It was a privilege, Harry, and privileges can be taken away. You broke three rules, Harry. Three! What do you have to say for yourself?"

Hadrian was a bit horrified to note that there were tears in the corner of Harry's eyes. "You're as bad as the Dursleys!"

"Now, wait—"

Harry didn't give him a chance to say anything more. He ran away from the table, muffled sobs following him as he raced up the stairs toward his bedroom.

Hadrian stared at Harry's empty seat for a moment. He looked down at his breakfast, no longer hungry. "Fuck," he muttered. That could have gone better, but he couldn't take anything back now. The punishment had to fit the crime and he thought he'd been totally fair.

Still, it was rough to be compared to the family Hadrian himself had suffered abuse from for even longer than Harry.

Harry stayed in his room the rest of the day. Hadrian made sure Zesty sent up food for him so he wouldn't starve himself, because that wasn't a punishment he would ever inflict on his charge. Other
than that, he left Harry to his tears. Perhaps they were needed.

.o.o.o.

Harry was cold. He tried to move his arms to cross them against the chill, but he wasn't in control of his body.

He was a snake. He had no arms.

Harry whined in the back of his throat, suddenly scared. There was another presence in his mind. It was murmuring dark things. ::Kill them. I will kill them all.::

::Stop, please!: Harry cried. He wanted to clutch his head against the pain.

The snake began to move. It was in a forest. It was annoyed. Three separate beings crowded in that body. The snake was slowly fading from the pressure of those forces.

Harry thought he might recognize his companion. He didn't know why. He'd never been in a forest like this, but that murmuring voice sounded familiar.

The world began to draw backward. Harry knew he was waking up and in that sudden surreal moment he knew where he was, what was happening.

::We're going to help you, Mr. Riddle!:: Harry called out as he found himself being pulled away.
::Just wait, we're going to save you!::

::I'll kill you. Kill them all…..::

"Harry? Harry, can you hear me?"

Harry sat up. His head was pounding. He clutched his scar and when he pulled his hand back, he realized it was bleeding. "Hadrian?"

"That's right." Hadrian had one arm around his shoulders. "You okay there?"

Harry shook his head and scooted himself closer to his guardian. "I had a dream I was Voldemort."

Hadrian was silent for a minute. "It probably wasn't a dream, Harry."

Harry nodded. "I didn't think so. I was in a snake's body. So was Voldemort. He was scary, Hadrian. He was muttering about killing people."

"Remember that he's insane. Even more so without a body, having to possess snakes to survive." Hadrian sighed. "I'm sorry you had to go through that."

Harry shrugged. "It's okay."

"It's really not." Hadrian murmured. He brushed his fingers to Harry's scar. "Just another couple weeks, and then we'll fix this."

Harry grabbed Hadrian's hand. "I'm sorry for running away earlier." He blinked away tears. "And for breaking the rules." The tears refused to go away and instead began falling harder. "I really like living with you. You're loads better than the Dursleys."

"Harry," Hadrian's voice was sad. "I hadn't meant to be so angry with you, but I was scared."
"You weren't. You're not scared of anything."

"That's not true. I'm scared of a lot of things. I'm especially scared of hurting you."

"Why?"

"Because you're in my care. What would have happened if you'd fallen off your broom while I was gone? I didn't get back until around two in the morning. I... I can't see you hurt, Harry."

Harry gulped. He hadn't thought of that. "I wasn't going to fall."

"You never know. You're a very good flier, Harry, but you are only eight. Do you think any other eight-year-olds' guardians let them fly by themselves?"

Harry wanted to say the Dursleys wouldn't have cared, but they never cared about him. That was the point. "I'm sorry."

"Just promise me you won't do it again."

Harry nodded silently. He rubbed at his eyes. "I really wanted to help you with the potions."

Hadrian sighed deeply. "How about this? Tomorrow, you have a lot of work to catch up on. You need to finish On the Nature of Potions and read the book you were supposed to today. Tomorrow's assigned book you'll read the next day along with that day's book. It will mean you won't have any time for play either day. Once you're all caught up, I'll consider letting you help me with the pepper up."

"The dreamless one is the cooler one though, you said."

"I could not let you help with either of them."

Harry nodded. It was his fault for breaking the rules. "Thank you, Hadrian."

Hadrian hummed softly. "You'll get a chance to make dreamless sleep potions on your own when you're older. If you show me you can work hard, I might even let you try your hand at some other cool ones before you go to Hogwarts."

"Okay!" Harry smiled. He looked up at his guardian as the man moved as if to leave. "Can I...?" He stopped himself before asking what was on his mind. He didn't want to sound like a baby.

"Can you what?" Hadrian's voice was patient. It gave Harry the strength to continue.

"Can I sleep with you tonight?"

Hadrian didn't answer and Harry looked away. Finally, his guardian leaned forward and kissed Harry's head. "Of course. Come on, let's get in the bed."

Harry snuggled up next to Hadrian, listening to the sound of his breathing. It settled him enough to be able to go to sleep—assured that no harm would come to him while Hadrian was there.

.o.o.o.

It was a full moon. The magic of All Hallows Eve was strong, the souls restless, the air sparking with power.

"Almost done, Harry," Hadrian whispered.
Harry was whimpering, the scar on his forehead bleeding a river of dark green goo and bright red blood.

Hadrian took the manticore venom and separated it into two glasses. He spelled one directly into Harry's stomach and, quickly as he could, drank the other himself.

Rowena had been cautious about this part of the ritual. The venom usually had to be lanced out of their bodies afterward so as not to kill them, but Salazar had reminded her that, as parselmouths, Hadrian and Harry could sweat it through. It would increase their recovery time, but in the end they would be immune to all venom less toxic than that of a manticore's.

Considering that the only more toxic was a basilisk's, it was almost as good of an immunity as Hadrian used to have.

Harry began to scream. It was perhaps one of the worst sounds Hadrian had ever heard. He wiped away tears from the corners of his eyes and continued concentrating on the Latin he was muttering.

All at once, the power seemed to surge and out of Harry's scar came a bright glow. Hadrian had expected it to be black, but no Tom's soul piece was as pure as anything could be.

The soul piece pulsed and then shot away from the ritual circle. Hadrian knew it would meet up with the other soul pieces from Voldemort's various horcruxes before flying off to wherever he currently was haunting.

Hadrian felt exhaustion rush over him. The paper in his hands dropped to the ground and caught on one of the candles lining the ritual circle. It burned. Hadrian watched it, feeling faint.

::Silly human. Drink the potion::

A snake. Why was a snake there?

Oh right, he'd asked Kiran and Faeda to watch over them.

Hadrian shakily grabbed two pepper up potions. His magic was flickering around in his core. He didn't feel confident enough spelling the potion into Harry, so he forced the boy's mouth open and poured it in. He drank his own moments later. It would help them both fight off the effects of the venom.

The dreamless sleep potions came next. Hadrian could barely maneuver himself to lie on the bed next to Harry, and then darkness spread like a comforting blanket over both of them.

::O.o.o.

In the dark forests of Albania, a figure woke as if from a long sleep. He raised his hands. His fingers were long and pale, the tips pink like the skin of a newborn baby. He rolled ungracefully to his knees.

There was a clear pond next to him. He'd been drinking from it when the pain had come. Next to him, a long snake lay in an undignified heap. He remembered her. She'd been the one to last under his possession the longest.

Possession…

He looked down at his reflection in the pond. He was younger than he thought he remembered being. His face was smooth, with only a small few age wrinkles along the corners of his mouth and
He felt more whole than he had in years. Since he was young, even.

His horcruxes!

He sat back, uncaring of his nakedness, of the grass and twigs under his legs, of the chill that was spreading through his bones.

How had he gained a body? His memories were so murky. He remembered… something about a prophecy. Merlin, he'd been obsessed.

He rubbed his temples. He needed to sort through his memories. He hadn't felt so weak in so long—so aware of his own foolhardiness. He'd need to collect himself before appearing before his followers again. He would not be seen so out of sorts.

::You did not tell me it would hurt so much,:: a voice hissed next to him.

He looked at the snake. A magical, venomous python. She was truly a spectacular creature. ::I apologize. That was… unexpected.::

The python shook her head. She slowly rose up. ::You have a body now.::

::Yes.:: He paused. ::Do you remember what happened?::

She flicked her tail. ::Six pieces of light came flying toward me. They ripped you from my body. It was so bright.:: She hunched down, obviously displeased.

Six? He only remembered making five horcruxes.

_We're going to help you, Mr. Riddle!_

His head came up as the memory of that young voice sparked in his mind. Who had that boy been? He'd been speaking in parseltongue. There was a distinctive dialect for human speakers versus snakes and he recognized it. He'd thought that he was the only parselmouth left.

He needed answers, that much was clear. He stood, shaky but growing steadier.

::Where are you going?:: the snake asked.

::Eventually, to Britain.:: He looked at the snake. ::Would you like to accompany me?::

The snake nodded her large head. ::This forest was boring before you came. If you're leaving, I'll come with you.::

He laughed. "Then you should have a name." His human voice was rough from disuse. He would need to fix that. "How does Nagini sound, my dear one?"

She hissed her pleasure, coiling herself around his legs like a cat. ::What is your name then?:: she asked. ::You never did say.::

He tilted his head, thoughts racing. He thought immediately to say the title he'd taken on, but it no longer sounded right. He had ruined his own chosen name for himself. That was discomforting.

But nor did he want to be Tom. Tom was a vile, muggle name. Hardly fit for Lord Riddle, Head of the House of Gaunt, Heir of Slytherin.
"Marvolo," he said finally. "Marvolo Riddle."

Yes, he decided. He could work with that.
"Mr. Weasley. Mrs. Weasley," Hadrian greeted. "Thank you for letting me come to your house."

"You did say it was an urgent matter, Lord Naga," Arthur said.

"Hadrian, please."

"Well then feel free to call me Arthur, and of course my wife is Molly."

Hadrian smiled. He had truly missed the Weasley family. They'd never been the same after Fred's death, and then with Ginny and him divorcing things had been so awkward. Now, perhaps he would have a chance for a fresh start.

That was… if they didn't hate him for what he was about to bring to their attention.

"Come, come, let's sit," Molly said.

She ushered Hadrian into the Burrow and toward the sitting room. Hadrian sat on one of the lumpy armchairs. Over in the corner, eight-year-old Ron and seven-year-old Ginny gave him a curious look from where they were playing chess. Though nowhere near as good as he'd become, Hadrian could see that Ron was decimating his sister's forces.

Molly and Arthur sat down on the loveseat across from Hadrian's chair. They looked curious, not expecting anything too bad Hadrian supposed.

Time to get the ball rolling. Hadrian opened his mouth, but before he could say anything he heard the sound of the front door opening. "Mom, Dad, we're home!"

"Oh, that's Bill with the twins." Molly stood and rushed over to help her eldest son. A second later, Bill came into the room. Holding both his hands, Fred and George stared up at Hadrian with mischievous expressions on their faces.

"Who're you?" Fred asked. Hadrian had a moment of deep sorrow fill him. He'd missed Fred, the twin with the slightly deeper voice, the one just a bit braver and just a bit more protective of his brother.

"My name is Hadrian Naga," he said, kneeling down to be on the twins' level. "And who are you?"

"George," Fred said. "And this is my brother Fred."

"Nice to meet you," Hadrian told them.

"I'm Ron!" Ron called from the corner. "'Cause you didn't ask earlier."

Hadrian pivoted on his heels. "So sorry, Ron. It's nice to meet you too. And who's this? Your sister?"

"Ginny," she said shyly, not looking at him.

"A pleasure."

"Okay, Fred, George, you can go play in the corner with your siblings. Lord Naga—"
"Hadrian," he reminded Molly.

She smiled. "Right, Hadrian here has something he wanted to talk to me and your father about."

Hadrian stood. He held out a hand for Bill. "You must be the eldest."

"Bill Weasley," Bill shook his hand. "Mind if I join this discussion?"

"Not at all. It concerns your family, after all."

Bill sat on a chair next to his parents. Hadrian took a moment to study his scarless face and unpierced ear. "Where do you work, Bill?" he asked, curious. "You look as though you just graduated Hogwarts."

"I did, five months ago, yes." Bill shrugged. "I'm afraid I haven't found a job yet, though. I do some contracted work every now and then, but I'm not yet a Master in my field so I don't get too many offers."

"And what field is that?"

"Curse breaking."

"Oh?" Hadrian let himself visibly think. "You know, when I was in Egypt, I ran across some goblins from Gringotts exploring through the pyramids and other tombs. They asked me if I had any skill in curse breaking and wards, but alas I'm but rudimentary in both. Maybe you could inquire at Gringotts if they still needed the help."

"That's a marvelous idea!" Arthur said. "You should do that, Bill."

Bill nodded, his young face brightening. "Yeah, I will. Thanks, Lord Naga."

"Hadrian, like I told your parents." Hadrian smiled, and then he let it drop. "I'm afraid the suspicions I bring to you today aren't of a happy nature." He could feel the tension in the room heighten. In the corner, all four of the youngest Weasley children quieted down to listen in.

"Suspicions?" Molly asked.

"Well, just one suspicion, actually." Hadrian sighed. "Your son, Percy I believe, he's at Hogwarts isn't he?"

"Yes, he's a second year," Arthur said. "What does Percy have to do with this?"

"Does he own a rat?"

"Scabbers," Bill said.

"Scabbers?" Hadrian frowned. "Is that rat missing a toe?"

"Well, yes, now that you say that... I do believe he is." Arthur said.

"He came that way, though," Molly said. "Percy found him in the yard. Why, he was only five at the time. Was just enamored with the thing. We checked the rat for diseases of course, but he was a very gentle creature and we saw no harm in letting Percy keep him."

"So that was... seven years ago?" Hadrian asked. "Just around this time of year, I bet."
"You're right. It was just around the beginning of November," Arthur said.

"If you could explain what you're getting at?" Molly asked, her eyes sharpening.

"I don't want to bring too much alarm to you, but I have reason to believe that your son's rat is a Death Eater."

"What?" Arthur, Molly, and Bill all yelled at the same time. In the corner, Fred and George were whispering furiously to one another and Ron and Ginny had completely stopped their game, staring at their parents.

"Why would you—" Molly began.

"Hear me out," Hadrian said. "Scabbers is at the very least seven years old. That's awfully long for a rat to live, isn't it? And he was found right after Voldemort," and there were the flinches, oops, "was defeated. I believe him to be an illegal animagus hiding out to escape imprisonment."

"That's an awful thing to suggest," Bill whispered. "Are you sure?"

"Well, if I'm wrong, I deeply apologize… but if I'm right, you wouldn't want a Death Eater living in your home, sleeping in your son's room, now would you?"

Molly was red in the cheeks, practically shaking. Arthur, in contrast, was pale white.

"Look," Hadrian said. "Let's go to Hogwarts. There's a simple spell that forces an animagus to change if they are one. It won't hurt the rat if he truly is just a long-lived pet."

"We can't not check," Arthur said. "Molly, what if?"

Molly opened her mouth and then closed it. She nodded briskly and stood. "Bill, watch your siblings. Your father and I are going to Hogwarts."

"Yes, Mum," Bill said meekly.

Half an hour later, Hadrian waited with Molly and Arthur in Dumbledore's office. McGonagall had gone to collect the two Weasley children that were currently at Hogwarts. She'd been told to tell Percy to take his rat, but nothing more than that.

Hadrian leaned against one of Dumbledore's many shelves, steadfastly ignoring the man's gaze. Molly and Arthur were both silent themselves, having told Dumbledore nothing yet. That had surprised Hadrian.

There was a soft sound of talking that steadily grew louder as McGonagall came up the spiral stairs to the office with Charlie and Percy.

"Mum, Dad!" Charlie said as he and his little brother arrived at the landing. "What's happening? Is everyone alright?"

Molly and Arthur exchanged a solemn glance. "Everyone's fine at the moment," Arthur said. "Percy, can we see Scabbers?"

Percy frowned, but pulled Scabbers out of his robe pocket. Hadrian resisted the urge to hex the rat immediately.

"Miss McGonagall," Hadrian spoke up. "Do you know the spell to force an animagus back into their human form?"
McGonagall reared back, but Pettigrew had already figured out what was going on. He bit Percy in the finger and when Percy dropped him went racing for the stairs.


"I don't understand," McGonagall said. "Who are you?"

"Hadrian Naga," Arthur introduced before Hadrian could. "Now, please, Minerva, can you cast the spell. To ease us all."

McGonagall blinked and looked at Dumbledore. He was frowning, but otherwise said nothing. She looked back at Pettigrew and flicked her wand, muttering a quick spell.

Pettigrew grew, turning into the sniveling human that Hadrian wanted so badly to gut. He forced himself to show surprise as everyone else in the office, save Dumbledore, gasped out loud.

"That's… Peter Pettigrew!" McGonagall said. "I thought you were dead?"

Pettigrew was still frozen from Hadrian's earlier spell. Hadrian didn't undo it. He cleared his throat. "I don't know what's going on here. I'd heard that Sirius Black had killed Peter Pettigrew years ago. Perhaps we should get some aurors in here?"

Arthur nodded and disappeared in the floo. Molly stayed, clutching her pale children to her side. Percy looked like he was about to be sick.

"I would like some answers myself," Dumbledore said. "Not the least of which being how was it that you knew that young Percy's rat was an animagus, Mr. Naga?"

"Lord Naga, if you please," Hadrian said coldly. "I don't wish to blame you for not noticing a Death Eater living in your school… but I had heard rumor that James Potter and his friends had all turned into animagus while they were in school with your silent permission. How is it that you weren't aware of Mr. Pettigrew's presence?"

"I ask again, how do you get your information?" Dumbledore said, no twinkle in his eyes.

"James… an animagus?" McGonagall murmured. "He always was quite talented at Transfiguration, but Peter was an average student." She paused. "Didn't you just say Death Eater? Why… Peter isn't —"

"One way to find out," Hadrian said. He walked forward to the still form of Pettigrew and pulled up his left sleeve. There, dark as night on Pettigrew's arm, was the dark mark.

"Oh my lands," McGonagall gasped.

"Oh, Percy," Molly cried. "He never did anything to you, did he?"

"No, Mum," Percy said. He was crying now. "I didn't know. I promise I didn't know."

"It's okay, Perce," Charlie said. "We all thought he just was a rat too."

Several auror arrived them with Arthur. One stepped forward. "Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. What seems to be going on here?"
When Hadrian got home that night, he was exhausted. He'd been questioned repeatedly by the aurors and Dumbledore. He'd avoided the headmaster and answered the aurors with his story.

Bones had put Pettigrew in a cell at the Ministry, a bracelet on his wrist to prevent his transformation and a guard on him at all times while they attempted to figure things out. She'd been disgusted to learn that Sirius Black had never been given a trial and had called for one immediately.

"Harry," Hadrian called.

Harry was in his room, getting ready for bed. Hadrian waited until he had his pajamas on before coming in. "Where were you all day?" Harry asked.

"Remember when I said I would try to prove your godfather's innocence?" Hadrian asked. He sat on the end of Harry's bed. "Well, I caught the man actually guilty of your parents' betrayal."

"You did? Does that mean Sirius is free?"

"Not yet," Hadrian said. "There'll be a public trial tomorrow. I'll have to be there, but I want you there too."

"But aren't I supposed to be a secret? That I'm living with you, I mean."

"I'm afraid that's not going to be a secret anymore after tomorrow. No matter how I play it. But that's okay. I won't let them take you away from me."

Harry nodded slowly.

Hadrian leaned forward and pulled his charge in for a hug. "Harry, the aurors asked how I knew. I couldn't explain the truth, so I told them that you used to dream about a rat." He paused.

"But I didn't."

"No. And you don't have to remember the dreams. I told them you were muttering in your sleep and it got me wondering. You won't have to say anything." He sighed. "They might call you up to the stand after to ask who you want to live with, because Sirius is your godfather."

"I'll tell them I want to live with you."

Hadrian kissed Harry on the head. "I love you, you know. I'm lucky to have you."

Harry's arms squeezed Hadrian tighter. "I love you too," he murmured. "Hadrian… can I call you my uncle?"

Hadrian blinked. "If you want. We are family, you know that."

"I know. I still just want to call you Hadrian, but I mean if anyone asks I want to say 'I'm living with my uncle.' Is that okay?"

"That's fine by me, Harry. You're the best nephew a guy could ask for."

Harry giggled. "Does that mean you'll show me how to make the cure for boils or a forgetfulness potion?"

"I'll think about it."
Hadrian and Harry flooed to the Ministry as soon as they finished breakfast. Harry kept his head down, his fringe covering his scar. The lightning bolt was much paler now with the horcrux gone from it. Hadrian wouldn't be surprised if it faded even more as Harry grew.

Hadrian held Harry's hand. As he'd expected, there was quite a crowd heading toward the antechamber that would hold the trial. Reporters would be all over this. He wondered who exactly had leaked the news. He knew Amelia Bones wouldn't have, but any of the other aurors were likely.

Hadrian met up with Bones, the Weasleys, and McGonagall outside the antechamber. They were all to be called for witness statements.

"And who's this?" Bones asked, looked at Harry.

"My ward," Hadrian said. "I have a feeling that if Sirius Black is freed, there will be questions concerning him, so I brought him along."

"Is that so?"

McGonagall took that moment to gasp. "Oh, why I recognize that hair. Can it be, young Harry Potter?"

Hadrian was glad they were secluded from the crowd, and that the only Weasleys there were Arthur, Molly, and Percy. Presumably Bill was sitting with the rest of his siblings in the audience.

Harry glanced up, his hand tight in Hadrian's. "Hello."

"I hadn't realized that Harry was placed in your care, Hadrian," Arthur said. "Weren't you out of the country until recently?"

"I was. I didn't take Harry in until I returned, but that is a long story. One that I'm sure I will have to explain at the trial."

Arthur blinked and then nodded. "Yes, of course. If Mr. Black is indeed innocent then he is Harry's godfather, isn't he?"

Bones sniffed. "Though we don't yet know about his innocence. I'm not convinced that he and Pettigrew weren't working together."

"At least he'll be given a trial as he should have initially," Hadrian said. Harry was pressed close to his side, avoiding the curious eyes of the three Weasleys and McGonagall.

"You know, Minerva," Bones said as they waited for the crowd to settle down so they could go sit in the witness stands. "You must have been a fantastic teacher to produce three animagus."

"That is, if what Dumbledore has said about the three friends is true."

"I can't take credit for that," McGonagall said. "I would have told them to register immediately if I'd known. I don't know what Albus was thinking, not making them."

"What was he thinking indeed," Molly said, her voice cold.

Hadrian hid a smirk. He saw Harry glance up at him with a sly expression. He ruffled the boy's hair and Harry giggled. When Hadrian looked back up at the other adults, they were staring at the two of them with fond expressions.
Another fifteen minutes, and they were all seated. Sirius Black was brought in, chains across his arms. Hadrian recognized the animagus band that would prevent him from transforming. He supposed Bones was taking no chances, even if she might not believe he could be one.

Bones tapped her wand to the podium as Sirius was pushed into the witness chair that faced it. The noise from the crowd died down.

"We are here today to perform the trial Sirius Black was never given," Bones said loudly. "Mr. Black will be given three drops of veritaserum."

At her words, an auror Hadrian didn't recognize did just that. Sirius took the drops without complaint. His face was pale and gaunt. Harry was silent next to Hadrian, staring at the man that should have raised him.

"State your name," Bones began.

"Sirius Orion Black."

"And your date of birth?"

"September 15th, 1959."

Huh, Hadrian thought. Sirius was one year younger than he was. That was strange to think about.

"Mr. Black, are you a Death Eater?"

"No."

There were some murmurs.

"Mr. Black, are you an animagus?"

"Yes."

"What is your form?"

"A dog."

"And were your friends animagi as well?"

"James was. He was a stag."

"What about Peter Pettigrew?"

Sirius' face twisted. "He's not my friend. Not after what he did."

"Answer the question, Mr. Black."

Sirius looked down. "He's a rat."

There were more murmurs from the crowd. Bones held up her hand and they quieted down. Hadrian wondered if they noticed Sirius' use of present tense.

"What did Peter Pettigrew do, Mr. Black?"

"He betrayed us." Hadrian looked away as soon as he noticed the tears glimmering in the corners of Sirius' eyes. "He betrayed James and Lily's location to You-Know-Who."
"Wait just a minute!" Fudge said, standing from his seat next to Dumbledore. "If Pettigrew was the real betrayer, then why were you caught saying 'It's my fault'?"

Sirius scowled. "It was my fault! I suggested it, the secret keeper switch. I thought we could trust Peter." He buried his face in his chained hands. "It was all my fault."

Bones coughed. "Minister Fudge, if you could please not interrupt the trial."

Fudge sat. Hadrian noticed Dumbledore whispering something in his ear. He frowned. He flicked his gaze to Fudge's right and saw Lucius Malfoy sitting there with his family. Young Draco was free of a sneer, looking as wide-eyed as Harry at the proceedings.

What did it say about Hadrian that he would prefer a Fudge controlled by Malfoy over one who listened to Dumbledore?

"Thank you, Mr. Black. Give him the antidote." It was administered and Sirius was pulled aside to a seat surrounded by aurors. The trial was far from over.

Pettigrew was brought out then. Sirius jerked, almost jumping from his seat before the auror next to him froze him in place. Hadrian kept a tight hold on the back of Harry's neck, trying to comfort his charge. And to remind himself that he couldn't do exactly what Sirius was visibly thinking.

Pettigrew was placed on the same witness chair Sirius had just vacated and given the three drops of veritaserum.

"State your name," Bones said.

"Peter Pettigrew."

"Date of birth?"

"February 3rd, 1960."

Harry's parents had also been born in 1960, Hadrian remembered. Sirius must be like Hermione, he mused. Both of their birthdays just missed the September 1st cut so they ended up being twelve for most of their first year and well into eighteen when they graduated Hogwarts.

"Are you an animagus?"

"Yes."

"What is your form?"

"A rat."

"When did you become an animagus?"

"In my sixth year at Hogwarts. James and Sirius and I all did."

"And what was James Potter's form?"

"A stag."

"And Sirius Black."

"A black dog."
Bones nodded. Hadrian supposed she was just checking to make sure the stories were all straight and therefore the veritaserum was hopefully working.

"Mr. Pettigrew, are you a Death Eater?"

"Yes."

"Did you willingly become one?"

Hadrian saw Pettigrew visibly struggling against the serum. Finally, he blurted out a meek, "Yes." And then he went on with, "But you don't understand. The Dark Lord's power is too great to—"

"Quiet!" Bones shouted. It served to silence both Pettigrew and the crowd, which were stunned at this proclamation.

"On October 31st, 1981, were you the Potters' secret keeper?"

"Yes."

"Did you give their location to the man known as Lord Voldemort?"

Hadrian was surprised at Bones' guts. His esteem for her rose when she said the monster's name.

"Yes."

More yelling from the crowd. Bones held up a hand, though it took them a while to settle down then.

"What happened when Sirius Black cornered you that night?"

"I was scared. He was going to kill me." Pettigrew struggled, sweat beading across his forehead. "I blew up the street. Didn't mean to get the muggles, just wanted to stop Sirius. He shielded himself. I cut off my finger and turned into my rat form. I escaped down the sewer."

"And after that?"

"I hid out for a while, but I didn't want to live in the sewer forever. I snuck back to the wizarding world, hoping that I could come out of hiding with Sirius in Azkaban, but I heard they'd declared me dead so I couldn't. I found myself at this weird house and this little redheaded boy picked me up and made me his pet." Pettigrew grinned. "It was a good life. I didn't have to do anything you see. I was a good pet."

"You disgust me," that was Molly Weasley. She was gripping Percy's shoulders. The boy was crying into his hands.

Bones shot her a look, but didn't reprimand her for the statement. Hadrian was sure she was thinking the same thing.

"If the Wizengamot will cast a vote. All in favor of Peter Pettigrew's innocence, raise their hand."

No hand rose.

"His guilt?"

Every member of the Wizengamot raised their hand, even the ones Hadrian knew to be Death Eaters themselves. He supposed with that overwhelming evidence it would look strange for them not to.
"With that, I proclaim Peter Pettigrew guilty of the crimes of James and Lily Potter's murder by association, the murder of twelve muggles, the attempted murder of Sirius Black, and being an illegal animagus. For these crimes, I sentence him for a life imprisonment in Azkaban." She tapped her wand. "Take him away."

