Of a Linear Circle - Part III

by flamethrower

Summary

Harry Potter's fifteenth birthday starts off just like all the others...for the first few seconds, at least. The gift he receives changes his entire life.

Notes

This one's not complete, so the chapter updating will be a bit slower than the madcap run that was Linear Circle Part II, but someone nudged me and the author-cackling needed to be indulged. It is, however, 171 pages already...

Cheerlead by @norcumi and @jabberwockypie; beta'd by @sanerontheinside, all of Tumblr fame. @mrsstanley might join in on the beta-work for later chapters but her summer has been insane.

Characters added to the list as they put in their various appearances.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Harry stares up at his watch in the darkness, holding the button down so its green light will keep illuminating the numbers as it ticks down the seconds. At midnight, Harry releases the button and sighs. “Happy Birthday.” On his fifteenth birthday, just like every birthday before it, he’s saying the words to himself.

“This is terrible. This is worse than I thought it would be.”

Harry yanks his wand out from beneath his pillow and points it in the direction of the voice, his heart hammering in his chest. Standing in the corner near the window, where Harry knows no one had been a minute ago, is the shadowy form of a man. Harry can’t tell if he’s dressed in wizard or Muggle clothing, but he can see streetlight reflecting on an awful lot of silver in the man’s dark hair and close-trimmed beard.

_He has to be a wizard, you idiot._ Muggles would have had to open the window first to get in, and that would have irritated Hedwig.

He glances at his owl. Hedwig isn’t making any alarmed sounds, but she also knows that to wake the Dursleys is to invite more trouble than either of them needs.

“Who are you?” Harry asks, glad that his voice doesn’t shake.

“I’m a friend—well, let’s leave it at ‘ally.’ That probably seems more reasonable at the moment,” his guest answers. He has a pleasant voice, but then, so did Tom Voldemort’s diary shade. “Are you going to point your wand at me all night?”

“If I have to. It’s not like I have old men showing up in my bedroom all that often,” Harry retorts. “I—old—you called me—” He can see the shadowy figure put his hand over his face. “That was not very nice.”

“You showed up in my bedroom at midnight, in the dark, without knocking, haven’t introduced yourself, and _I’m_ the one who’s rude?” Harry asks in disbelief. “Seriously?”

“Old!” the wizard repeats again in dismay. “Fine, then. I apologize for the late intrusion, not to mention the secretive part, but I didn’t want to wake your interesting relatives. I’d probably stab them, and then there are police and M.L.E. investigations, and it’s just a great big pain in the arse.”

“Okay, that’s kind of a fair point,” Harry admits, but he doesn’t lower his wand. He’s not even supposed to have it out of his school trunk, but the Dursleys weren’t in Little Hangleton last month. He can’t sleep unless it’s in touching distance. “What do you want?”

“Might I turn on the light? It will probably make things seem much less clandestine—and don’t worry about sound carrying. I already cast a spell that will ensure that no one else will hear anything.”

Harry hates that his wand dips a little in reaction. “Which means you could murder me and they’d never know.” They wouldn’t care, either, but Harry suspects the stranger is aware of that.

“Usually the point to murdering people is that they don’t know about it beforehand,” his guest replies. “Light?”
“Hold on.” Harry gets out of bed, finds the jumper he took off last night, and shoves it along the bottom of his bedroom door. “Now I can—”

The ground tilts alarmingly; the only thing saving him from falling is the wizard’s sudden grip on his elbow. “Relax. I’ll let you go the moment I’m certain you’re not going to brain yourself on the floor,” he murmurs.

Harry shakes off the lightheadedness. “I’m fine.”

The wizard sighs. “You aren’t,” he says, but he lets go and flicks the bedroom overhead light on, which only has one surviving bulb left. The light in the room is horrible, producing dirty yellow paths interrupted by dark shadows. The man has short dark hair; his skin could be pale, brown, yellow, or none of those. Harry can’t tell what color the wizard’s eyes are, either, but the lines around his eyes seem kind instead of cruel.

“Who are you?” Harry asks again. He realizes, too late, that he lowered his wand, but this wizard also made it from one side of the room to the other without making a sound. Harry is probably outmatched, again, but so far he’s not bound, being threatened, or dead.

“I can’t tell you that, and not because I don’t want to.” The wizard steps back and leans against the wall a polite distance away, which makes Harry’s shoulders relax a little. His clothes are entirely Muggle, Harry realizes, but they don’t seem local. Neither does the man’s accent, though his English is flawless.

“Then what can you tell me?”

Harry doesn’t think it’s his imagination that the old wizard seems unhappy. “I’m here to save you from what’s to come. It’s just going to be a rather complicated method of saving.”

“What’s to come?” Harry asks.

“Voldemort,” the old wizard replies. Harry doesn’t flinch, though it’s a near thing. “Again, and again, and again, until someone dies. I’d rather it not be you, as would quite a number of other people.”

Harry almost starts laughing. “A number of—that’s rich. I read the Prophet, you know.”

“I read the Daily Prophet, too, but I’m not stupid.”

“Okay. Let’s say I believe you.” Not that Harry thinks he has much choice. “What does this ‘saving’ of yours involve?”

“I can tell you that you will be a hell of a lot safer than if you were to remain here. I can tell you that you will receive useful magical training for your survival, not the guesswork you’ve been expected to perform up until this point.”

Harry frowns. “What’s the catch?”

“The catch is that it could take a while,” the wizard replies.

“A while,” Harry repeats. “So people could die while I’m off doing whatever mysterious thing you’re talking about.”

“If you die, a lot of other people will also then die at Voldemort’s hand,” the old wizard says. “At this point, you’re arguing semantics. No matter which option you choose, death might be lying in
“You don’t work for Dumbledore,” Harry guesses. He’s not sure what makes him certain, but he is.

“No. He’s not a bad sort, but we have some differences of opinion,” the wizard says.

“Like?”

The old man scowls. “Your residing in this fucking house, for starters. It was meant to be
temporary, not permanent.”

The swearing is a little surprising, but he’s heard worse from Dudley’s gang. Harry is more
concerned with the second half of what was said: temporary, not permanent. “You knew my
parents.”

“I did.” The old man frowns and crosses his arms. “They wouldn’t have wanted this.”

Harry clenches his jaw. He’s heard that one a lot, too. “Oh, really? What would they want, then?”

The wizard just raises an eyebrow. “They wouldn’t want their child to be forced to fight in a war
he’s not prepared for.”

That isn’t what he expected at all. Harry lets his arm relax at his side, even if he can’t release his
white-knuckled grip on his wand. “You’re the first person I can think of who’s ever said anything
like that to me.” He’s heard a lot about how Harry should let adults handle problems, and then he
gets to watch and roll his eyes as they don’t do anything. He was sick of that nonsense in his first
year of primary school.

“No, I imagine they’re too busy prattling on about Chosen nonsense,” the wizard mutters. “I will
not force you from your own home, Harry Potter, but I believe you’re intelligent enough to realize
I’m telling you no falsehoods.”

“But there are still plenty of things you’re not mentioning at all.”

For some reason, that makes the old man smile. “Clever lad. There are many reasons for my
secrecy, and some of the secrets I hold are meant to safeguard others aside from you.

“If you decide upon my offer, you can take very little with you. Not photos or books, not clothes
beyond what I find appropriate. Your wand and your Cloak—yes, I’m aware of its existence, and
would not ask you to leave it behind—and if she’s willing, your owl.”

“Everyone else just tells me what I’m supposed to be doing.” Harry hates that he sounds pathetic.

“Which you don’t often agree to. You’ve too much defiance in you for that, but you’re not used to
being granted the opportunity to make a decision that’s all your own.” The old wizard spreads his
arms wide. “I can give you that, at least.”

Harry glances at Hedwig again, who is only regarding their visitor in quiet curiosity. She’s a good
judge of character, even when he hasn’t been. If she’d decided the old man was a threat, she would
be repeatedly lifting her talons and putting them back down, anxious to attack. “Let’s say I believe
you. You’re offering me something genuine, some way of killing Voldemort without dying in the
process.”

“I notice that the aspect of safety doesn’t seem to be a concern.”
Harry shrugs. “I’ve never been safe. Not that I can remember, anyway. I mean, you could have just killed me the moment you got here, and you didn’t. Either you’re bad at making people dead, or you’re hung up on making people like you before you kill them.”

The wizard is giving him an odd look. “You’ve either watched too much telly, or not nearly enough. I am actually quite good at making people dead, thank you, but we’re back to how many others find it to be an inconvenience.”

“Right. You mentioned that.” Harry stares at him. The more he thinks about it, the more the old man looks a little bit like he should be family. “Have we—have we met?”

“We have. And after you leave here, we’ll meet again, as well.”

“You’re not going with me?” Harry blurs out in surprise.

“I can’t.” The old wizard doesn’t look happy about it, at least. “As I said: I safeguard others aside from you.”

“If one of your jobs was safeguarding me, you are really bad at your job,” Harry says dryly.

The old man sighs. “Yes, well, I’m not the only one. A lesson you should remember, Harry, is that a single person can only do so much: no matter how much wisdom they hold, no matter how powerful they are, or how much influence they’ve gained. I’m sorry for what you’ve lost; I can only offer to make up for it.”

Harry tries to come up with reasons to say no. He’s dealing with a strange wizard who could be meaning to send him anywhere…but isn’t as if he can’t get back. If he can take his wand, and Hedwig, he can send a message off and have someone retrieve him.

He thinks of Cedric falling in a blast of green light. Some nights he can’t sleep for remembering it. When it’s not him, it’s Hermione, Ginny, Ron, Sirius—and he can’t. He can’t let that happen. If it takes random bargains with strangers to be able to protect them from Voldemort, Harry already knows he’s going to say yes.

“Okay,” Harry says, and tries not to shrug again when the old man just looks at him. “I watched someone I like die in front of me, sir. I killed my first Dark wizard at age eleven with my bare hands. A basilisk controlled by Tom Riddle tried to eat me when I was twelve. I learned Peter Pettigrew betrayed my parents, not my godfather, when I was thirteen—oh, and that my other godparent is a werewolf, that was fun, but I don’t hold that against him. Then last year a Death Eater got me involved in a tournament that could have killed me three times over, and since I didn’t botch it, Voldemort is walking around in a body again with a wand he can point at anyone he pleases. You know I’m going to say yes.”

“I did, and I did not,” the wizard replies. He rubs his face, as if thinking, but Harry knows he isn’t mistaken when he sees the glimmer of moisture in the man’s eyes before it’s gone again.

“You’re family. Or close enough for it not to matter, Harry realizes. You care.

If he wasn’t certain before, he is now. “What do I need to do?”

“Your watch has to stay here. It’s a useful device, but it cannot go where you’re going,” the wizard tells him. “I see trainers resting on top of that trunk, but they’ll not do. Do you have boots?”

Harry shakes his head. “No, just those and school shoes.”
“It snows in Scotland.” The man looks unimpressed. “Your school sees bloody snowfall.”

“But I’m only here in the summer. Nobody local is selling boots for the snow in summer,” Harry explains. No one in walking distance, at least.

“Is that your best pair of trainers, then?”

“It’s my only pair,” Harry says.

The wizard makes a sour face. “All right. Fine. Hand them over, and a pair of the school shoes if they’re made of real leather.”

Harry does so, bemused. “Anything else?”

He’s directed to find the darkest pair of denims he owns, a t-shirt or a long-sleeve cotton shirt, preferably with no pocket. Harry settles on a white t-shirt; a rust-brown hooded jumper is also considered acceptable. The old man doesn’t look pleased about the jumper, but the only cloak Harry owns is for school in the winter. His guest is shaking his head over it not being true wool and declaring it useless, which also seems to include a muttered rant about polyester.

The clothes Harry was wearing are otherwise clean, so he keeps his pants on while changing into the approved selections. The old man has his back turned as he prods at both pairs of shoes. His wand is made from unvarnished wood, but Harry is really not the best person to go to when it comes to identifying trees that don’t have leaves on them. Sometimes he’s useless even if they still have the leaves.

Harry pulls up the loose floorboard in his room, shining his pathetic excuse for a flashlight down into the dusty recesses. He’s not worried about much here except for the book of wizarding photographs, gifted to him by Hagrid, and the leather pouch that holds what wizarding money he keeps during the summer. Hagrid got him a wallet once, but it kept biting him instead of biting strangers, so Harry gave up on it. Hagrid really hadn’t seemed surprised at the “news” that Harry’s wallet had eaten itself, which makes Harry not regret at all his decision to leave it in a garbage bin.

“You can take the money. That will be useful,” the old wizard says without turning around. “The photographs are important?”

“They’re of my parents,” Harry says. “If we’re meeting again, then…then I was hoping you’d look after them for me. They’re not safe here at the Dursleys, not if I’m gone.”

The wizard looks over his shoulder to peer at Harry. Then he glances down at the leather-bound book of moving pictures. “I promise they will be safe. Is there anything else you value as much?”

“Just people, and they’re not here.”

“Of course,” the wizard says in a low voice. “If you have proper winter socks, put them on. If you don’t, double up on summer weight. You’ll want the extra padding.”

“For what—oh.” Harry looks in surprise at the pair of black boots waiting on the side table where two sets of shoes had been before. “That’s really neat Transfiguration.”

“You’ll learn it,” the old man says, smiling. “Black leather from the one set, but trainers have better soles to them. Make sure they fit; sometimes I bollocks up the sizing.”

Harry tries to smile. “Oh, so you make your own shoes a lot?”
“I’m particular,” the old man grumbles.

Harry settles his feet into the boots, even if he’s already too warm in a pair of blended wool socks. Those he could buy easily enough; between the wool and the warming charms he looked up, he’d kept his feet from freezing off when it snowed during the school year. “Sizing’s good, unless my feet get longer.”

“Transfiguration. There is enough material there to take you up at least one more size,” the wizard counters. “Ready?”

Harry feels a bad jolt as he realizes that he’s done everything that’s been asked of him. He can’t take anything else, he’s dressed, and the night isn’t getting any younger. If he dawdles too long, he risks Uncle Vernon’s early waking and temper. “Here,” he says, thrusting out the photos. “Please don’t lose them. I don’t know if there are any other copies.”

“I won’t.” The wizard tucks the book into his jacket and tilts his head at Hedwig. “Your owl? You have to ask.”

“Yeah.” Harry walks over to her and opens the cage, watching as the street lamps from the window cut a white swath over his arm as he unhooks her door. “What do you think, girl? Want to go to some new place that isn’t here?”

Hedwig nips his fingertips and then shuffles her way out of the cage. She stretches her wings wide and then tucks them back into place, sidling up his arm until she’s perched on his shoulder.

Harry turns around to face the wizard again. “I think that means yes.”

The old man is watching the owl. “It usually does. Hold out your hand.”

Harry tucks his wand into his sleeve, making sure it’s secure. His cloak is properly shoved into his rear denim pocket. There is money in his front pocket. He’s dressed, he has his glasses, and Hedwig is calm.

Then he reaches out and clasps the old man’s hand. The shape of their hands is even a bit similar, though the old man’s skin is much darker. Harry’s skin tries to be bronze, but his mum’s complexion interferes and turns it really pale, like hers had been. Harry’s dad was maybe one-quarter white and three-quarters something else, and Petunia hates James Potter for that, too. Harry can pass well enough as long as people ignore the bird’s nest masquerading as his hair.

“Is this like Apparition, then?” Harry asks, trying not to let on that he’s half-terrified.

“A bit, but not Side-Along. You and Hedwig will be going on your own.” The old man touches his wand to Harry’s forehead—not his scar, but directly in the center. “This is going to feel a bit odd.”

“Odd how?” Harry asks, but he never hears the answer.
Bloody Surrey

Chapter Summary

"Surrey is that way, south of the Tamesis. Granted, no one has called Surrey ‘bloody’ before. It’s appropriate enough, considering how often England and the Danes have squabbled over it."

Chapter Notes

I got both of my betas for chapter 2 back on the same day, and @mrs_stanley is totes on board. Squee!

Harry wakes up to the feel of weight on his chest and something feathery rubbing against his chin. That is followed a moment later by a sharp peck. “Okay! I’m up, Hedwig, I’m—”

He’s not looking up at the ceiling of his bedroom overhead. He’s staring at a wide stretch of blue sky. The night before comes back in a rush; he sits up so fast that he dislodges Hedwig, who hoots at him angrily about the indignity before righting herself to perch on Harry’s knee.

He’s sitting in a field dotted with trees that are not trimmed back, but left to grow in any direction. The air is chilly, and it looks more like early spring than midsummer. Everything smells wild, green and earthy, not anything like he’s used to despite the fact that he is the reason Aunt Petunia’s flowers grow so well—and that’s only because he can lay fertilizer and weed flowerbeds, not because he’s great with plants.

“Where am I?”

Hedwig gives him a sharp look and then ruffles her feathers. She has no idea, and she’s not happy about it.

“All right.” Harry convinces Hedwig to latch onto his wrist before he stands up, relieved to find that all of his allowed belongings are where he left them. He glances around, wondering where they’ve been sent, but there are no landmarks. “I don’t see why trainers weren’t acceptable,” he tells Hedwig. She hoots again in curiosity before slowly climbing his arm to settling down on his shoulder.

Harry turns around in a full circle before he notices smoke rising in the west. “That way, I suppose. Maybe we can ask someone where we are.”

He judges it’s about a mile’s walk before a village set in a low valley comes into view. He halts in place, uncertain; it’s like nothing he’s ever seen in Surrey. It looks more like Hogsmeade, but with fewer proper shops and a lot more randomly placed cottages. Everything is built from stone or wood with thatched roofing. Every building that looks like it might be a home has a vegetable plot with herbs intermixed. Harry’s grades are terrible, but he does pay enough attention in Potions—and to Aunt Petunia’s stupid garden—to recognize some of those plants. There are no paved roads
or walkways, just trails. Sheep, goats, chickens, cows, and short, furry ponies outnumber the
people by a large margin.

Harry frowns. Hogsmeade is supposed to be the only wizarding village left in Britain, but he might
not be in Britain any longer. Either way, even being lost in a strange country is preferable to being
locked in his bedroom at the Dursley’s. He’s also starving. “Hedwig, find a tree you can hide in
properly,” he says. “I’m going to take a closer look. We don’t know how these people react to
owls.” Hedwig gives him a gentle nip on his fingers before taking off, making for a sprawling oak
tree on a hillside.

It’s slow going down the hill until he finds a footpath, which makes his descent into the village
much easier. People give him curious glances, though they don’t seem to be afraid of him. Some
even smile in greeting, but they’re working, so Harry just nods and keeps walking. He also picks up
a full parade of children; Harry smiles at them, which makes them all scatter.

His heartbeat is starting to pick up. He isn’t alarmed, exactly, but something isn’t right. Everyone is
clean and has decent teeth, though a lot of the adults have pockmarked skin. That’s smallpox; he
remembers seeing a really exaggerated picture of it in his last year of primary school before
Hogwarts. Smallpox vaccines are common, but maybe this generation missed out? He knows some
did, and the children seem to be all right. Magic dealt with smallpox with…well, magic, most
often. Possibly not a wizarding village, then. Maybe he’s in South America? He doesn’t know
much about that continent except that there are a lot of indigenous groups who still dress in older
styles of clothing.

No, that can’t be correct, either. These people are mostly white, if ruddy-skinned or dark brown
from sun exposure. Even with the other racial skin tones he can see here and there, the
predominant population is white European.

Harry finally finds a middle-aged man sitting on a rock, carving a piece of wood. The knife is
beautiful, all black patterns over the silver, even if the hilt is simple, brass-ended wood. It looks
like he’s making a flute of some sort. “Uh, excuse me?”

The man looks up, revealing blue eyes and bushy, curled brown hair that reminds him of
Hermione’s on a particularly humid day. “Hâlette, byre—ðu lóclóca tó bóe meteþearfende!”

“I—I’m sorry,” Harry smiles weakly. “I have no idea what you said.”

The man tilts his head and mimes words while making a particular gesture before his mouth.

Harry takes a guess and shakes his head. “No. I’m sorry.”

“Ne, sorig,” the man says, and nods. He holds up his hand in a clear signal to wait. Harry does so,
shifting on his feet and hoping he’s not about to be attacked.

Ne, sorig. That sounded very close to No, sorry. Maybe the language gap—whatever language this
is—isn’t so bad.

The man returns with what looks like an entire roll of homemade bread. Stacked atop it are large
slabs of meat and layers of greens. “Oh, god, thank you,” Harry says, wide-eyed. “I—I can pay.”

Maybe. He fishes out knuts and sickles by feel and holds them out, hoping the expression on his
face isn’t insulting.

The man shakes his head and grasps Harry’s hand long enough to close his fingers over the coins.
“Ne,” he repeats. “Gyft.”
That, Harry understands. He smiles. “Thank you.”

The stranger clasps his shoulder before he returns to his work. Harry gives manners about a second’s thought before he starts eating, trying to pace himself by breaking the bread in half and cramming everything inside in a makeshift sandwich. The last time he was reintroduced to real food after Dursley-provided starvation, he’d been ill and had to start all over again. He does not want that man’s kindness to become vomit abandoned in the grass.

He saves a few strips of the meat—unfamiliar poultry—for Hedwig as he walks out of the village. There is an honest-to-god smithy, and the heat emerging from that stone edifice is intense. A small shop looks dedicated to selling things that aren’t local, but Harry can’t read any of the prices carved into the wooden shelves below cloth sacks of dried seed. A few crafted wooden toys that move if they’re pulled by a rope, stone statues that look religious, and gold jewelry are kept high up on the walls, out of reach of curious fingers. There are no premade clothes, but rolls of what looks like undyed wool.