The aurors who'd been guarding Pettigrew grabbed him roughly by the shoulders. He began to plead with all who would listen. Hadrian tuned him out. As soon as the man was gone, Bones called McGonagall to the stand. She explained her ignorance of the animagi that she'd taught and how she'd been instructed by Arthur and Molly to find their son, Percy, and cast the spell on the rat. She didn't mention Hadrian's part in it all. He wondered why.

Bones called Arthur Weasley to the chair next. Arthur gave his recount of finding Pettigrew seven years before and willingly took veritaserum to show that he had no idea they were housing a Death Eater. When asked about how they came to suspect that their rat was a Death Eater, Arthur didn't explicitly say anything about Hadrian. Instead, he said they'd been given a tip and were uncomfortable not checking to make sure. Molly did the same, and then after young Percy was called with the permission of his parents.

Hadrian wondered if the three—Molly, Arthur, and McGonagall—had talked this small deception out beforehand. Were they protecting him? And if so, why? Or did they suspect him? He would have to think on it.

Bones nodded as Percy was given the antidote and hopped off the chair to return to his parents at the witness seating. "Very well, on behalf of the Ministry I declare the Weasley family free of any charges that could be laid upon them for unknowingly housing Peter Pettigrew. Furthermore, I award them two hundred galleons in reparations."

"What?" Fudge stood. "Madam Bones, you can't do that!"

Fudge was digging his own media-fueled grave, Hadrian mused. He could see the reporters in the room frantically writing down every comment.

He was glad that Bones had taken his suggestion from yesterday about the Weasleys, though he hadn't expected her to pay them two hundred galleons.

"Minister, though you were not in charge at the time, I believe it a grave oversight of the Ministry to have not given Mr. Black a trial," Bones said. "Had he been, we would have caught Pettigrew sooner and the animagus wouldn't have spent years living in the Weasleys' home. Twenty-five galleons for every year they unwittingly let a Death Eater sleep with their children and twenty-five to cover the cost of keeping that pet is the least the Ministry could afford them."

Arthur was crying and Molly looked close to it herself. Hadrian heard her whispering to Percy, "It's okay, Percy. We'll buy you a new pet. How about an owl?"

"So long as you make sure it's not an animagus," Percy whispered back, choking on his own tears.

"Of course we will," Molly reassured her son.

Hadrian was happy for them. Maybe his family having a little more money (or a lot more in their eyes) would help Ron get over his jealousy when he and Harry went to school together. Hey, who knew… maybe he'd be content with the bit of fame the Weasleys would surely get from this episode.

Bones called Sirius back to the chair. "Sirius Black, you have spent seven years in Azkaban. You were innocent of all crimes charged against you, except that you are in fact an illegal animagus. The
usual punishment for not registering is up to a year in Azkaban or a fine. If we take off one of your years, you still spent six years in Azkaban beyond your sentence. For those six years, the Ministry will pay you six hundred galleons, as well as all the medical costs you'll procure from healing your time in prison." She paused and looked over at Hadrian. "As a free man, you are still Harry Potter's guardian. I would ask that Harry's current guardian step forward."

Dumbledore began to stand, but then Hadrian stepped forward, Harry trailing behind him.

"Madam Bones," he said. "My name is Hadrian Naga. I am Harry's current legal and magical guardian."

"Lord Naga." Bones inclined her head. Hadrian saw Sirius staring at him and then turning his eyes on Harry. The man's face flickered with so many emotions, Hadrian couldn't begin to place them. "And Mr. Potter."

Harry shyly stepped forward to stand next to Hadrian, on the far side from Sirius. Hadrian supposed the man did look a bit frightening at the moment. He was still dressed in his prison greys and he obviously hadn't washed in days, if not years.

"I would like to explain to the audience how it was I came to be Harry's guardian," Hadrian said. He locked eyes with Dumbledore briefly and then looked away. "I've only been back in Britain since June. At Naga Manor there is a tapestry that depicts all who have Naga blood. I was stunned to see Harry Potter, the boy I had only known at the time as the savior of the British wizarding world, on that tapestry. His mother, Lily Potter née Evans, had always been assumed to be a muggleborn witch. I found her on that tapestry. Her grandmother was Lillian Naga, who married a muggle. I assume she was a squib, though I am not certain."

Severus Snape was in the crowd, Hadrian realized then. The man was deathly pale. Hadrian wondered if it was from anger that Sirius was free, or because of the mention of Lily.

"Regardless, I learned that Harry was related to me, as is Lily's sister, Petunia Dursley née Evans, who I found out was charged with raising Harry. Though Petunia comes from magic, as does her son Dudley, I sensed no magic in either of them. In fact, as I talked to Petunia I learned that she was a bit fearful of magic and what it could do. All she knew about her sister's death was that a bad wizard had killed her and suddenly there was a baby on her doorstep with a letter addressed to her."

"I'm sorry, Lord Naga," Bones interrupted. "Did you say that Mrs. Dursley found Mr. Potter on her doorstep?"

"That's correct. At the end of October, whoever had taken Harry after his parents were found had wrapped him in a blanket and placed him on the front doorstep of the Dursley residence. That person didn't even talk to Petunia, instead leaving the letter I mentioned explaining in very simple detail what happened and charging Petunia with raising another child on top of her own."

Harry was shaking slightly. Hadrian wrapped his arm around him and pulled him close. He knew this was hard on his ward. "As I talked to Petunia, I learned that she found herself and her husband ill-equipped to raise a magical child. Already Harry had shown tremendous signs of accidental magic and Petunia was fearful of the muggles in her neighborhood suspecting something."

"Acting a bit on impulse, I must admit, I offered to take Harry. I am unmarried, but I have always wanted a family. Harry deserves to be raised in his parents' world and I am related to him. Petunia was more than happy to sign over her rights to Harry and, once I made sure it was okay with Harry himself, I took him home with me."
Bones cleared her throat, obviously stunned. "And Mr. Potter, what do you have to say to all of this?"

Harry looked up at the head auror. "I love living with Hadrian. He's taught me all sorts of stuff I didn't know before. He even took me to a quidditch match!" Harry smiled brightly and Hadrian could see the room instantly charmed. "At Aunt Petunia's house, I didn't really feel at home. I didn't know why, but then Hadrian came and told me I was magic and I was so excited. He's really great." He paused and screwed up his face. "Even if he does give me homework sometimes."

"Homework?" Bones sounded amused.

Harry nodded. "I have to read books like *On the Nature of Potions* and *Hogwarts, A History* and write an essay on their main point. Hadrian said it was so I'd be prepared for Hogwarts." He sighed. "Well, I do like the books so I guess writing essays is okay. I just wish I had more time for flying."

Hadrian had to control his face so as not to grin. He really wouldn't be surprised if Harry ended up being sorted into Slytherin. The boy was a natural.

"I'm sure you do." Bones nodded, covering her own smile. "Now Harry, I don't know if anyone told you, but this man here is your godfather. That means that he was supposed to raise you."

Harry made a show of looking at Sirius and smiling hesitantly. "I know," he said. "But I really like living with Hadrian." He scuffed his right foot across the floor. "Maybe Sirius could come live with us?" He looked at Hadrian. "Please, Hadrian? Then I could live with both of you."

Hadrian blinked slowly, acting shocked, and looked at Sirius. The man had his mouth hanging open. "Well, I don't mind. Naga Manor certainly has the room and it would be nice to have another hand to help raise you." He ruffled Harry's hair and, like before, Harry giggled and ducked aside. "If Mr. Black wants to, that is."

Everyone looked at Sirius. He scratched his full beard. "I... I would love a chance to get to know you, Harry," he said finally. "I'm sorry I wasn't there to raise you, but it sounds like you like where you are. I don't want to take that away from you."

Hadrian gave Sirius a grateful smile, which Sirius cautiously returned.

"That settles it then," Bones said. "Mr. Black, I'm afraid I have to insist that you stay at St. Mungo's for a bit. You've been dealt some damage over the years and they'll want to look you over. Once you're released, I'm certain you and Lord Naga can get in contact over any details, but it seems that Harry's official guardian will stay as Lord Naga."

Hadrian bowed his head and Harry cheered.

They managed to escape after the trial without talking to anyone. Harry was in high spirits, and truthfully Hadrian was as well, though his brain was still picking apart the consequences and questions that the trial had brought.

So many questions, Hadrian mused.

Well, there was one thing he wanted to do immediately. While Harry happily chatted with Faeda and Kiran, telling them all about the trial and the fact that they'd have a new person living with them soon, Hadrian drew out a piece of parchment.

*Mr. Remus Lupin,*
My name is Hadrian Naga. I am the current guardian of Harry Potter. I'm writing to you because of some events that went on today. If you get the Daily Prophet wherever you are, then you'll soon learn that Sirius Black was declared innocent. I'll let you read the report on the trial in the papers.

As it were, Sirius is going to come live with Harry and I in Naga Manor as soon as he is declared healthy enough by the healers. As the other friend of Harry's father (and dare I presume, the Marauder known as Moony?) I would like to invite you to come visit us. Harry would be delighted to meet another of his parents' friends.

Please respond as soon as you are able. There are plenty of rooms in my home, so I don't want you to be worried about putting me out.

Hope this letter finds you well,

Hadrian, Lord of the House of Naga

Kreacher rubbed his eyes. He was so tired. He should be grateful that his old master's father, Lord Arcturus Black, had made sure to reinstate his bond to the magic of Grimmauld Place when his mistress had died.

But he was so tired. He wanted to have been allowed to die when his mistress had.

No, he reminded himself. He couldn't give up yet. He had to destroy the locket. Young Master Regulus had trusted him with it. Had trusted him to destroy it.

And Kreacher had failed. For years and years and years.

Kreacher threw himself on the floor, a sudden crying bout coming over him. He was a worthless house elf. He would never get his head mounted on the wall with his family. He would die alone and his body would rot and they would burn it and forget all about him because he'd failed.

Kreacher finished crying and picked himself up. He wandered to the parlor. He touched the tapestry of the family he'd served faithfully for years.

One more try, Kreacher thought drying his eyes. He could try again, he could. He had to keep trying. For Young Master Regulus.

Kreacher popped into the study where he'd put the locket. He grabbed it. It felt different... less heavy. Kreacher must be getting old. He had such a hard time remembering these things.

He popped back in front of the tapestry. He looked at Regulus' name and set the locket in front of it.

Taking a deep breath, Kreacher concentrated on the locket. He thought of the strongest cleaning magic he could. He would clean the locket right out of existence, he would.

Kreacher closed his eyes and snapped his fingers.

There was a great shattering sound. When Kreacher opened his eyes, he found the locket in pieces on the ground. He stared. Rubbed his eyes. Stared some more.

"Kreacher has done it!" he yelled. "Look, Young Master! Kreacher has done what you asked!"

The tapestry didn't answer. Kreacher blinked and noticed something. His spell had been big. He'd fixed the tapestry. All the burn marks were gone. He could clearly see Young Master Sirius' name
next to Young Master Regulus.

Kreacher looked at the name. Young Master Sirius was a blood traitor, he remembered vaguely… except Young Master Regulus had said something hadn't he? He'd said Sirius' name when he'd died. Something…

_For Sirius. Kreacher, you must destroy the locket._

Kreacher rubbed his ears again. Young Master Regulus had wanted the locket destroyed for his brother. Maybe… maybe Young Master Regulus had convinced Young Master Sirius to come back to the family? Maybe Young Master Sirius would return some day?

Kreacher thought he would like that. His mistress had been so sad when Young Master Sirius had left. She hadn't come out of her room for days.

Kreacher snapped his fingers and the remains of the locket disappeared. He looked around and noticed how dusty the room was.

This wouldn't do, he thought. If Young Master Sirius returned, he wouldn't want to live in such a dirty house. Kreacher had been such a bad elf. He would punish himself, he would, and then he would start cleaning.
Chapter 6

Hadrian woke up to Harry jumping on his bed. He yawned. "Is there something you need?"

"Just for you to get up."

"Is it Yule morning?"

Harry giggled. Hadrian was glad he'd caught the reference. In his old life, he'd only ever known Yule as Christmas, but Hadrian Naga had been raised a wizard and he knew the holiday as Yule. Hadrian had made sure to give Harry a book on wizarding holidays a few weeks ago.

"Not yet. We've still got almost two months."

Hadrian huffed. He sat up, rubbing his eyes. "Then why are you waking me up?"

"We're bringing Sirius home today! You've got to eat breakfast so we can go."

Hadrian chuckled. "He's not a pet, you know." Except, thinking about it, he kind of was. They were indeed going to be picking up an excitable black dog from St. Mungo's today… even if he was in human form.

Harry rolled his eyes. "I'm going to start eating without you."

"I'll be down soon." Hadrian poked Harry in the side. The boy yelled happily and ran away. Hadrian covered his laugh in another yawn and got out of bed.

Just about an hour later, he and Harry were waiting by the floo at St. Mungo's as Sirius came to join them. He'd been in the healers' care for ten days.

Hadrian had to say, Sirius looked much better. They'd obviously gotten him set on some nutrient regime—the gauntness of his cheeks was less pronounced. He was clean and wearing a plain set of black robes, his face clear of that untamed beard and his hair cut back to shoulder-length.

His eyes still spoke of shadowed horrors, but they were clearer than Hadrian remembered ever seeing them. He supposed that was what being officially free would do to a man.

"Sirius!" Harry called, waving. Sirius saw them and walked over, a smile spreading across his lips.

"Harry," Sirius said. "And, Lord Naga, wasn't it?"

"Hadrian," he said. "We are going to be living in the same house, after all."

"Then call me Sirius." Sirius held out a hand. Hadrian grasped it. "I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am. Madam Bones said you were the one who had the suspicion about Wormtail."

"Wormtail?" Harry asked. "Wasn't he one of the Marauders?"

Sirius looked down at Harry. "Uh, yes. He… Peter used to be our friend, your dad and I."

Harry scrunched his nose and nodded. "Then who was Moony? Was he an animagus too?"

"Let's take this conversation back to the manor," Hadrian said before they could get into it. "The floo is just Naga Manor. The wards have already been adjusted for you."
Sirius nodded. They all flooed back, ending up in the sitting room. Hadrian waved for Sirius to sit down. The man chose a burgundy armchair. Harry sat next to Hadrian on one of the green couches.

"Bito, some tea please," Hadrian called.

Bito came a moment later, a tray of tea in his hands. He set it down on the coffee table in between the chairs and left with a pop.

Sirius grabbed a teacup and sipped it slowly. "It's been too long," he murmured. Hadrian was pleased to note that his hands only had the finest of tremors, instead of outright shakes.

"So, Moony?" Harry pressed.

"Remus Lupin, is his name," Sirius said. "He wasn't an animagus. Actually, he was the reason we became animagus. Remus is a werewolf."

"Oh!" Harry looked at Hadrian. "Is that why you had me read Werewolves, As Mindless as Dragons are Harmless?"

"Well, no, I didn't know Mr. Lupin was a werewolf. I just think you should respect all magical creatures. Werewolves get a bad hype, but with the invention of Wolfsbane, they're just as capable as any other witch or wizard," Hadrian lied smoothly. "I suppose that does explain why his nickname was Moony, though."

"How do you know our nicknames?" Sirius asked.

"My dad left me the map," Harry explained. "And a letter. Do you want to read it?"

Sirius nodded. Harry ran up to his room. While he was gone, Hadrian looked hard at Sirius. "I know you fought for the light in the war," he said slowly. "And while I have never considered supporting Voldemort, I want you to know that I am not light."

"I figured not, with the name Naga," Sirius said.

"I would have figured you dark with the name Black," Hadrian countered. "But yes, I follow in my family's footsteps. I'm not completely dark. I'm grey and I have no doubt Harry will become so as well as he grows. He'd not a copy of his father."

"Lily was a grey witch," Sirius said. "I don't know how much James ever realized that, but I knew." He took a deep breath and looked down at his tea. "I've always been grey. As much as I preached the light, I couldn't get rid of my family background. In Azkaban, I realized that maybe I didn't want to. It was a part of me just as much as the light is."

Hadrian nodded. He listened for Harry's footsteps. They were coming back down. "I've heard rumor of your anti-Slytherin prejudice. The Naga family are descendant of Slytherin himself, and Harry holds that blood. I won't be surprised if he's sorted into that house at Hogwarts."

"I understand. I… I'll keep my thoughts to myself."

"That's all I can ask for."

Harry returned. He thrust the letter at Sirius. Sirius read it slowly. When he was done, he set it on the table. His hands were shaking now. "You have your dad's hair, you know. The Potter curse, he used to call it. But I can see your mom in your face. Her nose, her cheekbones… and those eyes." He looked at Hadrian. "That has to be a Naga thing."
"As Naga as black hair is for your family," Hadrian agreed. "It's surprising that my father never contacted Lily, but I suppose we were out of the country by the time she was off to Hogwarts. He probably thought she would be a muggle with squib blood like the rest of her family."

"My mum was the most powerful witch at Hogwarts!" Harry declared.

Sirius laughed. "Well she was Head Girl. And your dad was Head Boy."

Harry grinned. "I'll be Head Boy too, then."

"Work hard, and I'm sure you can be," Hadrian said. "Of course, you'll have to get your Hogwarts letter first."

Harry huffed dramatically.

Hadrian looked at Sirius. "On the subject of Remus Lupin, I sent him a letter after your trial. I didn't know he was a werewolf—though I suspected him to be Moony. He was the only other one I've heard that ran around with your group." Hadrian shook his head. "Not that him being a werewolf really matters."

"Did he reply?" Sirius asked. "I'm afraid I haven't contacted him yet."

Hadrian nodded. "He's going to be here at the end of the week. I don't know how long he'll stay, but I'm going to set him up a room in the manor just as I have for you. I hope that's okay."

Sirius nodded slowly. "It will be good to see him, I think." He sighed. "If he forgives me."

"Why would he need to forgive you? You're innocent," Harry said.

"Not for that. I... we knew there was a spy for You-Know-Who, you see," Sirius said. He glanced hesitantly at Hadrian, visibly wondering how much he could tell the eight-year-old. "We suspected him as the traitor. He wasn't, of course, and I should have trusted him."

Harry frowned. "Well then you should apologize." He shrugged. "He probably thought you were actually guilty, so really you two are even. You can start over."

Hadrian smiled. "Hopefully they'll be able to, but that's between Sirius and Mr. Lupin. Now, why don't we give Sirius a tour of the house?"

Harry nodded, jumping to his feet. He led the tour, showing Sirius around through the bottom floor, the second floor, and the third floor. "The fourth floor is warded for family only, Hadrian said, so I can't bring you up there." Harry explained. "Not unless you marry Hadrian."

Hadrian blinked and then chuckled. "I don't think that's going to happen."

"Why not? I'll have you know I'm a perfect boyfriend," Sirius said, mock offended.

"I'm sure," Hadrian remarked dryly. "I have also heard rumors of your playboy ways. I'm afraid I'm into commitment." He paused. "Beside, we're related, through my mother."

"Oh?" Sirius frowned. "Which one of my many cousins was she?"

"Lycoris. Your great aunt, I believe. Which would make us... second cousins?"

"Yeah, that's a bit too close for me." Sirius shook his head. "My parents were too, you know, second cousins. I always figured that contributed to my insanity."
"Well, at least you admit it."

"Hadrian, which room is Sirius'?" Harry asked, obviously wanting to move on.

"Which ever one he'd like."

Hadrian wasn't surprised when Sirius ended up choosing the red bedroom. The man bounced on the bed, grinning, and then looked over at the wardrobe. "I'm going to need to get a new set of clothes. And a new wand." He sighed. "The ministry snapped mine."

"We'll can go today, after lunch," Hadrian said. "Assuming you have access to your vault."

"Yes, my grandfather wrote me. He granted me back my personal vault. Apparently it was given to him by Gringotts cause he's the current Lord Black when I was incarcerated. He's also in charge of my dear cousin Bellatrix's vault. Anyway, I got mine back, I just need to get the key from a goblin."

"Your grandfather?"

"Arcturus. I guess he's your uncle."

"Oh, yeah," Hadrian said. He frowned. "He is my uncle, isn't he?" Hadrian tried to remember when Arcturus died in his original timeline. '91 or '92, he thought. Well, the man only had a couple more years then.

"Can I go to Diagon Alley with you?" Harry asked.

"Have you finished your work for the day?" Hadrian countered.

"It's Sunday."

"Oh, I suppose it is." Hadrian tapped his chin. "Yes, you can, but if things start to get too dangerous we're leaving." He sighed. "I don't want you to be destroyed by the crowd. Now that they know you're living in the wizarding world they'll be rampant to get your attention."

Harry scrunched his nose. "That's stupid."

"It is, but we can't change it. Hopefully by the time you go to Hogwarts they'll calm down."

Harry nodded.

Hadrian looked back at Sirius. "Sodder!" he called.

Sodder appeared with a pop. He bowed to Hadrian. "Yes, Master Hadrian?"

"Sodder, this is Sirius. He'll be living with us for as long as he likes. I want you to listen for him." Hadrian nodded to the man. "If you ever need anything, feel free to call Sodder. But I will warn you, I don't tolerate any house elf abuse in my home."

"Of course," Sirius said. "Thank you, Sodder."

Sodder bowed again and disappeared.

"There's a couple more members of the household you need to meet then," Hadrian said. "Let's go back downstairs. Harry, you want to run and find Faeda and Kiran?"

Harry nodded and ran out of the bedroom.
Hadrian and Sirius walked down the stairs at a more leisure pace. As they reached the sitting room, Garnet flew in through an open window. Hadrian held out his arm for the owl to land. "Ah, well here's another one. Sirius, this is my owl, Garnet. Feel free to use him if you need to send out letters."

"I think I might get my own in the Alley," Sirius said. "Though that's a beautiful bird."

Garnet clicked his beak. He held out his leg. Hadrian untied the letter attached. "Thanks." Garnet blinked at him and flew off.

"Mind if I read this?" Hadrian asked, waving the letter.

Sirius shook his head.

Hadrian opened it.

Dear Hadrian,

Arthur and I wanted to thank you for your help in catching Pettigrew. Percy is much happier now with his new owl, and of course Bill and Charlie are as well with theirs. I think it might have started a bit of a trend in the family. Arthur's now thinking of getting a replacement for our poor Errol. The old thing can hardly deliver letters anymore. I'm only glad you sent us a letter first, so that I could send this back with your beautiful bird. After seeing him, Ron was adamant about getting a bird just like him. I told him he had to wait until Hogwarts. I'm sure you understand the trouble, what with raising a boy Ron's age.

To answer your question, yes Minerva, Arthur, and I did talk about it earlier. We didn't mention your involvement for several reasons, the first of which being that we didn't want to put scrutiny on you. You rescued us from living with a Death Eater in our home and we thought it would be ill willed of us to begin to barrage you with information as to how you knew, especially since you already explained it to the aurors.

I know that explanation probably doesn't satisfy you. Truthfully, Minerva had wanted to do investigation of her own after the trial if it was true indeed that Sirius Black was innocent. We all learned to follow our own rules during the previous war and many of us learned a mistrust of the Ministry judgment system. Too right we were.

That being said, we talked after and decided that we are certainly glad we kept the spotlight off of you. As Harry's guardian, we can only guess that you have been extra vigilant about Death Eaters and we thank you for that. Harry seems so happy in your care and I'm glad you took him in. He deserves to be raised a wizard.

If you, Harry, and Sirius if he so wishes to, would ever like to come to the Burrow for lunch or dinner, you are more than welcome to. I'm sure Harry would love to hang out with some kids his age and my Ron is always on the lookout for playmates who aren't his siblings.

Best wishes to you,

Molly Weasley

Hadrian closed the letter and placed it back in the envelope. He frowned down at it.

"Bad news?" Sirius asked.

"No," Hadrian said. "Just the Weasleys asking if we wanted to come for lunch some time."
"Bit long for just an invitation for lunch," Sirius said.

Hadrian smiled and said nothing. Sirius snorted and looked away.

He wasn't sure how he felt about the letter, if he was being honest with himself. He understood that McGonagall had wanted to investigate him without Ministry interference. He could even imagine Dumbledore asking her to do so. He was sure that if she still did, even with Molly's assurance that she wouldn't, she wouldn't find much.

What he wasn't sure about was going to the Burrow and letting Harry and Ron be friends. He wasn't convinced that it was a friendship that would suit Harry well. Not if Ron turned out to be just as prone to jealousy and betrayal as he had in Hadrian's former life.

Hadrian would let Harry decide that for himself, he figured, but at Hogwarts. He knew that if he let the Weasleys be Harry's first friends his age... it would create the same bond that had kept Hadrian sticking by Ron's side even after countless strikes against him. He didn't want Harry to have to deal with that much back and forth.

Harry took that moment to return. Slithering along behind him were Faeda and Kiran.

"Those are snakes!" Sirius yelled, jumping to his feet.

Hadrian and Harry laughed and after a moment Sirius joined them.

"Yes, they are snakes," Hadrian said. "I'm a parselmouth. So is Harry. We both get it from the Naga line."

Sirius stared and then visibly held himself back from saying the first thing that must have come to his head. He cleared his throat. "So you have pet snakes." He nodded. "Okay. What were their names again?"

"This is Faeda," Harry said. "She's an iridescent shieldtail. And this is Kiran. He's a king cobra."

::This is Sirius, as you can guess,:: Hadrian told them. ::Be nice to him.::

Kiran hissed. ::He smells like dog.::

Harry giggled. At Sirius' confused look he explained, "He said you smell like dog."

Sirius grinned. "Can't help that." He looked at Hadrian. "Can I?"

"Of course, whenever you want."

Sirius nodded and shifted. Padfoot wagged his tail, his coat a bit mangy but otherwise fairly healthy. Harry shouted in delight and reached forward. Padfoot let himself be pet, thumping his tail on the floor.

::I don't like this,:: Faeda said, protesting the vibrations. ::Make him stop.::

Hadrian chuckled and picked her up. Kiran slithered up onto the table as Faeda curled herself around Hadrian's neck and shoulders.

Peachy popped into the room. "Lunch is ready, Masters."

"Thank you, Peachy." Hadrian said. "Okay children, let's eat."
Diagon Alley was far less crowded than it had been the last time Hadrian had taken Harry, for which he was grateful. Where the crowd had worked to their advantage for blending in before, now they weren't hiding and it was best that not too many people were there to badger the boy.

They flooed in through the Leaky Cauldron. Hadrian lent Harry his wand so that he could tap the brick to open the archway. Harry grinned about it the entire walk to Gringotts.

At Gringotts, Sirius got a goblin to get him his vault key, as well as a pouch like Hadrian's to allow for easy money spending. Harry was disappointed that by doing so, that meant they didn't have to go down in the carts. Hadrian cheered him up by saying they could go flying with Sirius that afternoon.

That sparked the need to get Sirius a broom. Hadrian wanted to call it ironic that the very first spot was Quality Quidditch Supplies. After they got him a Cleansweep Six to match Hadrian and Harry's, they headed to Ollivander's.

"Mr. Black," Ollivander said. "I've been expecting you." He looked at the other two. "And this must be Mr. Potter. You'll be back in a couple of years, I suspect."

"Yes, sir," Harry said shyly.

"But I don't recognize you, though you have Naga eyes."

"Hadrian Naga," Hadrian said. "I got my wand from Gregorovitch."

"Indeed? Do you mind?"

Hadrian handed his wand over.

"Let's see here, twelve inches, ash with the core of... something snake related it feels like."

"A sliver of a basilisk fang, yes," Hadrian said.

"A very unique wand. I would not have thought to pair ash with so strong a core. Gregorovitch always has been rather experimental, but if it suits you..."

"It does, thank you Mr. Ollivander."

Ollivander handed the wand back. "Now, Mr. Black, such a shame about your original wand. Ten and a half inches, aspen with a kneazle whisker wasn't it?"

Sirius nodded.

"Still right-handed, I suppose?" Ollivander didn't wait for Sirius to answer. His measuring tape was already out and working.

Harry seemed fascinated by the process. Hadrian supposed it would help him know what to do when he got his own wand. Sirius waved wand after wand until finally a shower of black and white sparks shot out of a wand tip.

"Marvelous!" Ollivander said. "Eleven and three quarters. Ebony with thestral tail hair."

"Aren't thestrals the creatures you can only see if you've watched someone die?" Harry whispered.

"That's right," Hadrian said. Personally he felt the wand suited Sirius. The man wouldn't be the same
after even just seven years in Azkaban.

Sirius paid Ollivander seven galleons and they headed to get Sirius new robes. Sirius chose to go to Twilfitt and Tatting's, an upper market robe shop. While he set about getting a whole outfit, Hadrian set Harry up with a different tailor to get him some winter cloaks and outer robes. It was starting to get colder and while he had plenty of clothes, Harry didn't have anything in heavy wool.

Harry's tailor, a young brunette, fussed over him a bit but was otherwise very collected. Hadrian supposed that—it being a high-class shop—the workers here were used to serving the more celebrated of wizards and witches.

Sirius and Harry both finished half an hour later. Hadrian gave the teller the name of his house elf who would come pick the robes up the next day when they were completed.

As they went to leave the shop, Narcissa Malfoy stepped in, talking to a witch Hadrian didn't recognize.

"Oh!" Narcissa said. "Why, Cousin Sirius. It is delightful to see you."

"You as well, dear Cissy," Sirius said, putting on his roguish smile. "And Miss Viola Bulstrode. You were in Cissy's Slytherin friend group at Hogwarts, weren't you?"

Viola, Millicent's mother perhaps, smiled. "Hello, Mr. Black."

"I see you are with Lord Naga," Narcissa said.

"Pleasure to see you again, Lady Malfoy," Hadrian said. He gestured Harry forward. "I'm not sure you've met my charge. Harry, this is Narcissa Malfoy. She's Sirius' first cousin."

"Nice to meet you, Lady Malfoy," Harry said politely.

"What a charming boy," Narcissa looked pleased, though Hadrian could see the calculating glint in the corner of her eyes. "You must come by Malfoy Manor sometime to meet my son. He's your age. His name is Draco."

Harry looked at Hadrian. He smiled. "I'll see if we can find the time." He paused, an idea forming. "Perhaps I'll host a gathering at Naga Manor. There are several witches and wizards his age I'm sure he'd love to meet. I'll be sure to invite yourself, your husband, and Draco of course."

"Millicent would love to come," Viola said. "My daughter. She often takes lessons with Draco."

Hadrian inclined his head. "Of course."

"Well then," Sirius said, obviously wanting the conversation to end. "I'm afraid we must be off."

"Do write some time," Narcissa told him. "I know it may not have seen like it, but I have missed you, Sirius. There are so few of us left."

Hadrian saw the real longing in Narcissa's eyes and he wondered if Sirius did too. He personally had nothing against the witch, however wary he was of her husband. Narcissa had saved his life by lying to Voldemort and after the war she and Draco had worked together to rebuild the Malfoy family name while Lucius faded in the background.

Sirius cleared his throat. "I'll have lunch with you, but only if you invite Andromeda. She's my cousin as much as you are, even if she married a muggle."
Narcissa blinked, looking down briefly. When she looked back up, her eyes were bright. "Her daughter is at Hogwarts, isn't she? I've heard she is a metamorphagus."

"That's an old Black family trait," Sirius murmured in surprise. "Nymphadora, wasn't that her name?"

Tonks would have to be fifteen or so, Hadrian thought. Just around the same age as Charlie.

"I do not believe I ever knew…." Narcissa murmured. She seemed to make a decision. "You are correct, Sirius. She's my sister. I may not agree with her choices, but that doesn't stop her from being family. I'll send her an owl."

Sirius smiled. "Maybe we could all do lunch once Hogwarts ends for winter break. So we can meet Nymphadora."

Narcissa agreed and shortly after they parted ways.

Hadrian thought about this as they made their way back home. He hoped the sisters reuniting would be good for Narcissa, and for Sirius. Tonks could hopefully break any awkwardness at the family meeting. She was good at that. Then again, Hadrian didn't know how Narcissa would react to the girl turning his nose into a pig snout just to gander a laugh.

Either way, it would be interesting.

On the way back to the Leaky Cauldron, they stopped by Eeylops Owl Emporium. Sirius bought a small barn owl he immediately named Sunshine because Harry said her orange and yellow tail feathers looked kind of like a burst of sunlight.

After years spent without ever being allowed to see the sun, Hadrian could understand why that would appeal to Sirius.

.o.o.o.

Lucius was drafting a proposal for a new law reform when his study door opened with a bang. He stood up, wand in hand. In front of him stood an unfamiliar wizard with black hair and dark amber eyes.

"Who are you? How did you get past my wards?" Lucius demanded, keeping his wand trained on the man.

"No need to be rude, Lucius," the man said. He strolled forward and sat gracefully in the extra chair in front of Lucius' desk.

Lucius wanted to gape. The man looked at him and his eyes flashed a familiar bright red. "Sit, Lucius."

Lucius sat. "My Lord," he began, because the mark on his arm was tingling and there was no one else who could command a room quite like Lord Voldemort could.

"Lord, yes," he said. "Did you know I would return, Lucius? I suppose not." He tilted his head back. "I have been gone for seven years it seems and in that time I thought over some things. I tell you this only because you were once a trusted member of my inner circle and it seems I have few of them left that are not in Azkaban." He smiled coldly. "I am back, but things will not resume where I left them."
Lucius carefully blinked. Seven years it may have been, but he remembered his lord's crucio well.

The dark lord seemed to smile as if he knew exactly what Lucius was thinking. "None of that. I don't wish you to fear me… well not quite that much. I am a new man and I need your help assuring that."

"I… I'm sorry, my lord, I don't understand."

"Call me Marvolo," he said. "Marvolo Riddle. You knew who I was, of course. I imagine your father told you. Abraxas was a good friend of mine at Hogwarts."

"Tom Riddle," Lucius said slowly.

His lord's eyes flashed red again. "I think it is time for Tom to die. I am his son, Marvolo Riddle, procured with a pureblood witch who sadly died in childbirth. I was in your years at Hogwarts, Lucius. Don't you remember?"

Lucius nodded. "Of course, my lord. You were a top student, if often silent."

"Yes, exactly." His lord… Marvolo smiled. Lucius had a moment of realization that the man was now attractive as he never had been as Lord Voldemort. "I told you, though, none of that 'my lord'. Not anymore. We're friends."

Lucius wasn't fooled, but he knew better than to not play along. "Of course, Marvolo."

Marvolo nodded. "Few of my other followers are to know of my reappearance. Over the next year, the dark mark will slowly fade until it is but an outline. I have found it… too obvious a symbol."

Marvolo looked to the right, staring at Lucius' bookshelf. "Tell me, do you still have the book I gave you?"

"Yes, my lo- Marvolo," Lucius reached into his desk. He'd kept the journal in the bottom-most drawer. He pulled it out and handed it over.

Marvolo touched it briefly. A strange smile seemed to flit over his lips. "It is as I suspected then," he murmured. With a flick of his fingers, he burned the book.

"I have your wand as well," Lucius said slowly. "Pettigrew had it, but he got himself discovered just recently. I managed to find out its location before he was taken to Azkaban."

He reached in the same drawer and took out the yew wand he'd placed in there only a few days prior.

"I hadn't been sure that his lord would return, but he'd had a suspicion after having been handed the journal that perhaps his lord wasn't able to die a normal death. He wasn't sure how he felt about being right, but he did know that he was interested in this new man before him.

Marvolo accepted his wand. It seemed to hum in his hands. True pleasure appeared in his dark amber eyes. "I need your mark, Lucius. This is the last time I will be using it, but I believe I should call a select few to help… spread word of my presence. Suggestions?"

Lucius considered the man. "Am I to assume you wish to take your plan to a more… political level?"

Marvolo smirked. "I am Head of the House of Gaunt."

He flicked his lord ring. "And of the ancient line of Slytherin."

"I had wondered, if you'll excuse me for saying so," Lucius said. "There is another with Slytherin's blood."
Marvolo leaned forward. "Oh?"


Marvolo simply leaned back in his chair. "Is that so?"

"If you'd like, my- Marvolo, I can put all my memories of him in a pensive." Lucius offered. "I have only seen him twice. Once at the Blishwick Manor for a small gathering, and then as a witness in Pettigrew and Sirius Black's trial just a fortnight ago."

"Yes," Marvolo said. "I should like to see those memories. But first, my followers." He paused, obviously waiting.

Lucius let out a deep breath. "Lord Nott would be a good choice. I know you favored his uncle, but Trent is the head of the family and very politically minded. Amicus and Alecto Carrow both work in the Ministry. Lorelle Greengrass might also be a good choice."

"Not her husband, Astor?"

Lucius shook his head. "While Lord Greengrass is an excellent dueler, it is his wife that sits in the Wizengamot seat. You marked her, I believe, when you marked my own wife."

"I remember. I had grown paranoid about family members of my followers. I imagine that if I had gone on too much longer as I had been, I would have started marking the children." Marvolo shook his head. "This does not leave this room, Lucius, but as I'm sure you had noticed… I was not in my right mind by the end of our war."

Lucius didn't comment. Marvolo smirked.

"Very well then. Trent, Amicus, Alecto, and Lorelle." Marvolo pressed his wand to Lucius' mark. It burned as much as he remembered.

Despite the pain and the nervous anticipation, Lucius couldn't help but feel a spark of excitement bubbling through his body. Two new players on the political field in such a short amount of time, he thought. He couldn't wait for Marvolo Riddle and Hadrian Naga to meet face-to-face.

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Hadrian, Sirius, and Harry were eating lunch when Remus arrived through the floo. Hadrian stood to greet him, telling the others to stay at the table.

"You must be Lord Naga," Remus said, holding out a hand.

"Mr. Lupin," Hadrian greeted. "Please, call me Hadrian."

Remus inclined his head. "Hadrian. Call me Remus."

Hadrian flicked his gaze down Remus' body. The man had obviously worn his best robes, but even they were frayed at the edges. Hadrian wanted to fix that, though he wasn't sure how. He made sure his thoughts weren't showing on his face. "We were just starting lunch. Would you like to join us?"

Remus' stomach growled before he could speak. He blushed. "I haven't eaten yet. If you don't mind…"

"Trust me, Peachy, my house elf chef, made more than enough."
Hadrian led Remus to the dining room. Sirius jumped to his feet as soon as they entered. "Remus!"

Hadrian left them to their greeting. He called for Peachy to set another spot for their newest guest. The elf did so immediately, practically beaming at having another stomach to feed.

He really would have to set up some large gathering soon. Peachy would love to cook for a crowd.

Remus sat in the spot next to Sirius. He smiled at Harry, who was across from his godfather whilst Hadrian sat the head of the table. "Hello, Harry. I'm Remus Lupin. I was one of your dad's friends at Hogwarts."

Harry nodded. "Nice to meet you. Did you know my mum too?"

"Remus and Lily used to study together," Sirius said. "When she wasn't studying with Snivellus that is."

"Snivellus?" Harry asked.

"That was, uh, our nickname for Severus Snape. He was a Slytherin in our year and Lily's best friend for a long time," Remus explained quickly.

Sirius' face drew in and he opened his mouth.

Hadrian cleared his throat before the man could get himself in trouble. "Sirius, I ask you to remember that half of this table has Slytherin blood in their veins."

Sirius closed his mouth with an audible snap. He had the grace to look sheepish. "Right."

Remus looked interested then. "So it's true? The Naga line comes from Slytherin? I read the transcript of the trial, of course…"

"Yes, all I said about Harry and my relation is true. I can even show you the tapestry if you're interested."

"Cenric Naga married Adrianna Slytherin," Harry said. "They had a son named Hadrian, just like my Hadrian."

"Your Hadrian?" He chuckled. "I'm actually the third Hadrian in the family."

Sirius grinned. "I'm the third Sirius."

"Mr. Lupin," Harry began.

"Remus, please. Or Moony, if you want."

"Okay, Moony," Harry said. He'd already taken to calling Sirius 'Padfoot', in either form. Hadrian still only thought the man such when he was a dog. "Is it true that you're a werewolf?"

Remus nearly spat out his drink. "I… Sirius?"

Sirius shrugged. "They don't care, Moony. And I figured if you were going to be living with us, they should know." He paused. "I hope that's okay?"

A bit late for that, Hadrian thought to himself. "Truly, Remus, neither Harry nor I do care. We know werewolves get a bad rap, but then so do Slytherins." And there came the blush across Sirius' cheeks. "Harry and I are parselmouths. It would be silly of us to judge someone because of an ability
It's not really an ability so much as a curse," Remus muttered. "But thank you, Hadrian, Harry."

"No problem!" Harry said, his words jumbled.

"Don't talk with your mouth full," Hadrian told him.

Harry mumbled something. Remus laughed.

Remus looked around his room. He'd been given a tour of the manor, introduced to the two owls—Hadrian's Garnet and Sirius' Sunshine—as well as the two snakes—the iridescent Faeda and the shining black Kiran. After the tour was over, Hadrian had shown him this room, the blue bedroom supposedly, and told him that if he needed anything he could call for the house elf Sodder.

It had all happened so fast. Seeing Sirius again, and Harry for the first time since he was a baby, and meeting the elusive Hadrian Naga. Remus honestly didn't know what to think about it all.

There was a knock on his door. "Come in," Remus called.

Sirius opened the door and closed it behind him. He wasn't looking at Remus. Remus felt a conflicting wave of emotion wash over him at the sight.

"Sirius—"

"Remus—"

They both stopped. "You first," Remus said.

"I'm sorry," Sirius told him, quickly as if he was afraid of a reaction.

"You're sorry?" Remus blinked. "I should be the one apologizing. I am apologizing. I should never have believed you would betray James. You two… you were so close."

He felt a very familiar jealousy prickle at the thought. But no, he thought he had done away with that long ago. It was worse to have now. James was dead, buried with his wife. He wasn't coming back.

"I don't blame you," Sirius looked up. "We suspected you. James and I and a lot of the Order. Now that I look back, Peter may have been the one to first suggest you were the spy… but we believed it. That was wrong."

"We knew someone had to be," Remus said. It still hurt, the memory of how they all turned their backs on him, but it was in the past. "I don't blame you."

"You should! Just because you were a werewolf, a dark creature. I never should have pushed you away. You were the best thing that ever happened to me, you know."

Remus didn't believe that. He couldn't let himself believe that. "Sirius…"

"Merlin, turning my back on our friendship was the stupidest thing I ever did. And I did a lot of stupid things."

"Yeah, you did," Remus agreed. He felt tears prickling in the back of his throat. "You should never have gone after Peter by yourself."
"I should have stayed for Harry." Sirius rubbed at the corner of his eyes. "I shouldn't ever have told you to seek out Greyback's pack because that was the only place you belonged. It's not. You don't."

Remus rubbed his face. "You never should have pranked McGonagall in fifth year and blamed it on me," he said, because he needed to get away from that painful memory.

Sirius swallowed. "I should have never have led Sniv- Snape to the Shrieking Shack."

"No, you shouldn't have." Remus wondered how that revelation had come to the man after years of laughing it off.

"If not for him, then for you. I know you, at least I like to think I do." Sirius stepped forward. "When I was in Azkaban there was a werewolf in the cell next to me. I never knew her name, but I'd hear her howling. She was in pain all the time. We all were but I think the dementors liked to torment her especially. If they did it enough, they could bring out her wolf even when it wasn't a full moon."

"Merlin," Remus whispered.

"I don't know why she was there. Maybe she deserved it. Maybe she bit children, like you were bitten. Or maybe she was innocent like me." Sirius shook his head. "You would never have forgiven yourself if you'd bitten Snape. If you'd killed him."

"No, I wouldn't have. And I never would have forgiven you."

"Why did you? It wasn't me that stopped him. It was James."

Remus looked away. He wanted to say… something. The truth was, he couldn't not forgive Sirius. Not until he did something Remus truly couldn't get over. And despite all the things that had happened, it hadn't yet come to that.

"Okay," Sirius said slowly. "Maybe… we can start over?"

"Start over?"

"Hello, my name is Sirius Black." Sirius stuck out a hand, his smile sharp and brittle and hopeful. "I just got out of Azkaban and I need a friend."

Remus felt a smile twitch on his own lips. "I'm Remus Lupin. I'm a werewolf without a pack."

"Nice to meet you, Remus."

"Nice to meet you, Sirius."
At breakfast the morning after Remus arrived at Naga Manor, Hadrian went downstairs to find Harry already at the table. Now, that wasn't too unusual in it of itself. Harry was an early riser and a big fan of food in general so he was usually one of the first to come for a meal. What was suspicious was the little smirk at the corner of his lips as he read Montrose Daily.

Hadrian sat, casting a wandless, wordless spell on his food. It seemed as if there was something in his pumpkin juice.

"You know, I'm not feeling like pumpkin juice this morning," Hadrian said. Harry frowned at him. "But I'm sure our two guests are."

Harry watched with wide eyes as Hadrian poured his glass of pumpkin juice into two smaller glasses and set them by the Sirius and Remus' plates. Then he called Peachy and asked for some breakfast tea.

"I—" Harry began.

Hadrian winked and Harry closed his mouth.

Remus came down a moment later, followed by Padfoot.

"No dogs at the table," Hadrian said.

Padfoot huffed and transformed into Sirius. He sat down at his place. "Oh, pumpkin juice!"

Sirius took the first sip, though Remus drank some of his only moments later. Both of them set their glasses down and began eating as if nothing were wrong.

Harry didn't look concerned though. Hadrian had to wonder what exactly the prank was. He flipped to the last page of The Daily Prophet.

Remus looked at him and opened his mouth. "Hisssssssss."

Hadrian and Sirius both stared whilst Remus clapped a hand over his mouth, wide eyed. Sirius tried. "Hisss hisss."

Hadrian looked at Harry, who was already laughing. "That's not even proper parseltongue."

"I know," he said. "I mean, I don't suppose the people at the joke shop care, 'cause they probably never met a parselmouth before."

"When you're older, you can work to invent one that's proper," Hadrian said. "If you want." He paused. "Well, actually if you do then you might be able to sell it as more than just prank material. I'm sure loads of people would like the ability to temporarily talk to their snakes."

Harry nodded eagerly. "That'd be cool. It could be a secret language. "It's not fun that only us two can speak it. Who will I talk to at Hogwarts?"

"The basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets," Hadrian said.

Remus hadn't said another word since his first, though Sirius had been trying out different combinations to see if he could make more than a stereotypical hissing sound. Now, though, they
both stared at Hadrian.

"Can I?" Harry asked eagerly.

"No," Hadrian said. "She's too dangerous for you. I'm going to go to Hogwarts at some point and release her deep into the Dark Forest so she isn't a threat to the students."

"The Dark Forest?"

"The Forbidden Forest."

"Oh."

Remus pointed to his mouth and looked at Harry. Harry smiled at him.

"I think he wants to know how long until it wears off."

"Um, a couple of days," Harry said. "But I got the antidote."

Hadrian ruffled his hair. "Go get it for our poor guests."

Harry giggled and ran from the table.

Hadrian looked at the two men. "I'm sure you're wondering how I know about the Chamber and what's in it." He placed his cheek on his open palm. "I'm afraid that will have to stay a secret for now."

Surprisingly, it was Sirius who nodded first. Remus saw him doing so and added his own nod of agreement, though he still look a mix of curious and concerned.

Well, that would either change the more he lived with them or it would get worse. Hadrian figured it was a half and half chance.

Harry came back and poured a clear liquid in both cups of pumpkin juice. The men drank them and immediately sighed in relief.

"I'm so proud," Sirius said. "Little prongslet, leading the next line of Marauders."

Harry blushed a bit at his godfather's tone. "I was trying to prank Hadrian, but he switched his glass for yours."

Hadrian shrugged. "The day you manage to successfully prank me, Harry, I'll buy us tickets to the Quidditch World Cup."

"Confident, aren't you?" Remus asked.

Hadrian grinned. "Constant vigilance."

Sirius began to laugh. "I don't suppose you know Alastor Moody?"

"I don't believe I do," Hadrian said calmly.

"Well, I think you two would get along."

"Regardless," Remus said. "Harry if you're going to be a prankster, there are a couple things you should know."
Harry sat up.

"Firstly, pranks should always be intended to make everyone laugh. Including the people being directly pranked, even if they only laugh after the fact."

Hadrian nodded. "Cruelty in the name of pranking is not something I will ever tolerate."

Sirius was fiddling with his fork, but Harry didn't seem to notice. He nodded seriously. "I won't, I promise. I don't want to be like Dudley."

"Who's Dudley?" Sirius asked.

"My cousin." Harry wrinkled his nose. "He liked to go Harry hunting. Said it was funny." Harry rubbed his arm. Hadrian knew that it had been broken before by Dudley's gang and felt a familiar anger bubble through him.

Both Sirius and Remus looked a bit murderous. Hadrian cleared his throat before they could press the boy about it. "Secondly?"

Remus coughed. "Right. Well, secondly, you should never tell people if the prank didn't go according to plan. So long as it still worked a little, then you should pretend everything went exactly as you wanted it to. That way, your integrity as a prankster doesn't get trampled on."

Harry nodded. "Okay, I can do that."

"You know," Sirius said. "Even though your dad was a right good prankster, it was your mum that really knew how to do it. She didn't prank often, mind you, but when she did….

Remus chuckled. "I still have nightmares about your neon green hair."

Sirius shuddered. "Don't remind me. I have to say pink looked dashing on you though."

Remus mock glared and Hadrian laughed. "I want pictures."

"They don't exist," both Marauders said at the same time.

"Too bad."

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"His old house," Sirius began. "How bad was it?"

They were walking through Diagon Alley. Remus and Harry were up ahead, supposedly buying Yule presents for Hadrian and Sirius, whilst said two trailed behind to gather their own gifts—most of which would obviously be for Harry though Hadrian had some ideas for Sirius and Remus as well.

"Bad," Hadrian said. "Petunia didn't just dislike magic, she hated it and she spewed that propaganda onto her husband such that by the time Harry came to live with them he saw magic as a direct line to hell."

Sirius winced.

Hadrian nodded. "They thought that maybe they could work it out of him. They starved him and had him sleeping in the cupboard under the stairs. The healer says that the only reason Harry's still alive is because of how powerful his intrinsic magic is."
Sirius began to curse. Hadrian let him, thinking to himself. Thinking of Harry's guardianship had him wondering why Dumbledore had yet to try and contact him. The man had to be planning something, Hadrian figured, he just wasn't sure what.

"I hope you cursed them," Sirius said darkly.

"No," Hadrian said. "I didn't." He sighed. "I'm not evil, Sirius, however much I may be a bit dark. I'm not in the business of cursing defenseless muggles. Yes, the Dursleys probably deserve it, but cursing them would simply reaffirm their ideas about magic."

"I don't understand."

"Muggles like the Dursleys aren't likely to change. Cursing, torturing, killing them… there's no point. They're not the enemy however much they may be a personal enemy. The wizarding world needs to wake up and realize that muggles outnumber us one to a hundred thousand."

"Are you suggesting they're dangerous? That's like saying that ants outnumber us—"

"No, it's not." Hadrian stared hard at Sirius. "Do you know what a gun is? A bomb? Muggle weapon technology has far surpassed what wizards can do. They still may be behind us in some ways… transportation and things like that, but they are far superior at the art of war."

Hadrian looked up at the sky for a moment. "If we're discovered by the muggle population at large, then I think the wizarding world will have a bit of shock at the realization that we have almost no defense against muggles. Wizarding Britain has integrated in between the sprawling muggle population too much. Even with repelling charms, it'll be too easy for them to guess where we are."

Sirius was silent for a moment. "So you're anti-muggle then?"

"Not at all. I'm just pro-isolationism. I think that we're separate societies for a reason and we need to stay that way as much as we can. They will eventually find out about us, but if we can live in an area they can't really get to and stay out of their way, then we'll be fine." Hadrian sighed. "That's my hope, anyway."

"What about muggleborn, then? Do you think they shouldn't be allowed into our society?"

"That would be just as suicidal as attacking muggle society and proving our existence. Your parents are an example of why we need muggleborn witches and wizards."

"How so?"

"Inbreeding. It's a problem, and it will become a bigger problem the more the purebloods stick to it. You know, in Asia marrying a muggleborn is the height of social boon. Strong, fresh blood with no family magic attached is perfect for the old families to keep their heritage alive while keeping their line powerful."

Sirius frowned. "So you're saying… muggleborn have clean magic?"

"Exactly. I would say look at Harry, but his mother wasn't actually a muggleborn, though she did have fresh magic because she came from several generations of squibs. In cases like that, it tends to purify the magic of the children, I've heard. Which made it so Harry got a strong connection to both the Potter line and the Naga line. But there are many halfbloods in the world who are among some of the most powerful magic users."

"But muggleborn have connections to the muggle world. Which you seem to want to cut."
"So we cut it. The Ministry needs to be better about secrecy charms on the families of muggleborn children. I think the biggest reason that muggleborn aren't accepted into society as a whole is because of their lack of understanding on how the wizarding world works. So we go to muggleborn earlier. We give them books and take them on trips and educate them on wizarding culture."

"You've thought about this a lot."

"I have. It's important to me. One of my best friends was muggleborn and she was one of the strongest witches I knew, but her problem was that she hated so many aspects of wizarding society. I'm not saying there's a lot I would change, but she just didn't understand and wasn't educated on the reason for things that wizards do. It led to a lot of contention between her and one of my pureblood friends."

"Sounds rough."

"Well, they eventually married and she started to really integrate herself into society better after that, but it was a tough journey for her because of how people just assumed she never would learn better. We need to assume that the muggleborn population can learn our ways and teach it to them, preferably starting early."

Sirius nodded. "I get what you're saying." He paused. "You should really go into politics, you know. You're very inspiring."

Hadrian flushed. "Not really. I just have a lot of practice with teaching children. No matter the subject, you have to be charismatic to make them interested."

Sirius gave him a considering look. "You don't say."

Hadrian smiled blandly. "Let's head into Slug & Jigger's real quick. I want to pick something up for Harry."

He watched out of the corner of his eye as Alecto Carrow detached herself from the group that had been walking behind him and Sirius and disapparated.

Ball's in your court, Tom, he thought dryly.

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The day after Hogwarts got out for winter break, just five days before Yule, Hadrian and Sirius were getting ready to leave for lunch with Narcissa, Andromeda, and their two children.

"If you need anything, you have Remus, or you can always buzz me through the mirror," Hadrian told Harry.

"I know," Harry said. "It's not like you haven't gone out before."

"And what happened the last time?" Hadrian asked slowly.

Harry blushed and looked at his shoes. "I'll finish my essay before going out to play," he promised. "But I can fly if Moony watches me, right?"

Hadrian nodded, ignoring the curious looks from Sirius and Remus, and ruffled Harry's hair to show he was forgiven from the incident in October. Contrary to his usual behavior, Harry leaned into his hand for a moment before pulling away.
"We're off then," Sirius said. "If we don't return by dinner, call the aurors because Cissy has poisoned us."

"He's kidding," Hadrian reassured Harry, though he wasn't sure that Sirius was. "Bye, Remus."

Remus waved and Hadrian and Sirius apparated away.

"I don't understand why I'm coming," Hadrian said as they appeared in Hogsmeade.

"You've got Black blood just as much as young Draco and Nymphadora," Sirius said. "This is a Black family gathering."

"If it was a Black family gathering, then we would have had to invite Arcturus, Pollux, Lucretia, and Cassiopeia," Hadrian reminded the man dryly. All four said Blacks were to die within the next couple of years, but no one other than Hadrian knew that.

Sirius waved a hand in the air. "Not those old sods. The younger generation." He paused as they neared the Three Broomsticks. "Besides, I needed the backup."

"Even from Mrs. Tonks?"

"Andy's fine, but she'll probably start badgering me about settling down." Sirius shrugged.

Hadrian snorted. "Right."

They arrived at the pub and were ushered into the private backroom where the rest of the lunch party was already sitting. They stood as Hadrian and Sirius entered.


"Sirius," the two women greeted back.

"Andy, this is Hadrian Naga, I don't believe you've met," Sirius introduced.

Andromeda held out her hand. Hadrian took it and kissed the air above it. "Pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Tonks."

"Andromeda, please. Even Andy, if that's too long for you." She smiled warmly. "This is my daughter, Nymphadora."

"Dora," Tonks corrected. Hadrian blinked at that, though he took her hand and repeated his earlier gesture.

Well, he supposed that Tonks – Dora probably hadn't started with the surname yet. He wondered why she ever did. Dora wasn't that bad of a name. Maybe she'd picked up Tonks in auror training.

"And this is Draco," Narcissa said. "He was hoping you'd bring Harry."

"So sorry, Draco," Hadrian said to the eight-year-old. It was fairly easy to disassociate this blond child with the boy who'd tormented Hadrian at Hogwarts and who'd become a sort of friendly acquaintance after the war. "He's home doing his daily assignment."

"Ah, yes," Narcissa said as Hadrian and Sirius both took their seats. "I remember that being mentioned at Sirius' trial. Quite ingenious, though I wonder why you don't just hire the boy a tutor."