Harry finally wanders out of the village, which has offered him hospitality but otherwise left him alone. It’s kind of nice. He should probably feed Hedwig, but after that, he has no idea what to do.

He spies movement in the grass when he passes the last house—a common adder on its way into the village. “Where do you think you’re going?” Harry asks the snake.

The adder lifts its head in annoyance. “The village has chickens. Chicken eggs are delicious.”

“Well, yes, they are, but those are eggs for people, not for you. You leave those eggs alone.”

The adder flicks its tail, temper roused. “Why do I not just bite you and continue along, anyway?”

“Because it’s rude, and I’m telling you not to,” Harry retorts. “You have an entire field out there that’s full of mice and rats. The only excuse you have for going after eggs is if you’re a terrible hunter!”

“I am not a terrible hunter!” the adder hisses, insulted.

Harry smiles. “If you’re not terrible at hunting, you should go prove it. If you keep going for those eggs, all I see is a lazy snake who can’t catch a meal unless it’s not capable of moving at all.”

“You are a terrible human boy,” the snake mutters, sulking.

“Yeah, like I haven’t heard that before. A lot.” Harry points in the direction of the field. “Go on! Be a proper hunter. And don’t bite people just because they walk nearby!”

“Terrible human boy!” the adder calls as it glides back towards the higher grass. “Insulting my hunting prowess!”

“You were trying to hunt for chicken eggs!” Harry hisses back, amused by the Parseltongue version of swearing he receives in response.

“Oh, dear gods,” he hears.

Harry turns around, expecting another snake, and instead finds a man not much older than he is, but he’s pants at guessing other people’s ages. The man has brown hair so dark it might as well be black, bronze skin, hazel eyes, and a wide, pleased smile on his clean-shaven face. He isn’t wearing a robe, but a loose black long-sleeved shirt, black trousers and boots, and a knee-length button-down green vest. It has a black strip of embroidery along the edges covered in swirls of
silver and gold thread. It’s probably one of the finest bits of clothing Harry has ever seen, and that includes all of the flash robes worn at the Yule Ball.

He also spoke in Parseltongue. Harry isn’t great at telling the difference, but he’s almost certain of it. “Hello?” he ventures in English. That gets him a blank look. “Great,” Harry mutters, and tries not to let his shoulders tense up too much. “Hello,” he repeats in Parseltongue.

The man’s smile widens into a white-toothed grin of delight. “I wasn’t mistaken! You’re a Parselmouth!”

“Yeah.” Harry tries not to bite his lip. “I’m not used to people being so happy about it.”

“Why not? It’s an excellent magical gift!” the man replies. “It’s useful, and it makes people happy when I can stop by and tell all the new snakes in the area to stay out of the village. You even found one I missed!”

“I guess I did.” Harry glances at the village. “No one thinks you’re evil because you’re a Parselmouth?”

That gets him a look of complete bewilderment. “No. Why would they?”

Harry glances away. “I—where I’m from. They do. I don’t speak it unless I don’t think anyone else is around.”

“Then I’m very glad I caught you. I’m not native to the area, either. Gods wept and thank them all, someone else who can finally understand what I’m saying all the time!”

“Are you a wizard?” Harry asks.

The man frowns. “Do you mean a magician? Of course I am. I’ve never met a non-magical being who can speak Parseltongue. It’s a family trait—and if I didn’t know any better, I’d say you were family. We look very much alike.”

“We do?” Harry is starting to feel stupid. This man is…well, he’s what the girls in his year would call fit. No one has much called Harry anything other than inconvenient.

“I suppose your family didn’t have a mirror, though that doesn’t excuse one’s inability to gaze into a smooth body of water.” The man peers at him. “Unless those magnifying lenses on your face aren’t very good?”

“They’re good enough,” Harry mumbles, blushing. “I—can you help me?”

“Help you? Probably. What can you then do for me?”

Harry slams his jaw shut. It takes him a moment to find words again. “Never mind,” he says, trying to keep his fury to himself. His eyes are burning, so it’s probably not working very well. “I’ll just remain lost. There are a lot of people who’d be happy to know that.”

He turns and stalks away, knowing that Hedwig will be observing his progress. She’s a smart owl; she’ll stay back until Harry signals for her.

The man suddenly appears in front of him. Harry wheels away from him, trips on a rock, and falls onto his back, wheezing when the air leaves his lungs in a rush.

“I’m sorry! Twice over now, it seems. I’ve never seen anyone react that way just from the notion of
trading!

Harry fixes his glasses so he can get a clear view of the man again. He’s reaching out for Harry, his eyes wide in surprise. “Every other time someone’s said that to me, they haven’t meant it in a way that’s anything other than cruel,” Harry says, giving the man’s hand a wary look.

“They’re complete bastards,” the man replies in a disgusted tone. “Let us start over. My name is Sal.”

Harry gives Sal’s hand another suspicious look before giving up. He needs help, and at least Sal speaks a language he understands. “I’m Harry,” he says, holding up his hand.

“Hari?” Sal repeats as he grasps Harry’s hand and pulls him to his feet. There is an odd cadence to Salazar’s pronunciation of his name, a sound-split that turns Harry into Hah-Ree.

“That’s not quite—wait, you know what? It probably doesn’t matter that much,” Harry admits. “Sal, I have a little money, but not much else unless you literally want the shirt off my back. Where am I?”

“Did someone leave you here in order to be rid of you?” Sal asks in what appears to be genuine concern.

“Sort of. This was…this was an improvement over what I was dealing with before. I was…” Harry flinches. “This is better than imprisonment.”

“Most things usually are,” Sal agrees. “Why don’t you know where you are, then?”

“A wizard—I mean a magician,” Harry corrects himself, wondering at the difference in words. “A magician sent me here, and the old man was very secretive about where I was going. Nobody in the village speaks a language I know, though ne and sorig were sort of easy to figure out.”

“Oh, that’s West Saxon,” Sal says.

Harry stares at him. “I have no idea what language that is. Who speaks that?”

Sal doesn’t laugh. Instead, he just looks baffled. “Almost everyone in the south of the isle, especially in the kingdom of England? And you really don’t look convinced. Where are you from?”

“Bloody Surrey!” Harry exclaims. “Southwest of London!”

“Oh. Well, Surrey is that way, south of the Tamesis.” Sal points southeast. “Granted, no one has called Surrey ‘bloody’ before. It’s appropriate enough, considering how often England and the Danes have squabbled over it. We can…sorry, I still keep forgetting the word in other languages. Desplazarse. Oh, you don’t know Castellano, either. That’s inconvenient. We can magically move ourselves there.”

“Apparating,” Harry says, glad that he knows what it is. Thank you, Hermione.

“That, then, I suppose. You know how to, yes?”

Harry tries not to feel embarrassed. “I’m not old enough to do it on my own, I don’t know how, and I don’t have a license, anyway.”

Sal’s expression of complete confusion would be funny under other circumstances. “What does age have to do with anything, and what’s a license?”
“A license is a piece of paper that says you’re legally allowed to do something?” Harry winces at his explanation. It’s not a very good one.

“That’s a stupid idea. Let’s go, then.” Sal offers his arm again. “I can take us both.”

“Wait, please.” Harry lets out a whistle. Hedwig launches herself out of a tree and flies straight towards him, landing on his outstretched arm. “Hedwig, this is Sal. Sal, this is Hedwig.”

“A Cumbric name,” Sal comments, which makes no sense at all. He watches as Hedwig daintily eats the meat Harry salvaged from the gifted meal. “Has your owl ever traveled this way before?”

“Not this way.” Harry glances at her, hoping Hedwig knows about Apparating. “Apparating without the cage. You up for it, girl?” Hedwig gives him a disparaging look and tightens her grasp on his arm without digging in with her claws. “I think it will be fine.” Harry grabs Sal’s arm and feels a twisting knot in his stomach. It’s not nearly as bad as a blasted Port Key.

“Here we are,” Sal tells him. “Surrey, overlooking the River Tamesis.”

Harry glances around, unnerved by the quiet. He can see a few villages off in the distance by hints of thatch and stone or by chimney smoke, but otherwise it’s all tree-studded fields and rock. The only other outstanding feature is the Tamesis River, which looks wide and wild. There is nothing like this in Surrey unless Harry finds a public garden. Even Hedwig seems disturbed.

“Is something the matter?” Sal asks.

“If I asked you to show me London, could you?”

Sal eyes him. “Are you going to swoon if I do?”

“Maybe,” Harry admits, but Sal obliges him. The next thing Harry knows, they’re standing on a hillside overlooking a walled stone city.

“It’s safer up here, but do not speak human tongues aloud,” Sal warns him. “We might be regarded as spies, and I do not wish to be dodging arrows today.”

Harry regards the stone-walled city in growing disbelief. It’s more of a walled fortress, a settlement ready to defend itself against invasion at any moment. Hogwarts looks quite similar, if more sturdily built.

Hogwarts is a Medieval Scottish castle. This is Medieval London.

Harry makes himself concentrate on the words. “Can you take us someplace safer? Sometimes I don’t know if I’m speaking in Parseltongue or English.”

“I’ve heard you speak. That was not English,” Sal replies. He takes Harry away from the sight of London and its wooden bridge over the Thames—the river Sal is calling the Tamesis.

“We’re safe. There is no one for at least half a day’s walk in any direction,” Sal tells him as they arrive in a field even rockier than the one in Not-Surrey. “What’s wrong?”

Harry is busy wracking his brain, trying to remember dates that had seemed entirely useless at the time. The Founding. The Founding of Hogwarts. No good; he doesn’t recall. “I’m a student of Hogwarts,” he says. “Does that mean anything to you?”
“Hogewáþ?”

Harry considers it before nodding. That sounds close enough to probably be correct.

“You’re not one of our students,” Sal says at once, frowning. “We know them all by face and name, and you, my friend, are a Parseltongue-speaking stranger.”

“I was afraid you were going to say that.” Harry manages to find a stone and sits down on it before his knees give out on him. “Sal, do you know years by AD? Anno Domini?” he asks, hoping he got that right.

“Yes. Most of the western kingdoms use those years now, if only so the Empire will leave us alone. Only the Moors, Hebrews, and other peoples of the East use differing calendars.”

“Oh. Uh…” Harry smiles as Hedwig butts up against his cheek and hoots gently. “What’s the date?”

Sal looks at him as if he’s cracked. “First day of Martius.”

Harry nods. Martius is March; that’s easy enough to figure out. “First March. Okay. What year?”

“Oh. I’m not going to like whatever you have to say, am I?” Sal seems to be bracing himself. “It is 990, Hari.”

Oh. Harry feels more air leave his lungs in a shocked whoosh, but then he draws in a new breath and his chest no longer feels like it’s vise-clamped. The old magician really wasn’t lying when he said this training thing would take a while. He just meant those words far differently than Harry realized. He wouldn’t have believed that old man even if he’d spelled out the fact that Harry was going on a time-traveling jaunt that just made Hermione’s Time-Turner look like a baby toy.

“When I was magically removed from my home—well, prison…” Harry swallows. “Thirty-first July, 1995.”

Sal’s mouth twists up in displeasure. “I was right. I did not like that answer one bit. I’m also reserving the first opportunity I receive to yell at Myrddin for not telling me that magic can be used to send people throughout time.”

“You—you believe me?” Harry asks in shock.

“Why wouldn’t I?” Sal counters. “I’ve never seen magnifying lenses made of such fine material, and that includes what magic allows for. That cloak you’re wearing is pathetic—”

Harry feels his face heat. “It’s a jumper.”

“—fine, a jumper. The fabric seems to be cotton, but its weave is unfamiliar, just like your odd trousers. The soles of your boots leave behind prints like I’ve never before seen. You can’t understand a word of England’s primary language, despite claiming to live there. There is also the fact that London is hideous, but most people do not stare at it as if it’s the most horrifying sight in creation. Usually they are reserving such for York.”

Harry has no idea how to respond to most of that. “Who—who is Myrddin?”

“A complete bastard,” Sal replies crossly. “He was also my teacher, and now I have full rights to accuse him of conveniently forgetting a few lessons.”
Something really obvious occurs to him. “You’re Salazar Slytherin, aren’t you?”

Sal looks at him in disbelief. “Are you quite serious? You don’t know proper English and still you use the mangled version of my House’s name? Wait. How do you know that name?”

“Because you’re one of Hogwarts’ four Founders.”

“Well, it’s always nice to be remembered—” Sal breaks off after noticing Harry’s expression. “Oh, come now. I know much can change in a thousand years, but you’re acting as if I’m about to eat your owl and set your home ablaze!”

Harry bites his lip. Sal has done nothing so far except help him. He hasn’t even asked for that supposed trade yet. He’s also—he’s funny. That is part of Slytherin’s history that isn’t mentioned anywhere. “Can you maybe start by telling me what your name is supposed to be, then?”

“Yes, but in Castellano. Otherwise there are parts that do not translate properly.” Sal gives him a low, sweeping bow. It looks like a formal precursor to a bullfighter’s more extravagant nonsense that Harry witnessed on the telly exactly once before Dudley got bored and changed the channel. “Salazar Fernan, Marqués de León, Casa de Deslizarse de Castile y Ipuzko.”

“De means ‘of,’ right?” Harry asks, and Sal nods. “There were a lot of those.”

“I’m nobility. We are born with a lot of useless nonsense to cart about,” Salazar replies. “Salazar and Fernan are my given names, an idea becoming more popular as fear of giving a stranger your true name spreads. The Church has ridiculous notions. I am a magical Marqués in the Kingdom of León over the County of Castile, though I do my best to pretend not to be. It was already a terrible role when I was twelve years of age.”

Harry lifts his hands, feeling lost. “My family name is Potter.” He does wonder what Casa de Deslizarse means, but it’s probably some variation on Slytherin—except Sal said that wasn’t correct.

Sal. Salazar Slytherin.

Harry should be panicking, but this still isn’t as frightening as Voldemort living on the back of Quirrell’s head, Tom Riddle’s diary, Dementors, or Little Hangleton. His childhood has really set the bar high for terror.

“Your family makes crockery?” Salazar asks.

“No, my family’s dead,” Harry answers, and feels guilty when Salazar appears horrified. “We weren’t—family names don’t really work that way where I’m from. Harry James Potter. No ridiculous titles or anything useful at all.” He’s lucky that was in Parseltongue; Hedwig would have bitten him if she’d heard that.

“Look. Trust me for one more bit of Desplazarse—Apparition, as you said?” Salazar holds out his arm.

“Where are we going?”

“You said you were a student of Hogewáþ. That is where we will go, unless you have other pressing matters to attend to?” Salazar lets out a brief sigh when Harry hesitates. “Hari, I’m but twenty years old. I’m the youngest of the Four who hold the school’s magic.”

“You’re twenty?” Harry blurts out. “You don’t look—you look younger—I’m going to be quiet
now.”

“I did tell you I was youngest,” Salazar replies, giving him another odd look. “I would much prefer for you to speak your tale while in Helga, Godric, and Rowena’s company. They might have some clearer idea of what we’re supposed to do with one who was flung a thousand years into the past by an unidentified magician.”

The other Founders. Hermione would be losing her mind with joy right now.

Harry swallows. “All right.”

Scotland is colder than England, but not unbearable. Harry looks up at the familiar castle, which has hardly changed from his day except for the moat around the castle walls—

“Wait. There’s a moat. Is that a drawbridge?” he asks in disbelief.

“Those are often a structural aspect of a castle, yes.” Salazar’s voice too dry to be mistaken for anything except sarcasm.

“We’re on the school grounds, though. We Apparated directly onto the grounds!”

Salazar gives him another odd look. “I’m not going to like the future, am I? Aside from Hogewáþ, do you know where you are?”

“Scotland,” Harry says, and Salazar looks absolutely incredulous.

“This is the Mormaerdom, the Kingdom of Moravia—or Moray, if one is speaking English. Do they not teach children anything in your Hogewáþ?”

Not much, Harry thinks bitterly. “In my time, all of this is Scotland.”

“Could you mean Alba? That tiny kingdom? That’s just insanity,” Salazar mutters. “Now I’m curious. Name me the kingdoms that populate just this island, will you?”

“There’s just the one—the United Kingdom of Great Britain?” Harry ventures. He has no idea what Salazar says next, since it isn’t in Parseltongue, but he suspects it’s probably interesting language. He’s glad none of the castle’s supposed other students are around. “The UK is just Wales, England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland.”

“I have no idea what Wales or Ireland are. There are no kingdoms by that name here.” Salazar sighs. “Let’s just... come inside, please.”

They walk onto the drawbridge, which Harry finds fascinating. He peers over the side into the water, which is perfectly clear; he can see all the way to the bottom.

“Careful, unless you can swim. It’s deeper than it looks,” Salazar warns him.

“I can sort-of swim,” Harry defends himself. He’s just not sure if the Second Task counts as swimming so much as politely not drowning.

“Sort-of-swimming is better than no swimming at all—” Salazar yells something in an entirely foreign tongue as a group of laughing children rush past them on the drawbridge on their way out onto the grounds.

Harry turns to watch them, bewildered. Some are very young, while others are teenagers. It hasn’t been that long since he was eleven, but he’s pretty sure the youngest child is maybe six.
“Entschuldigung, Salazar!” a brown-haired girl chirps, grinning wide at them.

Salazar rolls his eyes and gestures for her to be off. “That’s Helena Ravenclaw, Rowena’s youngest daughter. Do you know of her?”

“I don’t think so.” Harry feels like he’s seen her before, though. For all he knows, Hermione shoved a portrait of the girl into his face and waxed on at length while Harry was thinking about something else.

The double doors are exactly the same, which shouldn’t be surprising. A good Preservation Charm would keep them looking new. He remembers enough from Hermione’s chatter about *Hogwarts: A History* to know that the castle’s magic is a permanently embedded part of it, so there is never a need to renew the charms that make it Unplottable and keep it in pristine condition. At least as long as no one causes specific spell damage, and even then, Harry thinks it has to be one hell of a spell.

The Entrance Hall is unchanged, the hallway to the Grand Stair where he remembers it. The Great Hall is much smaller, though, and there is no riser at the far end. Instead, there is a great stone fireplace with a wide hearth, burning with cheerful warmth; a mastiff is sleeping in front of it, oblivious to their presence. There is a single round table set with a pitcher surrounded by carved stone goblets. Harry glances up and takes note of an entirely normal ceiling overhead, with four different iron circles suspended by chain from the ceiling. Each iron ring holds a full circle of candles, casting enough light that the wall sconces seem unnecessary.

“This one is different, then?” Salazar asks. Harry glances at him in surprise. “It’s the only thing you’ve stared at. The Entrance Hall must be the same in your time, but not that hall.”

“We call it the Great Hall. Meals are served here.”

“Why—no, don’t tell me.” Salazar makes a disgruntled face. “This is merely the Receiving Hall, Hari. We eat in the kitchen unless we need to impress someone.”

“There are not that many of you, then?” he asks.

“We six teachers, sixteen students, and ten paid servants.” Salazar grins as Harry’s mouth falls open. “What, not impressive enough? It’s our first year of officially teaching others, Hari. Give it a few years, and we’ll be overrun.” Salazar pulls a wand from his sleeve, a fascinating pale wood without any adornment except for sets of thin lines traveling from grip to tip. It’s more decorative than Harry would have expected.

Salazar’s Patronus is, however, all but pants-wetting terrifying. “Godric, finde Rowena ond Helga, gegegian wiðinnan þæs cycene.” The corporeal Gorgon Patronus nods and slithers off through a wall. “That will probably get me another lecture from Godric about not being capable of speaking proper English,” Salazar explains, putting his wand away. “Of course, then Godric is angered when I spend the next day speaking nothing but Castellano. Rowena knows some of it, but Godric doesn’t,” he confides, grinning. “Helga is mature enough to ignore it, but don’t let that fool you. She wants me to teach her Euskaran for the occasions when Rowena isn’t available.”

Harry is just trying not to exist in a state of perpetual bewilderment. “Mocking each other is a time-honored tradition, then?”

“What else are friends for?” Salazar responds. Harry isn’t sure if that’s a trick question, so he decides it’s wiser not to answer.

“I need a place for Hedwig to go. It doesn’t seem polite to take her down into a kitchen,” Harry
says. “Is the Great Hall—I mean, is the Receiving Hall safe? Is that okay?”

Salazar nods. “She can rest on the wooden shelf above the fireplace. I’ll make certain the castle’s servants know she’s here, so she will be fed this evening. Don’t worry about the dog. Diego is harmless, even to owls.”

“Thanks.” Harry looks at Hedwig and nods at the shelf above the fireplace. Hedwig bobs her head and flies directly towards it, landing in a neat flutter of wings before she picks a spot to roost.

“That is a very intelligent owl,” Salazar comments in a thoughtful voice.

Harry smiles. He’s glad she decided to come with him, even if he’s still bewildered “Yeah. Yeah, she is.”
“What did you find this time, Salazar?”
“A who, thank you.”

To everyone who is apparently going to hop on the YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG train: when I specify Rough in a language translation, that is because it is my best translation attempt. I make no claim to it being completely accurate because Old English and I loathe each other. tl;dr Critiquing and then walking away is not nice and not proper fandom etiquette; politely offering to help fix it IS.

Remember: offering unsolicited criticism makes the writer sad and then the fic writing *slows down or stops.* None of us want that.

Oriel, Eadburga, and Meraud give Hari curious looks when Salazar and Hari enter the kitchen. “A new student, Salazar?” Meraud asks in Cumbric. She is head of the palace’s staff and master of the kitchen, and the only one of their ten hired men and women who speaks Cumbric, Gaelic, English, Norse, and francês. Such makes her invaluable for the running of a magical castle.

“Possibly,” Salazar answers. He doesn’t want to admit to further, not yet. “This is Hari. He speaks no local tongues, Meraud. We’ve been conversing in Parseltongue. Please pass word to the others that if he remains, your favored underlings will need to have patience with him.”