"I tutored children for many years before I came back to Britain," Hadrian said. "I felt that hiring one
would just a waste of resources when I was perfectly willing to grade Harry's essays myself."

"You're a teacher, then?" Andy asked. "What subjects?"

"Well, I have a basic knowledge of all subjects," Hadrian said. "But my main specialty is Defense."


"Because I don't just specialize in DADA," Hadrian said. "I believe it's important to know defensive magic against everything, not just the Dark Arts. Light magic can be just as dangerous." Hadrian frowned. "To be honest, many professors teach students how to defend against various magical creatures in DADA even though there are in fact few creatures that are classified as Dark."

"That's true," Andy said. "I've never thought about that."

Narcissa looked interested as well and even Draco and Dora seemed to be listening intently.

"The current DADA professor at Hogwarts does that," Dora offered. "Just before break we were learning about defending against house elf magic, but house elves aren't Dark at all."

"Most consider them Light, actually," Hadrian said. "Who's the current professor?"

"Peg Penner," she said. "I like him, but he won't be back next year."

Hadrian had never heard the name, but he supposed he shouldn't be too surprised by that. "Why not?"

"It was the same when we were at Hogwarts," Andy said, gesturing to Narcissa and Sirius. "Some say there's a curse on the position. Never had a professor last longer than a year."

"Must be a strong curse," Hadrian said. "Why has no one tried to break it? I imagine constantly going from one professor to another is hardly helpful for learning proper Defense."

"Hogwarts students' Defense OWLS and NEWTS have never been good in comparison to other schools," Narcissa agreed.

"Someone should complain to Dumbledore," Hadrian said. "Surely a headmaster of his supposed power would be able to do something. Or if not, then hire someone to do something."

Hadrian himself had been able to break the curse in his old time, though that had partially been because he'd been familiar with Tom's magic by that point.

Rosmerta came in then and asked for their orders. When she left, the conversation turned to catching up. It seemed as though Andy and Dora had arrived just moments before Hadrian and Sirius had, so the sisters had yet to really talk.

"And you never wanted more children?" Andy asked.

"I do," Narcissa said. "But Draco's birth was hard on me. Lucius is too worried to let me try for another."

Her tone was a bit heartbreaking and Hadrian noticed Draco frowning sadly at his plate. Hadrian coughed slightly. "Have you considered blood adoption?" he asked. "I know some circles think it cheating, but family magic has never denied a child solely because they were adopted. So long as the proper ritual was done."
Narcissa looked at him in wonder. "Well, no we hadn't considered it. There aren't that many children available for such a procedure."

Hadrian knew that magical relatives were already raising most magical children orphaned by the first wizarding war. Harry had been the exception to that rule, but so many families were related in the wizarding world that it was easy to find someone blood related to take a child in. However, Hadrian also knew—or had learned when he was headmaster—that there were many muggleborn children who lived in orphanages, abandoned by their parents because of the bizarre things that happened around them, that never even made it to Hogwarts.

He told as much to the table. "I looked it up, you see," he said. "Because the muggleborn population of other countries is so much greater than it is here. The problem is that these children often never get their Hogwarts letters because the system that finds them is flawed."

"How so?" Even Narcissa seemed fascinated, however much Hadrian had figured she was turn her nose at the mention of muggleborns.

"It only detects muggleborn children when they do magic in such an obvious public way that Ministry workers have to come erase memories," Hadrian said. "There are so many children who have accidental magic outbursts that just aren't that noticeable and they slip through the cracks."

"Really?" Sirius asked. "Wait, what you were saying earlier about muggleborn being integrated into our society earlier..."

"Unfortunately these kids never get integrated at all. The death rate is high, because often they accidentally hurt themselves with their untrained magic as it matures," Hadrian explained.

"Hadrian was telling me earlier about how muggleborn magic was clean," Sirius said. "When they get married into old families, they're children get a strong dose of the family magic because there's no competing magic on the other side."

"And there's no inbreeding problem," Hadrian added. "Which has been proven to be the leading cause of squibs."

"Proven?" Andy asked.

"Journals all over the world have done studies on it, but I haven't seen the British Ministry reporting any of it." Hadrian sighed. "I have to wonder how much the Ministry tries to keep quiet from their public so as not to allow for public outcry."

"Is that really true?" Narcissa asked.

"I'm sure you'll be able to ask for copies of the relevant books and journals from Lord Malfoy's cousins in France."

"I will."

"It makes sense to me," Andy said. "I mean, no one was very happy when I married Ted, but he's not actually fully muggle."

"He's not?" Hadrian asked. That was news to him.

Dora was the one that shook her head. "Nah, my dad's mum was muggleborn, but she married a muggle after Hogwarts and never went back. He knew about magic before he met mum, actually."
"But see, that's clean magic running through my Dora's veins," Andy said. "Truly highlighted the Black magic in her."

"You are a metamorphmagus, then?" Draco asked, excited. "Can you show me?"

Dora laughed. "Sure, little cousin." She changed her hair from the neutral brown it had been into a bright blond color to match Draco's. She even shortened it.

"Again!" Draco demanded.

Dora's face shifted and the roots of her hair darkened to black and then suddenly an exact copy of Narcissa sat in her seat.

"Impressive," Hadrian said as Draco grinned.

"Indeed," Narcissa agreed, smiling. "What house did you say you were in, Dora?"

Dora changed back to her regular face, though she kept her hair color half-blond, half-black. "Hufflepuff." There was a hard glint in her eyes as if she dared anyone to mock her house.

Narcissa seemed to realize that and she just nodded.

"Back to adopting," Hadrian said. "There are several rituals, I can send you some books if you want, which help find magical children in the area. If you do one in a muggle city then I'm sure you'd be able to find a child in a muggle orphanage to blood adopt into the Malfoy family."

"Mum," Draco said. "If we adopt a muggleborn with blood magic, that means they won't be muggleborn anymore, right?"

"I suppose technically…." Narcissa pondered that for a moment.

Their food arrived them in steaming plates. Everyone was silent as they began to eat.

After a while, Narcissa set down her fork. "These children living in muggle orphanages, what is stopping us from taking all them?"

Draco looked at his mother with wide eyes. "I don't want that many little siblings!

Sirius began to laugh. "I don't think that's what your mother meant," he told the boy.

Draco blushed. "Oh."

"You mean, setting up some sort of magical orphanage?" Hadrian asked.

"I know there are more families than mine that wish for more children," Narcissa said. "And if what you say about squibs is true, then introducing more blood into our society can only be a good thing."

"Blood adoption doesn't get rid of the fact that they have clean magic and weren't born blood related," Hadrian agreed. "It's not even technically incest if a blood adopt child marries the biological child of the family he or she was adopted into, though I hope that wouldn't happen often."

"All it does is introduce the family magic on top of the muggleborn clean magic," Sirius said. "Giving the child a bit of the characteristics that come with the family magic….""
"Or green eyes for the Nagas," Hadrian said.

Narcissa nodded.

"That'd be cool," Dora said. "Then those kids would know about magic before they got their letters. And they'd be sure to get their letters… no more getting forgotten."

Hadrian wondered why he'd never thought of this idea before. Sure, he'd fixed the Hogwarts system so they no longer forgot any children—regularly checking to see when new magical babies were born… but he'd never thought to take them out of their muggle orphanages and put them into magical ones.

"How many muggleborn children do you think live in orphanages around Great Britain?" Narcissa asked.

Hadrian frowned. "Perhaps a hundred or so. Maybe even more. To be honest, we'll probably find some children who are already past eleven. Something will need to be done about them."

"Maybe a tutor system," Andy suggested. "Until they're ready to join whatever year at Hogwarts they should have been in."

"While we're at it," Sirius said. "Maybe we should see if the Ministry can send people to the houses of the muggleborn who aren't orphaned. Surely knowing about magic earlier than eleven wouldn't hurt."

Hadrian nodded.

"I'll have to talk with my husband about this," Narcissa said. "And perhaps some of the other purebloods I know." Hadrian knew that meant she'd be talking to Tom as well.

"Send us an owl," Andy said. "I don't have the same funds you do to see this happen, but I'm certainly interested in helping out."

"I can support the cause," Hadrian said. Sirius quickly agreed as well.

"Perfect." Narcissa smiled. "I would love to do lunch again some time. It truly has been too long, Andy, Sirius. And Hadrian, your company is always interesting."

Hadrian grinned. "Maybe next time I'll leave you to Black bonding time."

Sirius discreetly kicked him under the table.

"Or you could bring Harry," Draco said. "So I can meet him."

"How about this," Hadrian told the boy. "I'll be hosting a New Year's gathering at Naga Manor this year. I'll invite your family, and yours of course Andy," he said smiling at the two Tonks.

"I don't have to go back to Hogwarts 'til the third," Dora said, grinning.

"Fantastic," Hadrian said. "I suppose I'll send out invitations to other families with children around Harry and Draco's age so Harry at least can meet more people he'll be going to Hogwarts with. I know Draco must already know many of his future classmates."

Narcissa nodded. "That does sound like a wonderful idea," she said. "I will await your invitation."

"Us too," Andy said. "I'm sure Ted will be delighted."
Yule morning dawned bright and early as Harry jumped on Hadrian's bed. Hadrian got up, smiling at Harry's emerald pajamas with golden snitches zooming around the hems. They'd been an early Christmas present for him to wear as they opened gifts.

He pulled on a house robe as Harry went to go wake Sirius and Remus. Breakfast was a feast of pancakes, bacon, sausage, and muffins, along with the ever-delicious pumpkin juice. Harry came down just after Hadrian had sat, Sirius and Remus trailing behind him.

"It snowed!" Harry gasped, looking out the window.

"It's a white Christmas," Remus murmured.

"Yule," Hadrian corrected gently.

Remus nodded. "Right, Yule."

"Can we play outside?" Harry asked.

"Don't you want to open your presents first?" Hadrian asked.

"Oh, right!"

The adults all laughed as Harry quickly began shoveling his breakfast.

"It's not going anywhere, kid," Sirius said.

"Like you can talk," Remus said. "You eat like a dog."

Sirius grinned around a mouthful of pancake.

Hadrian gave a dramatic sigh. "What has this house become?" he asked the ceiling.

They finished breakfast and converged in the sitting room where a large tree stood in the corner. It was decorated with fairy lights and silver and gold tinsel.

"Thanks," Remus said.

"For what?"

"Including the gold. Gryffindor colors."

Hadrian smiled. "Well, we're split half and half, aren't we?"

Remus smiled back. "I suppose we are."

The gifts were soon dished out. Harry got a set of tickets for four to a Magpie's game from Hadrian.

"It's really for all of us," Hadrian said.

"I'm not a huge quidditch fan," Remus murmured.

"But it's the Magpies!" Harry told him. "You have to come, Moony."

Remus smiled. "Well, since we already have the tickets…."
Sirius got a giant supply of chocolate from Remus, which he began to eat into even though he'd just had breakfast.

Hadrian got a set of cool snake hair ties from Harry. He laughed as he switched out his plain black one for one of the silver snakes.

Remus got a year's supply of Wolfsbane from Hadrian, which he tried to protest.

"Even if you don't live here for the next year, which you are more than welcome to," Hadrian said. "I'd like to think we've become friends. I have the funds and I'm more than happy to help a friend in need with his furry little problem."

Remus blushed, but eventually nodded, setting aside the owl order form that had announced his present.

Harry got a Potions kit from Hadrian and a set of make-it-yourself pranking materials from Sirius.

Remus got a whole new set of robes from Sirius, which seemed to stun him as much as the Wolfsbane had. Sirius didn't even let him protest, moving on to open another of his gifts.

"Ah!" Sirius yelled, falling backward.

Harry began to laugh. Hadrian and Remus both looked inside the box. There was a snake inside. Hadrian almost began hissing to it, until he realize the snake was actually not alive.

"That's impressive," he said.

Sirius righted himself and reached in the box, pulling out the fake snake.

"You can wear it around your shoulders," Harry said. "Or prank people with it."

Sirius began to grin. "I like your style, Prongslet," he said. "No one would expect it from me."

Remus sighed. "Oh no."

Hadrian opened his joint present from Sirius and Remus. It turned out to be a wristband that, when worn, helped protect the user from mind arts such as legilimency and even the imperio curse. He thanked the two, preferring not mention that he could protect himself against both curses.

Beside, the wristband would help explain his impenetrable occulumency walls, curtsey of magic itself since Hadrian's travel through time.

Harry opened his present from Remus, a book on how to prank responsibly but with creativity. Another present from Hadrian was opened next, a muggle-style shirt that had the logo for the Montrose Magpie's on it. The boy declared he'd be wearing it to the game.

Remus got a couple rare Defense books from Harry.

"Hadrian helped me pick them out," Harry said as Remus thanked him.

Sirius' last present was also a book. It was untitled.

"It's a Black family grimoire," Hadrian explained. "I think it was my mother's. I don't know why she had it, but anyway I think you'll like it." He grinned. "It details some of the less known exploits of your illustrious family, including a time when one of our great ancestors attempted to mate with the giant squid."
"You don't say?" Sirius' eyes lit up. He began flipping through the book in earnest.

Remus got a broom from Hadrian, so that he could go flying with the rest of them. Hadrian could tell the man was a little nervous about the fact, but he set the broom aside gently anyway.

The last present under the tree was to Harry. It was a photo album, not unlike the one Hagrid had given Hadrian once upon a time. Hadrian supposed the giant had gotten many of his pictures from Remus, but there were several that Sirius had put in that Hadrian had never seen, including some of Lily and a woman Hadrian vaguely recognized as Alice Longbottom.

The rest of the day they spent playing outside in the snow until dinner called them back inside for a warm cup of eggnog and a quiet time by the fire as they all immersed themselves in various books.

All in all, Hadrian thought, it had been a very good Yule.
Chapter 8

Harry pulled at the hem of his emerald green dress robes. Most of the guests had already arrived for the New Years gathering, but he and Hadrian still had to wait in the sitting room for the last party to floo in.

The fireplace flared bright green and a tall redhead stepped out.

"Bill," Hadrian greeted.

"Hello, Hadrian," Bill said. He stepped aside as one by one his family came through.

There were a lot of them, Harry thought. All with bright red hair. He was kind of stunned. He remembered the two parents, Molly and Arthur Weasley, as well as Percy from Sirius' trial, but the rest were new to him.

"Let's go outside," Hadrian said as he greeted the last of them.

They all tromped outside to where Hadrian had set up several pavilions with tables and chairs. One of the pavilions was the children's area. There were already a number of kids there. Harry was excited to meet them all. They'd be his first magical friends his age, after all.

"Harry, why don't you take Percy and his younger siblings over there. I'm sure Bill and Charlie would like to hang with the adults."

"Okay!" Harry agreed readily. Five of the Weasleys detached and followed him to the kids' tent. Harry walked to the middle of it and saw everyone turn to look at him.

"Hello everyone," Harry said. He remembered some of what he'd learned about wizarding etiquette. He was the host here so it was his job to introduce everyone, but he actually didn't know anyone's names other than Percy.

The group said hello back. Harry cleared his throat. "Right, well I'm Harry. I know some of you probably know each other already, but I think we should all go around in a circle and introduce ourselves. Is that alright?"

Most of them seemed to nod and one by one they said their names. The Weasleys were Percy, Ron, Ginny, and the twins, Fred and George. Then there was Luna Lovegood. Hadrian had invited Luna and her father because they liked the Quibbler so much. Harry smiled at the blue-eyed girl. She smiled back dreamily.

After Luna were Susan Bones and Neville Longbottom. Neville seemed shy. Harry could barely hear his name and had to ask the boy to repeat it.

Then there were Millicent Bulstrode, Daphne Greengrass and her little sister Astoria, and Pansy Parkinson. After them were Blaise Zabini and Theodore Nott. Finally Draco Malfoy introduced himself.

"It's nice to meet everyone," Harry said. "Um, so we have exploding snap, wizards chess, and some other games. Food will be at seven."

They split up into groups after that. Harry made sure to make a couple rounds to talk to everyone because he wanted to be a good host.
Ginny and Luna sat together immediately. Apparently they'd already been friends. Harry took Astoria over to them because he thought they were the same age and the other four girls didn't seem to want her with them. Astoria seemed hesitant around Ginny and Luna at first, but soon enough the girls were caught up in a discussion about pets they wanted when they were older.

Pansy and Millicent seemed fine together and Harry was a bit hesitant around girls his own age so he left their group after only a quick conversation. Daphne didn't seem to want to talk with those two, but neither did she move to join any other group. Susan too was sitting by herself. Harry asked them both if they liked chess and when they agreed he set them up at one of the boards and left them to it. When he looked over ten minutes later, they were laughing together.

Harry sat down on the pillow chair in the middle and smiled at all five of them. "So, we'll all be going to Hogwarts together."

There were nods. Harry nodded too. "I'm really happy to meet everyone," he said. "I haven't met any wizards my age before."

"So you were living with muggles before Lord Naga took you, then?" Blaise asked.

Harry nodded. "My aunt and uncle, yeah. And my cousin, Dudley." He rubbed his arms and then noticed that both Draco and Theodore had tracked the movement. He stopped immediately.

"My dad really likes muggles," Ron said. "He thinks they're fascinating."

Harry noticed Draco scowling. He remembered what Hadrian had said about the Malfoys and the Weasleys having some sort of blood feud. He quickly talked before Draco could say something. "Muggles are interesting like how foreigners are interesting, I guess." He shrugged as all the boys stared at him. "I don't want to live in the muggle world again. I belong here. But I understand why some wizards want to visit the muggle world on holiday. It's a tourist trip, I suppose."

"That makes sense," Blaise said. "Mud – uh, muggleborn," he changed as Harry raised an eyebrow at him, "they are a lot like foreigners when they come in at eleven, right? They don't know anything about how our culture works."

"And then they try to change it to suit them," Theodore said. "My father said that's why Hogwarts has such bad international ratings. Because we allow too many muggleborn in, so the education has to be brought down to fit their level."

"Actually," Draco said. "There are more muggleborn that never get their letters."

Harry nodded. Hadrian had told him all about the lunch conversation with the Black relatives. "Yeah, Hadrian and Draco's parents are considering building a magical orphanage to bring muggleborn in earlier so they won't be like foreigners. They'll be like me, see? They'll have time to learn about everything first, before Hogwarts."

"Does it really matter?" Ron asked, shrugging. "Come on, let's play a game or something."

Harry glanced at the redhead. It did matter, he thought, but it was true that there wasn't anything he or any of the others could do about it. They were too young. And playing a game sounded fun.

They played exploding snap in a big group, and then Ron challenged Blaise to a chess match.
because Blaise bragged about his skills. Harry made sure to strike up a conversation with Neville, which got easier once they started talking about Herbology. Theodore, or Theo as he insisted on being called, joined in for that and soon Harry left them to it and started talking just with Draco in more detail about the lunch he'd had with Hadrian. His uncle was so awesome, even Draco thought so.

They separated for dinner to eat near their parents, and then converged back together after in a big group including the girls that would be in their year.

Harry taught them how to play duck, duck, goose, though he changed the name to owl, owl, howler. It was pretty fun and got them all laughing and running around. Soon enough, Percy, the twins, Luna, Astoria, Ginny, and even Pansy and Millicent were all asking to join in and they had to widen the circle.

By the time the evening came to an end, they were all exhausted but smiling. Even if he'd had to deal with a couple of snide words between Ron and Draco—the former being quick to anger and the latter a bit spoiled and haughty—Harry figured everything overall had been a success.

Later, when Hadrian asked, Harry made sure to tell his guardian that he wanted to do it again and no there wasn't anyone that he wanted to make sure not to invite. After all, he figured the best way for them all to get along—especially Draco and Ron—was to force them to have fun together. Harry could do that.

So Harry went to bed that night with at the very least five new friends. He wasn't sure if he could count the rest of them in that category yet, but with more time he thought he might be able to. The most exciting thing about it, he thought as he drifted off, was that he figured he would probably be set no matter what Hogwarts house he got into. Draco would be a Slytherin, probably, like all Malfoys were, and Ron a Gryffindor like the rest of the Weasleys. Theo and Blaise he figured could go into Slytherin or Ravenclaw, and Neville would probably be a Hufflepuff. A good mixed group and that wasn't even counting the girls.

Harry fell asleep smiling.

.O.O.O.

Hadrian had many years of training in how to be a good host and he utilized nearly all of it the evening of the New Years gathering. His first order of business had been to get conversation started, so he introduced Ted to Arthur and left listening to an eager Weasley asking all sorts of questions about muggle technology.

Hadrian might have expected all the high society pureblood wives to congregate together, but truly only Lady Parkinson, Lady Nott, and Viola Bulstrode made up that little gossip circle. Andromeda and Narcissa delighted in catching up together. Hadrian was pleased that they were even friendlier than they'd been in the Three Broomsticks.

Hadrian pulled Charlie, Dora, and Bill away from where they'd awkwardly met up and gently pushed them in separate directions. Charlie he had talk to Xeno Lovegood about rare species of dragons. Amelia Bones was more than happy to answer Dora's questions about auror training, and Bill and Remus seemed to enjoy talking Defense together.

Hadrian took a moment to chat with Augusta Longbottom. The woman had been the hardest to convince to come to the gathering but Hadrian was glad that she'd eventually conceded. He took her over to Molly Weasley, who immediately began talking about all the activities she had her children engaging in. That was perfect, Hadrian thought to himself as he watched Augusta slowly nod along
as Molly told her about how she always had her boys help her gardening. Neville would benefit from
the advice, even if Augusta only took a bit of it to heart.

Lord Greengrass and Lord Parkinson had been asking Figger for alcoholic beverages since they
arrived. Hadrian left them to the drunken stupor they would soon find themselves in.

"Lord Naga," Lady Zabini said, walking up to Hadrian as he made his way over to where Sirius was
conferring some last minute instructions to Peachy for the meal at seven.

"Lady Zabini," Hadrian greeted. He arrived by Sirius' side. Time to cut off the flirting before it
began. "I don't believe you have met Sirius Black. Sirius, this is Lady Bella Zabini."

"My lady," Sirius said, kissing the air above the back of her hand.

Lady Zabini's expression went from cool to slightly interested. "Mr. Black," she said.

"Call me Sirius, please," he said. "I could not have such a pretty lady be so formal with me."

And the rogue still had it, Hadrian thought to himself. He slipped away, turning to go join the last
group. As he did, he noticed Remus looking in his direction. Except, no, not at him. The werewolf
was looking at Sirius. Hadrian noticed a flash of yellow in his eyes and looked back to see Lady
Zabini curl herself up close to Sirius.

That was… unexpected. Hadrian had never gotten a vibe… well maybe Remus just knew of Lady
Zabini's reputation and didn't want to see his friend get hurt? Or maybe there was a whole other
reason Remus had slipped into depression at Sirius' death in Hadrian's old timeline.

Hadrian watched Remus for another moment, but the man soon turned back to his conversation with
Bill—deliberately putting his back to where Sirius stood. Hadrian vowed to keep an eye on the
situation, though he wasn't sure he wanted to get in the middle of it.

Lucius stood with Lord Nott and Lady Greengrass. Hadrian took a moment to wonder over that. He
knew it was rare for a woman to be in higher societal standing than her husband, but Lady
Greengrass seemed to slot in nicely with the two men.

Time to see what was going on, he supposed.

"Lord Malfoy, Lord Nott, Lady Greengrass," Hadrian greeted as he joined them.

"Lord Naga," Lucius said for the three of them. "Narcissa was so pleased that Draco and Harry
would be able to finally meet."

"Yes," Hadrian said. He glanced over at the children's tent. It seemed that Harry was sitting in a
group with Ron, Neville, Draco, Theo, and Blaise. He hoped his ward would be able to mediate
between the future Gryffindors and future Slytherins. "I think Harry is pleased as well."

There was a moment's pause.

"We have been wondering," Lady Greengrass began. "If you were planning on taking up your seat
at the Wizengamot." She smiled. "We understand, of course, if you do not feel prepared to take on
the position, what with raising a child by yourself, but there are many members who grow nervous at
an empty chair when the lord, or lady, is living in Britain."

Hadrian considered her. "You were born a Greengrass, were you not, Lady?"
"Call me Lorelle, please," she said. "And yes, I was. My husband is my third cousin."

Not too bad, Hadrian thought, and it explained why Lady Greengrass seemed to be the power in the family. She was the true Greengrass, from the main section of the family perhaps instead of whatever branch her husband had come from. Or even if not, then she had somehow convinced Lord Greengrass to concede the politics to her. Hadrian wondered if he'd accepted easily.

"Lorelle," Hadrian accepted. "I would be pleased if you called me Hadrian, then."

"My pleasure."

"Then you must call me Lucius," the Malfoy added.

"And I, Trent," Lord Nott continued.

"Of course, and I extend the same courtesy to you both," Hadrian said. "As to the Wizengamot seat, I confess that I have no real love for politics." He wondered how the three purebloods would take that news. None of them showed anything on their faces.

"Would you consider marrying and allowing your spouse to take up the seats, or is it your plan to keep them empty?" Trent asked.

Hadrian smiled softly. "I would not mind the former, but unlike many in our society I will marry only for love. If I should find a spouse for whom I develop those feelings for and that man is willing, then I would gladly cede my Wizengamot seat to him."

"Then Bella never did have a chance," Lorelle noted, picking up on his preferred gender.

"She would not have had a chance regardless," Hadrian mused. "I do not dislike women, or even the touch of women, but I find my preference is toward men." When he truly had a choice, he thought considering the memory of Ginny. After they'd divorced he'd dated—unwilling to live a monk for the rest of his life and wanting a family—and every person he'd stayed with longer than a couple weeks had been male. Of course, none of them had lasted more than a couple of months, but that was in the past, or rather the nonexistent future.

Lucius cleared his throat. "On the matter of the muggleborn orphanage that you brought up with my wife…"

Hadrian was surprised to find that all three of his current conversation companions were interested in the idea. They talked merits and expenses and legality, but by the time dinner was called they seemed to have a plan to begin spreading the idea through the Ministry.

Lucius, especially, seemed keen on his wife being able to get another child as she so craved and Trent mentioned that he'd always wanted a daughter, though his wife had refused to have more children and her marriage contract had only required her to birth one.

None of them had spouted obvious muggleborn dislike. Hadrian supposed they all remembered his careful quiet from the Blishwick dinner. It could be more than that, he thought. Lorelle mentioned that having muggleborn raised within the society would change the state of marriage eligibility. It seemed they all acknowledge that there was perhaps getting to be an inbreeding problem and a chance to add in some clear magic wouldn't go amiss in any of their families.

After dinner—which was a delicious feast made by Peachy with the help of Figger and Zesty—Hadrian made another set of rounds and ended up in a conversation with the two adult Weasleys, Sirius, and Remus that lasted several hours.
By the time he made his way back to Lucius, Trent, and Lorelle it was nearly time for them to leave. Augusta had already taken Neville home and Amelia had come up to him just a minute before saying she had to get Susan back to the girl's parents before they began to worry.

"I hope you enjoyed your evening," Hadrian said to the three purebloods.

"We did," Lucius told him.

"My family is hosting an Easter gathering this year," Lorelle said. "I will, of course, send a proper invitation, but I hope you will accept. At the very least to give young Harry another chance to spend time with the other children."

Hadrian smiled. "Indeed, we would have been delighted, but the Weasleys have already invited us to Easter brunch." He paused. "We would certainly come by after, if the gathering is to go on that long."

"It will go on through dinner," Lorelle said.

"Are you not concerned with allowing your charge to be influenced by blood traitors like the Weasleys?" Lucius asked, scowling.

"Careful," Hadrian told him pleasantly. "Arthur and Molly are fast becoming friends of mine." He paused. "Such division in our society is one of the reasons we continue to fall behind the likes of France, Russia, and Bulgaria. I agree that there are certain things the Weasleys are perhaps naïve about, but instead of insulting them and isolating them would it not be more productive to befriend and eventually educate them?"

Lucius, Trent, and Lorelle stared at him. Hadrian continued to smile.

"Hadrian!"

Molly and Arthur walked up. Arthur seemed to stiffen at the sight of Lucius, but Molly gave the three a hesitant smile. "We were just heading out," she said.

"I wish you a pleasant floo trip home," he told her. "I hope your children had fun."

"I'm certain they did," Molly said. She smiled as Hadrian kissed the top of her hand and let it go. She turned away and then seemed to hesitate before turning back. "A pleasure to see you, Lord Malfoy, Lord Nott, Lady Greengrass. I wish you all the best." She gave a little curtsey, took Arthur's arm, and left.