Meraud shakes her head while Eadburga studies Hari, who is exploring the kitchen with his eyes instead of moving around. “Another rescue, then? The poor lad looks starved, Salazar.”

Salazar makes a noncommittal noise, watching Hari as he gives Meraud amended instructions for the evening. Hari’s skin color interests him; it is not truly northern white, but pale enough to be mistaken for it, even in the clear light of midday. It is Hari’s hair that truly speaks of Hari having ancestry from people who dwell in lands other than England. It’s a wild black mess that reminds Salazar of men he has met from the lands of the hindavī. Hari still has the lankiness of youth to him, something Salazar was happy to abandon at last. He is perhaps thirteen or fourteen years of age, at most.

*Or perhaps not,* Salazar thinks. Hari’s eyes, the color of true emerald gemstones, linger on a bowl of last year’s preserved apples before quickly moving on to study the fireplace, the trestle tables, storage barrels, and the trickle of fresh water that runs down the wall to fill the pitchers placed beneath. Hari did say he’d been freed from a prison, and prisoners do not see many meals. Hari’s eyes go particularly wide when Eadburga begins stripping a bird of its feathers with brisk efficiency, but Salazar isn’t certain what prompts that reaction.

Salazar wonders what Hari did to earn imprisonment and discards that thought just as fast as he did
the initial impression of youth. If Hari was freed by magical means, someone was going against the Council’s word…or he was unjustly imprisoned in a way that the Council isn’t aware of at all. Neither are good possibilities.

“She’s using magic, but the others aren’t?” Hari asks when Oriel draws her wand to speed along the preparation of supper.

“Only two of Hogewáþ’s servants are magically trained. The others are non-magical,” Salazar replies. “Not all of us are nobility, Hari. Magicians must earn coin somehow.”

“But—” Hari seems bewildered. “Non-magical beings aren’t allowed in Hogwarts in my time. They can’t even see the castle.”

“Why not?”

“Uh—there’s a law about not letting non-magical people know magic exists,” Hari says. “It passed in…uhm, the seventeenth century, I think.”

Salazar lifts both eyebrows. “The Church?” he asks, not overly surprised. His family has been laying plans against such interference for quite some time now. He only marvels that it took so long for such a law to be created by non-magical rulers.

Hari bites his lip. “Maybe. History isn’t really my best subject.” Something about the mix of non-magical and magical workers makes him relax, though. Hari now looks torn between trying to assist Oriel, Meraud, and Eadburga, and wishing to remain out of their way. Salazar suspects that Hari might not know what to do with all that he sees, but his eyes follow movements and preparations in a way that suggests experience in a kitchen. That is the pose of one who finds ease in understanding what is new.

Meraud, Eadburga, and Oriel take the others’ meals upstairs when they’re complete. Most of the platters follow Oriel as she floats them along with a levitation charm. The castle’s servants, Salazar’s family, Godric’s wife, Rowena’s daughters, and the other thirteen students will dine together in the receiving hall.

Before Salazar can draw his wand to send a message to the other adults to let them know of the change to their evening routine, Godric makes his swift way down into the kitchen. His hair is still dark red from being wet, as if he was stirred from his bath. “What did you find this time, Salazar?”

“A who, thank you,” Salazar replies, tilting his head in Hari’s direction. “One whose situation is very complicated.”

Godric lifts both eyebrows. “Complicated. I understand.” He gets out his wand to cast his Patronus, revealing the familiar griffon from his family’s seal. “Find all of the adults and tell them that we’ll need the kitchen to ourselves tonight, but supper is…”

“A who, thank you,” Salazar replies, tilting his head in Hari’s direction. “One whose situation is very complicated.”

Godric lifts both eyebrows. “Complicated. I understand.” He gets out his wand to cast his Patronus, revealing the familiar griffon from his family’s seal. “Find all of the adults and tell them that we’ll need the kitchen to ourselves tonight, but supper is…”

“Waiting in the Receiving Hall,” Salazar informs him.

“Supper is waiting in the Receiving Hall. Tell the eldest they’re to put the young ones to bed tonight. I have no idea how long we’ll be unavailable.” The griffon nods and vanishes.

Hari is giving Godric a look similar to the one he gave to Salazar upon learning his full name. “Hi?” he offers with a hesitant wave of his hand.

“Is this one a rescue?” Godric asks, repeating the gesture. “His clothes are intact, and those truis and boots seem all right, but that tunic—is that a cloak? Whatever it is, it is too small and of poor
Salazar nods. “He has definitely been rescued, yes, and he is magical.”

“Magician? I would like to see it proven, then,” Godric challenges Hari, smiling.

Hari stares at Godric and then looks at Salazar in confusion. “He’s asking you to prove your magic,” Salazar explains in Parseltongue, giving Godric a narrow-eyed look. “Godric, you idiot, just because he appears old enough to be trained does not mean he is! Godric has a good heart, but no damned manners,” he says to Hari.

Hari shrugs and reaches into the sleeve of that pathetic brown cloak, removing a dark-colored wand whose wood looks unfamiliar, but the handle is carved to resemble natural tree bark—also unfamiliar. “I don’t mind. Oh, and my wand is holly with a phoenix feather core,” he tells Salazar, who smiles to mask his confusion. Phoenix feather is a rare and delightful core which tends to latch on to those with the intelligence to use it properly, but holly’s wood is not that color.

“I’ll go easy on him, then.” Godric points his ash wand at the boy before Salazar can warn either of them. He need not have worried; Hari erects a very good shield charm to protect himself from Godric’s blue-tinged binding spell. He glares at Godric in a way that makes his emerald eyes seem even greener still before he whispers, “Serpensortia.”

Salazar has the genuine pleasure of watching Godric leap back from a duel in terror when a snake from the East appears on the floor and crawls right for him. “I’ve never heard of that spell,” he says while Godric tries to retreat up the stairs backwards. As if stairs will stop a determined serpent.

“It’s Latin,” Hari says.

“Then it is a form of Latin so bastardized it is no longer called such,” Salazar responds in disbelief. “It sounds as if you mean to say serpe va sortia, or ‘snake came out’ which is odd phrasing for such a spell. It is meant to be a serpent-summoning spell, yes?”

“Yes.” Hari looks confused. “I know a spell in Spanish? I thought they were teaching us everything in Latin!”

“That was Catalan!” Salazar insists. “Catalan and Castellano are not the same. The spell for serpent-summoning is Vocare colubrum in proper Latin,” he corrects before switching back to Parseltongue. “Who taught you Latin, Hari?”

Hari only lowers his wand once he realizes no one else intends to throw spells at him. Yet another sign of intelligence, that, with a warrior’s good instincts. “No one.”

“No one—” Salazar bites his lip and tries not to teach this boy the wrong kind of Castellano before he even knows how to say hello properly. “Are you certain you attend our school?”

“Finished my fourth year last month,” Hari says, swallowing. “I knew I was bad at it—”

“You threw a serpent at Godric. You are not bad at it,” Salazar interrupts that statement at once. Absolutely not. Anyone who has Godric in full retreat with a single spell is not bad at magic. “Four years. When did you begin?”

“I was eleven.”

Salazar feels his eye twitch in response. The boy is fifteen and too starved to look it. “Such a late
“That’s just...how it was done,” Hari says. “I thought some of the children outside looked really young.”

“They are,” Salazar replies. “A student in this castle begins their magical education at eight years of age, though some have circumstances that require they begin even earlier. It is not only magic they are learning, after all.”

Hari gives him a blank look. “It’s not?”

The others have the grace to arrive before Salazar begins sputtering in sheer outrage. “Godric, why are you trying to flee backwards up the stairs?” he hears Rowena ask.

“Because there is a sarding snake chasing me!” Godric yelps.

“Are you certain you’re a magician?” Helga asks in amusement.

“Also, I see no mating reptiles. Just one who seems very intent on eating Godric’s boot,” Rowena adds.


“Go home. You are very far away from where you belong,” Rowena says. There is a slight burst of magic before she enters the kitchen with Helga. The expression on Hari’s face in regards to Helga and Rowena is one of resigned bafflement.

Helga smiles. “Salazar, I see you brought us a new friend.”

“You did complain much about the lack of Castellano in your life until I mastered the basics,” Rowena says. “This should end some of your difficulties.”

Godric comes back down the stairs, holding up his hands to show he doesn’t have his wand at the ready. “The lesson has been learned. Just please, no more snakes,” he begs when Hari gives him a doubtful look.

Salazar repeats the message, smiling, but Hari looks concerned. “How does he cope with adders, then?”

“Adders are—oh. That became a name for them? Adder is merely the word for serpent in Godric’s tongue. Snakes from other lands are those which send him fleeing for the hills,” Salazar explains. “He wanted to know how you coped with local snakes,” he explains in English.

“Those are normal snakes!” Godric retorts.

“Sal, I’m kind of trying not to freak out, here.” Hari has an uncertain expression on his face. “All four of you are, uh, famous.”

“Then it is nice that we are all four remembered...but what does ‘freak out’ mean?” Salazar asks.

Hari just seems frustrated. “The closest word I know is ‘panic,’ but this isn’t panic.”

“Salazar, this child is spell-damaged,” Helga says in a low voice. “Yes, I’m aware that you’ve said he speaks no local tongues, but I didn’t wish to shout it, either.”
Salazar glances at her. “How so?”

“Two ways, but one is far more recent, and for some reason, untreated.” Helga walks towards Hari with her hands held out. “Ék er Helga Hlodvirs dóttir. Ók mega hjálpað þér.”

“I don’t know what she’s saying,” Hari says. “That’s not West Saxon, either.”

“She is speaking Norse, and says her name is Helga Hlodvirs dóttir. Helga believes you have spell damage, and she’s offering to help,” Salazar translates. “I’m not sure what she’s looking for, but I absolutely swear, except for Godric’s appalling lack of manners, none of us will harm you.”

“I—I believe you,” Hari responds. Salazar hides a frown; it took quite a bit of willpower for the boy to make that statement. Hari said his family was dead, but if so, why did no magical family take him in? Why his imprisonment?

Salazar has the feeling he’s going to want a lot of people dead when he discovers the answers to those questions. Unfortunately, they may truly be a thousand years beyond his reach.

Helga continues to hold out her hands, palms up in invitation, until Hari understands her meaning and places his hands over hers. She gives him an encouraging smile until their palms touch. “Better,” she announces in Cumbric, not English—she and Salazar both struggle with the isle’s southern tongue. The four of them are trying to decide on a single scholarly language to use in the school, but Salazar thinks it’s a failed effort. There are too many languages on this tiny island for that to be an easy decision.

“Bespelled torture,” Helga whispers, brows drawing together. “No one repaired the damage. He has tiny fractures in so many bones, Salazar. Is he not in pain?”

“Aren’t you in pain, Hari?”

Hari looks at Helga before glancing at Salazar. “I—not really? I wasn’t…” He hesitates. “A little, maybe? Sometimes it’s hard to tell.”

“How bad, Helga?” Salazar asks.

“Bad enough that his body still sings of it, even if he is not aware. The curse itself was not removed, either.” She frowns. “His blood has also been stolen in a necromancy ritual. It was used to grant another some form of immunity against—oh, he carries the remains of a sacrificial blood protection. Someone who cared for this boy very much gave their life to safeguard him. Even with that protection much weakened, it is still very strong.” She hums and tilts her head to one side. “A mother, yes. A mother would be so willing.”

“Can either be fixed?” Rowena asks, her sharp blue eyes studying Hari. Salazar glares at her and silently tells her to stop; it’s making Hari nervous. Hari claims not to be panicked, but if he runs, Salazar thinks that would be a very bad idea for all involved.

“The first, certainly. The second—not until the one who stole the blood is either defeated or forced to return it, but…oh. Oh, by the ancestors in my family’s halls. The first two problems just became the least of our worries. He is a soul jar,” Helga murmurs.

Hari notices at once that Godric, Rowena, and Salazar are all staring at him. “What?” he asks. He sounds not fearful, as Salazar would expect, but resigned to terrible revelations. “What is it?”

Salazar feels no need to hide the truth, not when they’re barely holding Hari’s trust. “You are a soul jar.”
Hari blinks at him in confusion. “I don’t know what that is.”

“Godric, repeat the term in English?” Salazar requests.

“Horcrux,” Godric obliges him.

Hari lifts his shoulders in a faint shrug. “I still don’t know what that is.”

Helga lifts one of her hands and waits for Hari to nod cautious agreement before her fingers brush the odd scar on the boy’s forehead. “It’s right here, and it is very strong. Ask if he is susceptible to headaches, bad dreams, has trouble understanding his feelings, if the feelings of others are overwhelming, or if he copes with feelings that do not belong to him.”

That takes a few minutes to speak of it all in Parseltongue. Salazar has to think through several phrases to make certain it will translate correctly.

“Headaches? Sometimes, but I suspected my glasses—the magnifying lenses,” Hari corrects for Salazar’s benefit. “They’ve never quite been right. My aunt was too cheap, er, frugal, or…all right, she was too terrible to make certain they were proper.” His mouth twists up in a faint grimace. “I think my feelings are fine. As for not understanding the feelings of others, I always just thought it was us being kids.”

Kids, Salazar thinks, is likely a later English word for children, not the Norse term for goats. “You are probably correct. I was an irritable little pain in everyone else’s backsides.”

“Nightmares…” Hari glances away and nods. “Yes. Nightmares with feelings that aren’t mine. No feelings that aren’t mine when I’m awake, though. Would someone please tell me what a soul jar is?”

Salazar glances at Rowena again and takes the hint lurking in her eyes. “With supper, I should think.”

“Supper? I—” Hari breaks off whatever he’d thought to say. “All right. What’s Rowena’s Patronus? If you’re answering questions, I might as well keep asking them.”

“Rowena, your Patronus? Helga, yours as well if it’s not a bother. He is curious, and he’s already seen mine and Godric’s.”

Rowena takes a moment from pouring water into five goblets to remove her spiraling wand of pear from her sleeve, casting her raven. Helga waits for the Patronus to be dismissed before she reveals her yew wand to cast her favored badger, the vicious little bastard.

“None of these surprise you, do they?” Salazar asks Hari.

Hari shakes his head. “Not the other three. Yours did. I didn’t think it would be a Gorgon. Some other sort of snake, maybe.”

“My family has a long history of being friends with serpents. A Gorgon is still related to the serpentine, if more Grecian than anyone in my family expected,” Salazar says. “What is yours, Hari?”

Salazar half-expects to find yet another neglected lesson. Instead, Hari eyes Godric as he pulls his wand from his sleeve again, as if waiting for more spells to be tossed in his direction. Godric is too busy scowling at Rowena and adding a jug of wine to the table to notice.
Hari murmurs, “*Expecto Patronum,*” under his breath. A corporeal grown stag emerges, one with a fine display of antlers.

“At least that one wasn’t butchered Latin,” Salazar says. “A stag. I wouldn’t have considered a stag for you.”

Hari dismisses the stag. “It was my father’s Patronus. I don’t know if that’s something that happens, a Patronus following in family lines, but it did for me.”

“He wanted that Patronus. I can sense it,” Rowena says without looking in their direction as she and Helga gather up the meal that the servants left for them, moving it to the kitchen table with Godric’s grumbled help. “Helga mentioned his mother’s death, but I think his father’s must have been of a similar time.”

Salazar gives no sign that Rowena’s words were meant for his ears. “Did you know your father very well?” he asks, as if continuing their conversation.

Hari shakes his head. “I never knew him. I’ve seen him in a few photographs. I mean, moving pictures taken with a special device,” he explains. Salazar nods; such a device sounds fascinating, and much more efficient than painting a canvas. “I was only a year old when they were killed. I only remember my mother’s voice before she dies. She’s begging a Dark Wizard, Voldemort, not to kill me while he orders her to step aside.” Hari stares straight ahead as he speaks, as if it’s a tale he’s told often. “She refused to.”

“Wizard?” Salazar asks. “You’ve said that word before, but it is an unfamiliar term.”

“Men are wizards and women are witches.”

“We use the term ‘magician,’” Salazar tells him. “*From the Latin, as it does not denote sex while other terms do.*” Hari nods, looking thoughtful. “Your time seems fond of corrupted languages. Vol de Mort,” he says in *français* before swapping tongues again. “Flight of death.”

“I’m the only person he’s never killed. Something went wrong when he tried. I have this really stupid nickname of The Boy Who Lived because of it. Never mind everyone else who—” Hari seems to choke on the word. “—who died.”

*Soul jar,* Salazar thinks again, and feels the first stirring of true anger. The magicians of Hari’s time left Hari to linger as a soul jar from infancy onward, a reprehensible act.

Rowena and Godric argue good-naturedly as to where the platters should be placed on the kitchen table until the task is done. Hari doesn’t seem to know what to do until Helga smiles and gestures for him to sit next to her. Salazar doesn’t take it as a slight. Helga is fiercest, and probably the most reassuring of all four of them—Godric’s terror of foreign snakes notwithstanding.

Salazar does not miss seeing Hari observe all of the others before eating. He suspects the others witness it, too.

He uses Cumbric to inform the others as to Hari’s traveling backwards in time, courtesy of a mystery magician who claimed to be helping Hari. Rowena frowns, but admits that travel to the past is an existing possibility. She has just never heard of anyone using such advanced skill to travel backwards more than a few hours.

“We can travel backwards in time.” Godric makes a face. “You will not find me doing such.”

“Or perhaps it is something that should be reserved for dire situations,” Helga muses. “Rowena did
also say that it was a rare skill.”

“Imprisonment certainly fits the description of a dire situation,” Salazar says. “I fear that is not the only difficulty, though.”

Rowena nods. “I know of only one person who can do so in the whole of the Empire, and she is not fond of sharing the magic. She will need to one day confide it to her apprentice to keep such knowledge from being lost, but in the meantime…”

“In the meantime, perhaps we should keep Hari’s true origins from others.” Helga sighs. “I imagine he would agree to that.”

Salazar holds up his hand to halt their conversation and mentions Helga’s idea to Hari, who shrugs. “I don’t mind. I think we’d quickly run out of people who are that open-minded, anyway.”

“Open-minded?”

“Oh—willing to accept a far-fetched sounding explanation,” Hari replies. “Unless you all know about other people who’ve been sent back in time by one thousand five years.”

Salazar grimaces. “No. Rowena knows of only one magician capable of that sort of magic, and that is by a few hours only.”

“Like a Time-Turner,” Hari says, which sounds like a device. Salazar thinks it a terrible idea that Hari’s time holds an actual, crafted means of traveling backwards in time, but decides not to say so. He has a suspicion that Hari might take offence, though he doesn’t know why.

“Salazar, please inform the boy as to what a Horcrux is,” Godric says after part of the meal is consumed.

“A soul jar, Hari, is a container that holds a part of another’s soul. You hold a shard of another’s soul within your body.”

Hari pales. “He’s—that bastard is in my head?”

“Literally,” Salazar confirms, even if it makes him feel terrible to do so.

“It’s the worst soul jar I’ve ever seen. I know I haven’t performed as many removals as Godric and Rowena,” Helga says, “but this one is very strong.”

“It can be removed,” Salazar tells Hari. “It isn’t a pleasant process, but it can be done. What concerns me is that no one did this for you.”

“I don’t think anyone knows how,” Hari says after a minute of thought. “I—if they did, they would tell me, wouldn’t they?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never met the magicians of your time, so I can only speak of what we know, and of what you know. What sort of school has Hogewáþ become that they imprison students and withhold food?” Salazar asks. He’s not ready to share that part with the others yet. Godric would find something to break; Rowena would be furious. Helga would at once attempt to travel forward through time just to wreak havoc.

“Oh, not Hogwarts. I have to go home every summer, to my aunt and uncle. They, uh,” Hari looks down at the table, “they don’t much like me. Or magic. Petunia hated my father, and her sister. The Dursleys, my family, they thought that if they…treated me a certain way, I’d stop accidentally
making things happen. I’d stop being magical. Didn’t work very well.”

“I absolutely despise people I will never meet,” Salazar says in Cumbric. “His family is foul.” He switches back to Parseltongue. “Hari. I think the four of us should hear your tale from the beginning. If there are truly things you believe you should not mention, then do not, but we must know more of what we’re dealing with in order to help you.”

“Even the stuff about Hogwarts? Won’t that mean—what if I change something?”

Salazar passes on the message to the others, who continue to debate the idea in Cumbric, to his relief. He’s learned much of English since arriving on this island, but he’s spent more time in areas where Cumbric, Pictish, and Gaelic dominate. Not that he claims to understand Gaelic much of the time, but they complain similarly of Salazar’s Castellano.

“I really can’t see that words spoken tonight will define what Hogewâþ will be like in one thousand years,” Godric says.

“I agree.” Rowena turns and gives Salazar a message to pass on, which is a sensible one.

“We’ve already begun this school, Hari. We four are the cornerstones of this school’s magic. We teach those students whose skills most match our own. Is that so different from your time?”

Hari seems frustrated by his task of stabbing at food on the trencher with a knife. “No, everyone says it’s by the Founder’s personality traits, not skills.”

Salazar gives Hari a blank stare, his mouth hanging open. “Well, that’s ridiculous. I’m glad you’re not going back there.”

Hari looks up in alarm. “I’m not?”

“Hari, we know of only one magician in the entire Empire who knows anything of magical travel within time, and her skill is based only in going backwards, not forwards,” Salazar says. “We’re magicians, not gods. Until I met you today, I didn’t know either was possible!”

“Oh.” Hari bites his lip. “Then I guess I can tell you what applies to me, but can it be after we finish eating? I had a sandwich in that village where we met—I mean bread with meat and greens on it, but before that I, uh…I hadn’t eaten in a while.”

Salazar draws in a breath and lets it out. He cannot kill this child’s relatives. They are unavailable. “Very well,” he says, and informs the others.

Hari is making a face over the knife and spoon and all but using them as if he’s in the East, eating with sticks. “Where is the fork?” he finally asks.

“I have no idea what a fork is. Describe it?” Salazar listens with interest to the idea of a spoon with four pointed, stabbing ends. “I want one. Tomorrow, I’ll figure out how to create one.” Then he has to describe the concept of the “fork” to the others. Godric wants to know what’s wrong with a good knife. Helga counters that it would make the eating of certain foods quite a bit easier.

“You don’t have to use the damned thing if you don’t want to, you idiot,” Salazar tells the man, shaking his head. “Honestly. Snakes and forks. What a joyful passage we’ll place on your tomb.”

“At least no one else will know what a fork is,” Godric retorts, smiling. “We’ll leave them wondering, the better for so many rumors to circulate as to what foul creature caused my death.”
“Grapes,” Rowena says in irritation. “Do try to be sober for this child’s story, Godric.”

Salazar resists the urge to grind his teeth as the boy eats more food than any of them. Godric is Roman and Saxon-descended—the man can eat an entire hall clean and search for more, but still this boy has outdone him.

Then Salazar spends the rest of the evening talking himself hoarse in two different languages as he relates Hari’s tale to the others. It’s a lot more complex than he imagined—and far more enraging. The loss of his parents at the age of one year and some months. Ten years of slavery, servitude, imprisonment, and starvation at the hands of his mother’s sister and her family. Hari was schooled in reading, writing, and basic maths from age five until age ten, but only because the kingdom of England required it of all children. Salazar decides it best if he does not translate Helga’s infuriated raving. There is always the chance the boy cares for his school’s current leader, and wouldn’t be fond of the ways in which Helga is plotting the man’s untimely, painful death.

What schooling at Hogewâþ Hari mentions seems haphazard, while the Latin of Hari’s time makes Salazar want to bite through the table. He came from an environment utterly without magic and magic’s tools, and then was not taught anything of their creation or how to properly use them. Rowena mutters dire things about what Hari’s handwriting must be like.

Hari was forced to use the power of his mother’s blood protection to burn an evil magician to ash to protect a powerful object. That is a task that should have been reserved for a trained magic-worker, not a child of eleven. Then Hari is forced to slay a monster at age twelve in defence of another, though Salazar wonders at the lack of specifics. Perhaps that is for the best; what Hari does speak of is enough to curdle his blood.

Hari’s godfather was placed in a magical prison and likely pushed to the brink of insanity. Salazar has no idea what a godfather is, but it seems to be legally named family. Rowena begins saying terrible oaths under her breath in her native Bavarian when they learn the Animagus magician was imprisoned without a trial before the Council, which Hari refers to as a Wizengamot.

Godric stops drinking in sheer outrage when Hari describes the events of his fourth year of schooling. That horrific foolery of a tournament ends in the death of an adult student, and allows this vile Vol de Mort to regain his power with the necromancy that Helga detected, the theft of Hari’s blood. Salazar suspects that Hari is not speaking of all that happened in that cemetery, but at the moment, finds no blame. Salazar doesn’t think he would be coping half so well with everything those fools have asked of Hari.

Helga truly loses her temper when she hears that the leader of Hari’s school sent the boy home to his foul relatives just after he was tortured by an evil magician. That is made worse when Salazar convinces Hari to admit that while his visible injuries were healed, the Cruciatu—Hari calls it the Cruciatus Curse, which is, at least, almost correct—was not tended to at all.

“Did I do something wrong?” Hari asks in concern. “I didn’t know you needed to do anything to help someone after the Cruciatus Curse.”

“No. If anything, you’ve done it all correctly, else you’d have died before ever meeting us,” Salazar replies. He decides a distraction from such terrible things is in order. “Tell me more of how students are sorted by traits instead of talents. Students are placed under teachers within the four corners of our magic by our personality, truly?”

Hari nods. “They are. Yours, are, uh…well, I don’t understand.”

“Understand what?”
“You’re nice.” Hari glances away. “Everything else I’ve ever learned about you… it isn’t.”

“People can change, I’ll grant you that,” Salazar says. “But from everything you’ve told me, it sounds much like history has warped and changed over the years from now until then. We all four are appalled that there is such rivalry in your Hogewâp, all of it based upon points. How is anyone to learn anything in such an environment?”

“Hermione does it.” Hari looks down at the table. “She tears into me for not doing the same, but she has parents who will take her to Wizarding London so she can get more books. I can’t really do that.”

“We do have a room of books and scrolls in the castle. Many of the scrolls need to be updated and preserved as bound tomes, but the knowledge is here. Is there no such room in your Hogewâp?”

Hari looks miserable. “There is, but I can barely keep up with the lessons I do have to take.”

“Considering someone has tried to kill you all four years of your schooling, and three times in a row it was this sarding Vol de Mort? That doesn’t surprise me it all. It is very hard to read a book if someone is trying to murder you,” Salazar says dryly.


“Ah. It is a crude term for mating.”

Hari blushes. “Oh. Like—like fuck.”

Salazar raises an eyebrow. “I don’t know that word.”

“Let’s just keep using sarding. No one in my time knows what sarding means, either.”

Rowena sits down across from them while Helga is still raging in Norse. “Let’s begin with a few basics. Translate for me, please, Salazar.” Rowena holds up one finger. “Min.”

“My.” Salazar repeats in Parseltongue.

Rowena lifts her second finger. “Ágennama.”

“Name.”

A third finger. “Sy.”


“Min ágennama sy Hrodwunn, inhíredes Hrabanklawa.” Rowena smiles. “Despite West Saxon’s similarities to my home’s Bavarian tongue, the people of the isles find it simpler if I say, ‘Min ágennama sy Rowena, inhíredes Raven’s Claw.”

“What’s inhíredes?”


Hari smiles after Salazar finishes translating. “Don’t think that one applies to me. Min ágennama sy Harry James Potter.”

“Not a pottery-making family,” Salazar mouths at Rowena. She nods back and smiles at Hari’s success, even if Salazar can’t get Hari to become Harry in his head. He’s spent too much time
immersed in Castellano and Euskaran, and the Euskaran in particular is loud about the pronunciation of Hari’s name.

“Oh, English. This I can do.” Godric comes over to join them. “Min ágennama sy Godric inhíred Grypusdor.”

Hari looks surprised. “What does Grypusdor mean?”

“Godric can trace his lineage back to the time when the Romans still dwelled on the island, as Latin was beginning to entwine with the Brittonic tongues,” Salazar explains. “His father’s family’s seal is a griffon; his mother’s ancestors were door-guardians. Thus, Latin Grypus with the West Saxon dor. Griffon’s Door.”

“That’s really cool,” Hari says.

“You’re cold?”

Hari gives Salazar a look that seems equal parts frustration and despair. “Slang is going to be difficult, isn’t it?”


“Slang is…it’s a way of expressing pleasure or displeasure in something without being formal. Cool means cold, but we also use it for excellent. Rubbish means garbage, but it also means terrible. And…garbage is also a problem, isn’t it? You don’t know that word.”

“I don’t, no,” Salazar says, bemused.

Hari runs his hand through his hair, which seems to enjoy having a life of its own. “Garbage is things you throw out, get rid of, things you don’t want back.”

“Oh! I can follow that now. I don’t know the word in Godric’s English, but in Castellano you would say desperdicios. This is actually fascinating,” Salazar says. “The four of us all speak English, and given that I suspect there are similarities to your tongue, you’ll learn of that first. Then we’ll move on to Norse, Latin, Cumbric, Pictish, and Gaelic.”

Hari looks horrified. “I can’t learn all of that!”

“Why not?” Salazar asks.

“I—I have no idea. It just…” Hari bites back whatever he wished to say. “Let’s just start with your version of English. It will be nice to be able to talk to the others without dragging a Slytherin translator around.”

“Casa de Deslizarse!” Salazar corrects, miffed.

“Maybe, but Slytherin is a lot easier to say.” Hari has an entirely innocent look on his face. It takes Salazar a moment to realize that Hari is teasing him.

“You’re learning proper Castellano, too,” Salazar declares in revenge, and grins when Hari winces.

Then Hari asks, “What does Hogewáþ mean? We don’t call it that.”

“I was wondering at your horrible pronunciation,” Salazar replies. “It is rough English, from a time when the language was younger. Hogewáþ means to seek thought—learning.”
“Oh.” Hari smiles. “That’s much better than what hog and warts means in my time.” Hari buries his arm in his sleeve to hide a yawn.

Helga notices first, and Salazar repeats her question. “When did you last sleep?”

Hari frowns in thought. “If it was midday when we met, then a full day, dawn until midnight, and then noon until now, but I don’t know what time it is.”

Salazar retrieves a small mirror of silver from his vest pocket and breathes across its surface. “It’s just past the seventh hour beyond midday,” he says, though it feels much like it should be midnight. Then he catches Hari staring at him. “Yes?”

“You can tell time in a mirror?” Hari asks.

“You please tell me that you have time-keeping devices in your future.”

Hari looks to be biting back a smile in response to whatever expression must be upon Salazar’s face. “Yeah, we do.”

“I was not reading time in a mirror. I was using the mirror to see a calibrated hourglass in my quarters. Why were you awake until midnight?” Salazar says in English to gain the others’ attention, and then repeats it in Parseltongue.

“Oh. It’s my birthday. My aunt and uncle always ignore it, so I stay up until midnight to see it. A few of my friends would send owls at that time, so it isn’t as if no one cared at all. That odd old magician showed up just after midnight.”

“He only just turned fifteen today.” Salazar reminds himself that he cannot kill Hari’s relatives while Helga spits in Norse under her breath. “This is possibly not the gift you expected for the occasion.”

Hari shakes his head. “Not really, but there were worse options.”

Salazar tries not to cringe. Hari is utterly resigned to those worse possibilities in a way that does not speak well of his mind’s health. “Do you have objections to passing the night with myself and my family upstairs?” Orellana won’t find company offensive, and Fortunata will be delighted to have another speaker of Parseltongue in her home.

“Do I have a choice?” Hari asks, and then winces. “Sorry, that was rude. I’m really tired. I mean, it’s not every day you meet the four most famous wizards and witches in Britain because someone dumped you in the past so you wouldn’t be murdered before you came of age.”

Salazar is very good, and does not grind his teeth together. It isn’t Hari who is stirring his blood to anger. “I suppose it’s a rare and tiring event, yes, and you do have a choice, Hari. There are individual chambers in this castle, though staying with any one of us in our quarters would mean you had a sleeping chamber to yourself.”

Hari glances down again. “I’ll stay with you—if you still don’t mind. You’re the only person who knows what I’m saying.”

“If you’re putting that boy to bed, let me go with you. Those bones need tending, Salazar,” Helga says.

“Once you’re ready to sleep, Helga wishes to heal you of pre-existing injuries outside the bounds of the soul jar, Hari.”
Hari nods and says good night to the others. That part of Hari’s English is almost exactly the same as West Saxon English; Rowena and Godric respond in kind. Hari then follows Salazar and Helga out of the kitchen without complaint or question, the act of someone resigned to doing what others say regardless of consequence. Salazar is going to break that terrible habit. He just doesn’t yet know how.

Helga and Salazar guide Hari to Salazar’s quarters. Hari keeps his hand on the castle walls, tracing the stone as they climb the stairs. There is a faint smile on his face, one of familiarity and longing. Everything else might be strange and unfathomable, but at least Hari is fond of the castle.

Salazar opens the door on the third floor that reveals his quarters within Hogewáp. “I’m back, dearest.”

Orellana casts aside her embroidery, stands up from her chair, and greets him with kisses to both of his cheeks. “I would say sharp words about your schedule, but I’m long used to the fact that you do not have one. Is this boy the reason for your late evening, Sal?”

“This is Hari Potter,” Salazar introduces him. “He is an utterly lost, in multiple ways, a half-trained magician, and at the moment speaks nothing but Parseltongue.”

“Ah; now I will not have to bear the brunt of your rants about being misunderstood,” Orellana teases him. “Fortunata! Come here, please!”

Fortunata bounces out of her sleeping chamber. “Yes, Mother—oh! Hello!”

Hari lifts his hand and waves at them both. “Hari, this is my wife, Orellana, and my daughter, Fortunata.”

“Aren’t you young to have a daughter that age?” Hari asks, and then ducks his head. “That was rude again, you don’t have to—”

“Nobility and nonsense,” Salazar answers him anyway. “Orellana and I were forced to marry too young, and then made to produce an Heir far too soon. It is to our great fortune that my daughter and Orellana are healthy and strong, hence Fortunata’s name.”

“Hello!” Fortunata chirps again in Parseltongue, and Hari stares at her.

Salazar frowns. “How many Parselmouths do you know, Hari?”

Hari uses both hands to point at Salazar and Fortunata. “And Voldemort, but he doesn’t count.”

“But you’ll get to meet the rest of my family, and then you’ll know lots more!” Fortunata declares.

“That’s…good?” Hari tries. “I will?” He looks like he’s on the verge of shock, whereas in Hari’s place, Salazar would have resorted to shocked horror at midday. “I mean—it’s nice to meet you, Fortunata.”

“You may indeed do so,” Salazar says, and Hari nods, still wide-eyed. “Orellana, love, would you mind if Hari stayed with us for a time? I do not wish to place him elsewhere in the castle. He would be alone with no one who understands his words.”

Orellana smiles at Hari. “You are welcome here. We’ve never used the other sleeping chamber in these rooms, as Fortunata is too young to need a place meant for a child nearing adulthood. That will do nicely.”
After Salazar translates, Hari smiles at Orellana. “Thank you. Wait, is gracias a Castellano word?”

“It is. Congratulations; you know a single word in my language,” Salazar replies in a dry voice.

“It’s my pleasure to have you in my home,” Orellana says to Hari, then gives Salazar a pointed look when Hari yawns again.

Salazar leads Hari to the chamber on the far side of their sitting room, opening the door. There is a bed waiting in the bedchamber, though the bedding is a bit dusty. Helga fixes with a cleansing charm that always seems more vicious than necessary when she performs it.

“Through here…” Salazar opens the sleeping chamber’s other door. “The garderobe, but we’ve combined it with a proper privy and bathing chamber. If you know your warming magics, fill the bath and then warm it so your washing isn’t a lot of screeching words about cold mountain water.”

“I have no idea how to use…that.” Hari points at the privy, which has its own folded screen for a semblance of privacy.

“Do what is necessary and then cast the Purgo Charm. It is much better than the non-magical privy.” Salazar tries not to feel bewildered at needing to describe a magical privy. He hopes that 1995 is a miraculous improvement instead of a terrible lapse in hygiene.

Hari is swiftly turning bright red. “Uh, so, privies. We, uhm, use a different means of…cleaning up afterward. What do, I, uh—”

Not a terrible lapse in hygiene, then; merely different. Salazar just doesn’t understand the extent of Hari’s embarrassment in regards to a normal function of the body. “There are clean cloths in that basket, and another basket over there. It has a lid; place the used cloths inside so they will be collected for washing.”

Hari all but wilts in place with relief. “Thanks.”

The pitcher for water and its empty bowl on the table is another cause for bafflement. “How do I clean my teeth? I don’t think toothbrushes have been invented yet.”

“Please do tell me what toothbrushes are tomorrow, as they sound intriguing and easier to use than rubbing one’s teeth with silk and ground herbs,” Salazar says. He fills the pitcher from the water tap over the tub, and then Summons forth one of the bars of hard soap his family uses. “For tonight, there is water enough to wash your face, hands, and to rinse your mouth if you wish. We’ll concern ourselves with other necessities tomorrow.”

“Okay.” Hari gives him a shy look that is hint enough for Salazar to vacate the room. He makes a mental note that he really wants Hari to define his word “okay.” The context of its use helps, but that doesn’t tell Salazar of its origin.

Hari emerges a few minutes later, the ends of his messy hair damp. “Tell Hari that I wish him to lie down and get comfortable,” Helga says to Salazar, who relays the message.

Hari makes a point of glancing down at his muddied trousers and boots. “I don’t have anything to—you know what? Never mind, since I don’t know what sleepwear is like here. I’ll sleep in my pants.”

Salazar turns Helga around while wondering what pants are. There are many words that Hari uses that translate into Parseltongue, yet Salazar has never heard their like before.
They wait until Hari tells him that he’s in bed. His clothes are cast over the wooden railing meant for quilting, something Orellana must have stashed within the room. Not the purpose it is meant to serve, but as they’ve acquired nothing else, it will do for now. Hari’s magnifying lenses are lying on top of his clothes, the odd metal rims folded up behind the glass. Helga eyes Hari’s clothes and subjects them to another cleansing charm, removing the day’s dirt and dust; Hari gives her a most sincere thanks.

“I am going to make certain that you sleep through the night, but it will be to heal this odd curse damage you have suffered all over your body,” Helga says while Salazar translates. Then she peers closer at Hari’s eyes. “Your eyesight is terrible, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Hari admits, like it’s a personal failing. He then nods, eliminating Salazar’s need to translate.

“You might sleep until midday, then, because I refuse to allow that to continue,” Helga says in irritation. “Honestly, what are magicians even doing in your time?”

“Magicianing?” Hari suggests after hearing the translation, which causes Salazar to bite back a laugh before he repeats it for Helga’s benefit.

“Maybe.” Helga holds out her hand, palm up, and gestures for Hari to take it. “My oath that I will not harm you.”

Hari nods. “I believe you.”

Helga puts her other hand over Hari’s forehead. “Close your eyes. You won’t notice a thing.”

It’s the greatest amount of time Salazar has ever witnessed in regards to Helga placing someone in one of her healing sleeps. “That stubborn, is he?” he asks once the door is closed behind them.

“That terrified, actually,” Helga murmurs after noting Orellana and Fortunata’s closed chamber doors. “But yes, stubborn too. Definitely one who refuses to let fear rule him. With proper teaching, he will be an incredible magician, Salazar.”

“I have no doubt of that at all.”

Helga smiles. “Are you planning on teaching him yourself?”

Salazar starts to say yes before hesitating. “I believe it should be all of us, at least until that soul shard is removed. I don’t think Hari has ever been allowed to discover where his magical strengths and talents lie in truth. It’s more as if he’s been guided onto another’s stifled path. He is so far behind the other magicians of his age, Helga.”

“I do not think it will take him long to catch up now that he is lacking certain interferences,” Helga says. “Those relatives of his! Those teachers! What were they thinking to demand that an untrained child fight a powerful and evil magician on his own?”

“Do you think it was Myrddin?” Salazar asks. “Do you think the old bastard lingered on this earth long enough to send us an extra student instead of allowing such to continue?”

“Nothing Myrddin does would surprise me at all,” Helga replies. “He obeys his own rules. From the legends I’ve heard, he always has.”

Salazar nods. There is already a knot of fear in his chest, and he hasn’t even asked his next question. “What do you think that soul shard took from Hari?” he asks after escorting Helga back
out into the castle corridor.

“I couldn’t yet say. He is intelligent, curious, his magic is well-developed—that was an excellent Patronus cast without difficulty,” Helga muses. “It is clear to me that Harry has been tortured, starved, and enslaved for most of his life, but he seems to have mastered his defiance so that it only surges forth when there is need.”

“You read him that deeply?” Salazar asks in surprise.

“No. The defiance is right at the surface of his thoughts, along with his stubbornness and fear. It was impossible to avoid any of it. He nearly ejected me without even intending to.” Helga frowns. “The problem is that he knows nothing of Mind Magic.”

Salazar stares at her, appalled. “Not a bit of it?”

Helga shakes her head. “None, and that lack concerns me a great deal. If we’re to remove that shard, Harry will need to learn of Mind Magic first. He has to separate himself from that shard, which has had a very, very long time to integrate itself within Harry’s mind and his magic.”

“We can do it. We can, yes?”

Helga glances at Salazar. “You’re already attached to him.”

Salazar smiles and looks down at his boots. “I spent half the day in his company. He reminds me of myself, though I fear I would not have done half so well if put through so many endless trials.”

“Sometimes I forget that you’re still so young. You came to us an angry young man intent on escaping your kingdom’s insistence that Orellana should die in childbirth trying to produce yet another child too soon.” Helga puts her arm around his shoulders. “You are stronger than you know, Salazar. So is he.”
Novis Oculis Meis

Chapter Summary

He is completely lost in a familiar castle with utterly foreign people in a lumpy bed that’s nothing like a traditional mattress at all. The only person he can communicate with is someone he was always taught was the enemy in terms of House rivalries, blood purist bigotry, and oh, yes, the giant basilisk that tried to kill him.

Chapter Notes

Hello! I have been a physical wreck all week. Have a chapter!

Harry wakes up to the familiar sound of an owl tapping at his window. He rolls over in bed, fiddles with the wooden turning latch that holds it closed, and allows Hedwig to come inside. “Hi, girl. Mail?”

Hedwig gives him a look of utter disbelief before butting up against his hand for a proper scratching of her neck feathers and breast. The leather wrapping on her leg shows no signs of messages.

Harry glances outside and sees that it’s fully light out, possibly afternoon. He slept too long. He is so late for class—

He sucks in a startled breath as yesterday comes back in a rush, memories triggered by how very different the grounds are outside. No, he doesn’t have classes. He is completely lost in a familiar castle with utterly foreign people in a lumpy bed that’s nothing like a traditional mattress at all. The only person he can communicate with is someone he was always taught was the enemy in terms of House rivalries, blood purist bigotry, and oh, yes, the giant basilisk that tried to kill him.