"She was a year above me," Lorelle said suddenly. "Molly Prewett. Her parents were so angry when she married Mr. Weasley."

"I believe in love and it is her parents fault that they never got the chance to meet their grandchildren," Hadrian said firmly. "Molly may have married a man obsessed with muggles, but she has not forgotten what she was taught as a Prewett. If you took a chance to civilly talk to her older children, you might realize that she passed down quite a bit of that knowledge to them."

"You don't say," Trent murmured.

Hadrian had learned quite a bit of pureblood etiquette in his old life from Bill Weasley. He'd always wondered how the man had caught the attention of a high society Veela such as Fleur and in fact he'd learned that Bill had properly courted her. They'd married when they'd fallen complete in love, but they'd already held affection for one another when the courtship had started. It was a pattern
Hadrian himself wanted to replicate in his new life.

It was just unfortunate that Molly had grown lax on her teaching of such wizarding customs and manners to her younger children. Hadrian supposed she might have figured the older siblings would be the ones to pass it down, but in his old life such a thing hadn't happened.

The Lovegoods and Tonks left soon after the Weasleys, followed by the Zabinis, the Parkinsons, and the Bulstrodes.

Kiran slithered up as the Bulstrodes walked away. He and Faeda had stayed away from the party, but Hadrian supposed he now figured there were few enough people that he could join Hadrian.

::Doing okay?:: Hadrian asked, ignoring Lucius, Trent, and Lorelle for a moment.

::No,:: Kiran griped. He lifted himself up. Hadrian grabbed him and helped him wrap himself around his body, his head up by Hadrian's. ::Who are they?::

::Friends,:: Hadrian said. ::Maybe::

Kiran studied the three purebloods and then seemed to shrug. He settled his head down on Harry's shoulder and closed his eyes. Hadrian knew he was completely alert. The snake wouldn't sleep with strangers still nearby.

"We shall take our leave now," Lucius said as Hadrian turned his attention back to them. The man's voice only shook slightly. Hadrian wondered if it was from fear or excitement. "Before we do, though, we wanted to inform you about a friend of ours."

"Oh?" Hadrian asked.

"Marvolo Riddle," Trent said. "You will likely read about his return to Britain in the paper tomorrow. He was in mine and Lucius' Slytherin class at Hogwarts, but he left to travel the world after he graduated and just now returned."

"I see." Hadrian wanted dearly to show his surprise.

Marvolo Riddle? Tom always had looked younger than his true age and Hadrian supposed that with the reclaiming of his horcruxes he still was. Changing his identity in such a way that it wasn't completely a lie, though… that was smart. Of course, Tom– or not Marvolo he supposed, always had been intelligent.

"Marvolo is the last descendant of the Gaunt line," Lorelle began.

"And therefore a descendant of Slytherin," Hadrian finished for her. "Why yes, now that you mention it, that is fascinating news."

::Is this the man you've been waiting for?: Kiran asked softly.

::Yes,:: Hadrian said. ::He is indeed::

"Kiran wants to meet him," Hadrian told the three. "You said he was getting back to society tomorrow?"

"Oh no, he's already back," Trent said. "The announcement will merely be made tomorrow."

"I see." Hadrian absentmindedly stroked Kiran's hooded head. "Well, please tell Lord Riddle to send me an owl at any time." He looked over to where Sirius and Remus were now talking and then back
at the three. "Actually, I would certainly be grateful if you would pass along a message for me."

"Oh?" Lucius asked. "We would be more than happy to."

Hadrian let his smile morph into a smirk. "You perhaps will need to use a pensieve, however."

"Why would we—" Lorelle began.

::I am pleased to learn you have recovered, Lord Riddle,:: Hadrian began in parseltongue and all three purebloods froze. ::I am interested in meeting you face-to-face, but I feel compelled to warn you. If you wish any harm upon my ward, I will not rest until you are dead as you should have been the night you tried to kill him. This is your second chance. I look forward to seeing how you use it.::

.o.o.o.

Marvolo sipped his firewhiskey. He was sitting in the room he'd turned into his study in the western wing of Malfoy Manor. He had the entire wing to himself and had been told by both Lucius and Narcissa that he could stay as long as he liked. Most days, he rarely saw his hosts, instead getting food from a curious house elf named Dobby and occasionally flooing out through the fireplace in the sitting room off his bedroom suite.

Now, though, he was awaiting the return of his three most loyal followers… or perhaps they weren't his followers anymore. Marvolo had never had friends in the conventional sense but he thought that in the months since he’d gained his body and sanity back, Lucius, Trent, and Lorelle had become the closest to being considered such.

Still, he hardly wanted to live in Malfoy Manor for the rest of his life. The Gaunt family house had been sold generations ago to help combat the poverty that had waged through various gambling debts his ancestors had indulged in. His mother, grandfather, and uncle had lived in a shack in Little Hangleton. A shack Marvolo had burned down a few weeks before after collecting the Gaunt ring that had once been his horcrux.

The ring now sat on the middle finger of his right hand. He stroked it with his thumb. It had been the only horcrux he'd bothered to go collect and only truly because he needed some obvious proof for the world that he was the last Gaunt heir.

Marvolo sneered. He wouldn't consider living in the Riddle manor house. It was muggle, for one. That house belonged to Tom, and he wasn't Tom Riddle anymore. His two main options were to buy an appropriate manor house or obtain one through other means. Buying a house would be too expensive. He had a vault full of galleons obtained from the war he'd engaged in years before, but it was nowhere near the mounds held by families such as the Malfoys.

Obtaining one… well he wanted to keep himself relatively legal, at least for a little while. Marvolo carried with him the stain of the previous Gaunt poverty. The family was a noble house, and therefore Marvolo was a lord, but even their former Wizengamot seat had been auctioned away a century ago. He would be in good standing with the endorsements by Lucius, Trent, and Lorelle, but he would still have much work ahead of him.

It was exciting in a way he hadn't felt since perhaps even before he made his first horcrux. Manipulating everyone around him had been Marvolo's life since he was old enough to understand how humans worked—barely seven when he'd first learned the power of fear and eleven when he discovered charm. How he had steered away from his original plan of careful domination of the British wizarding world to unnecessary torture and murder was something he'd been thinking over deeply.
There was a knock on his sitting room door. "Enter," he called. The door opened and Lucius walked in, followed by Trent and Lorelle.

They greeted him and sat down. Lucius held a pensieve and he placed it on the table between them. It was the same one Marvolo had used to view Lucius' earlier memories of Lord Hadrian Naga.

"How was it?" he questioned.

"Hadrian throws a warm gathering," Lorelle said. "Not too formal, but neither was it lax in etiquette."

"Hadrian?"

"We were all given permission," Trent said. "Lucius can show you the memory."

Marvolo inclined his head. Lucius pulled a silver strand of memory from his mind and placed it in the pensieve. Marvolo dipped his wand into it and was transported to the gathering.

He watched as Naga greeted Lucius and his family. He took a moment to study the boy at Naga's side. This was the eight-year-old Harry Potter, he thought. The boy he'd tried to kill seven years ago.

The child knew his manners. He bowed to the Malfoys, but stayed quiet and allowed his guardian to do all the verbal greetings, as was proper of an underage wizard.

Marvolo considered the prophecy that had caused him to be so obsessed with the boy. He walked closer and studied the lightning bolt scar he'd left when his killing curse had somehow failed.

The scar was lighter than the pictures of it he'd seen in the papers. Either the dullness of the memory was working hard on his senses, or the scar had faded rapidly from the pictures taken at Sirius Black's trial.

How? Why? Had Naga given his ward anti-scarring crème to help clear it up? It was possible.

The memory blurred and when it settled Marvolo was standing outside. Naga had set up pavilions for his guests. Young Harry was over with the rest of the children. Marvolo ignored them and stayed close to the memory figures of Lucius, Trent, and Lorelle. They were soon joined by Naga.

He listened the conversation and carefully watched Naga's face. The man showed few flickers of emotion, though his eyes were the most expressive part of him. It was true with many people, but seemed highlighted by the intense green of the man's irises.

He tilted his head as the mention of Naga's dislike of politics and preference for men came out. For a man who supposedly didn't want to play the field, he surely knew how to. It wouldn't take long for Lorelle to inform any and all interested pureblood females that Lord Naga had little interest in becoming their husband. He wondered if the man had already gotten annoyed with putting off eager female suitors.

They moved on to discussion of the muggleborn orphanage idea Lucius had brought up a few meetings ago to him, Trent, and Lorelle. Marvolo felt strange at the memory. If such a thing had existed when he'd been younger… he would have never had to go back to the nasty muggle orphanage he'd grown up in.

It wasn't his to endorse, though. He did not yet have the political power, nor the funds to help such a project. He left that to Lucius, Trent, Lorelle, and their spouses with his carefully disinterested blessing.
Though several of his old followers had known he was a halfblood who'd murdered his muggle father, none had known he'd grown up in a muggle orphanage. They had all assumed the Gaunts had raised him and he meant to keep it that way even with his new friends.

The memory blurred again and when it came back, the sun had set. Floating orbs and lanterns lit the pavilions as Naga came up to say his farewells to Lucius, Trent, and Lorelle.

He narrowed his eyes as Naga mentioned the Weasleys and his plan for them. The lord was indeed a manipulator, though perhaps a kinder one than Marvolo. He saw real friendliness and affection in Naga's eyes as he said goodbye to the two Weasleys.

A snake approached. It was a black king cobra, and a handsome one. Marvolo felt his flickering interest spark harder. Here was the true proof that Lord Naga was as Slytherin as he was. Sure, he'd seen Lucius' memories of the trial, but being informed by the lord that he could speak parseltongue and hearing it were two different things entirely.

He forced his eyes away from Naga's mouth as the three purebloods brought him up, as they'd been told to do at the gathering. Marvolo smirked at Naga's obvious interest in him.

::Is this the man you've been waiting for?: the snake asked.

::Yes,: Naga replied. ::He is indeed.::

Marvolo froze, allowing himself to show such obvious sign of his shock only because he was alone in the memory. He pulled his thoughts together as Naga announced that he wished to give him a message.

::I am pleased to learn you have recovered, Lord Riddle. I am interested in meeting you face-to-face, but I feel compelled to warn you. If you wish any harm upon my ward, I will not rest until you are dead as you should have been the night you tried to kill him. This is your second chance. I look forward to seeing how you use it.: The memory ended and Marvolo was thrust out of it. He came back to himself in the sitting room.

"May we ask what it was he said to you?" Trent questioned.

Marvolo considered the man, and then Lucius and Lorelle. He'd informed the Carrow twins of his true identity, but while they were being useful about spreading the seeds of his plan through the Ministry, they weren't to the same level as these three in front of him.

"He knows," Marvolo said finally. "Somehow, he has knowledge that I was once Voldemort." He smirked a bit, looking away toward the fire. "He threatened me should I attempt to harm his ward."

"Will you?" Lorelle asked.

"No. The boy interests me no longer." As far as Marvolo was concerned, the piece of a prophecy Severus Snape had reported to him was invalid. He had been a fool to chase after it without knowing the full verse, but now he deliberately ignored it. It was true that the boy perhaps had the power to vanquish him, but having the power to do so and doing so were different things.

"None of us told him," Trent said. "And the Carrows are spelled to secrecy."

"No," Marvolo said. "He learned another way."
Marvolo remembered that young voice who'd come to him when he was in Albania. Could that have been Naga? No… it had to have been his ward. He thought about that fading scar. If there were some spell or ritual to combine together his horcruxes back into him, then it would have had to originate from at least one of them.

Six glowing pieces of soul, he thought. Was it possible that he'd made the boy into a horcrux? It could have been. He'd killed the boy's mother just before he cast at the child.

If Naga had adopted the boy and researched the curse scar, he could have discovered Marvolo's horcruxes. Somehow, he'd known or learned how to take the horcrux out of his charge by combining them back into Marvolo. He must have suspected the minute he'd been informed that Marvolo was an heir to Slytherin than he was, in fact, the regenerated Lord Voldemort.

He couldn't tell the three all he'd just theorized. They still hadn't been told about the horcruxes, though Marvolo supposed they might have guessed something. He settled for a possible truth, one less likely than his theory but plausible. "Perhaps he has inherited an item by Slytherin himself. A tapestry of all the Slytherin line or something similar. He would have known I had not died."

Lucius nodded slowly. "It is possible."

Marvolo folded his hands. "I need to consider all I've learned. It is late and I am sure you are all tired. We'll convene again in a few days."

Marvolo went back to his earlier ponderings as Lucius, Trent, and Lorelle left. He needed to obtain a proper home, secure himself a Wizengamot seat if possible, increase his standing in the political world, and up his fortune faster than he'd be able to by selling various protection, and cursed, objects as he'd already been doing.

Hadrian Naga, he mused. Looking for a husband, one to take his spot in the political field, and a fellow Slytherin heir. It was almost too perfect.

Well, there was a catch. Love. He sneered. Marvolo didn't believe in love. To him it was a fairytale told to children. Lust, he understood. Even affection and trust. He had never trusted someone completely and he'd rarely felt such genuine affection, but he knew both. Love was a mystery to him, so much so that the mere mention of it dropped Naga's eligibility in his mind.

But the pros outweighed the cons. Marvolo was a master manipulator and while Naga seemed good, very good even, he wasn't at Marvolo's level. Marvolo would never fall in love with the man, but he could learn how to make Naga fall in love with him.

Marvolo could court him.

::Not yet,:: he hissed.

Nagini lifted her head up from where she was curled by the fire. ::What?::

::Merely thinking aloud,:: Marvolo told the snake.

Not yet, he repeated mentally. Naga knew too much and Marvolo wanted to figure out how. He couldn't trust the man's intentions and until he had a better grasp on his personality and goals he had to put off any thought of them marrying to further Marvolo's own plans.

There was nothing else for it. Marvolo would have to arrange a meeting with the enigmatic Hadrian Naga.
Molly Weasley picked up the letter on her kitchen table. She and Arthur had just finished tucking all the children in. It was past their usual bedtimes, for the young ones at least, but tonight had been a special occasion. It was the first day of 1989 and her children had finally been able to meet little Harry. The gathering had been fun, less formal than she'd feared though several proper pureblood families had been in attendance.

The letter was addressed to her and Arthur. She opened it.

*Molly and Arthur*, it read.

I had hoped to talk to you both about the trial of Sirius Black. I understand that is has been hard on you to learn that you had let your son keep a Death Eater as a pet, but I hope that you have had time to put that aside. I am worried about this Hadrian Naga who informed you of the wizard's presence in your home.

I heard that you took your family to a gathering at Lord Naga's manor today. I do hope you have all returned in good health. Should you wish to talk about it, my office is always open to you.

Always wishing you and your children the best,

*Albus*

Molly scowled. She set the letter aflame with a flick of her wand. She didn't know what was up with Albus recently. The man had let a Death Eater live inside Hogwarts, never mind that the same Death Eater had slept in her son's room. The wards on the castle were supposed to prevent things of that nature, and yet Albus had let Pettigrew slip under his nose.

And all this interrogation over Hadrian. Was Albus truly so prejudiced against the man because he was of Slytherin blood? Hadrian was perfectly nice and friendly and Harry obviously adored him.

Molly was growing sick of Albus' behavior. She knew Minerva was too, though the woman had always been more tolerant of the headmaster than Molly. Arthur as well, though her husband would follow her on this. Molly was done listening to Albus for anything that didn't directly concern her Hogwarts children.

Perhaps she should warn Hadrian of the man's interest. Molly frowned. Hadrian had only met Albus briefly and they hadn't even been properly introduced, but she remembered that Hadrian hadn't seemed to like Albus much. It must have been from the stress of finding Pettigrew and trying to get Sirius free.

She'd jot a quick note to him, Molly decided. A head's up of sorts. It couldn't hurt.
Chapter 9

"So what do you think of this Marvolo fellow?" Sirius asked, pointing to the paper. The first article on Marvolo Riddle had come out a week ago, but there'd been a continuing mini-series about him just as there had been about Hadrian all those months ago when he'd returned to Britain.

Hadrian looked from Sirius to Remus. Harry stared down at his plate. He'd already asked Hadrian if Marvolo was Tom Riddle and Hadrian hadn't lied.

Hadrian considered his options. Sirius and Remus had been living in Naga Manor for a little more than a month and neither of them had said anything about moving out. By now, they were both used to Hadrian and Harry speaking parseltongue and neither of them had made any comments about how Hadrian was obviously teaching Harry to be as grey as he was, policy and magic-wise.

"You're hiding something," Remus said. "Both of you."

Harry looked at Hadrian. ::Don't worry.:: Hadrian told the boy. ::Go start on today's book. We'll join you when this is all settled.::

Harry frowned, but nodded. He jumped down from the table and headed up to the library.

The adults watched him go. When he was out of sight, the two Mauraders turned back to Hadrian. "Should we get out our wands?" Sirius asked.

"Hopefully not," Hadrian murmured. "How much do you two know about Voldemort?"

Both man flinched only a small amount, much better than the normal wizarding public. Hadrian smiled at that. In his old life, he and Dumbledore had basically trained the entire Order to not flinch at all at the mention of the name.

"What do you mean?" Remus asked. "What about him?"

"I mean… do you know who he was before he was Voldemort?" Hadrian asked.

Both men shook their heads.

"He went to Hogwarts in late thirties and early forties. His mother was Merope Gaunt and his father was a muggle named Tom Riddle. He was named the same, Tom Riddle Jr., a halfblood who was sorted into Slytherin."

"The father of this Marvolo bloke," Sirius said. "Wait, you're saying You-Know-Who sired a kid?"

"Tom Riddle Jr. was a charmer and a political genius. He became Head Boy and went on to gain a position at the Ministry. Then, for some reason, he vanished and when he returned he was the Dark Lord Voldemort." Hadrian shrugged. "Who knows what caused him to snap. Anyway, he's dead now because of Lily."

"Because of Lily?" Remus asked. "Not Harry?"

"Harry was a year old," Hadrian stated. "What sort of inherent magic of a one-year-old would be able to kill one of the most powerful dark wizards of the age? No, Harry and I talked about it and we think it must have been someone his mother did. Some light ritual she set up which caused Voldemort's curse to backfire and kill him."
Sirius nodded. "Lily was always very strong. And now we know she has Naga blood… Slytherin blood… I bet she found some way to use You-Know-Who's Slytherin blood against him."

Hadrian blinked. He hadn't thought of that. "You might be right."

"We'll never know for sure. The question is, what about this son of his. You think he might become another dark lord?" Remus asked.

Hadrian shook his head. "Marvolo Riddle is not his father, just as I am not my father and Harry is not his father."

"We know that," Remus said. "Harry's more like you then like James."

"Not that that's a bad thing," Sirius reassured quickly. "You're a good man."

"Thanks," Hadrian murmured. "I have a feeling Marvolo is going to make a lot of changes in the Ministry. His heritage, though it doesn't seem too impressive to those who don't know who his father was, will bring him a lot of influence in the darker pureblood circles. He's also related to me and Harry, albeit distantly, because he's another Slytherin heir."

Sirius rubbed his chin. "It's just so strange. I don't remember him at all, and he was in Cissy's year at Hogwarts."

"Like I said, he's not his father," Hadrian said. "He didn't try to stand out, but I'll bet he made a lot of connections with the kids who would become his father's followers."

"Hell, he probably recruited them for him," Sirius said.

"Except he didn't fight in the war," Remus said. "I don't remember him at all."

"He probably was allowed not to," Hadrian told them. "His father wouldn't have cursed him for leaving the way he probably did for any of his other followers."

"True."

"So wait," Remus said. "Does Harry not know? Is that why you made him leave?"

"No, he knows," Hadrian said. *More than you two*, he thought silently. "I just didn't want to risk him listening to you two spouting prejudice about Marvolo because of his heritage."

"I think we've both learned not to do that," Sirius said. "If I didn't know better, I'd say you imperiused me."

"I haven't," Hadrian said. "I don't use the unforgivables."

"At all?" Remus questioned.

"Even the aurors were using the killing curse during the last war," Sirius added.

"If I want to kill someone, I'll do it a different way. The killing curse makes me feel dirty." Hadrian frowned. "And I'm not a fan of torture."

"That's good to hear," Remus said.

"That being said," Hadrian continued. "You know I'm not a light wizard. There are a lot of changes I want to see made to this country. I think Marvolo might be able to help them along. If I become
friends with him, I don't want to lose your friendships either, if only for Harry's sake."

"And is Harry okay with you becoming friends with the son of the man who killed his parents?"
Remus asked.

Harry was actually okay with Hadrian becoming friends with the man who killed his parents period. Well, only because he was sane now. Hadrian was so happy with how understanding the boy was about it all, because he did want to give Marvolo a chance.

"He is," Hadrian said evenly.

"Then we'll find a way to be okay with it too," Sirius said.

Albus popped a lemon drop in his mouth. The second trimester of Hogwarts had just started. In a few months, the students would have tests and then they'd be off to Easter hols and the castle would most empty until the students came back for the final trimester of the year. It was a continuous cycle of coming and going, ebbing like the tide through Hogwarts.

"What to do, Fawkes," Albus murmured. He'd gone to the Dursleys residence almost immediately after Sirius Black's trial and the discovery of who'd taken Harry, only to find that there were new wards around 4 Privet Drive preventing anyone magical from stepping foot anywhere near the house.

They were strong wards. Albus was impressed despite himself. There was no doubt this enigma, Hadrian Naga, had created them.

Young Harry had lived with the Dursleys for eight years. Albus knew Petunia had never been happy raising the boy, but he was shocked that she would sign away her own family to a stranger. Harry was meant to grow up ignorant of his status in the wizarding world, so that he wouldn't become arrogant—so that he could be trained to be a proper wizard for the light to fight Voldemort when he returned.

But now he was being raised by a pureblood wizard who seemed, by all account, grey if not dark. One who was teaching the boy about proper wizarding etiquette. Naga had probably already poisoned his mind against muggles and muggleborns.

Albus frowned. Nothing was going according to plan. He hated when his carefully laid plans failed.

The problem was, even if he did manage to convince the public that Naga wasn't a good guardian for Harry, then Harry's guardianship would go to Sirius, not back to the Dursleys. Beside, it was a little too late to send him back. Albus would have erase his memory of the wizarding world and to use a memory charm on a young child could damage Harry's brain permanently. Harry need to be strong, powerful enough to fight Voldemort.

And he was already back. Albus glanced at The Daily Prophet. Tom had returned. Albus knew he'd never had a student named Marvolo Riddle at Hogwarts, but when he'd checked the records they'd already been changed to indicate another Slytherin student, one who'd never gotten detention or lost or gained many house points.

The only people who had access to that record were Albus, Minerva, and the Board of Governors. Lucius Malfoy must have changed it, but there was no way Albus could prove that. Not without looking foolish. So many had already claimed they remembered Marvolo—some, Albus knew, just did so to put their names in the papers.
Was it possible that Naga and Voldemort were in league with one another? Albus certainly hoped not. Already he'd brought up with Minerva about reinstating the Order, but she'd been insistent that it wasn't needed. She remembered Tom Riddle fondly from her school days and Albus had never had the heart to tell her that Tom had become Voldemort. Now, she was excited to know that Tom had produced a child and lamented not paying attention to the Slytherins enough to remember the boy when he was at school.

It was infuriating. Albus sucked his lemon drop harder. He needed a plan. He needed to know more.

"I have to meet him, Fawkes," Albus said. The phoenix chirped at him. Albus nodded.

All the plans he'd created and discarded over the last months faded away in his mind. They weren't viable. Sirius was living in Naga Manor, reportedly, so he wouldn't easily be convinced to fight for custody of Harry. And even if he did get it, he had ignored all of Albus' letters. Albus feared Sirius blamed him for his lack of trial.

The best thing to do, Albus figured, the only thing he could think to do would be to find a way to get Naga under his influence and away from Voldemort's clutches.

.o.o.o.

Hadrian contemplated the letter he'd received from Dumbledore as he waited on his lunch partner. The invitation for a meal from Marvolo hadn't been a surprise, but Dumbledore's had been. He'd replied to Marvolo, thus the waiting, but had yet to answer Dumbledore.

Frankly, he wasn't entirely sure he wanted to see the old man yet. Dumbledore had been dead for so many years to old him and his new self had never known the man. For all he had let this bitterness well up in him, he still remembered how he'd looked up to Dumbledore as a sort of grandfather-figure.

Hadrian looked up as a distinctive—and dare he think intoxicating—aura appeared at the edge of his conscious. Marvolo Riddle stepped up to the maître d'. Hadrian was too far away to hear what was being said, but it seemed Marvolo was effortlessly charming the hardened woman who ran Bells—one of the finer eating establishments in Diagon Alley.

Marvolo was as handsome physically as the pictures of him in the Daily Prophet had shown, but with the added affect of his magical aura, Hadrian could see several of the elite currently eating their own lunches turn away from their conversations to catch a glimpse of the man. Hadrian had no trouble imagining how Marvolo had wooed so many to his side back when he was at Hogwarts. He'd lost so much of this allure when he'd become Voldemort.

It was dangerous, actually, how attracted Hadrian was to the man at that moment. Magic of that power was always attractive, but while even powerful witches and wizards only exuded a bit of their power across the room, Marvolo seemed to radiate a tantalizing amount of swirling darkness like a delicious poison begging to be tasted.

Hadrian quickly cleared all thoughts of that from his mind as the maître d' approached his table with Marvolo as her side. Hadrian stood, smiling politely at both of them. The maître d' left them with words that their server would be with them shortly.

"Lord Naga," Marvolo greeted easily.

"Lord Riddle," Hadrian returned. "If you please." He gestured for Marvolo to sit first. It wasn't just a statement of respect, but also of acknowledgement that, in terms of pure magical power, Marvolo
was stronger than him.

It was troublesome. He'd banked on the idea that he could defeat the man if he decided to become Voldemort again, but Voldemort had been so magically weakened by his horcruxes… Hadrian knew he was very strong indeed but in a straight duel he would struggle against Marvolo.

Marvolo's eyes were a red-brown, not quite the bloody color he'd been as a snake creature but not the same brown he'd had as a school child. Hadrian met them easily, not at all worried about his occulmency shields—even if Marvolo would have been able to breach the ones he'd built up before becoming Hadrian, magic itself prevented anyone from reading Hadrian's mind now.

Speaking of occulmency, he'd really need to get Harry started on at least the basics before Hogwarts. He didn't trust Dumbledore not to take a dip in his ward's mind.

"I do not believe you are as surprised by my existence as I was by yours," Marvolo murmured.

Hadrian nodded slowly. "Indeed, I don't think I was very surprised at all."

Their server came. Marvolo ordered first without having even looked at the menu. He had been here before, then. Well, so had Hadrian. He ordered the lamb as the server turned then to him, "And a butterbeer, if you would be so kind."

Marvolo raised an eyebrow at his choice. Hadrian was momentarily distracted by the realization that the man had eyebrows now.

"I'm quite fond of butterbeer," Hadrian said simply. He knew that, by reputation, butterbeer was more of a childish drink or a statement of an unwillingness to actually consume alcohol. Hadrian enjoyed firewhiskey like the best of them, but he doubted he'd ever loose his taste for butterbeer.

Marvolo studied him hard for a moment. Hadrian knew the man was making a decision on how to approach the coming conversation. He wondered if the dark lord would attempt a subtle manipulation and dancing around the knowledge they both possessed… or something a bit more blunt.

Marvolo's lips quirked briefly. ::I had heard that you were something of an enigma, Lord Naga.::

Oh, parseltongue. Well, two could play at that game. ::I am not the only enigma at this table,:: Hadrian hissed. ::Though I don't suppose many have realized that yet.::

::And when did you realize it?::

Hadrian smiled. ::So blunt, Tom::

Marvolo's eyes flashed. Hadrian reacted before he could think about it. He had his fingers on his wand in an instant, casting a nonverbal shield charm around himself.

Marvolo deliberately relaxed back against his seat. Hadrian stared at him and then lowered the shield as their server came back with their drinks and plates floating in the air beside him. He placed them down with professional cheer, seemingly unbothered when they dismissed him a moment later.

One of the good things about being two of three people in the world who knew a language was that one didn't have to be worried about being overheard even by the people struggling to listen in at the booth behind Marvolo.

::Do you know how much I hate that name, or was that simply a mistake?:: Marvolo asked after too
long a pause.