Except that Sal hasn’t acted like that at all. Salazar Slytherin has been kind when he didn’t have to be. His sense of humor reminds Harry a little bit of his own (very rare) moments of dry brilliance, and he’s been patiently translating everything Harry has to say without a hint that it’s inconvenient.

Harry likes Helga quite a bit. Rowena is intimidating, though Harry can’t quite put his finger on why. Godric is…well, nothing like he expected. Likeable, yes, and Harry can definitely see the friendship that was supposed to exist between Salazar and Godric, even if he can’t understand what they’re saying. History just didn’t mention that they were all friends. It’s always “Helga and Rowena” or “Godric and Salazar” instead of the four together.

Harry also has no idea what Salazar means when he says they hold the school’s magic. Maybe he’ll ask about that, too, and hope that he remembers enough about magical theory to understand the answer.

“Hedwig. I’m in the year 990, the year of Hogwarts’ Founding, and I’m in a castle with the Founders.” He looks at his owl. “How did this happen?”
Hedwig gives him a baleful look and ruffles her feathers. She thinks he’s asking a very stupid question, then.

“Okay, I know how it happened. It’s just…” Harry bites his lip. “I’m not sure I believe it yet, okay? It doesn’t seem real.”

He also can’t go home. He remembers being told that they don’t know how to send him back. Harry doesn’t know how to cope with that idea. He’s either exhilarated or sad—or a baffling combination of both, which just makes it worse.

It’s reaching for his shirt that reminds Harry of something very important, a lack he didn’t notice until he sees his glasses still lying in place on top of his clothes.

He can see. He can see everything perfectly.

He’s used to waking up to unexpected things. If he can handle meeting the bloody Founders of Hogwarts without panicking, then he can also handle this.

In very calm manner, Harry retrieves his wand from beneath the odd, feather-stuffed pillow sack he’d slept on last night. He puts his glasses aside on the pillow and gets dressed.

The privy still works exactly as explained, even though he doesn’t know what *Purgo* means. Purge, maybe? That would make sense, but he’s made some appalling guesses in regards to Latin before.

What’s really neat is that he is in a medieval castle that has sort-of plumbing. Cold water brought in from what he thinks might be lead pipes is still much better than the complete lack of plumbing he was always taught was the case in the Middle Ages.

*Note to self,* Harry thinks distantly. *Do not drink water from those pipes.* He remembers enough history to know that he doesn’t want lead poisoning, though he isn’t sure if just drinking water from a pipe would do it, or if it needs to be combined with wine in a lead cup. At least the goblets last night were carved from stone, not made of metal.

Maybe he should tell them about lead poisoning. Muggles didn’t know, but Harry has no idea if wizards were aware of the danger. Better safe than…well, lead-poisoned.

At least their drinking water was trickling down the stone wall in the kitchen, like it’s coming from a natural source from above instead of a pipe. A spring, maybe? The water from the moat? It looked clean enough, not anything like a castle’s moat he’d read about in a few Muggle history books in primary school. Granted, this sort of moat might be cursed against invaders. It wouldn’t need to be befouled water if it just Vanished or repelled whoever tried to cross it.

Harry turns the makeshift tap over the copper tub on and off again. He really wants to try out a bath in this tub, but he’s in a hurry. He needs to go outside and get a clearer view of what’s beyond the bedroom window.

He opens the door and eases out into the sitting room, relieved when no one comes to investigate. Then he opens the outer door and creeps into the corridor. He still doesn’t see anyone, but he hears distant laughter coming from a floor or two above.

The castle walls, steps, and stone railings, highlighted by the sunlight shining in through the windows, nearly stops him in his tracks. What had always been a slightly blurred gray is now crisp and detailed, but it isn’t just gray—there are blues and violets, white and blacks, even odd hints of yellow in the stones that he’s never seen before. The stone walls in Salazar and Orellana’s quarters hadn’t been like this; they had been more uniform grey, maybe with blues and greens sneaking
Harry forces himself to keep going. There is no one in the Entrance Hall, or the Great—the Receiving Hall. The doors aren’t barred, so he pushes one open and glances over to see that the doors turn on wooden hinges, not metal. The dark brown wood is alive with reds and oranges over so many shades of brown.

He walks onto the school grounds, feeling lost all over again. There is no stone courtyard in front of the Entrance Hall, just the wooden path across the moat. The grass is not cut short, but pounded down into dirt; sheltered tufts of it grow tall around piles of rock. The grass is blue and green and purple, touched with gold or streaked with yellow. The dirt isn’t dull, but brilliant reds, whites, browns, coppers—he’s running out of names.

What stops him is a tree growing where he thinks Hagrid’s hut is in a thousand years. The low valley is the same, if overgrown with tall grass that shines silver, grey, and so many shades of green and yellow in the light.

The tree has silvery black and orange bark, with more repetitions on the browns and copper. The leaves are such a vibrant, glowing pale green that it steals his breath; it’s like staring at tiny emeralds, the shine is so intense. There are hints of blue within the leaves, but that vibrant, multihued emerald is most prominent. The blue sky above him is every single blue he could conceive of, pale violets, hints of pink, and even suggestions of green. He looks as close to the light of the sun as he dares and sees the rainbow-like range of the color spectrum, but it’s so much more than he remembers.

Every color, every shade feels like hypersensitive awareness. Every detail is fine-lined and crisp. He is not going to miss those glasses. Not when this is the result.

“Béo ðu á rihtgewittig?”

Harry turns around and spies a ginger kid, maybe ten years old, staring up at him. He knows the kid’s hair is ginger, but it there are a lot more colors in ginger hair to make that color now. He also looks a lot like Godric, if the shape of his chin and nose are anything to go by.

“I’m sorry.” Harry smiles and then lifts his shoulders in a shrug. “I have no idea what you’re saying.” Wait; he can do something, at least. “Min ágennama sy Harry.”

The ginger boy grins. “Min ágennama sy Leoric.” Then he holds up one finger: wait.

Harry watches the kid run back to the castle before returning his attention to the sky. It isn’t long before he’s surprised by a tugging on his sleeve. It’s Leoric, and he has a basket woven from multicolored reeds. Or maybe they aren’t multicolored at all, and it’s just him. “Uh—”

Leoric rolls his eyes, unimpressed by that response, and moves a bit of cloth to reveal food hiding underneath. “Oh! Thank you!”

The kid gives him an odd look, and then slowly says, “Þancword.”

“Thank…word—oh!” Harry smiles again, and Leoric looks thrilled with himself. “Þancword.” He tries nodding. “Yes?”

“Gese.” Leoric seems amused by Harry’s response and sits down with the basket. “Æt,” he orders.

“Those two, I can figure out.” The food is just as weird for new colors as the plants, the trees, and
the sky, and some of it doesn’t look the same; he identifies it by taste. All right, then.

Harry still misses forks, but at least he’s sharing food with someone who is enthusiastic company. Leoric doesn’t mind pointing out the names for things when Harry asks. Rock is *clifstán*, apple tree is *milscapuldor*, dirt is *ádela*, and boy is *cnihtcild*. He has no idea how to spell any of these words, but it’s a nice list of useful vocabulary.

It isn’t long before there is a shout from the castle. Leoric flinches like someone who’s just been caught skipping class and scoops up the basket. “Ábiede!” he shouts, racing back to the castle.

Harry settles for waving. It’s probably a term for “goodbye” but unlike a lot of the other words, it doesn’t sound even vaguely correct. Well, unless it’s “abide” but Harry didn’t know that meant goodbye. If that’s true, then a church song he heard once suddenly makes a lot more sense.

“All this killing all the grass, where is a body supposed to hide…”

Harry looks around to find a grass snake sliding through the dirt. Even the snake’s coloring looks unfamiliar, though Harry’s eyes can still trace the gold bands and black spots. The grass snake is grumbling in Parseltongue like a belligerent old man. “Hello.”

The snake pauses, tongue darting out, before noticing Harry. “Oh, are you like the other magicians who can speak my language?”

The impression of belligerent old bastard is definitely getting more pronounced. “I am. I’ve never seen a grass snake this far north before.”

“Why? You can’t keep an eye out for a good grass snake?” the snake retorts.

“Always do. I’m friends with several at—in the south,” Harry decides to say. Home really isn’t; home literally doesn’t exist yet. “They have much better manners than you, though.”

“Manners are useless. I’m off to eat a frog,” the snake declares, and wanders away.

“Well, fuck you, too,” Harry mutters, and nearly jumps out of his own skin when someone starts laughing. He whirls around to find Salazar standing a few feet away. “Don’t do that!”

“Do what? Listen to you and Osborn refuse to make friends?” Sal grins. “Don’t mind him. I’ve known that snake for five years, and he’s never been anything except a complete bastard.”

“I got that impression. Stupid languages!” Harry grouses when Sal looks politely confused. “I noticed that!”

“You’re right, this is going to be nightmarish,” Sal says, agreeing with Harry’s assessment on language from last night. “Has English changed so much?”

“Uh—well, some of the current West Saxon—English—must have remained, because I can understand parts of words, or they sound almost right. Then there is the Norman invasion—”

Sal rolls his eyes. “Oh, good, just what this island needs: another invasion. It isn’t as if that doesn’t occur every other week.”

Harry wishes he knew more about early British history. The Norman invasion is the only one he’s aware of, but if invasions were that common… “My English picks up a lot of vocabulary from the Romance languages.”
“Romance languages being what, exactly?”

“Oh, uh—any language that descended from Latin, I think,” Harry says.

Sal frowns. “What did your language do, travel the earth to steal words from others?”

Harry bites back a laugh. “That sounds correct, yeah.”

Sal perches on a rock near Harry. In the sunlight, with Harry able to see, his black hair isn’t solid black at all, but full of hidden color that shifts when he moves; his eyes aren’t hazel, but rich greens, browns, and golds. Extra colors even lurk in Sal’s dark, embroidered clothes, which is confusing.

“Why did you rush out here without speaking to anyone?” Salazar asks.

“You’ll think it’s stupid.”

“Somehow, I doubt it.” Sal lifts both shoulders. “Besides, you won’t know unless you say it.”

Harry tries not to bite his lip. “I—I can see.”

“Good! That means Helga’s spell did exactly as she intended,” Sal replies.

“No, I mean—well, yes, that too, but I…I can see colors I’ve never seen before. It’s amazing,” Harry says, fighting a blush.

“Were you blind to colors before?”

Harry stares down at the dirt. “I didn’t think so. No eye doctor—healer—ever said I was the few times I visited one. But today I woke up and there are just…there are colors. Everywhere.”

Sal is giving him a thoughtful look. “I’m pulling a dagger, but not to harm you. I just want to try something.”

“All right.” Harry watches as Sal retrieves a solid silver knife from his boot and holds it out.

“Come here and look.” Sal turns the dagger so that light is shining along the flat edge of the simple blade. “How many colors?”

Harry gives him a helpless stare. “A lot?”

“Not a good question, then.” Sal hesitates before he points to one specific spot on the knife. “This color. Parseltongue has a limited vocabulary for color names, so give me a base color, light, or dark, or if you see a lot of another color within the first one.”

Harry glances at the spot Salazar is pointing at. “Bright blue with purple in it.”

“This one.”

“Dark green with brighter orange along the edges.”

Sal’s eyebrows are starting to go up. “This one?”

“Pale pink, darker red.”

“One more.”
Harry tilts his head. “Silver like it should be, but there is a lot of green, blue, and purple mixed in.”

Sal leans back and replaces the knife. “Hari, were you ever struck in the head?”

“I play Quidditch,” Harry says dryly.

“You are a witty one, aren’t you?” Sal grins. “I’ll be more specific. Could you see those colors before being struck during a game?”

Harry shakes his head. “No. I think I’d remember that. Seeker,” he adds.

“Rowena finally has competition, then.” Salazar looks pleased by that. “Were you struck in the head when you were younger?”

“Yes, but I was young enough that I don’t remember if colors were different.” Harry resists the urge to steal a blade of grass to shred, not wanting Osborn the bitter old bastard-snake following him everywhere in anger. “My aunt—she hit me with a frying pan. Uh—like that pan with the handle that had bread baking in it last night.”

Salazar gapes at him. “How are you not dead?”

“It wasn’t cast iron. The metal had a lighter weight. It still hurt, though. I remember my uncle being angry, saying that they couldn’t take me to a physician, and that I’d better not die and make him look bad.”

“I truly loathe your family,” Sal says in a flat voice.

“You’re in good company, then.”

“Quite.” Sal wraps his hands around one knee. “I really want to test the idea of our being distant relations, Hari. Had I shown that knife to anyone else, it would have revealed two or three hints of color at most. The only others I knew of who see color the way we do were my mother and my father’s mother. My sister is still angry that she didn’t inherit the ability.”

“It’s not normal? Like Parseltongue?” Harry asks, trying to decide if he’s alarmed or not.

“It’s rare, but entirely normal, and it doesn’t matter if you have magic or not. My mother was non-magical, though her family lineage is magical. It just seems to have skipped the last three generations. My magic comes from my father’s family.”

“You’re a Half-blood?” Harry blurts out in surprise.

Sal looks confused. “I’ve no idea what that means.”

“One magical parent born of a magical family, and one non-magical parent—or one magical parent who wasn’t born to a magical family,” Harry explains, feeling just as baffled.

“Oh. I suppose I am, then, as is Helga. Rowena and Godric are the only two who can claim magical parentage from both mother and father. Are you all right, Hari?”

Harry is resting his head in both hands. “My head hurts, and it has nothing to do with soul jars or healing magic. Just really stupid philosophy.”

“Is this something you should explain to me?” Sal sounds doubtful.

Harry drops his hands, thinking about it while chewing on his lip. “You know…I think I’d really
rather learn what you, Helga, Rowena, and Godric think about magic.”

When he finally dares to look up, it’s to find Salazar giving him a look of pure, expectant delight. “You,” Sal says, pointing at Harry with one finger, “are going to be an absolute joy.”

*          *          *          *

Harry doesn’t know why that changes anything, but suddenly he feels a lot more at ease in his own skin. He just had a picnic with Leoric, who turned out to be Godric’s ten-year-old nephew, and discovered that he really is a freak in the visual sense.

Except: he never has to go back to Privet Drive. Even if something changes and the others can send him back where he belongs, he won’t be fifteen. He’ll probably be seventeen, and at that point, no one can make him deal with his aunt and uncle ever again. He’ll finally be older than Hermione, and she’ll hit him and tell him he has to sit his N.E.W.T.s anyway.

If he lies in his bedroom and laughs hysterically over all of that for longer than is necessarily healthy, Orellana and Fortunata are nice enough not to say anything.

The night he met Salazar’s family, Harry expected to see more people who looked like Salazar, and he did—sort of. Orellana has sleek black hair, but her eyes are brown with lurking shades of red and gold; her skin is a pale, unblemished white. Their daughter is the one who takes after Salazar, but she has her mother’s colorful brown eyes.

Fortunata is grand company for a girl who’s just eight years old. She’s as excited as Leoric to identify items for Harry in her own language. Harry is pretty sure he’s mixing up West Saxon English and Castellano, but the children just laugh in a way that doesn’t mock his ignorance at all. He tries to do the same for them in his version of English, which makes Leoric’s expression scrunch up in bafflement.

If Salazar looks utterly, bizarrely unlike the portrait Harry is used to seeing in Hogwarts’ Entrance Hall, then Helga, Rowena, and Godric are also different. Helga is pale with a very sweet face, has warm blue eyes, and Harry is pretty sure she’s terrifying. He likes her anyway—Hermione is also bloody terrifying. He thought Helga was strawberry blonde during his first night in the castle. Now her long, curling hair looks more like spun gold, which isn’t just gold at all, but bronze and brass and copper all competing. She is Harry’s height, but muscled where Orellana is slight, and Godric claims she can hold and wield a heavy sword designed for her much taller kin. Harry’s not certain if he wants to see that immediately, or if he’d rather see it sometime approaching never.

Godric is also muscled, but not to the point of looking brutish, and he carries a visible knife or short sword everywhere. His eyes are an icy blue that refuses to be any other color, which is kind of a relief after this sudden attack by hundreds of new colors. Godric is beardless with straight red hair of many shades that he wears loose down to his shoulders, or he ties it back for teaching or running. He seems to do that a lot. For fun. Harry’s only ever had to run for his life; he’s not sure he’d be all that fond of running just to be doing it. Godric utterly adores children and will spend an entire day telling them stories unless someone reminds him that he’s also supposed to be giving them lessons.

Harry was told Rowena Ravenclaw was wise, but he always thought her portrait in the Entrance Hall looked beaten down, sad, and weary. This Rowena is nothing like that. Her hair hides a
multitude of colors, including silver, which Harry doesn’t see in anyone else’s black hair. Not silver hairs like with age, just drifts of silver that aren’t really silver at all. He tries to explain it to Salazar, who nods his understanding, but Sal doesn’t have words for that silver effect, either. Rowena isn’t nearly as pale as Helga or Orellana, and her eyes are the color of a beautiful autumn sky. Her smile is wise, but it’s also friendly and welcoming until she is engaging the older students in lectures.

Rowena teaches reading, writing, bardic tales and stories, other languages, and anything else that happens to cross her mind that might be useful. She finds his handwriting atrocious, and now that Harry can bloody well see it, he agrees with her. Harry can’t understand Rowena unless he has Salazar around to translate, but her lectures are the times when her expression turns somber and serious. It always makes Harry feel like he’s done something wrong, or something terrible is about to happen, and he hates that sensation. He isn’t even sure why it’s happening until he realizes that her stern style of teaching reminds him of Professor McGonagall. It’s easier to listen, after that, but he’s still stuck with the odd awareness that Ravenclaw’s Founder and Harry’s Head of Gryffindor House would probably get on like a house on fire.

On some level, Harry knew the Founders must have had families and children, but he was too stunned that first night to do much more than take Orellana’s and Fortunata’s existences in stride. It’s bloody weird to meet Rowena’s daughters, twelve-year-old Helena and fifteen-year-old Alicia, the oldest children in the school. Alicia is golden-haired with her mother’s blue eyes, though she’s supposed to resemble her father. Helena has brown hair and eyes, but still manages to look eerily like Rowena.

The bit about not telling anyone where Harry is from doesn’t seem to apply to the older kids and adults. Helena is the one who is most interested in Harry’s future, even though he can’t tell her much with the language barrier in the way. Salazar can’t translate all the time. Harry thinks he must be a complete pain in the arse, needing to haul around a Slytherin translator to speak with anyone, but Salazar never complains. He might lose his voice if Harry doesn’t get his act together and learn to speak enough of something local that isn’t Parseltongue, though.

Helena wants to know if anyone remembers her in Harry’s time; Harry tells her honestly that she looks familiar, but he has no idea why. There are a lot of portraits in his Hogwarts, and most of them aren’t labeled with names. Salazar just seems glad that the portraits exist as proof of the school’s recorded history, even if other things, he says, are complete sarding nonsense—especially the House points and the competition for the House Cup.

Alicia is pragmatic and has no problem demonstrating the spells she knows in German. Salazar says the language is Bavarian, but Harry has no idea if that means they’re the same language a thousand years from now or not. At least when he sees the results of Alicia’s spells, he can figure out the meaning of the word she used. Casting lumos as beleuchten is kind of fun.

Of course, then Salazar hears Harry use the word lumos and wants to know what language he’s using, which leads to another interesting rant about Britain’s shit Latin and how lumos isn’t a sarding word. Lux means light.

“What about nox? For extinguishing the wand light?” Harry asks, and Salazar slaps his hand over his face.

Nox means night. Deflammo is the more correct word to extinguish a light or quench a fire. All right, then. Harry gets ahold of a quill and a scroll of paper to start writing the blasted Latin translations down. If he doesn’t remember the corrections (and cast the spells correctly with them) the Latin rants will never end. They’re entertaining, but Harry doesn’t like feeling stupid, either.
Incendio, he discovers, is also wrong, since that’s a term usually applied to fucking arson. Since he has no plans on deliberately burning down someone’s house, he starts using Salazar’s correction, incendo.

Harry also seriously contemplates joining in on Salazar’s angry tirades about Hogwarts’ shoddy Latin. It’s more fun, and more frustrating, when Rowena gets involved, as she wants to know how knowledge of Latin could be so lost when it’s the language of the Church.

“Uhhh—” Harry settles on the easiest answer. “I don’t think I’ve ever been inside a church in my entire life.” Maybe his parents took him when he was a baby, but he doesn’t remember it, so he decides that doesn’t count.

Rowena merely looks surprised. Salazar is the one who grabs Harry by the shoulders. “How?” he bursts out. “I’m not even Christian, and I still have to put up with the sanctimonious pricks!”

Fortunately, Harry’s brain decides to provide an answer that isn’t complicated at all. “Because the Church of England isn’t the Church of Rome?” He only knows that because Aunt Petunia watched some sort of special about the creation of the Church of England and nodded sagely throughout, despite hearing that the king created the church because he wanted to get divorced. Aunt Petunia was adamantly against divorce and thought it sinful. Harry was eight and thought she was completely off her rocker for not noticing her own contradictory nonsense.

“England kicks the Church out of its kingdom and makes its own religious order?” Salazar blinks a few times as he steps back. “Does anyone else think of that bit of brilliance?”

“Probably not,” Harry hedges. They might have in the States, since it would have pissed off England and Rome at the same time.

Sedemai, Godric’s wife, is like meeting a force of nature. Her hair looks like fire used to with his old eyesight, all bright oranges and angry reds with lurking blues and whites. She has freckled pale skin and blue eyes that like to pretend at being grey, clear, or odd shades of blue or blue-green that Harry doesn’t know how to identify anymore. Sedemai is their equivalent of a Charms instructor, though like the others, she has no official teaching title. She’s quick with a wand and fun to spend class time with, when he can understand her. If she’s teaching, she is always moving, twitching her curved wand, casting spells, striding back and forth—and all of that is aside from the fact that Sedemai can literally fly. Harry thinks that is amazing and useful, but it’s funny to discover that even magicians who can fly still need a broom for Quidditch.

It’s Fortunata and Leoric who introduce Harry to the rest of the students in the castle, like Fortunata’s best friend, pale-skinned, green-eyed, and blonde-haired Martina—Matty—of Sussex, who is Fortunata’s age. Leoric’s younger sister is named Elesande, and just as ginger as he is, though her eyes are a sparkling gold that Harry thinks might properly be hazel. Eneko Heredia, a nine-year-old cousin of Salazar’s who definitely shares the family resemblance, made the journey north by stowing away on a ship making a trade voyage to the port in Alba. Salazar later translates Eneko’s words for Harry: “My family said no to magic, so I said no to them.”

Branwyne and Wander of Votadini, pale-skinned, dark-haired, and dark-eyed girls aged eight and eleven, are from what Salazar says is the bitter remains of what had once been a great Briton tribe. “They’re Celtic?” Harry asks Salazar.

“Kelts, you mean? They prefer to be called Britons, though Branwyne and Wander are both of the Votadini in Strathclyde. The Romans referred to them as Kelts, and they weren’t much fond of it,” Salazar replies. “You’ll only find the original Britons in magical communities now, or in their last three kingdoms west of England.”
From Alba—which Harry is pretty sure eventually becomes Scotland given how often he hears the kids say “Scots”—are eight-year-old Tholy mac Duncan and ten-year-old Elspeth ingen Cináed, pale-skinned and dark-haired with eyes that keep trying to mimic the ocean. They’re Christian, which is normal to Harry but odd for everyone else except Rowena and Godric’s families. Leifr Esbensson, ten, and Vigi Iomharsson, eleven, came down from the Orkney Earldom in the north; they have long braids of white-blond hair and pale skin, but their eyes hold more silver than blue. Fairman Johnsson and Jeph the Turner, nine and eleven, are from a southern village near Griffon’s Door. They’re both tousle-headed, tawny-haired, brown-eyed boys who have tanned so dark they could pass for Salazar’s relatives. The youngest student in the castle is a six-year-old girl with dark hair and grey eyes who calls herself Galiena of Laegrecastrescir.

“Leicestershire?” Harry repeats doubtfully.

Galiена purses her tiny lips at him. “Laegrecastrescir,” she repeats, eying Harry like he’s being exceptionally dense.

“I really, really don’t hear that much of a difference.” Harry tells Salazar after Galiena skips off with Matty and Fortunata.

Sal nods, sighing. “Neither do I, and I’ve been listening to these people speak English for over five years now.”

Harry has no idea if he’ll be able to keep up with ages and last names or people without writing it down, but he can remember the kids’ first names, at least—and that’s another oddity that he’s struggling to get used to. In Hogwarts, everyone goes by their last name in classes and during the day unless you’re close friends, but in Hogewáþ, everyone is on casual, first-name terms…and they’re all so young. The oldest person in the castle is Meraud, and she just turned forty last month.

Sal is twenty. Orellana won’t be twenty until May, which is when Sedemai turns twenty-five. Godric is twenty-seven; Helga is about to be twenty-two. Rowena is the oldest of them all at thirty-six.

“I just can’t get over how young you all are,” Harry says to Salazar. “It’s really weird.”

Salazar glances at him. “Why so? I know that myself, Orellana, and Helga are younger than the others, but we’ve all been considered grown and capable men and women for a long time now.”

“It’s…well, adulthood is different in my time. Probably stupid, too,” Harry replies. “But mostly it’s because of the portraits in the Entrance Hall.”

“Portraits of us, I assume,” Salazar says.

Harry nods. “Yeah. The four Founders of Hogwarts. The thing is though, in those portraits, you’re all…well, old,” he says when he can’t think of a politer way to say it. “And it’s strongly implied that those old portraits are how old you all were at the Founding.”

“Ah.” Salazar shakes his head. “Because only the old can be wise. That is the assumption, yes?”

“Yeah.” Harry smiles. “After meeting all of you, though, I’m really revising my opinion on how you don’t need to be old to be intelligent.”


Harry frowns and instinctively hunches his shoulders. “I’m really not.”
Salazar grins at him. “Yes, you are. My last sentence was not spoken in Parseltongue, but in Castellano.”

Harry mentally reviews the last bit of the conversation and groans. “Okay, okay! I’ll give you that. I can learn a language! But I live with you, Sal! I know that language immersion is a thing.”

“That last sentence made no sarding sense at all,” Salazar grumbles. That means Harry has to figure out how to explain a concept he barely understands—especially as immersion only relates to jumping into water in 990.

It’s less that he asks to attend school at Hogewâþ and more that he gets dragged along in Salazar’s wake. Harry doesn’t mind, really. He is supposed to still be in school, even if he’s in the wrong century. Besides, if that old magician was correct and “a while” means that it will be several years before anyone figures out how to send him back, then Harry would rather go back to his time bloody well educated.

“Where do I get a broom?” Harry finally asks Salazar after he sees the kids flying around the makeshift Quidditch pitch. He probably shouldn’t call it makeshift, but it’s really crude compared to what he’s used to. There is seating for spectators, but the bleachers are made from rough-hewn wood and is only about eight feet tall.

Salazar gives him a look that’s becoming very familiar—puzzled bafflement. “You make one.”

“Yes, but aren’t there restrictions and licen—no, never mind, those were stupid questions.” Harry tries not to bury his face in his hands. “I don’t know how. Brooms are bought in shops in my time, Sal.”

“That is sarding stupid,” Salazar growls. “Then you know nothing of the properties of wood?”

Harry shakes his head. “Not a thing.”

Salazar’s eye twitches. “Then aside from language, I know what you will be learning first.”

“Great,” Harry says, but as long as it means he’ll learn how to build a broom that won’t kill him, he doesn’t care. Learning something new is something to do. Aside from playing language-guessing games with the kids and listening to Salazar’s translations, things have been sort of dull.

That makes no sense at all. If anything, he should be panicked about being stuck one thousand years in the past. He misses Ron, Hermione, Ginny, the twins, the Burrow, and Sirius, but aside from that, he’s not really feeling anything aside from curiosity and relief. That last bit probably isn’t the right sort of emotional response to have, but then, no one else Harry knows was being told they had to off and go kill Voldemort by themselves.

At supper one evening, Helga greets him with a smile and then puts a colored egg into his hand. Harry stares at it, wondering if it’s Easter. He’s never celebrated that; the Dursleys wouldn’t have him near them on that day, and Hogwarts didn’t celebrate it, either—unless a pile of homework counts as celebrating.

“Oh, it’s Ostara, the twentieth day of Martius,” Salazar says when Harry asks about the egg. “A Norse holiday for their goddess of spring. The Norse give colored eggs to friends to wish them health and good fortune.”

“Oh.” That sounds a lot nicer than nailing people to crosses. “Did you get one?”

“Hari, everyone who is of a certain age received one.”
“Why?” Harry asks.

“Because Ostara is also their goddess of fertility,” Salazar replies.

Harry looks at the egg again. “I’m not eating this,” he says, and Salazar starts laughing.

He sits outside that night until long past dark, watching Hedwig swoop down into the field every once in a while as she hunts for her dinner. The local rodents are smart, and she’s enjoying the challenge. Harry’s glad for that; he doesn’t really have anything else for her to do.

No, that’s wrong. Hedwig is hunting for supper, not dinner. It’s still confusing, but Harry really needs to get used to the different terms. Nobody in 990 knows what lunch even means.

Supper is also called æfenmete, or evening meal. Dinner is nonmete (noon meal, maybe) or disner—close enough to dinner that at first, Harry didn’t hear a difference. Breakfast is already a word, at least.

Twentieth March. Harry’s been in 990 for twenty days. It still feels unreal, even though he wakes up every morning to crisp, colorful reality.
**Culture Shock**

Chapter Summary

“You’re using those lectures as an opportunity to get revenge on Godric for something, aren’t you?”

“Why should I waste a perfectly good opportunity to cause him to feel regret?”

Chapter Notes

Betas are badasses for making certain you guys got a weekend installment--a nice long chapter in which to roll around in historical nerdery. *G*

Orellana is what they call a Wood-Speaker, or a Tree Speaker. Harry learns more about wood and wandlore in five minutes of listening to her speak (with Salazar translating) than Harry ever has in his own time. He never knew that holly is used for protection, or that—as a wand—it’s meant to balance someone’s anger and impetuousness.

Harry isn’t certain about the anger bit, but he’s definitely guilty of acting without thinking. That usually came about because Harry lost his temper with people who were being right arseholes though, not because he flies off the handle all the time. Going after the Philosopher’s Stone had been desperation because no one would fucking listen to them—they’d certainly thought on it enough. Harry and Ron took a Defence teacher with them to deal with the basilisk, but Lockhart tried to Obliviate them instead of helping. Ron had no wand after it blew up in Lockhart’s face, and neither of them knew how to get out of the stupid tunnel, so on Harry went to fight Tom Riddle’s diary-ghost and a basilisk.

Peter Pettigrew and the Triwizard Tournament were both not Harry’s fault.

Salazar’s wand is about thirteen inches of carved beechwood, which reminds Harry of a Ravenclaw a year or three below him—Lovegood was her name, maybe. Instead of acorns, though, Salazar’s wand is carved with several thin strips of the infinity symbol that runs in unending lines along the length of the wand. Salazar blushes as he translates for Orellana when she says that beechwood is often paired with those who are wiser than their age would suggest.

“Are you making that up?” Harry asks when Orellana mentions that beechwood doesn’t like those of intolerant thought.

Salazar gives him a bewildered look. “No. Why would she?”

“I meant—never mind. Go ahead, please, Orellana,” Harry says. If the thing about beechwood is true, then—then where the hell did Salazar’s supposed blood purist bigotry nonsense come from?

Orellana lets Harry inspect her wand, which is a simple, uncarved line of alder wood, about twelve inches broken by the ridge marking the handle before it becomes smooth again. The wood is a glorious array of browns and golds, and the tree ring’s growth patterns were included with the
wand when it was made. They aren’t perfect lines, but irregular and sloppy and…well, pretty. Orellana says that alder wood likes nonverbal magic, and the Briton tribes favored it for making their wooden shields. Homes built from alder aid in protecting them from storm, flood, and wind; it’s considered so resistant to damage from water that bridges are often built from it.


“When you say neat, you are not referring to oxen, are you?”

Harry blinks a few times. “No. It’s—wait, neat means oxen? Since when?”

Salazar laughs. “It’s English, Hari! West Saxon English! Why, what does it mean in your English?”

“Uh—used properly, it’s a term for things being clean. Oxen? Fucking seriously?”

“Yes, I swear to you it’s true. Oh, and clean has not changed much. In English, it is clæne.” Salazar tilts his head. “Neat is your slang again? Used to mean…good?”

“Sort of,” Harry says. “More like something interesting you happen to like.”

“Francéis Sortir, Latin sortiri, Catalan sortir and sortia—Hari, some days I hate your slang.”

Harry winces. “Sort of means, uh…somewhat.”

Salazar holds up his hand and relates the entire conversation to Orellana, who collapses into a chair laughing. Harry sighs and puts his hands over his face. “Everyone is going to know about that by dinner, aren’t they?”

“Si,” Salazar replies. “And it is supper, not dinner. Dinner is at midday.”

“Fuck you, too.”

“I know exactly what you said, and you’re going to learn to say it properly, Hari.”

“That was proper, bastardo!”

Salazar chuckles. “Better.”

Harry was right. Everyone knows about oxen being slang for something interesting by the evening meal. He spends most of supper with his face planted on the table, embarrassed and hating it. He’d Apparate out of the kitchen if he knew how. He’d had an entire lifetime of people laughing at his expense—for screwing up, for existing, for being in danger while others stand by and talk about how funny it is, for being stupid even though he was punished if he brought home better grades than Dudley. That ended with Hogwarts, at least, but Harry thinks it was only because Aunt Petunia didn’t want to touch any mail that came from his school, especially anything delivered by owl.

He finally can’t take it anymore and excuses himself early. After supper, everyone socializes, which is completely unwanted right now. It’s confusing even when he’s willing to try it. Students and teachers alike spread out along the Entrance Hall, the corridor to the Grand Stair, and the bottom tiers of the stairs to sing, talk, play musical instruments, or in the adults’ case, keep drinking while also attempting to do the other three at the same time. Harry thinks they’re weird because students and teachers are mingling together, and it’s considered normal. They think Harry is weird because he can’t sing, doesn’t play a musical instrument, and has no poems, stories, or songs memorized. He tried to tell them that music was different in his time and that stories were
available for anyone to read, but he couldn’t get beyond “Music is different” before running into a language-based brick wall.

Hogewáþ is as familiar as it is odd. It’s only seven storeys tall in a few specific sections in 990, but in 1995 he could walk across almost the whole of the castle on the flat portions over the seventh storey, though that did include a few jumps and some balancing along the top edge of sloping roofs. There is no Hospital Tower, no Gryffindor Tower, no Divination Tower, and no Dark Tower—not that he went there much, anyway. The upper floors were extremely creepy, like a cold wind was always on the back of his neck.

The Headmaster’s Tower is already where Harry remembers it, but it’s not that at all, it’s the tower where Godric and Sedemai live. All of the children in the castle except Fortunata, Helena, and Alicia live in that tower’s lower levels, which Harry has literally never seen before. The kids have individual sleeping chambers in those lower parts of the Headmaster’s Tower, and there are four bathrooms—garderobes—that aren’t marked for boys or girls; any student can use whichever they want. Harry didn’t even know any of these rooms existed. In his time, it’s always been a long flight of moving circular stairs up to the sixth-storey Headmaster’s office.

The Defence Against the Dark Arts Tower exists, but it’s only called the Defence Tower, and it’s meant literally—Godric showed Harry how the narrow windows in that tower are archer’s windows, meant to allow an archer inside the castle to shoot at the enemy outside with less chance of dying in the process.

Rowena lives in what he knows will one day be Ravenclaw Tower; Helga lives in an underground level near the kitchens; a stairwell goes down to a door that opens into her quarters. Even without the barrels, Harry suspects that’s the eventual Hufflepuff Common Room and dorms.

Only the first part of the dungeons exist, including the ballroom, which doesn’t seem to ever be used for anything except indoor dueling practice. There are a few smaller, empty rooms, and a hallway that leads nowhere. He thought he’d know Snape’s office or the Potions classroom if he saw either, but aside from the not-ballroom, none of it looks familiar.

The Prefect’s Bathroom on the fourth floor doesn’t exist, either, though Harry desperately wants to suggest it just to have another go at swimming in something that isn’t the Black Lake. The library is on the third floor only, and is absolutely tiny compared to the modern library of Hogwarts. The Armory is a literal weapons-staging area, which is kind of cool. There isn’t a Clock Tower, though; no greenhouses, no Quidditch Staircase leading out to the pitch, zero secret passages—he checked—and no immense public bathrooms. The castle only has one or two individual garderobes (without bathtubs) per floor for people to use if they’re not in their living quarters.

The Astronomy Tower doesn’t look the same at all. The tower doesn’t even have a name yet, but at least he can find the stairs that lead to the roof. Harry sits outside on the edge between two massive stone bricks, his legs hanging over the side, and tries to enjoy the stars.

“Are you thinking of jumping?”

Harry turns around and frowns at Salazar, who is giving him a look that seems…cautious, maybe? He’s not sure. “Sal, there is a moat down there. Even if I jumped, I’d land in the water.”

“It was you who told me that you can only ‘sort-of-swim,’” Salazar reminds him. “Which, now that I know what that means, will be another thing to correct. I think you might be the first person I’ve met outside the bounds of early childhood who doesn’t know how to swim properly.”

Harry turns back around to face the forest. “Yeah. Rub it in, why don’t you?”
“Does this ‘rub it in’ mean what I think it means? To add insult to already hurt feelings?” Salazar asks.

Harry nods. “Si. It does.”

Salazar is quiet for a minute. “Is that what you think was happening during supper?”

“I really, really don’t want to talk about it.”

“That answered my question, regardless.” Salazar surprises Harry by jumping up into the next gap before climbing onto the top of the stone. He stands there like a sentinel in the dark, the wind blowing his hair away from his face. “You have almost no experience with such friendly gatherings, do you?”

“Who would I even have it with, Sal? The people in my Hogwarts who think I’m evil, the people who would have been happy to see me dead, or my relatives, who thought both?” Harry asks, and then jerks his head away from Salazar’s gaze. “Sorig.”

“Is that why you spend no time with us in the evenings unless it is with my family in our quarters?”

“You mean aside from the fact that everyone looks at me cross-eyed for not knowing songs or musical instruments or stories from memory?” Harry sighs. “Salazar, even if I could do any of those things, I don’t know the languages. I don’t know what anyone is saying or singing. Helga could be singing about snogging toadstools for all I know.”

“Not toadstools. It’s usually about vanquishing trolls,” Salazar says.

Harry scowls up at him. “Very funny.”

“I’m serious. The Norse lands seem to have a terrible difficulty with trolls. Granted, theirs are quite different from Briton’s trolls, which are also different from Iberian trolls. What the fuck is snogging, Hari?”

Harry bites back a grudging smile. “It, uh, means that you’re making out with someone. Shit. No, that doesn’t work. Uhm…kissing someone. Enthusiastically. Not necessarily sex,” he adds, feeling his face heat up.

Salazar snorts. “Do people truly have such trouble discussing coupling in your time?”

“Most people I spent time with did, yeah,” Harry answers, his stomach tying itself into a knot. “They also aren’t very nice about, uh…” He swallows. “Sal, how do magicians feel about men being with other men, or women being with other women?”

“I found myself about to say something very foolish until I reminded myself that you do not yet understand Norse or Norn, else you would be aware of that answer already,” Salazar says. “Helga prefers women. She does not rule out men as a possibility, but claims she has never found one who could keep up with her. Such things are only ever a concern if one needs to produce a legitimate Heir for their bloodline.”

“Helga’s gay?” That makes Harry feel a hell of a lot better, all at once. If a Hogwarts Founder who also happens to be a terrifying Viking can be gay and nobody cares, then…then maybe no one will care that he might be, too.

“Hari, your slang. I will stab it,” Salazar says flatly.
“Gay means, uh...okay, it’s supposed to mean ‘happy’ but it also somehow became a word for someone who likes people of the same sex. Uh, men liking men.” It’s also the only term he knows that isn’t crude, rude, or both.

Salazar seems to be pondering that. Harry leaves him to it, happy to stare out in the darkness while his cheeks burn. If he thought he was embarrassed before, now he’s mortified.

“Is such a thing a difficulty for magicians in your time?” Salazar finally asks.

“I don’t know.” Harry bites his lip. “I didn’t pay any attention to that, not before I was fourteen. That year was the stupid Tournament I told you about, though. I thought—I was raised by people who didn’t think it was okay to be gay. In either sense of the word,” he adds. The Dursleys certainly didn’t seem to want anyone to be happy but themselves.

“I didn’t really have time to ask anyone if that was...okay. There were supposed to be lectures about, uh, coupling, in my second year, age twelve, but someone let a killer monster loose in the school, so the lectures were canceled. They were rescheduled for my third year, but then everyone was terrified about my godfather getting into the school to supposedly murder everyone, so those were canceled, too.” Harry thinks about it. “If they held the lectures in fourth year, I was either busy or no one remembered to tell me.”

“The skies wept,” Salazar mutters. “The moment you speak proper English, I’m making Godric give you those lessons. It shouldn’t come from family. I was already educated, and still that conversation with my mother was so very awkward.”

Harry looks up. “You’re using those lectures as an opportunity to get revenge on Godric for something, aren’t you?”

Salazar smiles. “Why should I waste a perfectly good opportunity to cause him to feel regret?”

* * * *

The next morning, Harry doesn’t hear the word “neat” over breakfast. Not once. He glares at Salazar. “Is that your doing? No one talking about oxen?”

Salazar rubs at his temples, looking like he’s contemplating dumping his water goblet over his head. Sal seems to have a serious loathing of mornings. Harry might hate them too, but he’d have to sleep in the first place to be bothered by waking up. “Of course I said something. We may tease you in good spirits, but it is cruel when those words are harmful, and we refuse to be cruel.”

“Oh,” Harry replies, and spends the rest of the meal staring at his plate. That’s never happened before. Ever.

That morning he has to deal with Rowena again, who doesn’t teach after midday. Salazar is at least awake enough to translate without growling about it by the time they get to the room she likes to hold classes in.

“How do you teach if you hate morning this much?” Harry asks him.

“By teaching in the afternoon, that’s how,” Salazar growls back.
Orellana isn’t finished with loading him up on basic wood lore, so that’s his afternoon before dinner. Salazar rejoins him around five, when a bell from somewhere Harry hasn’t found yet is rung to announce that it’s an hour before supper. He only knows supper is at six because of the marked hourglass in Salazar and Orellana’s quarters, which is magicked to flip automatically at noon and midnight to resume counting off each set of twelve hours. Dinner is at noon, which hasn’t changed. Breakfast is ready at six of a morning, but given everyone’s staggered schedules, it’s usually available until eleven, when the castle’s small staff has to make dinner.

Godric’s wand, Orellana says, is red-veined ash, meant for the stubborn and courageous but not those of arrogant inclinations. Ash is also the tree that the Norse’s Woden is supposed to have hung upside down from in order to learn magic, something usually forbidden to men in their culture. The remaining Brittonic magic-workers prefer ash to every other wood when it comes to wands, shunning even their beloved oak. Ash wands are often buried with their owners, since it’s hard to find someone alike enough in temperament for an ash wand to bond with. Harry didn’t even fucking know that wands bonded to their owners, a statement that makes Salazar mutter under his breath while scowling.