::Perhaps both.,:: Hadrian admitted. ::It is not my wish to antagonize you. Not if I have any other choice.::

Marvolo tilted his head just slightly. ::At what point would you not have any other choice? If I attacked young Mr. Potter?::

Hadrian let his own eyes flash in much the same way Marvolo's had done. ::That would be the easiest manner of becoming my enemy, yes.::

::That would be uncouth.,:: Marvolo murmured. ::Especially as you are the one who facilitated my taking on this identity.::

::I facilitated only a second chance at sanity. It was your choice to do away with your previous names, both the one you loath and the one I do.::

Marvolo laughed. It was a startling sound and it did the trick of catching Hadrian off guard. He stared for a moment. Marvolo's eyes caught his and held them for an electrifying second and he could do nothing about it.

::I will not seek to harm your ward, Lord Naga,:: Marvolo said, amusement still clear in his hissing.

Hadrian looked away, struggling to control the sudden flush in his cheeks. He grabbed his butterbeer and let the warmth of it sooth away his lose of control. He hadn't expected to be attracted to the man who'd killed his parents in his old life. And even if he'd thought that the man's magic aura would be tantalizing, he hadn't thought to consider that being in Marvolo's company would have him blushing like a teenager.

::Good,:: Hadrian said, bringing himself together. ::I believe you have questions, but you do not wish to be in my debt anymore by asking them.::

::I am in your debt,:: Marvolo admitted. ::I do not like owing people.::

::By leaving Harry alone, I consider ourselves even.,:: Hadrian said, though he knew he could have asked much more.

Marvolo knew it too. He also seemed to realize that Hadrian had laid that out as a lead up to something else. There was some pause as they both began eating their food.

Halfway done with his lamb, which was as delicious as expected of Bells, Hadrian set his fork down. Marvolo reacted to the movement by setting aside his own utensils.

Hadrian took notice of the man's long, pale fingers. In some ways, they looked very similar. Both with dark hair, both with pale skin, both with tall and lean figures. And yet… Marvolo's face was a harder sort of refined and Hadrian's a more exotic look. He knew as much, knew how attractive this body was—though he'd been quite comfortable in his last one.

::I do not imagine it will take you long to work your way up through the Ministry.,:: Hadrian began.

Marvolo just watched him with those red-hued eyes. Hadrian let out a slow breath through his nose.

::You must have heard of my opinions on muggleborns by now.::

::Yes.,:: Marvolo acknowledged. ::It surprised me, I must admit. You so quickly changed opinions
deeply rooted into the minds of the heads of some of the oldest pureblood houses in Britain.

Sometimes all it takes is a logical explanation from someone one has a reason to respect, or at least listen to; Hadrian murmured. It is not as though I expect the Malfoys or the Notts or the Greengrasses to suddenly start consorting with muggles. It is simply a waste to ignore the source of clean magic in our society.

Marvolo sipped his wine for a moment. I despise muggles. This is not something you, or anyone, can change.

Hadrian met Marvolo's suddenly more-red gaze. Neither backed down for a long moment. And then Marvolo looked away.

Muggles and muggleborns are two separate things: Hadrian said evenly. Have you ever given any thought to why you are so powerful, despite having a muggle father?

Marvolo let out a controlled breath. I know very well.

Hadrian nodded. Marvolo had likely thought over Hadrian's explanations on clean magic and how it strengthened family magic. Marvolo showed his Slytherin ancestry so much because Hadrian's was bogged down in a range of other family magic, while Marvolo's had strengthened because of the lack of magic, or if there was any then clean magic, from his father's side.

You are likely a descendant of Salazar's eldest son: Hadrian said. I can't be certain, though I know you aren't a descendant of his daughter.

Because you are.

She married the last Naga. We have had Slytherin blood ever since. I believe I already explained that.

Marvolo inclined his head.

Hadrian finished his lamb, savoring the last bite. He wondered if he could convince Peachy to try a similar lamb roast recipe.

Will you tell me? Marvolo asked suddenly.

Hadrian glanced at him. I'm sure you've already guessed. He was curious to see what theory Marvolo had cooked up as to how Hadrian knew what he did.

Judging by Marvolo's small smile, he knew Hadrian was going to go with whatever the man said. It is impressive you recognized the dark magic that made up your ward's scar.

Impressive, perhaps. Or perhaps I spent a while researching why Harry was getting so many nightmares. Nothing untrue. In his past life, Hadrian had researched, sort of, his vision-nightmares.

Their server came the instant they both finished their food and banished the dishes away. Once they'd both declined dessert, he bowed and left. They'd be expected to put the correct number of galleons on the table before they departed.

"Let me pay," Marvolo said, speaking in English for the first time since they'd met. And then in parseltongue, It is the least I can do.

How interesting. Hadrian agreed easily, if only because it wasn't worth arguing about. And because
paying for a meal was something rarely done in the wizarding world unless it was to state intentions. Courting intentions.

Marvolo's gaze continued to burn into him as Hadrian stood. He didn't leave though, not quite yet.

::How were you able to get your OWLS and NEWTS?:: Hadrian asked curiously. He'd need to get them through the British Ministry.

Marvolo didn't show surprise at the question, though Hadrian knew it was a bit out of nowhere.

::The Department of Education at the Ministry should be able to help you… if you wished to take the British OWLS and NEWTS legally.:: The unspoken knowledge that Marvolo had it done illegally, or just had his results forged, was there between them.

Hadrian nodded. "Thank you."

"My pleasure, Lord Naga." Marvolo stood as well, offering his hand.

"Hadrian." It seemed like something to get out of the way. There was no way Marvolo was going to forget about him. Hadrian knew they'd be interacting more in the future. He put his hand in Marvolo's.

Marvolo flipped his palm and kissed the air over it. "Hadrian," he murmured. "It would please me if you called me Marvolo." He stared into Hadrian's eyes, making it clear that more than one thing was being stated, and asked.

Marvolo was asking if Hadrian could accept Marvolo as a new man… not as Riddle, as Tom, as Voldemort. He was asking if the intentions he'd just clearly stated would be turned down outright, or if they'd be allowed to continue.

Hadrian's heartbeat was audible in his ears. In times where he was stunned, he tended to work first with his instincts and then with his brain. "Marvolo," he accepted.

Marvolo let his hand go with just the hint of a caress and Hadrian left before the real implications of his acceptance fully hit him.

When they did, later at home secure in his bedroom, he wasn't sure whether to cry, curse someone… or laugh.

He settled with laughing, because if he couldn't find humor in the once Lord Voldemort asking the court the once Harry Potter… then what could he find humor from in this strange world?

.o.o.o.

"You never said how it went."

Hadrian looked up to see Harry watching him with intent green eyes. Sirius and Remus were both out for the day—Sirius to have lunch with his cousins and Remus with him because Sirius had begged him not to leave him alone with their evil matchmaking ways. If Remus had agreed a bit too easily, well Hadrian had told himself he'd keep out of it.

"My meeting with Marvolo, you mean."

Harry nodded.

Hadrian stood from his armchair and walked over to Harry. He easily knelt in front of the boy. "You
will tell me if this upsets you," he ordered softly.

"I will."

Hadrian gently grabbed the boy's hands in his. "I imagine I'll be seeing Marvolo more often. He... I don't know what the nature of our relationship will be." He wasn't sure what he wanted it to be. "But I think we might be able to work toward similar goals."

"So he's definitely not Voldemort anymore?"

"I can't say there isn't a bit of Voldemort inside him," Hadrian said truthfully. "But he's mostly Marvolo Riddle, a very smart halfblood with political leanings."

Harry pulled his hands from Hadrian's and brought them up to wrap Hadrian in a tight hug. Hadrian hugged back, a little surprised. "What's wrong?"

"I don't want him to take you from me," Harry whispered.

"Harry." Hadrian pushed the boy back just slightly so they could see each other's faces. "I will always choose you. If I have to choose, it will always be you." He was repeating himself, but it was important Harry understood that.

Harry nodded, his eyes suspiciously moist. "I believe you."

"Good," Hadrian said. He kissed Harry's forehead. "You don't have to meet him if you don't want to."

"I do one day, I think. Just... not now."

"You'll tell me when you're ready."

"Yeah."

Hadrian pulled the boy in closer. Harry hugged him like Hadrian never remembered being hugged before—like he was the center of the boy's world and Harry didn't appreciate his center being rocked out from under him.

He couldn't forget this, Hadrian promised himself. He was about to start playing a very dangerous game with Marvolo and he couldn't forget this boy who was his ward. He couldn't forget who Harry could have become... who Hadrian used to be. He couldn't forget the way this hug felt, like he was Harry's most important person. He vowed to live up to that in every way he could and if that meant rejecting Marvolo's more intimate gestures, he would.

Of course, he wasn't sure he wouldn't be doing that anyway. He wasn't sure exactly Marvolo's angle yet, but Harry would have to always come first. Hadrian would make sure of it.

.o.o.o.

Hadrian opened the Ministry letter. He'd been expecting it for the past week. With only his set of exams to grade, the Ministry tester had said he'd have his results by the end of the week.

Hadrian let his eyes skim past the drivel at the beginning and focused on his scores.

**OWLS**

*History of Magic - E*
It wasn't surprising how well he'd done. Hadrian had only taken exams he'd known he'd do well in. He was surprised that he'd done so well in Defense, though. He was quite good, but he knew many others he'd be wary to face in a duel, Marvolo highest on the list.

He was glad he'd elected to take Ancient Runes and Alchemy at NEWTS level instead of OWLS. He'd been a little cautious about both of them, since he'd only brushed over them as Harry Potter and truly only had his memories of Hadrian Naga learning them to go on, but apparently those memories were good.

Hadrian set the record down. He knew the results would be all over the Prophet soon. Such was the downside of doing it the public way… and not making his examiner enter into a secrecy contract. Oh well. Hopefully the hype about him wouldn't be too bad since the public had Marvolo to still titter over.

Though, if he was being honest, he knew the curiosity about both of them was only feeding the other. They were both heirs of Slytherin after all. And hadn't that been an interesting Prophet article. He had a feeling Marvolo had a direct hand in writing it. It was as if he wanted the world to know their connection.

And how good they, theoretically, would be together.

Hadrian sighed. It had only been a fortnight since the meal he and Marvolo had shared and as of yet he hadn't got an initial courtship gift, but he knew Marvolo too well to expect the man to forget about the whole thing. Marvolo wanted something out of him—whether his knowledge, money, connections, or some combination. And he'd obviously decided marriage to be the best way to obtain it.
Hadrian just wasn't sure yet what to do about that.

At the moment, though, there were other things on him mind.

Hadrian picked up a quill and dipped it in his inkwell. He placed a fresh piece of parchment in front of him.

**Dear Albus Dumbledore,**

*I apologize for the late reply. I was busy receiving my British OWLS and NEWTS. I would be delighted to meet with you. As the future headmaster of my ward, it seems prudent to get to know the man who influences so many of our magical youth.*

*Perhaps you wouldn’t mind giving me a tour of Hogwarts? I would understand if you are too busy, but as I have never been in the castle I would love to explore it.*

*I do apologize for how I brushed you off the last time we met. I was stressed, I am sure you understand. Harry is my priority right now and I will stop at nothing to ensure his safety. The ordeal with Pettigrew had me at a hair’s end. That is, of course, over and done with now and I hope for a chance to talk with you on more friendly terms.*

**Looking forward to a reply,**

**Hadrian Naga**

**Lord of the House of Naga**
"At first I thought it was a joke, you know," Pomona stated.

"As did I, Pomona," Minerva replied. The staff meeting had not yet officially began, and so of course it was the perfect time for the professors to gossip on the thing that had been bothering some of them: how they could forget one of their students so completely.

Of the Hogwarts professors who'd taught when Marvolo Riddle had supposedly attended Hogwarts, only Minerva, Pomona Sprout, Filius Flitwick, and Septima Vector remained. Well, and Albus as the headmaster.

Minerva frowned, thinking of Albus, but pushed it aside.

"I have a suspicion," Filius stated in his squeaky voice. The other professors turned to the half-goblin.

"Filius?" Minerva asked.

"It would have been a powerful ritual indeed, but it is possible, I think, to have indeed erased all our memories of the boy." Filius sighed. "Even Horace doesn't remember the boy and you know Marvolo's father was one of his favorites in school."

Septima began murmuring to herself about the complications of such a ritual as Pomona gasped in dismay.

"But why?" Minerva asked. "Is there a way to be sure, Filius?"

Filius shook his head. "A ritual of such nature would be permanent. If indeed that is why we cannot remember this boy though the records say he was here… to be honest it is suspicious that only his Slytherin yearmates remember him."

"Not so suspicious," Severus said from the corner of the staff room.

Minerva turned to the Potions' professor and raised an eyebrow. He scowled.

"Think!" the man growled. "Who is this Marvolo's father?"

"Tom Riddle," Minerva stated. "We do know that Severus. I went to school with Tom, you know. We were Head Boy and Girl together. He was a delight to work with, truly the best of Slytherin."

Minerva frowned. "The best of Slytherin…"

"I remember now," Filius said. "Those rumors, Minerva. That Tom was the Heir."

"He is an heir," Septima stated. "If we're to believe The Prophet."

"And who else was an heir?" Severus hissed.

Minerva paled. "Severus! You wouldn't dare instigate that Tom was—"

"No, no," Filius cut her off. "I see where Severus is coming from. For He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named would have dearly like to pull young Marvolo into his services, wouldn't he have? I think, indeed, that is why Tom left the country."
"I would have left too," Pomona stated. "Rather than fight against an insane cousin like that."

Filius nodded. "Tom was always very powerful. He would have been able to do the ritual. Indeed, I imagine only Marvolo's closest friends remember him because of the nature of that friendship. It is not so easy to completely wipe seven years of memory from their minds, at least not permanently, but from ours."

Minerva took a deep breath. "I don't think we can blame Tom for that, then." She ran a shaky hand over her smooth hair to her bun. "It does make too much sense."

"It does indeed," Pomona said, patting Minerva on the hand kindly.

Minerva noticed Severus retreat back into the corner just as Albus finally made his way into the room. Minerva drew herself up, composing her thoughts for the meeting.

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Hadrian, Harry, Sirius, and Remus all flooed to the Burrow for Easter brunch. Molly met them immediately upon their arrival. She kissed Hadrian on the cheek, which was a bit surprising, but she hugged the other three. Hadrian could tell that Harry still wasn't used to such contact, but he hugged back much easier than Hadrian would have in his past life.

The table was already set up. It was outside, the weather nice and sunny. Molly led them to where Arthur and the Weasley children were playing in the garden, and then retreated back to the kitchen to finish cooking.

Hadrian pushed Harry to play with Ron and the twins. Ginny shyly kept a hold of her dad's hand as Arthur greeted Sirius and Remus like an old friend—which Hadrian supposed they were.

Charlie and Percy were degnoming the edge of the garden. Hadrian considered helping them—throwing gnomes was always fun—but then Bill approached him.

"How are you doing, Bill?" Hadrian asked.

"Really good, actually," Bill said. "I got a job at Gringotts."

"Did you! Cursebreaking?"

"Yeah." Bill smiled. "I'm leaving for Egypt next month for my first expedition."

"Make sure to brush up on your cooling charms," Hadrian suggested. "And sun protection. Still, that's very exciting."

Bill nodded. "Thank you for suggesting it. I don't know that I would have thought of it if you hadn't, but I really think it's going to be perfect for me."

"I'm sure you would have stumbled across the position somehow," Hadrian told him. He asked the new cursebreaker about the interview process and listened as Bill went on and on about the goblins until Molly called them all to the table.

The food was delicious as always at the Burrow and Hadrian made sure to tell Molly as much—though leaving out the part about having eaten at the Burrow before. Harry seemed to get along with Ron well enough, though he seemed more entertained by the twins.

Hadrian made sure to mention that Sirius and Remus were infamous pranksters at Hogwarts. The
twins hadn't learned about the Marauders' yet, but that didn't stop them from being awe-struck by the stories they were soon told. Hadrian shared a grin with Arthur, though Molly seemed exasperated with the prank talking.

Hadrian and Harry stayed at the Burrow until around three in the afternoon. Sirius and Remus both opted to stay and continue talking about the old days with Molly and Remus as the two Nagas flooed back to the manor.

They changed into fancier robes fairly quickly. Harry put on dark green robes with white trim and Hadrian opted to wear silver-embroidered black robes that he knew made his more exotic features stand out.

They flooed to Greengrass Manor. No one was there to greet them immediately, but a house elf soon popped into the parlor and led them to where the rest of the guests were in the ballroom.

They'd missed the talking and lunch portion of the Greengrass event, but the dancing was going on right now. Dinner would be the last part of the evening. Hadrian had wondered initially why the dancing wasn't to happen after dinner, since that seemed more usual, but then he realized that the children wouldn't have been able to dance as long. Since Easter, often coinciding with the spring equinox, was a primarily children's holiday, it only made sense to cater some to them.

"Oh," Hadrian said as they arrived as the open double doors. He immediately felt the tantalizing aura of Marvolo. "Harry… I hadn't realized Lord Riddle would be here."

"He is?" Harry asked, suddenly going wide-eyed.

Hadrian nodded, finding the man on the dance floor. He was twirling a pretty witch Hadrian didn't recognized.

"I know I said you wouldn't have to meet him until you felt ready…" Hadrian began.

Harry shook his head. "It's fine."

Hadrian studied his ward for a second, before pulling him in for a side-hug. "You're a very brave boy, Harry, for facing your nervousness and fears."

Harry smiled. They pulled away from each other as Lorelle approached.

"I am pleased that you made it, Hadrian," she said. "And you too, Harry."

Harry blushed slightly under the beautiful woman's attention. Hadrian held back a chuckle. "We wouldn't have missed it, Lorelle," he told her. "And our thanks again for the invitation and understanding about our tardiness."

"Nonsense," Lorelle said. "Come now, Harry the other children are dancing on the far end of the floor."

Hadrian let Lorelle escort them both to that end. He watched as Harry was pulled into the fray by an excited Draco. The children had their own music to dance to, which was much more freestyle than the adults'. There were a couple coordinated dances thrown in, but Hadrian had made sure to teach most of them to Harry. If there were any the boy didn't know, Hadrian had no doubt the other children could help Harry out.

Lorelle led Hadrian back to the adults then. Hadrian made small talk with the Bulstrodes for a moment, before he felt that recognizably powerful aura come his way. He carefully did not stiffen,
though he showed no surprise when Marvolo stepped up beside him. Instead, he bowed his head to the Bulstrodes and disengaged from them to turn his full attention to the Dark Lord.

"Hadrian," Marvolo greeted. He took Hadrian's hand and briefly brushed his lips to Hadrian's knuckles.

"Marvolo," Hadrian murmured.

Marvolo straightened, but didn't let go of Hadrian's hand. "May I have the pleasure of this dance?"

Hadrian nodded and Marvolo wasted no time in sweeping him onto the dance floor. They arrive just as one of the smoother waltzes began. Hadrian fell easily into the position of follower, though he'd been taught mostly how to lead. Marvolo was a fantastic dancer—elegant and deft in his movements. Hadrian found himself responding without much conscious thought.

He let his magic flare out slightly as they moved from one dance to the next without missing a step. Marvolo's magic brushed forward in response. Hadrian shivered and Marvolo's hands, one gently holding his and the other curled around his lower back, tightened their hold. Hadrian finally let himself meet Marvolo's gaze directly. Marvolo's eyes were dark with some deeper emotion. Hadrian felt almost overheated.

He knew what was happening. Marvolo was a manipulator to the core. The man was trying to use the lust that seemed to so easily spark between them as a way to gloss over the true lack of affection. Whether he wanted to own Hadrian, or just Hadrian's monetary and political value, was another matter entirely.

Hadrian swallowed. He thought it'd be easy, remaining clear-headed around Marvolo. He couldn't forget what Voldemort had done in his past life and even in this one… but it had been so many years and this man in front of his was not Voldemort.

That wasn't to say that Hadrian was going to make this little ploy of his easy. When the next dance ended, Hadrian stepped back and bowed—signaling an end to their dancing. Marvolo let nothing show on his face, so Hadrian wasn't sure if he was annoyed at being cut off or had expected it.

Hadrian didn't protest as Marvolo silently offered his arm and, once Hadrian had taken it, led them both to the refreshment table. Hadrian noticed the stares they were getting as they sipped their drinks. There were a number of Ministry employees and even a few discreet reporters among the crowd. Hadrian wanted to groan at the knowledge that their dancing would be all over the papers and general gossip by the end of tomorrow.

Hadrian looked at Marvolo. There was no mistaking the way Marvolo had held him during those dances. The man had wanted the word to get out then. Hadrian hadn't officially accepted, nor given the chance to accept or deny, the courtship Marvolo offered yet. He wouldn't be able to until he was given that first courtship gift.


"I'm sure I don't know what you're referring to," Marvolo said smoothly.

"Of course." Hadrian looked away. By declaring his attentions to the world in such a public way during the dance, Marvolo was ensuring that Hadrian couldn't just reject the courtship immediately. People would wonder why. Surely, on paper, Marvolo and Hadrian seemed like such a perfect match for each other.

Hadrian wanted to be angry, but he found himself amused instead. He would let it play out, he
decided—see what kind of courtship Marvolo was planning. If nothing else, it would be rather interesting.

"I would love to meet your ward, if you would allow it," Marvolo said as they finished their drinks. "I understand, of course, if you wouldn't."

Hadrian looked over to where Harry was talking animatedly with Draco and young Astoria. Judging by the hand waving, they were discussing quidditch. He looked back to Marvolo. "Briefly."

Marvolo nodded and followed Hadrian to where Harry stood.

"Would you mind leading young Miss Greengrass in a dance, Draco?" Hadrian asked as they stopped next to the group. "Just one should be fine."

Draco and Astoria needed no more encouragement than that to leave Harry alone with them. Harry scooted closer to Hadrian's side as he observed Marvolo silently.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Potter," Marvolo said smoothly. He knelt down, shocking Hadrian, so that he was eye-level with the boy. "I want to formally apologize for the death of your parents," he added very softly. "They were both brave and talented individuals." He stopped then, though a look of hesitation came across his face as if he almost wanted to say more.

Hadrian was shocked again when Harry reached forward and hugged Marvolo, just for a second. "It's okay," he heard Harry say. "I know you weren't you then."

"No," Marvolo agreed. "If I were, I doubt I would have hurt such a powerful magical family, even if they were on the opposite side of a war."

Hadrian didn't doubt that, actually. Harry seemed to believe it too. Still, Hadrian could tell his ward was at the edge of being really upset just by Marvolo's presence. Marvolo seemed to tell too, for he pulled away and stood.

"I hope we can learn to enjoy each other's presence, Harry," he said. "I hope to be seeing more of you in the future."

Harry nodded and fled to the dance floor. Hadrian let out a deep breath. Marvolo offered him his arm again and Hadrian took it. The man led them both out of the ballroom and to the couch in the adjacent parlor.

Hadrian sat down. Marvolo sat next to him and pulled from inside his robes a slender box. Hadrian accepted the courting gift with steady hands.

"I expected you to owl this to me," he murmured as he stroked the beautiful ribbon holding the box closed. It was silky, as if made from fairy wings. He carefully undid the knot.

"If possible, I believe I will always rather be able to see your face while you open my gifts to you," Marvolo answered.

"You seem to always know just what to say," Hadrian said. He pinned Marvolo with a steady look. "You must know I'm not fooled."

"Fooled?"

"As I told your fellows, I will marry only for love."
Marvolo seemed to consider him for a long moment and Hadrian let him. Finally, Marvolo sighed. "I was conceived with the use of a love potion," he admitted. "Love as you seek is something I may never be capable of."

Marvolo wasn't sure why he'd admitted that to Hadrian. There was something about Lord Naga that made him feel like a schoolboy again. He wanted to please, to impress, and ultimately he wanted to win Hadrian's favor. He wished he could convince himself that it was just because of his plans, but truthfully the real machination of said plans seemed to drain away upon his first meeting with Hadrian.

He didn't believe he would ever be able to fall in love with Hadrian. Children conceived under love potions rarely could fall in love. There was some suggestion that the ones that had were true *fated* pairings. Only such powerful magic could circumvent the negative effects of a love potion.

Marvolo didn't believe in soulmates, no did he believe he would have been able to love anyone even if his mother hadn't used a love potion on his father. His childhood had been so devoid of anything even remotely close to love that he didn't even know what a true loving relationship looked like. Nor did he want one. They seemed to be such a weakness he had worked his whole life to avoid.

Still, Hadrian was such an utterly fascinating individual and Marvolo found himself, for the first time since he could remember, almost willingly trapped in another's spell. The best part, the absolute best, was that Hadrian seemed so obviously suspicious of him.

Marvolo knew that if the man had fallen over him, he would have been disgusted. He would have thought himself, rightly, above the man. He would have used the resulting marriage as a means to an end.

He couldn't think like that. He knew enough of human nature to realize that Hadrian wouldn't be fooled by a mere act of love.

He told Hadrian that he was conceived under a love potion without truly thinking it through, but now that he was he realized it was the best move he could have taken. Hadrian would know now not to expect true love from Marvolo—and in the end Marvolo hoped that meant Hadrian would realize that gaining any sort of affection from him was equivalent. Marvolo thought he could learn to *like* Hadrian and that would have to be enough for marriage.

Hadrian reached forward and pressed his pale fingers against Marvolo's. He didn't look very surprised, but then Marvolo had found, in the short time he'd known him, that the man didn't show surprise often, if at all.

"What do you hope to gain from courting me, Marvolo?" Hadrian asked.

Marvolo considered for a moment the best thing he could say, and in the end he decided on the truth, or as close to it as he thought he would ever get. "You said yourself you wish for a husband to take on the political scene in your stead. You are intelligent, Hadrian, and I'm sure you already figured out this is why I started courting you."

"I would prefer to keep my seats empty than enter into a marriage devoid of affection."

"Then let us see if affection can develop. I will never be able to love you, not as you desire it, but I could come to cherish you." Marvolo smiled as the flicker of surprise Hadrian showed at his words. So he could still shock the man. "If you'll let us try?"
Hadrian let loose a short breath, as if deflating. "I can't very well say no to that, now can I?"

Marvolo held back his smirk. No, Hadrian couldn't. He'd manipulated Hadrian in more than one way so that there was no other answer Hadrian could give then to accept his courtship. The fact that Hadrian was aware of that maneuvering just made it all the sweeter.

He would have fun with this courtship. It was a game to be played between them, a game that would have to involve real feelings but then Marvolo was capable of manipulating even his own heart to get what he wanted. If he had to learn to like Hadrian, then he would. Because Marvolo *didn't lose*. And he would win in this.

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Hadrian steadied his heavily beating heart. He was nervous, he realized. Marvolo had just declared war on, of all things, his heart and Hadrian wasn't sure he was ready to engage in such combat. He could have never predicted this when he'd come back in time.

He shook his head and turned his attention to the gift in his lap. "I suppose I should open this," he said somewhat inanely.

Marvolo made a noise of encouragement and so Hadrian carefully pulled the top off the slender box. Inside, nestled in dark silk, was a delicate-looking silver necklace. Hadrian nearly gasped.

"Lady Slytherin's necklace," Marvolo said, confirming Hadrian's suspicion.

Hadrian gently picked the necklace up. The end was clasped with a tiny silver snake, which started to move the minute it touched his skin. The snake had glowing eyes, so small they looked like little pinpricks of light. It stared up at Hadrian for a long moment and then Hadrian felt a pressure at his mental walls.

He didn't expect the magic of the snake to be able to breach, but surprisingly the walls Magic herself had given him let the snake in. He stiffened as the snake went through the essence of his being. It wasn't invasive, in fact it was quite gentle, but Hadrian was stunned.

He thought back to what the founders had said. No person could break through his walls, he supposed. Snake necklaces created by one of the founders' himself were apparently okay. It made Hadrian nervous, but he didn't think the necklace actually recorded anything it saw. In fact, Hadrian realized that it was scanning him for worthiness.

For a moment, he thought it was another test, another way for Marvolo to confirm Hadrian's worthiness for his goals. Except, no… he wasn't even sure Marvolo knew the snake would do this. The whole process only lasted a mere second.

The snake end of the necklace lowered back down, but Hadrian could still feel what seemed to be almost like a familiars' bond tugging at the edge of his magic. It was warm, protective even. He barely noticed himself moving the necklace to his neck and allowing the snake to clasp around it.

"The necklace has a number of protective charms laced within it," Marvolo said. "Among them is protection from unwanted physical contact and from a number of mental attacks. There are rumors that it was forged within Avalon."

Hadrian blinked and focused on Marvolo. "The way to Avalon has been lost."

"It has," Marvolo acknowledged. "Salazar Slytherin took the knowledge with him to his grave. I have spoken with his portrait, but it refuses to say how to return to the place of Magic's birth."
Marvolo reached forward as he spoke and gently stroked Hadrian's neck and the small snake charm on it. A flash of pure heat spread through Hadrian, though he wasn't sure if that was his own reaction or that of the necklace. "Salazar's wife was the last priestess of Avalon. She wore this necklace until the day she died. It was then passed on to their eldest son with instructions to give it to his wife, should the necklace accept her. From what I've been told, the necklace has only accepted three Slytherin consorts since Lady Slytherin's death."

"I… I had only heard about it in passing," Hadrian murmured. He reached up, lacing his fingers through Marvolo's so that they were both touching the necklace together. "It's so beautiful."

"May it serve you well," Marvolo murmured. "It is my first courtship gift to you, dear Hadrian."

"I accept your intentions, Lord Riddle," Hadrian said formally. "Truly, I didn't expect something so…." He let out a deep breath. "Thank you."

Marvolo smiled and pulled back. "Shall we?"

Hadrian nodded and let Marvolo lead him back to the dancing.

The front page of *The Prophet* the morning after the ball was, like Hadrian had predicted, a speculation on his and Marvolo's relationship. The picture they used, however, was not one of them dancing. Instead, it was a shot of Harry hugging a kneeling Marvolo while Hadrian smiled softly at the both of them.

Hadrian read through the article, seeing that the reporter had noted that Marvolo and he had left the ballroom for around ten minutes and when they'd returned, Hadrian had a new necklace around his neck. So far, it seemed no one had connected the necklace with the famous Lady Slytherin's necklace, but he supposed it was only a matter of time.

Both Sirius and Remus read the article after Hadrian. They gave it to Harry next. Hadrian calmly ate breakfast as he waited for his ward to finish it.

"I like the necklace," Harry said as he did. "It fits you."

Hadrian smiled. "Thank you, Harry."

"Is he courting you, then?" Sirius asked.

Hadrian nodded. "I didn't expect it and I don't know if it will continue on much longer, but as of now, he is."

Remus looked at Harry, as if expecting the boy to be upset. Hadrian knew Harry was conflicted, but his ward was doing a frankly amazing job of appearing nonchalant about the whole thing.

"As long as he makes you happy," Harry said and then stood from the table. "I'm going to go read my book."

Remus scratched his head and stood. "I have to head to the Ministry."

"Job interview with the Muggle Liaison Office, right?" Hadrian asked.

Remus nodded. "Arthur recommended me to them." He blushed a bit. "Said the office was pretty liberal, because they tend to have to be, so for the most part they wouldn't be bothered about my, uh,
"Good luck, Moony," Sirius said. "I'm sure you'll get it."

Remus left then, leaving Sirius and Hadrian alone to finish their breakfasts.

"So, Hadrian," Sirius said. "I have a question."

"Hmm?" Hadrian asked.

"My house elf," Sirius said.

Hadrian grimaced. Sodder was truly an awful name. "I know. It's why I assigned him to you. Thought you might get a laugh out of it, to be honest." He sighed. "My family wasn't all perfect and I can't imagine they were all as conscious of house elf abuse as I try to be."

Sirius nodded sadly. "Do you think he'd like to be renamed?"

"I asked him, actually, and he said he would get too confused having to suddenly answer to a new name. If it makes you feel better, you could maybe call him Soddy. He said his former master used to do that."

"It's not that much better, but a little, I suppose." Sirius rubbed his chin. "At least you didn't give him to Harry."

Hadrian laughed. "I'm not that irresponsible a guardian. I may not watch my language as much as some, but I won't have Harry screaming 'Sodder' every time he needs his elf."

There was a pop and then the house elf in question appeared. "Master is calling Sodder?"

Hadrian shook his head, but Sirius stopped him before he could dismiss the house elf. "Hey, Sodder, do you mind if I call you Soddy from now on?"

"Sodder does not mind," the house elf said. "Is Master wanted Sodder to call himself Soddy too?"

"That'd probably be good, if you don't mind, Soddy," Harry said.

"I not mind. Is Master wanting anything else from Soddy?"

"No, thank you," Sirius said.

Soddy bowed and popped away.

"Well, now that that is taken care of," Hadrian said. "What are your thoughts on the potential locations for the orphanage?"

"Hogsmeade seems like a good choice," Sirius said. "The children would get introduced to Hogwarts early, at least the ones that didn't get adopted out immediately."

"But Hogsmeade isn't big enough to support the traffic of all the children and the people coming to adopt them," Hadrian pointed out. "I think somewhere a little more remote would be better. One of the old manor houses could easily be converted into an orphanage. It would have a high turnabout rate, but there would need to be a twenty-four-seven staff living there."

"True." Sirius frowned. "What ever happened to Potter Manor?"
"It burned down in the old war."

"Oh, right."

Hadrian sighed. "There was some suggestion about buying the old Dalle Manor. We should arrange a time for us all to go visit it and maybe a couple of the other empty manors for sale. Between the Black vaults you have, my money, the Malfoy fortune, the Greengrass accounts, and the Nott investments… we should have enough to buy whatever manor we think will fit the project best."

"Sounds like a plan," Sirius said. "Speaking of that, I really need to go talk to my goblin estate manager."

Hadrian nodded. "Now is as good a time as any. I'm going to go read in the library with Harry. There are a couple of new Defense journals from Bulgaria I want to look over."

They parted ways.

At dinner that night, Remus informed them all that he'd gotten the job at the Muggle Liaison office, including the three days around and of a full moon off every month. It meant he'd have to work more Saturdays, but he didn't sound too upset about that. Hadrian was happy for him and Sirius insisted they do something to celebrate.

So, they all changed into muggle clothes and trooped to the nearest muggle town. Harry had never been taken to the movies before with the Dursleys and Remus and Sirius had only gone once with James and Lily back when they graduated from Hogwarts. In the end, it was Hadrian who seemed to have the most experience with film, though he didn't have much.

They decided upon watching a movie called _Beetlejuice_ that entertained all of them, even if Sirius and Remus complained after how unrealistic the ghosts were in the movie.

Hadrian took Harry up to sleep as soon as they got back, because it was later than he usually went to bed. The boy was still keyed up from the movie, though, so Hadrian sat with him in the bed and rubbed his back until he was feeling tired.

"Hey, Hadrian," Harry murmured.

"Yes, Harry?" he asked, continuing to rub circles into Harry's back.

"Why'd you accept Marvolo's courtship?"

Hadrian couldn't explain all the complications of it to Harry, so he settled with the simplest truth. "Everyone deserves a second chance, even if it doesn't always come in the way we're expecting."

Harry looked up at him and then nodded. "Okay. But if he hurts you, you'll let me set Kiran and Faeda on him, right?"

Hadrian chuckled. "He's a parslemouth himself, you know. I'm not sure Kiran or Faeda will be able to do much damage to him."

Harry shrugged. "I'll figure something out."

"If he hurts me," Hadrian said. "I'll help you figure something out."

Harry smiled. "Good." He turned over then and within a minute was fast asleep.

Hadrian watched his ward, his once younger self, for a long moment. And then he shook his head
and stood. He had to let go of the past as much as he could, otherwise he'd go insane. Marvolo wasn't Voldemort, he wasn't Harry Potter, and young Harry wasn't who he had been at eight. Everyone was different—the Malfoys, the Weasleys, Sirius, Remus… and countless others affected in countless ways by Hadrian's arrival to the past.

It was amazing, but it was also scary. Hadrian couldn't predict much of anything anymore. He'd have to do like everyone else and just take each day as it happened.

Hadrian gently stroked the snake charm at the hallow of his throat. He could handle that, he figured. He had to. It was a challenge, but Hadrian had never been one, in either life, to back down from challenges.

"She truly is a beautiful as everyone says," Hadrian murmured.

He hadn't seen the castle since he first came back in time. How much time had it been? Six months? Seven? Eight? Far too long. Hogwarts was his home and perhaps always would be the home of his heart, even if he never lived inside her walls again.

Dumbledore twinkled those blue eyes of his. "Would you like a tour?"

"If you have the time."

Dumbledore nodded and gestured for Hadrian to follow him inside. Hadrian stepped in line with the man. He made sure to keep his facial expressions gently awed of the surroundings. He wouldn't be able to fake total astonishment, but he'd always thought Hogwarts beautiful. All he had to do was play that up a little more.

"How are you enjoying Britain?" Dumbledore asked as they passed the Great Hall.

"Enough to not mind staying here for as long as Harry wants or needs," Hadrian said, knowing the conversation would get to his ward soon and having no patience to wait it out.

Like he thought, Dumbledore's eyes sparkled just a little more at the mention of Harry. "You seem to be a devoted guardian for our young Boy Who Lived."

Hadrian thought he'd had a good hold on his emotions but at that moniker he felt his sudden rage leak into his aura. Were he to have mage sight, he would have seen it lash out like a star burst in response. Dumbledore's own blinding aura reacted by flaring and swirling into his space. Hadrian barely kept from stumbling at the sickening taste of the man's burning Light magic. He turned angry eyes upon the headmaster. Dumbledore studied him with all cheer gone from his face. They stopped walking.
"You do a good job," Hadrian stated. "Hiding the Grey in your aura behind that blinding Light. I imagine that's why you bonded with your phoenix." It had always been a problem for him, how he didn't think before speaking when he was angry. Hadrian bit back the rest of his words before he could spout off even more of his knowledge. It wasn't obvious that the gross Lightness of Dumbledore's aura was mostly façade. Sure, he was on the Light side of Grey, but Dumbledore's ability was such he could push some of that Light to the forefront, convincing everyone he was pure Light.

For a moment, Dumbledore just stared at him and Hadrian knew he'd managed to stun the man. And then Dumbledore smiled. "You are a surprise, Lord Naga." He started walking again, leaving Hadrian with no choice but to follow.

They passed the Great Hall. Dumbledore barely gave him time to glance over the students having a quick lunch between classes, before they moved on. The blinding swirl of Dumbledore's aura calmed as they passed one of the main staircases. Hadrian knew the intimidation part of the visit was over.

"As you must know, Hogwarts has four Houses," Dumbledore said. "Each founded by a pioneering wizard or witch. Helga Hufflepuff was the first healer who learned how to combine potions and charms for maximum affect. Rowena Ravenclaw invented the self-writing quill to aid in the many hundreds of books of magical theory she wrote. Godric Gryffindor created the guideline rules for honorable duels that we still use today, as well as several spells to use in them. And Salazar Slytherin—"

"Invented the wards we use to hide the magical world from muggles," Hadrian finished for Dumbledore. "Though most remember him only for his supposed hatred of muggleborns."

"Indeed."

Hadrian glanced at Dumbledore. "I wonder why that history is not being taught among these halls. I've made friends with many an ex-Hogwarts student these months I've been back in Britain and all have commented at least once how they wished they'd been taught more than the same few periods of goblin rebellions in class. Is it true that the same professor, a ghost no less, has been teaching since the early 1900s?"

"Professor Binns was an expert in his field," Dumbledore said.

"But it is the nature of ghosts to lose parts of themselves over the years until only that which was most important to them stays. From what I hear, Binns' expert knowledge in goblin wars is all fine and good, but there is far more to magical history than perpetuating stereotypes against those who control our money."

"Sadly, there are so few left with a strong enough grasp on the various eras of our magical history and a love of children. I have tried to find a replacement for poor Professor Binns, to no avail."

Hadrian wondered if that was true. "Maybe you simply need to broaden your search. I would have no trouble teaching the class myself and I only took the OWLS for it. Though, considering more than half of the NEWT test is dedicated to those years of goblin rebellion…"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "A valid point, Lord Naga. Perhaps I should offer you a position on my staff."

Hadrian was startled enough to let out a laugh. "If you did, I'd have to decline. I won't be leaving my charge."
"You could raise him here. It would not be the first time a teacher of Hogwarts has raised their child in this castle. Why, when I was a student, three of my professors gave extra credit to those who watched over their babies on the weekends!"

"You don't say." Hadrian understood then what Dumbledore wanted. It would be far easier, after all, for Harry to be under his thumb if he was brought to the castle early. "I'm afraid Harry and I are quite happy where I am now. Who knows, perhaps I'd take you up on that hypothetical offer when Harry turns eleven. I imagine I'll get lonely in the mansion by myself then."

"Are you planning on kicking your house guests to the curb then?"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't, but Sirius and Remus have their own lives and are just as likely to move out while Harry is off at school. It's not as though they stay for me."

"I see."

"I'm sure you do."

They continued to walk in silence, broken only by a random comment or fact on some painting or wall stain. It was all for the most part totally innocuous. Finally, it was late afternoon and Hadrian was itching out of his skin to leave Dumbledore and his twinkling stares and bothersome aura. Dumbledore seemed to notice and began to wrap the tour up.

"It is getting late, but before you go I was perhaps hoping you'd like to meet the professor most likely to be young Harry's Head of House."

Hadrian wondered what the man was scheming with this one. "Surely we can't know what House Harry will be in until his sorting?"

"Just as surely you have a guess?"

Hadrian's lips twitched. "Well, considering the family history…"

"Slytherin then," Dumbledore said without a pause, turning them in the direction of the dungeons. Hadrian wondered why the man was so pleased when he was sure Dumbledore would have preferred Harry be in Gryffindor.

Then again, he reflected as they approached Severus Snape's office—Dumbledore did think the hook-nosed man was totally under his thumb. And regardless of the future that would never be, Hadrian couldn't be so sure he wasn't.

They caught Snape just as he was entering his office with a floating box of vials from his afternoon class. The man took one look at them and masked his expression so quickly that Hadrian would have missed it, if he hadn't been spending time with so many ex-Slytherins.

"Ah, Professor Snape. Do you know Lord Hadrian Naga? He's raising young Harry Potter."

"I'm aware," Snape drawled.

"Yes, yes. You know, Severus here was good friends with your ward's mother. They grew up together even."

He saw a flash of pain flicker in Snape's eyes as Dumbledore turned to twinkle at Hadrian. Dumbledore, he reflected, truly was a mean man. There was little he wouldn't do or say to get toward his version of the Greater Good.
"I wasn't aware," Hadrian said. "And you're the Head of Slytherin too?"

"I am," Snape said shortly.

Hadrian looked at the dour professor for a moment, and then at Dumbledore. He thought he could see what the conniving headmaster wanted of this encounter and while he normally wouldn't give into the man's plans… he also had an advantage Dumbledore didn't. Hadrian had seen Snape at his best and at his worst and while he thought the man a horrible teacher, he thought Dumbledore a worse headmaster for being the one to keep him on the staff. He'd learned in his past life of the number of time the Potions professor had attempted to quit this job he hated and had been refused by the puppet master who twinkled oh so merrily.

He really did dislike that man. And befriending Snape, giving him not only a chance to make up for his part in Lily's death but also a way to reconnect with the reasons he'd joined with Voldemort in the first place, would piss Dumbledore off. Because Dumbledore thought Snape was his to control, but he wasn't the only master manipulator in the room. And Hadrian and Snape were both Slytherins.

"Well then," Hadrian said. "Perhaps you could come by for dinner sometime and tell Harry stories of his mother. He hears too many of his father, I think, with the current company." He winked, choosing to ignore the scowl Snape gave him.

Snape didn't know it yet, but Sirius and Remus weren't the boys he remembered from school. And maybe seeing that change would help him let go of the past. Hadrian could hope, anyway.

Snape nodded and Hadrian promised to send him an owl, before Dumbledore herded him away.

Later, as Hadrian left the castle, he thought of the portraits of the Founders. He wished he could go down to see them, perhaps get some advice, but he knew too well he was being watched and didn't dare risk it. Later, perhaps, he'd be able to sneak into the castle.

Until then, the Founders' wisdom would have to wait.

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"Well, it's… nice." Hadrian said.

Sirius laughed and Remus rolled his eyes. Lucius and Narcissa were too dignified to do more than sniff. Trent and Lorelle were talking to the crazy lady who had led them on a rather sporadic tour through the old Dalle manor. She'd kept mistaking them as husband and wife, which they'd taken with grace after it became clear the old woman wasn't all there.

"The last manor was too small, the one before was booby trapped, and this one--" Remus began, only to be interrupted by the entryway chandelier's cord snapping, the dusty crystal breaking into a thousand pieces as it shattered over the creaking hardwood floor. Luckily, they were all wizards (or witches) and it was easy enough to cast a few reparos. Unluckily, it would take a lot more than a simple repair charm to fix up the Dalle manor.

Trent and Lorelle walked up to the group, leaving the crazy realtor behind.

"I told her we would owl her later with our reply," Trent said.

"Though I do believe we all know what that is," Lorelle muttered.

Hadrian sighed. "We'll have to widen the search a bit. I wonder, have we looked into how expensive it would be to start from scratch? Build an orphanage?"
"A different set of costs, but certainly no more expensive than repairing this place," Lucius said. "I shall run the numbers once I'm back in the office."

Hadrian nodded to the man. "Okay then, time to go home and take a long shower to get all this dust and grime off. We should find Harry and Draco before they fall through a crack in the floor somewhere."

"They were playing on the south side of the yard last I saw them," Remus said.

Like all dramatic things, and because Fate enjoyed dipping her hand across the waters of humanity, it was at that moment that Draco ran into the manor. "Mother, Father! Lord Naga! Harry's been taken!"

Lucius had been Voldemort's right hand since before his father passed. He'd seen the Dark Lord at his best and at his worst but still he had never been more frightened of any wizard than the one in front of him. For Hadrian Naga didn't sink into the shadows like Voldemort had on his good days or rage hot like the bad ones. No, Hadrian instead seemed to grow larger—as if the tight control of his Grey aura had snapped.

But where Lucius wouldn't have expected Grey to feel so dangerous, he found a heavy weight surrounding him. Hadrian's aura wasn't blinding like the sickening Light or tantalizingly like the dangerous Dark. His aura was drenched with power and responsibility. His aura bespoke more than anything else Lucius had found out about the man that Hadrian carried a lot more on his shoulders than he seemed to.

Hadrian Naga's aura was that of a leader. And Lucius had nearly missed that, and all that such a designation meant.

Lucius shook his head. There was no time for such contemplation. Draco had explained how a man wearing a Death Eater's mask had come in, easily surpassing the decrepit Dalle manor wards, *stupify'd* Harry, and disapparated with the boy swung over one shoulder.

"Narcissa, take Draco home," Lucius ordered as Hadrian stalked up to the place the possible Death Eater had been. Narcissa nodded and took Draco by the hand. Lucius watched as Hadrian waved his wand in a complicated pattern of spellwork, attempting to ferret out the identity of Harry's captor. Lucius wasn't sure if the man had truly been one of Voldemort's or not, but it didn't matter. Marvolo would be furious.

"I shall contact our Lord," Trent said, softly enough so Remus and Sirius—both right behind Hadrian—wouldn't hear.

"Do so," Lucius said. "Lorelle, question the relator. Find out who else knew we were touring here today."

"Of course," Lorelle said, haughty eyes flashing as she turned to confront the woman still inside the house.

Harry glared. The Death Eater, for Harry had seen pictures of what they looked like during the old war in several books and there was no mistaking that horrifying white mask, was fiddling with rune stones on the other side of the dank room he'd been taken to.

The Death Eater muttered some choice words and took his mask off, throwing it aside. "Can't see a
damn thing with that on," he said to himself.

Harry studied the man. He had sickly pale skin and thin hair with balding patches. His robes were dark brown with darker spots of... something on them. Harry shuddered and looked away. He was tied to a ritual stone and the ropes scratched at his skin. The Death Eater had banished his clothes and now his butt was cold from having to sit on the dirty ground.

He was more than a little terrified. He knew that, given enough time, Hadrian would rescue him. He just wasn't sure he had that time.

Harry didn't really know much about rituals, only what he'd been told by Hadrian before the horcrux one they did in October, but he knew it was bad—very bad. He'd been taken by a gross man, tied naked to a ritual stone, and the man was currently approaching him with a ritual knife.

Harry opened his mouth to scream but the Death Eater flicked his wand and suddenly his mouth was forced shut. He glared as hard as he could, but the Death Eater just grinned at him maniacally and set the tip of the ritual knife over his right shoulder.

"A limb to regrow a body," the man stated. "Try not to bite your tongue, little wretch."

Harry felt tears well up in the corner of his eyes and he shook his head wildly, but nothing he did stopped him from feeling the knife dip just slightly into his skin.

A loud crack of apparition sounded and both the man and the knife he held were jerked away.

Harry looked up through teary eyes to see Hadrian pointing his wand at the Death Eater. At Hadrian's shoulder was Marvolo.

"Yaxley," Marvolo said, voice low and dangerous. Harry shivered, subconsciously pressing back against the ritual stone. He didn't know what it was, but the air had gotten heavily. There was a trickle of blood down his right arm and he couldn't stop crying and his mouth was still spelled closed and Hadrian wouldn't even look at him—so focused on the man who'd taken him.

"How--" The Death Eater, Yaxley, began.

"Shut up," Hadrian said. "I'm not dealing with you in front of my ward." He flicked his wand and Yaxley went flying backwards, hitting the far wall with a sickening crunch.

And then Hadrian was rapidly approaching him. He knelt down and banished the ropes, holding Harry close. Harry buried his head into Hadrian's shoulder, shivering against his uncle.

::Shhh:: Hadrian hissed in soothing parseltongue. ::I've got you, Harry.:: With a small snap, the spell on his mouth was broken and Harry was able to cry with both his eyes and his voice. Hadrian just held him. ::Shh:: he repeated.

Harry slowly stopped shivering and looked up. Hadrian smiled at him and kissed his forehead. ::I'm going to take you back to the house. Remus has already called a healer. You'll be fine, Harry, I promise.::

::Okay:: Harry replied softly. He clung to Hadrian as his guardian stood up. Hadrian hardly seemed to struggle holding his weight and Harry took several deep breaths, trying to stop crying.

They passed near Marvolo, who was slowly twirling his wand, amber eyes pinned upon the currently unconscious form of Yaxley. Harry considered him for a moment, this man who might take Hadrian away as he had, though different from, how he'd taken Harry's parents.
::How'd you find me?: Harry asked.

::Yaxley used to be one of Voldemort's:: Hadrian answered, slightly stiff under Harry's grip now.

::Marvolo was able to track him::

Harry nodded and slowly reached forward to Marvolo. Marvolo's amber eyes widened and he didn't seem to know what to do, but Hadrian helped Harry transfer over to the man. Marvolo was just as strong as his guardian and kept a hold of him. Harry hugged him. ::Thank you::

Marvolo was silent for a moment, before sighing. ::I will ensure this does not happen again::

::Okay:: Harry replied and held his arms back out for Hadrian. Hadrian took him. Harry pretended not to notice the small smile his guardian gave Marvolo. His head hurt too much and Marvolo had helped find him so he'd let it all slide.

::I'll be back:: Hadrian said, talking to Marvolo.

Marvolo nodded, a look Harry couldn't decipher passing over his face. ::I'll wait::

Hadrian nodded back and apparated with Harry back to Naga Manor.

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Later, after Hadrian had checked in with the Healer and made sure Harry wasn't too hurt physically or mentally from his ordeal, after he'd made Sirius and Remus promise to watch over him like they wouldn't already, after he'd hissed soft orders to Faeda and Kiran so they'd do the same, he apparated back to Marvolo.

"Harry is fine," Hadrian said before Marvolo could ask—because he wasn't sure the man would though he might have wanted to.

"I see," Marvolo answered. His gaze was still fixed upon Yaxley. The man hadn't woken yet, but Marvolo had tied him to the ritual stone Harry had been at.

Hadrian stepped fearlessly into Marvolo's space. Marvolo's Dark aura curled around him, all malevolence and anger, before it was pulled closer to Marvolo's body. Hadrian waited until Marvolo had decided to turn to look at him before speaking.

"Thank you."

Marvolo bowed his head in acknowledgment. Hadrian sighed.

"Thank you," he repeated firmly.

Marvolo frowned. "I don't deserve your thanks."

"Don't you?"

"Yaxley is one of mine."

"Oh, so you claim him?"

Marvolo took a step back. Hadrian crossed his arms. Marvolo glared. "What are you attempting to have me admit?"

Hadrian threw his arms up in the air. "I want you to accept the praise! You were the one who found
Yaxley in barely thirty minutes when it would have taken me hours. He'd already started the ritual, we saw that, he knew he'd be chased... if it weren't for you then it would have been too late."

Marvolo stared at him. Hadrian deflated. He hadn't known *Marvolo* long, not really, but he'd seen the former Dark Lord when he'd appeared at Dalle Manor, seen Marvolo's fury at what couldn't even be considered a betrayal. Marvolo cared, he honestly did, and even if it was only caring about what he'd lose if Hadrian used the excuse of Harry getting injured to break off the courtship.

Hadrian didn't think Marvolo was used to getting praised for good deeds. He figured now was as good a time to start as any. "Just, thank you," he said a final time. Shaking his head, he turned toward Yaxley—essentially allowing Marvolo to change the subject. "What kind of ritual was he attempting? I think you've more knowledge in ritual magic than me."

Something twisted over Marvolo's face. "A resurrection ritual. It wouldn't have worked, but only because your Harry is no longer a horcrux. Were he, it would have taken the broken soul fragment that was in Harry and created a new form, regardless of whether I existed otherwise. It's unstable magic."

Hadrian faltered. "Yaxley knew? About your horcruxes? Enough to realize Harry would be one?"

"He should not have." Marvolo's grip on his wand tightened. "I intend to find out how he came about that knowledge."

"Perhaps it was just a lucky guess," Hadrian said.

Marvolo's look showed clearly how unlikely he thought that to be. Hadrian rolled his eyes. He supposed Marvolo had a reason to be a paranoid bastard but still…

"You won't want to stay here for this," Marvolo said almost hesitantly.

"You don't want me to see you torture him." Hadrian sighed. "He needs to be turned into the Ministry, Marvolo. He can't just turn up dead. Too many people know that he kidnapped Harry, they'd know it was one of us if they found the body."

"They won't be able to discern Yaxley's identity from his body."

"I... didn't want to hear that." Hadrian looked away. "You can't guarantee this won't happen again, you know. And you can't go killing everyone who means Harry harm. They don't know you're back and if they learned, well..."

"They'd hate me for not being who I was. I am well aware."

"Do you hate who you are now?" Hadrian asked, only to regret asking a second later.

Marvolo slowly reached forward and trailed a cold finger down the side of Hadrian's face. "No."

Hadrian couldn't stop his blush. Marvolo had the nerve to smirk at it and Hadrian glared back. After a moment, Marvolo cleared his throat. "I hear your concerns, but I can't risk Yaxley being questioned by the Ministry with what knowledge he may possess."

"I understand." Hadrian ran a hand through his hair, skewing the ponytail in the process. A thought occurred to him suddenly and he grabbed on to Marvolo's sleeve. "You know the identities of all your Death Eaters?"

"Of course."
"You know which ones are most violent?"

"Otherwise I wouldn't have known who to place at the front lines," Marvolo drawled.

"Right." Hadrian personally thought that sounded like Voldemort had more strategy in his attacks than he obvious did, but he kept that opinion to himself. "Let's be proactive instead of retroactive. Submit a list of those Death Eaters. Turn them in to the Ministry."

Marvolo narrowed his amber eyes. Hadrian waited, knowing that Marvolo was more politically minded than him and likely going through all the likely scenarios of such an event. After a moment, he nodded. "We could make that work," he said finally.

Hadrian smiled. "Good." He waved his hand to Yaxley. "Do what you feel you must." And with that, he left.

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"It will be quick," Bones said. "Evidence is overwhelming. I don't the Wizengamot will even have to get the full details before voting guilty."

Hadrian felt himself freeze. It was that sort of attitude that had gotten his godfather—Harry's godfather—placed in prison for twelve years. "No, Madame Bones," Hadrian said, knowing his voice had just gotten colder. "It should not be quick."

Bones blinked. "I beg your pardon?"

"These alleged Death Eaters certainly seem guilty, but it is the job of a judge and jury to decide that. What you should do, Madame Bones, is make sure that no one bribes themself out of a sentence, but otherwise we should let the law do its work." He knew, of course, that every one of the twenty-seven people who'd been caught at the 'supposed revival of their Lord' were guilty—knew because he and Marvolo had set them up—but if they weren't legally detained in Azkaban there could be recourse for them.

Bones frowned at him. "You're angry at me. I thought you'd be chewing at the bit to have these men locked away."