Harry always tried to be polite, thinking everyone else in his House was saying the word enough for the entire school, but he’s been saying “fuck” a lot lately. Given the historical landmines he keeps tripping over, Harry thinks his use is entirely bloody justified.

Rowena’s wand, except for the handle, is carved so that it’s a spiral. The pear wood is a rich array of reds, with darker lines following the wand’s curve like marching soldiers. Pear trees grow best in the gardens of the warm-hearted, Orellana tells him, and as wands, prefer magicians of great wisdom. Pear loathes foul intentions and will never work for a magician full of hate. Pear trees were one of the sacred fruit trees growing in Alcinous’s grove in The Odyssey.

“I have…no idea what that is,” Harry admits. “The Odyssey.”

Salazar makes a noise that sounds suspiciously like a whimper.

“It’s an old Greek tale that is taken as myth instead of truth, as the non-magical often find the magic within too vast to be true,” Orellana says with Salazar’s help, who immediately adds, “They just find it unbelievable that the bastard couldn’t find his way home across a channel in ten sarding years.”

Harry has seen Helga’s wand multiple times by now, which is about fourteen inches long, the wood a blend of reds, browns, and golds that somehow remain separate colors; the tree rings are strict lines and off-kilter, oblong rings, which is pretty neat. Like Ginny’s and Edward’s, Helga’s wand is made of yew, though hers isn’t varnished. None of them are, Harry belatedly realizes. Everyone in this time oils their wands or coats them in beeswax, but they don’t hide the natural wood.

Orellana tells him that painted wand wood is considered a deceitful act in many circles, or an insult to the tree who gifted the wood for the wand in others. Sometimes it’s both at once. Then she explains how yew is a wood known for its desire to be a fierce protector of others.

“That explains a lot,” Harry says, and then spends ten minutes trying to describe Ginny, Edward, and the circumstances that made Ginny overprotective without giving away anything about Salazar leaving a murderous basilisk in Hogwarts that’s supposed to target Muggle-borns. He still has no idea what that’s about, and it’s just the first week of April. He’s known Salazar for a month. He’s still afraid to ask about basilisks of any sort.

Harry finds it really interesting that a yew wand is easy to pass down, but if it’s buried with its
owner, it will sprout a new yew tree to shelter the magician’s grave. The wood as a wand is also supposed to be grand for Transfiguration, illusions, Necromancy, and spells for eloquence, persuasion, or knowledge.

“Wait. Hold on a fucking moment,” Harry says, wide-eyed. “First off—persuasion. In my time, that’s an Unforgivable Curse called Imperius. It means you can make someone do whatever they want, and it sucks!”

“This island and its shoddy sarding Latin!” Salazar laments, shaking his head. “If we’re thinking of the same curse, its proper name is Tempero, not Imperius. The former means control, while the latter means a royal command.”

“You’ve had this curse used against you,” Orellana says, gazing at Harry in concern.

Harry tries to duck down in his chair, but benches are really not made for hiding. “Yes. But that’s not my only—necromancy?”

“Necromancy is about more than raising the dead, though that is one thing it can do. We will discuss such later,” Salazar says, frowning. Harry gets the feeling that Salazar doesn’t want to discuss it at all, which is odd. Salazar likes to talk about pretty much everything.

Sedemai’s lethal-looking curved wand is black walnut, which likes good instincts and insight, and is excellent for Charms and impressive magic. Harry thinks that flying definitely counts as impressive. Walnut in general is supposed to be good for weather magic, and for creating vertices.

“What are vertices?”

Salazar frowns. “A vortex.”

“A vortex to where?” Harry asks, and is promptly told that’s a question he should ask Godric or Sedemai, as they are door guardians. He decides not to make things worse by saying he doesn’t know what that is, either.

Fortunata’s wand is made of rowan, which Salazar considers to be a good omen for multiple reasons. He’s the one who explains that a blooming rowan tree is part of his family’s seal; Orellana tells Harry that rowan has more protective strength, no matter its use, than any other wood—yew included. It adds its strength to a magician’s casting of defensive charms, and is also a wand for geomancers and those who are magical weavers.

“What is geomancy?” Harry asks, and Salazar puts his hand over his face.

“Magic that revolves around the mapping of spaces or the creation of new spaces,” Sal mumbles through his fingers. “Please don’t ask for a further explanation. It isn’t one of my strengths, and I’m not certain you know mundane geometry.”

Harry blushes, feeling stupid again. “Uh—I don’t.”

“Sarding piles of shit by the bedamned roadside!” Salazar bursts out, and Harry winces. “I fucking loathe your schooling!”

Harry holds up his wand to distract Salazar. “This is varnished,” he says. “Do I need to find a new wand?”

“No. We simply won’t tell anyone,” Salazar replies in a calmer tone, though he still looks incensed over Harry’s lack of geometry knowledge. That one Harry knows isn’t his fault; they didn’t cover
it in his primary school beyond basic shapes, and Hogwarts has no such class called Geomancy. As far as he knows, it’s not part of Arithmancy either, or Hermione would have mentioned it. A lot.

It doesn’t take him long to realize that Orellana’s lessons hold a dual purpose. By learning more about the wood of the wands the adults carry, Harry has more of an idea about what kind of people they are. Orellana is sneaky, but Harry is used to untangling those sorts of webs. He appreciates that she was educating him while sliding him a puzzle piece instead of trying to either hide those pieces from him, or ram them down his throat. Hogwarts in his time seemed to be stuck on those being the only options.

Speaking of only options.

Fortunata walked in on Harry in his bedroom one morning, probably intent on making him get up to take her down to breakfast. That had quickly become habit, as Sal and Orellana are not early risers. Harry often was already awake—he had as much trouble sleeping in Hogewáþ as he did in Hogwarts—but that morning, Fortunata caught him before he’d put on clothes, and she opened the door to find him in just his pants.

Then she shrieked, slammed the door, and ran screaming for her parents, leaving Harry bewildered. “Of course she was startled,” Salazar explains when Harry goes out to the sitting room after getting dressed. “Fortunata has never seen a man bare-chested before.”

Harry blinks a few times. “How does that even work?”

Salazar rubs his eyes. “It is far too early for this. Fortunata said you were only wearing some indecent sort of braies.”

“What the fuck are braies?”

In answer, Salazar retrieves something from his and Orellana’s bedroom and flings the cloth at Harry. He holds it up and discovers a very loose-fitting pair of shorts with a drawstring waist. “Oh! Shorts!”

Salazar frowns and holds out his hand low to the floor. “Short?”

“Uh—shorts because they’re short trousers,” Harry says.

“Those are the same length as the trousers I’m wearing,” Salazar mutters crossly. “Keep those. They’re useful, and if you’re going to insist on sleeping without a shirt, that is far more modest.”

Harry balls up the cotton shorts in his hands. “Sal, when we’re saying trousers in Parseltongue, what word are you thinking of?”

Sal gives him a confused look. “Bracae,” he says. “In Gaelic or English, they are called truis or brēc. In Helga’s Norse, they are brok.”

“Yeah…not so much on my end. Trousers,” Harry responds in his English, though he suspects that brēc might be breeches. “I wonder how many words we’re missing because Parseltongue translates them.”

“I don’t even want to contemplate that thought before noon, Hari.”

“So, bare chests are immodest for men and women?” Harry asks.
Salazar nods. “Unless one is nursing a child, yes, but that is considered quite different—and limited to those who bear children, of course. Is it not so in your time?”

Harry thinks about it before he stands up, pulls off his jumper, and untucks his t-shirt from his denims. “Here is difference number one.”

“I see.” Salazar has one eyebrow raised. “That is not nearly long enough to preserve any sense of modesty.”

“I noticed the shirts under your tunics are a lot longer. Guess that means you sleep in them?” Salazar nods. “I thought so,” Harry says. “We don’t—men are allowed to be bare-chested for swimming or sleeping, or if it’s hot while you’re working outdoors, though at any other time it’s not considered polite to go shirtless in public,” Harry says, trying to figure out how to explain. “Women are still expected to be wearing shirts, but I haven’t really been around anyone nursing a baby to know about that one. Uh, if I know I’m sharing rooms with others, I usually sleep in pyjamas, which is a shirt and trousers specifically designed for sleeping.”

“Women have been expected to remain covered from neck to their ankles since the days of Rome, though given the weather in the south, bare arms were considered completely acceptable,” Salazar tells him in what Harry is starting to think might be his teaching voice. It’s hard to be sure, since Salazar has to teach him about everything around Harry all the blasted time. “Now it is a gown that is worn from neck to ankle with full sleeves, a camisia, or in English, a cemes.”

“Keh-mes?” Harry snaps his fingers in realization. “Chemise!”

“Your English stole words from francis, I see,” Salazar mutters. “Men of our lands are expected to wear long shirts at all times, just as women are always expected to always be in their chemise, unless one is bathing, or one is up to things that I’m still making others discuss with you. Men on this island wear stockings to their knees and bind them in place with the laces from their shoes. They only wear trousers if the weather has turned to ice and snow. In my land, we always wear trousers or hose beneath shirt and tunic instead of baring our legs. The idea of hose has made it to the royal courts in the north but no further yet, to Godric’s intense relief. The Christians are mandating that women cover their hair, but the only adult female Christian in the school is Sedemai, who is considered feral by other Englishwomen as she refuses to wear a veil when she is already burdened by chemise, gown, and cloak. Rowena will wear a veil over her hair if visiting a Court, as she is from a land governed by a Christian empire. The others do not bother unless there are politics involved that make it necessary.”

At least they’re allowed to take their clothes off for bathing, Harry thinks. He’s almost certain he heard once that people in the Middle Ages were told by the Church that they weren’t allowed to get undressed, ever, or there were...consequences, or something. He has no idea what those might be; the Dursleys weren’t churchgoers, wouldn’t take Harry even if they were, and he can’t even remember where he learned about people being sewn into their clothes so they couldn’t take them off.

“We knew clothing had to be different for you, as your hooded ‘jumper’ is far too short,” Salazar says, getting Harry’s wandering attention. “But given how much you have to learn just to speak to us all, we did not want to drown you in too many new things at once.”

Harry glances down at his denims and boots, which are holding up pretty well. His socks developed a hole or two, but he borrowed a needle from Orellana and fixed those himself. His t-shirt is fine, but his jumper’s elbows are starting to feel thin. “I appreciate that, actually. I don’t think I’d know what to do with new languages, new people, wrong time, and...well. Okay, how are your trousers the same length as these shorts? They look the same.”
“Braies,” Salazar corrects, rolling his eyes. Then he pulls off his boot, revealing that his trousers end just below the knee. He’s wearing a thick stocking beneath, and a leather band ties at the knee to keep everything in place; the boots hide the stocking and its tie from view.

“Oh.” That doesn’t look too bad. “Do you wear hose like you’re wearing those socks?”

Salazar’s eye twitches at the mention of socks. “Socks and stockings are the same?”

“Yeah,” Harry answers. “Well, mostly.”

“One can use short hose in place of stockings, then, but no, that is not what I meant. When hose is worn, though I reserve the occasion for Court, they are worn in place of trousers.”

“You mean you go to Court without wearing any bloody trousers?” Harry asks in high-pitched disbelief. Fortunata, just emerging from the back bedroom with Orellana, hears him and bursts into a fit of giggling.

Salazar pinches the bridge of his nose. “You sound like Godric.”

“You’re not wearing fucking trousers while you’re in someone’s Court!” Harry shouts again, which causes Fortunata to start hiccupping with laughter. Orellana is looking at them with mock-disapproval, waiting patiently for someone to translate all the hissing.

“These particular hose are worn exactly like trousers,” Salazar grates out, annoyed. “None of us are strutting about with our pintels and testículos swaying in the breeze!”

Harry already knew about testículos, at least. “Pintel means what I think it does, right?” He’s either on the verge of joining Fortunata in hysterical giggling, or he’s going to off and figure out how to hide under his bed.

Salazar sighs. “Yes, the English term. Scæþ is the English word for cunnus.”

“Oi, that’s not polite!”

“To refer to part of a woman’s body is an insult?” Salazar asks in disbelief. “Why?”

Harry slumps down in his chair. “You know, that’s a really good question.”

* * * *

Harry still doesn’t know how to make a broom once the wood-lore lessons are complete, but Orellana says she can only tell him of the wood and its properties. He has to choose the rest for himself.

“As long as I can borrow you long enough to identify trees, sure,” Harry says, and Salazar buries his face in his hands again.

“Not even that? They did not teach you how to identify trees? Zure eskolaratzea gaitzets dituzte I!” Salazar yells.

Harry looks at Orellana. “What—I mean, ¿qué?”
“Salazar odia tu educación,” Orellana replies, which doesn’t help much. Harry is just proud of himself for knowing what educación means. That is definitely a word his English stole from someone else.

“I loathe your schooling,” Salazar hisses through his fingers.

“Oh.”

Orellana agrees that when Harry is ready to venture out into the forest, she’ll go with him to finish his education in regards to identifying trees. The only hint she gives regarding his future broom is to say that the tree sap must be running freely, not sluggish or frozen, and she strongly suggests asking the tree’s permission. Harry stares at her and decides it can’t possibly hurt to ask. It’s too early in the spring to go out asking trees for their limbs, anyway. It might be April—Aprilis—but the Spring Equinox was only on the fifteenth of March.

No, it’s Martius. Stupid Latin months. At least they haven’t changed that much.

Godric gets his hooks into Harry after Orellana has crammed his head full of wood lore. Salazar tells Harry that Godric’s proper title is War Master, but not to call him that, as Godric doesn’t like it. It’s politer to say that Godric is a military strategist.

Godric doesn’t pull a wand on Harry again; instead he suggests late afternoon games of chess before supper. They’re calling the game by an unfamiliar word, Shatranj. The rules and pieces are a bit different, but Harry only needs a little bit of Salazar’s translation help to learn the differences. That’s also how he finds out that Salazar is the reason Godric knows of Almost-Chess—he brought the game north with him and taught the others to play, and Salazar had Shatranj because the Moors brought it north to Castile.

Godric trounces Harry at every game, but Harry doesn’t mind. He got used to losing at chess to Ron in his first year of Hogwarts. Unlike Ron, however, Godric then demonstrates with the pieces to show Harry where he went wrong so that Harry will get better at the game. Shatranj is probably never going to be his favorite activity, but Harry thanks Godric for every single lesson. If Myrddin ever turns up in Hogwarts—Hogewáþ, dammit!—and knows how to send Harry home, one of Harry’s first goals is to utterly thrash Ron at chess, even if it’s only the once.

When Salazar is available, Harry drags him into classes with Sedemai or Helga, who host lessons in varying types of magic for everyone in the castle. Most of it consists of things Harry’s never heard of before in his life. A lot of it is supposed to be the easy magics for magicians of this time, which is making his head hurt.

Harry can demonstrate things that are supposed to be more difficult, but they were taught to him when he was in third- and fourth-year. He’s figuring that those two years in Hogwarts are this time’s equivalent of someone who’s learned basic magic but is nowhere near ready for an apprenticeship yet. Maybe. He really is just guessing, but he can cast a Patronus, a Shield Charm, and a Disarming Spell—and he can do them well. He shows alohomora to Sedemai, who gives him a blank look before she points her wand and demonstrates an unlocking spell in Latin that is a much simpler reseror.

The first time Salazar hears Harry say finite incantatem, he launches into ferocious Spanish that has to be mostly profanity. That gives him yet more Latin to write down: finis incantata to end a spell or enchantment, or finis incantatio to end a charm.

“What’s the fucking difference?” Harry asks, baffled. “Aren’t they the same thing?”
“Incantata is designed to end most magical spells, while incantatio is specific to a charm.”

“That’s stupid,” Harry says flatly.

“I didn’t make these rules!” Salazar retorts.

“Why are they rules?” Harry hisses in loud frustration. “If finite incantatem works, why not keep using it?”

Salazar lets out a long sigh. “Because,” he says patiently, “in magic, there is intent, and there is understanding. Intent will take you far, which is why your improper spells works, even though there is no such term as incantatem. But if you understand the whole of the language you use to speak and craft in magic, you stand on the cusp of unlimited possibility.”

Harry blinks a few times. “One? That’s amazing. Two? I’m really still getting used to the fact that you guys will tell me these things.”

“You ask many questions about magic. Why do you not ask for other clothing?” Salazar wants to know.

“My clothes are fine!” Harry hurries to say. That is not a conversation they are having, thank you. What he’s wearing is familiar, even if he’s wearing the same clothes every day because they’re all he has.

Harry starts demonstrating the magic he does know for the kids who are still working on those spells, because why not? Except for Expelliarmus, which is supposed to be Expelliarmis, his spells are correct.

Salazar laughed until he turned an alarming shade of blue-violet when he heard Harry cast the Disarming Spell in front of the others for the first time. Harry was just mad that someone taught him a spell that means he’s been shouting, “I expel shoulder!” for two years instead of “I expel weapons!” Then he thinks on it and tells Salazar that everyone in his time is shouting about expelling shoulders, which puts Salazar down on the floor and on the verge of dry heaving from laughing so hard.

When Helga finds out why Salazar is a useless lump on the floor, she rolls her eyes. “And that is why I cast my spells in Norn or Norse.” It takes Harry a few minutes to find out what she said, but he agrees with her. Then he asks why spells won’t work in English for him if they work in Helga’s native tongue for her.

Helga asks him if he’s tried it.

Harry plasters his hands over his face when he realizes that it never even occurred to him to give it a go.

Salazar is still lying on the floor, even though he’s coherent again. Harry shrugs, points his wand at Salazar, and says, “Levitate,” while thinking hard on Wingardium Leviosa and lifting. He manages to raise Salazar a few inches off the ground before dropping him; Salazar grumbles at him in Parseltongue.

“I can levitate things. I can!” Harry retorts. “But Levitate sounds stupid. Not as stupid as Wingardium Leviosa, but I’m used to that one.”

Salazar and Helga both stare at him. “What the—what is—those words make no sense,” Salazar manages at last. Harry just shrugs; he doesn’t know what they mean, either.

“It means ‘to raise.’ But not me!” Salazar protests at once.

Harry snorts out a laugh and points his wand at a chair. Adlevo works…well, like a charm. Maybe there’s some weird disconnect in his head, and his version of English just doesn’t sound magical enough.

Spanish, though. Harry is going to try casting magic in Spanish the moment he understands enough of the words.

* * * * *

“I think we have it,” Salazar confronts Harry at dinner, accompanied by Orellana and Rowena.

“Have what?” Harry asks, putting his spoon down before he can dribble food onto his clothes in surprise. A way to send him home?

No, he’s pretty sure they’d find a better way to tell him.

Then again, Salazar can get really excitable.

“Your Wingardium Leviosa nonsense,” Salazar replies, as if they were still constantly talking about something from three days ago. “We three have been discussing it, and it’s the most bastardized of bastardized Latin any of us have ever encountered.”

“Oh…okay…” Harry says. “I’m sticking with Adlevo, by the way.”

“Yes, but I wanted to know where that nonsense came from!” Salazar translates for Rowena, who is scowling. “When properly broken down, that gibberish must have come from winga a diu levios. It’s a foolish statement that equates to ‘light wings a long time.’”

Harry tries to figure out how the Latin becomes the English. “Winga is wing. Levios is…light. A diu is Latin for ‘a long time?’”

“No, a diu is Catalan for ‘a long time,’” Salazar corrects. “A bird’s wing, in Latin, is cornu; the action is pervolo.”

“Winga is a term from a language I have heard in the land to the south of Iberia, beyond the realm of the Caliph,” Orellana says via Salazar. “The Moors call the people who speak that tongue the Sawahil.”

“Swahili!” Harry grins. “That’s really cool.” Then his grin falters. “That is a complete disaster of a spell, though.” After Salazar translates, Rowena leaves the table laughing. Orellana smiles and goes to help the youngest kids get their food.

Harry debates for a moment before he asks, “What about the Killing Curse?”

Salazar frowns. “You have used it?”

“What—no!” Harry bites his lip. “I’ve had someone use it on me, except I lived.”
“The soul jar.” Salazar’s expression becomes sympathetic. “One must attempt to murder the chosen vessel with the Killing Curse to create a living soul jar.”

Harry feels his insides twist. “Oh. That…that makes sense.” If Voldemort was trying to intentionally make one of those Horcrux things, that would explain why Harry is still alive. It’s nice to finally know. “I’ve had the Killing Curse cast at me since then, but gravestones are good cover.”

Salazar looks puzzled. “I do not know the word gravestones, even though it translates into Parseltongue.”

“Oh—burial markers. For someone buried in the earth, there is a stone with their name and dates and things,” Harry says.

Salazar nods in understanding. “Yes, a monument stone is a good way to avoid the green strike of the Killing Curse. Hardwood bound in iron will also defend against it, as do living trees. They draw their strength from the earth, so the Curse does not kill them, though it might scar the wood.”

“Is Avada Kedavra the spell you would use? If you were going to cast the Curse, I mean. Not that you will. Or—” Harry sighs. “Help.”

“I’ve never heard the words Avada Kedavra,” Salazar says. “I would say Maldición de la muerte. Curse of death. As to the rest…” He studies Harry in a way that makes Harry nervous. “All of us have killed, Hari. I saw war at age twelve in service to my kingdom, and have fought in many battles since that time. I participated in a battle the day I arrived at this castle in order to defend it. Every teacher in this school has killed in combat, in defence of another or themselves. Is killing considered so unnatural in your time?”

“It’s considered morally wrong, whether you’re a magician or not.” Harry tries not to bite his lip again. “The Killing Curse is like the Cruciatus Curse and the Imperius Curse. It’s classed as an Unforgivable—you go to prison for life if you use it on another person, and I’ve never heard anyone say it’s all right to use it to defend yourself.”