"The British Wizarding World has enough troubles without adding to the already corrupt nature of our legal system," Hadrian said.

"Corrupt? I know the system has made mistakes, but no system is perfect."

"The system is far too subjective. Though the muggle legal system is far from perfect itself, there is something to be said for how they present their evidence and the many restrictions in place up on what a judge can decide." Hadrian sighed. "You gave the Weasley family a substantial amount of galleons with an excuse that anyone with half a brain could see was contrived."

"Arthur and Molly have been friends of mine for quite a while," Bones murmured. "They've never accepted my help before."

"Don't get me wrong, Madame Bones," Hadrian said. "It's not that I think you are corrupt—at least no more than all humans are. Sirius certainly doesn't think ill of you for using his trial to give them monetary help. However, what's to prevent someone from abusing the system? What's to say it hasn't already been?"

Bones met his gaze with a searching look. "What would you suggest then, Lord Naga?"
Hadrian shrugged. "I don't know. I'm no legal expert... but I wonder if there are some? Ask the people, ask more than the purebloods currently in power, ask the half-bloods with muggle ties and the muggleborns and the squibs. See if you can get some different perspectives. You have the power to start fixing the system, Madame Bones."

"Perhaps," Bones said. She sighed, suddenly sounding her older age. "There's no harm in asking, anyway."

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27 DEATH EATERS IMPRISONED - MINISTRY SPEARHEADS NEW TYPE OF TRIAL

Readers, many things have happened in the last few weeks. As you will be aware if you've been reading the paper, there have been ongoing trials for 27 alleged Death Eaters. As of this morning, all 27 have officially been declared guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment in Azkaban.

Now, while the news of these Death Eaters identities have been shocking (see page 2 for a full list), the truly interesting piece of new information came in a press conference with Amelia Bones after the trials concluded.

"The ministry and i hope that this set of trials will be the last of their kind," Madame Bones declared.

"What do you mean by that?" I, of course, asked.

"It has come to the ministry's attention that our legal system is behind the times," Madame Bones said. "Our witness protocols, our general procedures, and our formula for sentencing are all archaic. The minister has approved a new type of trial. We'll be going through mock events with a team of legal experts for the next few months before implementing the changes, but we hope to have small changes affective immediately."

A detailed report of the changes, a look at the team involved with the project, and speculations on the ramifications of this change will be in tomorrow's paper.

Stay Tuned,

Rita Skeeter

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"Regulus!" Yaxley screamed. "Regulus Black told me!"

"When?"

Yaxley sobbed, pieces of his skin sliding off his body to become bloody glops on the floor. Marvolo hissed, using parslemagic to heal Yaxley just enough so he wouldn't pass out. "I won't ask again, Yaxley. When did Regulus Black tell you?"

Yaxley let out a pitiful whimper, and then in barely more than a mumble, "Last month."

Marvolo watched the fire in the fireplace, repeating Yaxley's words over again in his head. He'd gotten nowhere in tracking down Regulus the last few weeks. He'd thought the boy dead, had killed him himself, and yet Yaxley hadn't been lying. Yaxley had at least believed the man he'd contacted was the younger Black.
::You going to tell me what Yaxley said?:: Hadrian asked in a soft hiss, far more perceptive than Marvolo wanted him to be in the moment.

Marvolo turned away from the fire. "Does it concern you?" he replied in harsher English.

"I don't know, do you want to marry me one day?"

Marvolo sighed. "Touché." It was already shocking enough that Hadrian hadn't put up more than a token protest to him torturing Yaxley. He shouldn't push, not for a little while. Hadrian was powerful, enough to start a huge change in the Ministry with only a small conversation, and Marvolo had to remember that.

Hadrian watched him, idly fiddling with his silver necklace. Marvolo followed the movement. He wondered what Hadrian thought of their courtship, if he still felt simply trapped in it.

::Give me some time,:: Marvolo hissed finally. ::Then I will tell you.::

::Very well::, Hadrian stood and walked over to the bookshelf. They were in Marvolo's rooms at Malfoy Manor. Hadrian had flooed over after Harry went to bed, both the older Black and the werewolf watching over Naga Manor.

Marvolo stood and stepped up behind his intended. "The Banter Troop is putting on a show in London tomorrow," he said, not liking the tense silence.

"Why, Marvolo, are you asking me out on a date?"

"I'm asking the man I'm courting to go to a play with me. It's a comedy surrounding the fifth Goblin rebellion, if that helps the making of your decision."

Hadrian laughed and Marvolo found himself warmed by the sound. "Okay," he said. "Only if we get dinner beforehand."

"Of course," Marvolo murmured, resisting the urge to wrap his arms around Hadrian. He pulled away instead, unsure of his own compulsions. "Tomorrow then."

Hadrian looked at him, his eyes amused like he knew something Marvolo didn't. "Of course," he parroted.
Hadrian walked down to the dining room on Tuesday morning to find Remus frowning over his coffee. "Weren't you working today?" Hadrian asked as Peachy magicked him his breakfast.

"I flooed in sick for a family emergency," Remus said. "Sirius's grandfather died today."

"Which one?" Hadrian asked, knowing both Arcturus Black and Pollux Black were living last he checked.

"Lord Arcturus Black, the previous Head of the House of Black. It's... it'll be a big funeral. I'm sure you'll be getting official invitations to the wake once Sirius finishes drafting them."

"Sirius is doing that?" Hadrian asked. "I thought he wasn't close with the other remaining Blacks."

"No, they didn't want anything to do with him even after the trial," Remus said in a low voice. "Of course all the remaining are rather aged and set in their ways. But... but Arcturus never officially disowned Sirius and by right of blood, since Orion was the oldest, that makes Sirius the next Lord Black. Whether they like it or not, he's in charge of what's left of that cursed family now."

Hadrian nodded. He hadn't realized, though he should have. When he'd known Sirius in his past life, all the other Blacks had already died so he'd always figured that if Sirius had been able to take his title as Lord Black, he would have. But Sirius hadn't so he'd always assumed Sirius had been actually disowned. Then again, maybe Sirius had been disowned, perhaps by Arcturus right before he died. In this life, with Sirius free, Arcturus would have had no reason to do so.

Arcturus dying bothered Hadrian though, for more than just the obvious difficulty it put upon Sirius. He contemplated it while he finished his breakfast—with Remus brooding and Harry gone over at the Malfoys, having requested to introduce the totally fun idea of sleepovers to Draco, the time was oddly silent. Hadrian decided to check on Sirius before flooing over to get his charge.

He walked up the stairs and popped his head into Sirius's bedroom—the door already partially open. "Sirius?" he asked.

"Yeah," Sirius replied, voice gruff.

Hadrian opened the door fully and took note of the dog animagus. Sirius looked dead tired, eyes red and bags under them. There was a scruff on his cheek, likely he'd forgotten to do his morning shaving spell, and he wore a robe thrown over his night clothes.

"What time did you find out?" Hadrian asked as he watched Sirius drafting a letter.

"Don't know. Middle of the night. The family magic crashed down on me kinda angrily, probably 'cause Arcturus never liked me much." Sirius sighed and set down his quill. "You have any
experience writing obituaries?"

Hadrian had too much experience, from his previous life. He swallowed down the memory and nodded.

He helped Sirius draft three different versions of the obituary—one to send to the paper, one for Black family members including those closely married from the family like Lucius Malfoy, and to all the other members of ancient and noble houses that were expected to come to the funeral of a lord of such a house.

"I'll need to go to Diagon Alley to order enough owls to send all of these off," Sirius said. "And I need to deliver Grandfather Pollux and Aunt Cassiopeia and that lots' in person. Probably stay at Black Manor with them until the funeral." Sirius rubbed his face, frowning as if just now noticing his own scruff. He grabbed his wand and casually waved it away.

Hadrian watched the nonchalant use of non-verbal magic and considered how quickly the family magic was settling over Sirius. Family magic wasn't alive, not really, but it was a weight and with that weight brought a kind of deeper understanding of magic itself. There was a reason that the heads of noble houses were so respected and it came from a time when it was acknowledged they had a connection with the essence of magic—even magic tainted with the presence of all their house—that most would never experience.

Hadrian knew one of the reasons he felt just a little different from how he had as Headmaster Harry Potter was because he held the family magic of the Naga line instead of Potter. A subtle change, but one powerful enough to give him altered perspective.

Recently he'd been considering how he'd veered off his original path for traveling back in time. The destruction of the magical world as they all knew it was not too far in the future and yet here he was focusing on building relationships and raising himself and maybe dealing with some relatively smaller problems. But he knew that all of these building blocks he was laying would help him rally together the magical world when the time came to come up with a solution to keep them all safe. Still, if he were Lord Potter, he wondered if the famous Potter arrogance would have pushed him to trying to act sooner, maybe too soon.

But he wasn't a Potter anymore, he was a Naga, and he'd never know how it would have turned out. In the end, the only use was continuing on this path he'd set himself on.

Hadrian glanced once more at the obituary on Sirius's desk. Lord Arcturus Black was Head of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black for 36 years, making him the longest leading Lord Black since the founding of the house. This accomplishment speaks true to his dedication to his family—a dedication he carried all 87 years of his life.

Eighty-seven years, Hadrian thought.

He froze. In his mind's eye, he remembered studying the Black family tapestry, tracing over Sirius's burned out face, finding the connections, wondering about the family Teddy would one day lead.

Arcturus Black was suppose to die in 1991, at the age of ninety. This funeral was three years early.

Hadrian accepted that his traveling back in time would change some things, but dying that much earlier meant it was more likely Arcturus Black hadn't died of natural old age.

So, why had he died?

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"I can't stand being in this house anymore!" Sirius exclaimed to Remus. His head was pounding, the shrill voice of his Aunt Cassiopeia still echoing in his ears. "All they ever do is gripe and complain and gossip. I thought growing up with my mother was bad, but if this was the environment she grew up in, I understand why she was batshit."

"Calm down, Padfoot," Remus said. "You're just a little stressed."

"A little stressed, bah. Overworked is more like it. I know my grandfather could do more to help, but all he does is say that if Arcturus died, he surely isn't far behind, and can't the house elves work on his tea any faster, his heart could give out any second now. Lazy sod. And Uncle Cygnus is even worse."

"Maybe a change of scenery would do you good?" Remus suggested.

Sirius sighed. "Yeah, you're right, as always, Moony." He shook his head, knowing it was a behavior that he'd only started doing after all the time he'd spent in his animagus form. His mind healer had told him the next step to acknowledging those behaviors was attempting to stop using them but now was not the time to be playing mental games with himself so he didn't bother. "Want to go visit my childhood house with me? I'm sure the place is a dump but…" and here Sirius hesitated.

Pre-Azkaban, pre-living in the same house as his godson and his godson's too-smart guardian, pre-everything that had happened since he'd begun healing… pre-all that, Sirius wouldn't have said the words on the tip of his tongue. But he felt too old to hold back now, too wise to be afraid anymore because fear was cold and Remus Lupin had been his warm blanket since he was a wide-eyed eleven year old sorted in Gryffindor knowing nothing but his parents' disapproval his whole life. James Potter had been Sirius's best friend, his comrade-in-arms, but Remus had always been the one he went to when he needed to relax and remember that everything would be okay.

In the end, the thing he hated the most about Dumbledore's scheming during the war was how the man had managed to manipulate him into distrusting the only person he'd always felt completely safe with.

So, because they'd agreed to start over and because starting over with Remus meant childlike innocence and the desire to be at Remus's side and never leave, Sirius said, "I'm not happy, having to visit that place. I don't have a single good memory from there that isn't tainted by the rest and I can't imagine what it'll feel like to go back after I left. But I have a responsibility as the head of my house to check on all our holdings—the few that are left to this cursed family. So… I guess what I'm trying to say is, if you're with me, it won't be so bad. If you're willing."

Remus looked at him, amber eyes frozen and face expressionless for long enough that Sirius began to feel uncomfortable by his frank words. Then Remus's shoulders dropped and he stepped closer to Sirius, as if trying to fit into Sirius's space. "Padfoot… Sirius, I'd go with you anywhere you asked."

Sirius felt his heart try to claw it's way out of his chest. He raised his hand as if to push it back behind his ribs, and then his arm moved in the other direction and he found himself pulling Remus closer by the back of the neck. Remus came, too easily to be anything but willing, and rested his head on Sirius's shoulder. Sirius lay his forehead against Remus's fine hair—already greying but just as soft as it had always been—and closed his eyes.

Despite the near funeral, the many arrangements Sirius had to make as the new Lord Black, and the dreaded upcoming visit to Grimmauld Place, Sirius felt utterly at peace.

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The floo connection to Grimmauld Place was too old to be safe to use, so Sirius side-along apparated Remus to the street outside. As always, the sight of the muggles on the road filled Sirius with glee. Grimmauld Place hadn't always been number 12 in a line of muggle townhouses. It was, in fact, a manor in it's own right—with a multitude of rooms across three floors and a basement level. But a muggle neighborhood grew up around it and Sirius's great-great grandfather had been forced to ask the goblins to put the house under a set of charms to allow it to fit in with its new neighbors. During the last war, his parents had discussed putting it under Fidelius, but honestly the house was hidden enough. No one suspected that the ordinary townhouse fit between numbers 11 and 13 was actually a Black family manor.

Sirius glanced over his shoulder at the corner store that had been his haven growing up. His parents never used the front door—never would have dared associate with the muggles outside, preferring to take the floo to Diagon Alley or the Ministry instead. But Sirius had often snuck out to intermingle with the preteens and teenagers of the street. That corner store, with it's unchanged broken neon sign, was a spot of comfort in this bleak area.

"You grew up here?" Remus asked, the surprise in his voice evident.

"Shocking, isn't it?" Sirius agreed. He stepped across the street and up to the door of Number 12 Grimmauld Place. On the door step, the old wards reached out to feel him and his companion. A muggle would have been convinced to turn away because of the heavy matrix, but the wards recognized Sirius—recognized him as a child that once lived there and as the Lord of its family. The door opened with a small creak.

Sirius walked in first, hand still on Remus's arm. The physical contact was necessary for the wards to perceive Remus as a guest. If he were more confident in his skills as the family head, he could have just sent out a pulse of magic to tell them, but he wasn't. Especially not in this place—which had some of the nastiest intruder wards of any of the Black properties.

Remus closed the door behind them with a slightly creak. Sirius glanced around the dark hallway. There was a couple candles lit on an entry way bench next to a large portrait. Sirius had a second to wonder who had kept the candles going when the portrait spoke.

"Back, are you?"

Sirius took a deep breath, allowed himself to be bolstered by Remus's solid presence at his back, and raised his chin. His mother's portrait watched him with a shrewd expression. "Yes, Mother," Sirius said. "I am."

"Took you long enough," his mother said. "I suppose you ran out of money, then? Thought you could get free lodging out of this place? Pathetic. That's what you've always been, dear son, absolutely pathetic."

"And you, dear mother, have always been wrong about me." Sirius replied. His hands shook, just minutely enough to hide from the portrait but enough so he could feel the quivers. He want to rage at the painting, scream and yell and cry. His mother had never minced her words around him, never failed to tell him just how disappointed she was in his existence. Being here in front of her cruel gaze again was nearly too much.

But then Remus stepped up closer to him, warmth covering his back like a thick blanket, and he knew that it didn't matter what that craggy old woman thought. She was just a portrait, just a painted representation of a terrible person.

And though he couldn't convince himself that her words didn't hurt him, he could realize that he
didn't have to stand here and take them. This was not his mother and her soul was long gone from this world. So instead of retaliating, instead of telling her that he was now the head of the family, he just turned away and walked down the hall.

Sirius turned into the kitchen, expecting to see decaying wood counters and rotted food from dead perseverance spells. Instead, he was greeted with a clean space and a loud pop.

Kreacher, his mother's favorite house elf, bowed low. "Master Sirius has returned!" he squeaked. "Kreacher is so pleased Master Sirius has decided to return here. Kreacher has kept the house clean for his Master. Kreacher has not missed a day of work, he has not!"

Sirius stared. He hadn't expected to find the old elf still alive—had honestly not even given the creature a single thought. But if he had, he would have expected the thing to hate him like it always had. Was it different now because he was the head of the family?

"Uh, good, Kreacher," Sirius said. "That's really good."

Kreacher beamed. "Would Master Sirius be liking anything to eat or drink for himself or his guests?" Kreacher paused and pulled at his ears. "Stupid Kreacher, stupid. No food or drink to offer Master Sirius." He walked over to the counter and began beating his head on it.

"Stop!" Sirius commanded. "Stop, it's okay, Kreacher." He never liked the elf, but he certainly had always hated seeing any house elf punish itself. "Are you not connected to the family funds anymore?"

Kreacher shook his head wordlessly.

Sirius sighed. "Here, how about this, pop yourself to Black manor and report to the head house elf there. Tell her what's been going on, that I'm happy with what you've done, and that you need reassignment to duties on the main grounds."

Kreacher nodded and made to snap with his fingers, and then he hesitated. He looked around the kitchen, then farther back toward the little cubby Sirius knew had always been where he slept.

"Hey," Sirius said, though he wasn't sure where this strange pity in his chest was coming from. "You can grab anything you'd like from your room first. And... I'm not sure what I'll be doing with this old place, but when I figure it out you'll be the first elf I call back to take care of it, okay? I'm sure there's no one who knows this place as well as you do, so it'd be only right."

Kreacher's eyes filled with tears. "Master Sirius is as good as Master Regulus always said. Kreacher should have listened to Master Regulus sooner. Kreacher is sorry." He wiped his face then fled to his cubby. A second later, Sirius heard a pop and knew Kreacher was gone.

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Remus followed after Sirius as he walked through the house. It felt right to be behind Sirius, to be guarding his back, to be following his lead. Remus hadn't felt like this in years, not since they were children at Hogwarts, and even then sometimes it had felt more like he was eating Sirius and James's dust rather than being at their backs.

But Sirius had asked him to come here, had shown more emotional vulnerability than Remus had ever expected out of the man, and he wasn't sure how to deal with the swirl of emotions it caused in his own chest. He knew his own feelings, had known them with complete certainty for months now. He'd always had a crush on Sirius, always known it was a hopeless one, but living together with Sirius in Hadrian Naga's house had opened his eyes to other possibilities. They were two lost souls
left from a half-forgotten era—an era that had culminated in death and destruction and betrayal. Remus doubted anyone would ever understand how broken he was inside as much as Sirius did and he similarly doubted anyone would understand Sirius in the same way he did.

But Remus had never been a leader, never wanted to take charge, and he was content at doing this slow climb at Sirius's pace. That didn't mean he wasn't grateful Sirius had opened up sooner than he'd expected.

They walked through the bedrooms, the library—which had Remus salivating just slightly—and to the sitting room. There, Sirius paused and Remus stepped up beside him to see what had caught his eye.

It was a tapestry. A family tapestry, by the looks of it. It hardly had all of the Black family members on it, but certainly all the lines from the first Lord Black. Near the bottom, Remus saw Sirius's name, a little crown by it to denote his position as head of the house.

"Huh," Sirius said. "Kreacher must have removed the stains." He fingered his name, then a woman named Andromeda, then a man named Alphard. "I didn't know Uncle Alphie was still alive," he muttered, as if to himself.

"Wasn't he the one that gave you money when you, uh, ran away?" Remus asked.

"Yeah, that was him. He was always my favorite uncle." Sirius snorted. "He never was like the rest of the Blacks. I bet he's in France right now with two veelas on either side of him, charming the pants of their mother. It'd be just like him." He shook his head. "I have to make sure to send him an invitation to the funeral. I doubt he'll come, not if he's really taken care to cut ties with the family, but…"

"You'd like to see him."

Sirius nodded. "Yeah, I'd like to."

Remus pressed against Sirius's side before he could stop himself. The wolf in him just wanted to comfort Sirius, wanted to comfort their mate—because that's what his wolf had seen Sirius as since the first time the dog animagus had knocked him over and bared his teeth against his neck during the full moon. Sirius had no idea the significance of his body language during those nights they used to play as Grim and werewolf, but his inner wolf certainly did.

Sirius didn't pull away from him. He pressed back instead, wrapping an arm around Remus's waist as if subconsciously. His eyes were still fixed on the tapestry, while Remus's were fixed on his face.

Remus wondered if there was anything else he could do to help Sirius get through this. He hoped it wasn't too soon—this responsibility, this forced maneuvering to deal with his past. He hoped it wouldn't break Sirius, that it would make him stronger.

Sirius turned his head suddenly and met Remus's gaze. Remus's breath caught in his throat.

"Thanks," Sirius said.

"What for?" Remus asked softly.

Sirius leaned forward and rested his forehead on Remus's. "For being here with me."

Remus closed his eyes. "I already told you, anywhere, anytime you ask, Sirius. I won't abandon you again."
"I know," Sirius murmured. He pulled back and lightly kissed Remus's head. "When this is all over, Remus, we'll talk about us, okay? Just… I can't, right now."

"Whatever you need," Remus said honestly, though his heart pounded so loudly in his chest he was sure Sirius could hear it. "I don't… I'll wait as long as you need."

Sirius watched him with those piercing grey eyes and it seemed like he was seeing Remus for the first time. Remus felt naked, vulnerable in a way he rarely was with Sirius. "No," Sirius said, "You've been waiting long enough." He gently kissed Remus full on the lips. "I won't make you wait much longer, I promise."

And with that, he pulled away and continued walking through the house.

Remus didn't even bother holding back his tears, at least until the salty drops began to drip onto his smiling lips and he was forced to wipe them away.

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The funeral was a painfully formal affair, just as Arcturus would have liked. Severus wished he hadn't been invited, wished he'd been snubbed because the mutt was the one sending invitations. But Sirius Black had sent him a formalized letter, despite the fact that Severus was really only on the outskirts of high society.

"It's a wonderful thing that you've been invited, my boy," Dumbledore had said. "Just the excuse you need to remind Lord Naga that you're open to talking about Lily with young Harry. We need you to build that connection, Severus, you know that."

Severus knew exactly what Dumbledore's aim was, but that didn't mean he had to like it.

He gathered his robes around him and walked down the line of guests toward where Sirius stood. It was customary for a funeral guest to announce his presence to the one presiding over the event and though Severus hated the man, he would not give the new Lord Black a reason to publicly ridicule him.

"Lord Black," he greeted, though he didn't try to keep the sneer out of his voice. "My condolences on the death of your grandfather."

"My gratitude for your presence here, Master Snape," Black replied, just as formally.

Severus nodded and turned his gaze to the people standing around Black. The werewolf stood at Black's side, a position customarily meant for a spouse. Severus had always wondered about them in school. He briefly contemplated how the rest of the Black family would react to their new Lord mating with a werewolf. The thought amused him.

Standing on Black's other side was Pollux Black, whom Severus graced with a slightly deeper head nod before he moved on to allow the next arrival to talk to Sirius.

Standing by the outdoor fire, Hadrian Naga was talking with Arthur and Molly Weasley. Beside them, Ron and Harry huddled together. It looked as though Ron was showing off chocolate frog cards to Harry. Severus internally scoffed.

"Ah, Professor Snape," Hadrian said, spotting him.

"Good to see you, Severus," Arthur said, just a touch too jovially for a funeral. "I didn't expect to see you here."

Molly elbowed her husband in the side. "Of course he's here. It would have been rude for Sirius to not extend an invitation to an esteemed Potions' Master like Severus. Not to mention the only heir left of the Prince family." The even if he can't inherit the title of Lord Prince went unsaid. Like many old families, the Prince family law barred a halfblood like Severus from inheriting the house even if all the other family members were dead. Few old families had done away with those archaic rules, the Potters being one of them.

His eyes drifted over to Harry again. The boy was looking at him, seemingly ignoring the young Weasley boy's chattering in favor of observing him.

"Oh, that's right," Naga said. "I forgot I hadn't created a chance for you two to meet yet." He beckoned Harry over and the boy came quickly. "Harry, this is Severus Snape. I think I told you about him."

"You're the Potions Professor at Hogwarts, right, sir?" Harry said. "And you were the youngest ever Master in the field from Britain! I read about it in The History of Magical Mastery."

"Yes," Severus said, surprised despite himself. "Both statements are correct."

Harry practically beamed. "I'm so excited to learn potions from you! Hadrian lets me help out with him sometimes but I bet you know far more than he does."

Hadrian laughed, though Severus cringed at the insult. If he'd said such a thing about his father to one of his father's associates… But Hadrian merely ruffled Harry's hair. "I'm sure that's true," he said. "You've still got a couple years left until you're off to Hogwarts though."

Harry pouted. "I know."

Severus found he couldn't take his eyes off Harry. His hair was all James, the Potter family curse as it were, but his facial structure, his expressions, his eyes, that was all Lily. And it was almost too much for him.

Almost.

Severus looked up finally to find Hadrian's own shrewd green eyes observing him. "Now might be a good time for you two to have some time to talk," Hadrian said. "Funerals are a place of remembrance, to reminisce about the dead. I know Harry would love to know more about his mother, if you're up for sharing."

And underneath the weight of those two pairs of green eyes, Severus could only nod.

As he walked away with young Harry, he heard Molly ask Hadrian, "Is that wise? Severus has never been known to be good with children and I would hate for him to hurt Harry unintentionally."

"Have faith, Molly," Hadrian replied. "I think the experience will be good for the both of them."

Harry tugged Severus until they were by one of the far outdoor fires, mostly secluded from the other guests. "Did you really know my mum?" he asked and the hope in his tone was just strong enough to wrench at the iron doors around Severus's heart.

"I did," Severus said. "I grew up in the same neighborhood as her." Here, he took a deep breath. He thought of Dumbledore, of Naga, of James Potter and finally of Lily. And for the first time since her
death, he let himself hope just as Harry was.

*Have faith.* Severus didn't know if he could do that, but at the very least, he could hope. Maybe, just maybe, this little boy would be his salvation. Maybe, with the help of this child's innocent trust, he could finally allow himself to move on.

"The first time I met your mother, I was seven years old…"

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"You know, Hadrian, I was thinking," Sirius said as the funeral began to wrap up and the guests started leaving. "There's only four people living in Black Manor right now. Pollux, Cassiopeia, Cygnus, and Druella. Quite frankly, I hate all of them."

"I know you do," Hadrian said, having heard his complaints about his relatives in the weeks leading up to the funeral.

"Right, well, so I visited my old childhood house. It's pretty big and not in bad shape, honestly. Certainly filled with enough dark objects and forbidden books to keep those old croaks happy until they die. And if I convince them to move there… or you know, order them cause I'm Lord Black and I can do that."

Hadrian blinked, seeing where this was going. "Then Black Manor will be empty."

Sirius grinned. "And Black manor is large, relatively safe once we take down some of the wards, filled with a host of willing house elves to clean and cook and garden. There's even a quidditch pitch and stables. It's pretty much perfect."

Hadrian could already see it, see those spacious halls filled with laughing children and their caregivers. There were plenty of sitting rooms they could convert into classrooms to teach the children the basics of magic and reading and writing. The bedrooms could easily fit multiple four-poster beds, with nice rooms for the caretakers to sleep as well.

"It's perfect, Sirius," Hadrian said. "Of course, we could give you the funds we'd already collected as recompense."

"No," Sirius stated. "No, leave that money for the orphanage fund. I have plenty enough now that I'm head of this stupid house." He ran an hand through his hair, messing up the charm work Hadrian was sure Remus had done to keep it neat all through the funeral. "I'm just happy I can help. I really think this'll work."

"Let me know once you've figured it out with your relatives but… well as soon as you do we can let the rest know and continue onto the next stage. It's going to be great, Sirius, I can feel it."

"Me too," Sirius said. He looked around, watching the funeral guests take their leave. "I'm not happy about Arcturus dying. He wasn't a terrible person, really, but… I am happy I can be useful now."

"You were always useful," Hadrian argued, frowning.

Sirius snorted. "You know as well as I do that I never fit in with the crowd you walk with most often. Not then. Now, as Lord Black… now I can join you guys on equal footing." Sirius held up a hand before Hadrian could interject. "Hadrian, for the first time in my life, I feel comfortable in my own skin. I feel like I can be something other than a failure, a fool that makes mistakes one after another. I feel like I can atone for the deaths I've caused." He smiled and it was beautiful and bittersweet. "Will you let me?"
"Yes," Hadrian said honestly. "Stand on your own two feet, Sirius. I won't help steady you anymore."

"Good," Sirius told him. "Thank you."

Hadrian watched the man who'd once been his godfather walk away. And though he wasn't quite sure why, he felt a weight lift from his own chest with each confident step.

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