Salazar’s expression is utterly unimpressed. “That is ridiculous.” He hesitates. “Do you see us as less for having taken lives, Hari?”

Harry swallows. “No. I—I saw someone murdered, right in front of me. No one was defending themselves. Voldemort told Pettigrew to kill Cedric because he was there and inconvenient and unwanted and—” He bites back what feels like an avalanche of anger, guilt, and grief that he really doesn’t want to have to deal with. Ever.

“What I mean is that after seeing murder, I really get the difference between that and defending yourself. I’m not in a hurry to go out and kill anyone, though.”

Salazar shakes his head. “Hari,” he says gently. “None of us ever are.”

* * * * *

The last week of April is intense. Unlike Ostara or Easter, Walpurgis is celebrated by bloody well everyone. He always thought Walpurgis Night was just one night, but no, apparently they shortened it. The original Walpurgis is nine nights of bonfires and food. There are no lessons
during that time; Harry isn’t certain if it’s because there are none during the holiday, or if it’s because everyone is too hung over in the morning to contemplate teaching. He’s actually sort of glad when Walpurgisnacht ends with bonfires lit at midnight on first May.

Except that one is a holiday, too—May Day, the first day of summer. Yellow flowers are placed everywhere as decorations, a tree is chosen to be danced around, and there are even more bonfires that night because it’s also Beltane. Harry gives the bonfire walk one try before he hides in the castle for the rest of the night. After that much insanity, he sleeps like a stone for one of the few times in his life.

No one teaches on second May, either. Harry is not surprised. He’s just amazed anyone over the age of fourteen is capable of moving, much less lifting a wand.

Harry thinks he’s doing okay with West Saxon English until he gets past identifying basic nouns, items, foods, boy, girl, woman, man, animals, and whatever else he comes across. That only involves memorization and not mixing up the words with Castellano, Gaelic, Norn, and Norse, the other languages that are common in the castle. Then he runs into the language-based brick wall again.

Salazar is almost rabid about making certain Harry can speak a language aside from Parseltongue, concentrating on Spanish—Castellano, Sal insists on calling it—and West Saxon English. The latter means getting Rowena’s help.

The alphabet isn’t difficult, and he rather likes the letters ash, eth, and thorn, but Harry has no idea why J, K, Q, V, and Z are missing. The W, wynn, looks like a special sort of lowercase p, and G is called yogh. Rowena tells him that the Latin alphabet doesn’t have any of those missing letters but the G, V, and the Z. The Z is only included to acknowledge the Greek. Harry makes the mistake of asking why.

“K is the Greek letter kappa, and at first, the Romans used it for the letters C, K, and your Q, which held a hard G-sound in Latin, like the Greek gamma. The letter Q is Semitic and Etruscan—Roman predecessors—who used it as qw to create sounds like you would hear in the English cwén, which is spelled with the letters Ce and Wynn. Then the Romans got rid of the K and the Q, replacing it with C and G. V is also Semitic, and is used interchangeably with the sound you call U, which is a Phoenician letter. Latin has no juh-sound. Z is the Greek zeta, but in Latin it is also G, R, Di, and Dz.”

Harry stares at Rowena once Salazar is done translating. “Just so you know? I’m probably going to need you to repeat that more than twice.”

Then Rowena introduces words in Latin that Salazar has to translate: genus, declinationem and coniugationem. He’s not certain what is even meant by genus, but Harry understands the other two just fine. Declination and conjugation, the varying forms that words can take. Rowena is talking about grammar.

He is so fucked.

“You look like you are trying to eat something foul,” Salazar comments.

“I was terrible at grammar when it was my own language,” Harry responds. “At declinationem and coniugationem, I mean,” he adds when Salazar gives him another curious look.

Salazar glares at Rowena. “Non loquor Graeca!”

“Oh, I know that one! You don’t speak Greek!” It was less knowing the middle word and more understanding the context, but Harry doesn’t care. He understood it!


Rowena shakes her head. “Grammatica. Ars e verba.”

“Ah. Your grammar is a Greek term, grammatici, meaning the art of words, but I believe the better translation is the technique of crafting letters and words,” Salazar tells him.

Harry nods. He already knows that Apparition is to Desplazarse is to West Saxon English’s Síðian, comparative to Gaelic’s a Bhodadh and Latin’s Itinerantur, and that all of them are verbs that mean ‘to move’ or ‘to travel’ except Apparition, which Salazar says is from the Latin appariationem and just means ‘appearance.’ Harry is resigned to the idea that a lot of the words he thinks of as normal really don’t make sense given their origins, but he’s starting to think that West Saxon English might break his brain.

Síðoan is a weak form of the verb for travel, which is a concept that makes no sense at all. It just gets worse when he discovers that there are fifteen different forms of that same word, and they’re all used in different ways.

“How?” Harry wails at Salazar, letting him interpret for Rowena. “How the fuck does that even work?”

“Hari, I barely understand this language,” Salazar replies dryly, and proceeds to translate for whatever Rowena says next. “This will be a blended explanation, so listen closely. When we are speaking of things occurring now: I síđe; you síđest; he, it, or she síđaþ; we or they síđaþ.”

Harry writes that down and then has to start over when he mixes up Eth and Thorn. They’re useful letters, but it’s really hard to hear a difference in sound unless Thorn is the first letter of a word.

“Okay. That…makes sense. I guess. I don’t understand why they can’t use síđe for every single one of those.”

“It involves genus—a Latin word for Greek’s genos—and inflexión, and no, I’ve not figured out their notion of inflexiones, either. Castellano only has three forms of genus, whether you refer directly to your subject or indirectly: human, female, and things that are not human.”

Harry stares at him. “I can’t tell if that’s brilliant, or really fucked up.”

“Blame Rome—ah, Rowena understood part of that. She claims that there are only three genus for English, as well, and they are the same as Castellano.”

Harry looks at what he’s written already. “Yes, but she said there were fifteen words for síđian. Fifteen! If we’re talking about ‘go’ then my English has past tense—happened in the past—happening now, or will happen. Went, gone, go, going, goes, will go! We don’t change the words for this genus shit, either.”

Salazar tells Rowena what Harry said, who just seems amused. “That does sound more efficient, yes,” he translates for her. “But if you master this language, which is a sister tongue to Bavarian, Norn, and Norse, you will be capable at once of understanding much of the languages around you.”
Harry raises both eyebrows. “Okay. That sounds useful.”

Salazar averts his gaze. “People and objects have three genus forms in Castellano, yes, but there are, uh, over forty ways to apply coniugationem to a verb in Castellano.”

“Fucking forty?” When Sal nods, Harry gives up and settles in to try and figure out the damned difference between each version of síðian. Fifteen sounds a lot more reasonable than forty. If he weren’t surrounded by these languages, hearing them every day, he knows he’d never learn any of this.

At least scol is easy enough to remember. English’s word for school hasn’t changed much.

Harry stumbles onto the problem of weights and measures by accident. Salazar asks him if he would like shelves to place his absolute hodgepodge of notes, quills, inkpots, blank books, and books borrowed from the tiny library on so that Harry isn’t sleeping with them. He says yes and asks for something about three feet wide and five feet high, which Sal seems to understand well enough. It’s when he mentions it being fifteen inches deep that Salazar looks at Harry as if he just started babbling on like Trelawney.

“Hari,” Salazar begins, his expression screwing up in dismay, “what sort of measurement system are you using?”

“It’s the Imperial measurement system, and you have no idea what that is.” Harry flops back down onto his lumpy bed. He hadn’t realized measurements would be a problem. “How do you measure things by length in 990, Sal?”

Salazar takes a breath. “We had to vote on this during our first year as to what system of measurement we would use. The Norse and Danes have no standard unit of measurement. The Franks use old Roman standards; Bavaria is under the control of the Roman Empire, so that is what Rowena knows. The English have their own system of measurement, as do the Scots. I know Castile’s system of measurement with some knowledge of the old Roman system. Given our location, the size of England’s kingdom, and the fact that we knew many of our students were going to be of English origin at first, we settled on using the English measurements, which are based on the old northern Saxon measurements of length—Rowena was angry that Bavaria didn’t know the old measurements any longer.”

Harry lifts his head. “That was really informative, but it didn’t actually tell me how to measure things.”

“ping,” Salazar corrects absently. “Come with me. I’ll have to show you.”

Harry gets up, shoves his feet into his boots, grabs a quill, ink, and a piece of paper, and follows Salazar. They go over to the classroom Salazar uses, though Harry has yet to see him teach. Sal probably doesn’t have time to translate for Harry and teach his students. Maybe when he understands language better, Harry will get to find out whatever it is that Salazar does in this room.

Salazar rummages among his shelves until he pulls out several long strings marked by knots and lays it out on the table. “This is a foot,” he says, indicating the string that has the widest gap between knots.

Harry frowns and places his wand between the knots. “More than twelve inches. Maybe thirteen. Our foot is twelve inches as a standardized measurement.”

“Get used to this one.” Salazar glares at the strings. Harry doesn’t think Sal likes the English
measurements at all, but if Salazar can learn them, so can Harry.

Salazar indicates the string with the second-smallest gaps. “An English foot is divided into four equal parts called a palm. This is one palm, or a quarter of one foot. Four palms is one foot.”

“Right,” Harry says, baffled. He looks at his wand again, judging the distance. That’s a bit more than thirteen inches—thirteen inches and one-eighth, maybe? He writes that down and does the math that he was good at in primary school, even if he had to deliberately cock-up his tests to keep his grades down. Dividing thirteen and one-eighth into fourths would be three inches and three-eighths of a foot. “Three point three inches of a foot is a palm, then.” It sounds nice and precise. Sort of.

Salazar rubs at his temple. “You’re converting it, but I’m the one getting the headache.”

“No, don’t—you need to understand this. Don’t mind my complaints,” Salazar says. “I just hate this measuring system. Here.” He points to the string with the smallest gaps between knots. “There are twelve thumbs in a foot, as well. The distance between these knots is one thumb.”

“One point one inch. One and one-eighth,” Harry says. “I really need to convert this to metric later, too.”

“What is that?” Salazar asks.

“Oh, it’s a base-ten system of measurement. It’s easier, but we were taught both at the same time in my first school, so it’s all a complete pain in the arse.”

Harry writes down a cubit, which is two feet, or twenty-six point four inches; an elne, which is four feet in English or four feet and four inches in Imperial measurement; a rod is fifteen feet in English or sixteen feet five inches in Imperial; a furlong is ten rods, or one hundred fifty feet, which is really one hundred sixty-five feet in Imperial.

He scowls down at the paper. A furlong is supposed to be forty rods. Why he knows that, he has no bloody idea. Here, though, an acre is four rods by forty rods, or thirty-six thousand square feet. Ten rods definitely wouldn’t be enough to measure out an acre of land.

Now his head hurts. He hopes he’s done these conversions correctly so far; he has to learn this, and that means knowing equivalent measurements until he gets used to the new-old system.

Harry gives up on more conversions, saving that for later, and moves on to weights of measurement. He loathes them already because grains to penig to penigas to yntsa to yntsan to pund to pundas to sester to pundas again to amber to ambra to mitta, or great sester, makes no fucking sense at all. He has no way to convert this. Pund is probably the old word for pound, but Harry doubts it’s the same weight.

“This is all based on grains? That is completely ridiculous,” Harry says. “What does Castile use?”

Salazar looks like he wants to put his head down on the tabletop. “Punto, which is one-twelfth of a linea. One linea is one-twelfth of a pulgada. A pulgada is one-thirty-sixth of a vara. One pie is twelve pulgadas; one vara is three pulgadas. One pasa is sixty pulgadas. One legua, a league, is five thousand varas.”

Harry is thinking of joining Salazar in face-planting onto the table. “I have no idea what the fuck any of that means.”
“A vara is a rod. Pulgada means inch. Linea means line. Punto means point. Pie means foot. Pulgadas means feet. Paso means pace,” Salazar says. “No, none of these align with the English system, which is why I asked about your measurements for those shelves.” He gets out a knotted cord with its ends marked with blue dye, stretching it out next to the knotted cord that represents Saxon English feet.

Harry glances back and forth between them. “Okay, so...the English foot is larger, but the Castellano foot is even shorter than what I’m used to.”

Salazar nods and puts all of the cords away. “Everyone was in such a hurry to abandon Roman standards when the Empire crumbled. Thus, we all have to work with what I’ve shown you, and it is rare that any two systems of measurement are alike.”

“How does anyone ever get anything done?” Harry asks, and Salazar laughs.

* * * * *

Harry learns more about Orellana, Fortunata, and Salazar by simple osmosis of sharing rooms with them. He does think about requesting his own room, but he’s not an adult, and he still can’t remember how to ask someone where the nearest bathroom is half the time. He also likes Sal and his family, no matter how many of his fellow Gryffindors would be shrieking about Harry literally living with the enemy.

Orellana’s full name is Orellana Constanza, Marquésa de León, Casa de Luz de Sol. The last part means House of Sunlight, which Harry thinks is a beautiful name. Fortunata wants to take the name of her mother’s House as Heir to that side of the bloodline, but can’t thanks to some really stupid political reasons—aside from the fact that Orellana might never have another kid.

When he asks, Salazar tells Harry in a frank, annoyed tone that his father Pantzeska had the indecency to die three days after Salazar turned twelve. That meant a swift marriage to an available wife of suitable noble blood, and then the immediate production of an Heir for the Deslizarse House. Salazar and Orellana were engaged at ten, but originally they weren’t supposed to get married until they were fourteen. Salazar tried to point out at the time that he had already arranged to wed, and his sister was in the midst of doing the same, but he was overruled by both the monarchy and Salazar’s mother.

“Bastards.” Salazar spits into the fire in the sitting room. “An unnecessary rush, and it nearly killed Orellana.”

“How did you—I mean, you two seem to like each other,” Harry says. “I read once that a lot of noble marriages were just...you got married because it had to be done.”

“It did have to be done, yes, but fortunately I’ve known Salazar since we were very small,” Salazar translates for Orellana as the conversation shifts back and forth. “We were able to choose each other. There were far worse marriages I could have been forced into, and Salazar has always been kind.”
“Okay…” Harry has had to teach everyone that word just to avoid a lot of confused looks. He just can’t seem to abandon it; it’s useful. Besides, it even translates in Parseltongue. “Then why are you up here in Scot—uh, Alba—uh, Moray!”

Sal laughs at him for making the verbal trek through kingdoms until Harry found the right one. “When I was fourteen years old and Fortunata still a niñita, I heard rumors through magical circles that someone was creating a school for magic in north of Briton. I was interested at once, and with certain people already pressuring for Orellana to bear another child while still too young…”

Salazar reaches out and takes Orellana’s hand. “We made the decision to come here. My sister, Estefania, had made a good marriage by then to a man suitably pliant to her whims, as my father had been for my mother. It meant she could properly take on the title of Marquésa, and I left full control of our estates to her capable, rather terrifying hands. She likes the life of a noble; I do not.

“Orellana and I traveled until it seemed we were going to run out of island. Then we met Godric and Sedemai in the kingdom’s capital of Inverness. Godric was the one who found the path that brought us to this castle. Rowena and her daughters dwelt here already, as did Helga, though she was all but a fugitive at the time. Imagine my surprise when Myrddin told me he’d been waiting for my arrival, and couldn’t I have hurried it up a bit?” Salazar shakes his head. “He’s still a bastard.”

“Wait—do you mean Merlin?” Harry asks, startled.

Salazar considers it. “Perhaps. The sounds are similar enough. You’ll get to meet him one day, I’m certain. He visits Hogewáþ when whim carries his feet here.”

Orellana smiles. “Imagine our surprise when we discovered that Salazar was one of those who were meant to be creating this school.”

“Which meant that myself, Rowena, Helga, and Godric could establish the rules we most wished to see,” Salazar says. “No restrictions on who would be taught, be they nobility or common-born. No improper ideas that only the strongest of magic-workers deserved to learn. This school will teach anyone with magical talent. Prior to Hogewáþ, there were no schools of magical learning, only family teachers or apprenticeships. There might be such a school far to the East, but if so, none will admit to its existence. Hogewáþ is the only place of its kind in the whole of Europe.”

“You still haven’t told him why you’re only allowed to visit León once per year,” Orellana says.

“A good point, one that does tie back into our conversation earlier this week regarding defence and murder.” Sal leans back in his chair. “You’ve been here long enough to know that we all learn our magic at drastically different ages from what you’re accustomed to. Magical nobility tend to receive lessons as soon as they’re old enough to hold a wand and point it in the proper direction. One of the infantes, what you would call a prince, decided to embrace the dubious pleasures of necromancy—and hermanito, he was not doing good things. As the Marqués de León, it was my duty to demand he stop and atone for what crimes he’d committed. He refused, and raised the bodies of his dead victims against me.

“I lost my temper.” Salazar glances at the fire. Harry can’t figure out what kind of expression is on his face, but it’s definitely not happiness. “The kingdom couldn’t imprison or execute me, given what one of their own had done, but I’d killed a magical prince of the blood. My titles remain, but Estefania rules in truth.”

“Good for you,” Harry says, to Salazar’s surprise. “No, I’m serious. People have wanted me to kill a Dark magician since I was an infant, Sal. At least when you killed your first Dark idiot, you were
fully trained for it, and you knew you were doing the right thing.”

“I do not want to know why your teachers expected you to kill an evil magician in infancy,” Sal mutters, but Harry knows he’ll eventually start asking questions to find out.

“What did you call me?” Harry asks to distract him. “What does hermanito mean?”

“Oh—I—” Salazar smiles at Orellana, who just gives him a smug look, before he faces Harry again. “It means ‘little brother.’ I won’t do it again, if it offends—”

“It doesn’t!” Harry says quickly, wincing at the near-shout of denial. “I’m sorry. I mean, it doesn’t bother me. I don’t really…”

Harry thinks of the Burrow and its abundance of children, siblings who would never truly be even if he’d once longed that such a family would adopt him. He thinks of Sirius, who wants him but can’t have him because of the Ministry. He tries not to think of the Dursleys at all.

“I lost my only real family when I was a year and three months old, Sal,” Harry says in a low voice, staring down at the beautiful woven rug that covers the stone floor in the sitting room. “I don’t mind.”

*          *          *          *

On the fifteenth of May, there is something called Pentecoste, which is supposed to be a Church holiday but seems to be a thinly disguised reason to have another week of feasts and parties. The idea of another week of parties sounds exhausting.

“Can I stay here?” Harry asks. He doesn’t want to go to Inverness, which would be a first-time visit. Their primary language is Gaelic, and he doesn’t know that language any more than he’s mastered English or Castellano.

Sal gives him a concerned look. “You would be alone in the castle.”

“I’ve been alone before, and I can cook,” Harry says. “Please. I’m used to one holiday, Sal. Just one, once a year. This will be seventeen days of that in two months’ time. I will go with you next year, but this year, I’d rather hide in a fucking tree stump.”

“One. Holiday.” Salazar grinds his teeth. “What were they all doing with their time?”

“Working.”

“It sounds as if they were working themselves to death.” Salazar sighs and shakes his head. “That is no way to live, but I am not going to force you to attend this festival.”

“Thank you,” Harry says, though by the end of the week he’s wishing he’d gone, even if it would have been overwhelming.

He is alone in Hogwarts. A completely empty and very large castle. He did not think this through.

If Harry sleeps in the kitchen the last two nights so that he doesn’t have to dare the stairs, he isn’t going to be telling anyone. Ever.
When everyone gets back from Pentecoste, Salazar finally convinces Harry that yes, there is such a thing as harmless Blood Magic. “I just want to find out if you’re some descendent of mine,” Salazar insists. “It takes a drop of blood on an enchanted sheet of parchment, Hari. You may burn it yourself afterwards, if it calms you.”

“Oh, okay. Fine. Let’s do the drop of blood thing,” Harry says, which makes Sal’s face scrunch up in an entertaining way as he expresses his displeasure in hearing his magic referred to in such a cavalier fashion. Pushing Sal’s buttons is sort of…it’s kind of fun.

Harry watches as Sal uses a sterilized sewing needle to prick his finger, letting a single drop of blood fall on one edge of the parchment. It feels like strong magic to his senses, but not harmful. He accepts the re-sterilized needle, jabs his finger too hard, and lets a drop of blood fall on the opposite side of the parchment.

They both watch as faint red lines travel across the parchment until they meet, connecting one dot of blood to the other. “We’re family?” Harry asks.

Sal is still frowning down at the parchment. “Yes, but I’m not sure how. This is one of the faintest readings I’ve ever seen. Perhaps a great-grandnephew through my sister’s line? It is not a direct line of descent. You are not a great-grandchild.”

It’s a gap of a thousand years, but Harry doesn’t care. He’s related by blood to Salazar and Fortunata, and to Orellana by marriage.

He has family again, and it’s the happiest he’s been in years.
As summer progresses, Harry has good days and bad days. Most of them are good days, when there are no missteps with his rudimentary West Saxon English or Castellano, and he doesn’t need to drag Salazar with him everywhere he goes. He also remembers that the seasonal calendar is different, and that it really is summer, not late spring. In fact, no one seems to know what to make of the idea of spring or autumn. When Harry describes the time period for spring, the closest word anyone has is lencten. No wonder Salazar was trying to figure out why there was a “water” season. Parseltongue must have been translating spring for him when Salazar said it; it’s understood more to be planting season. When Harry describes autumn’s time period, that gets him the word hærfest. All right, then; planting season and harvest season it is.

Then there are the bad days, when Harry drastically misunderstands something that everyone else finds normal—like swearing. Apparently, swearing is just fine as long as you’re talking about body parts and excrement, but religion—no matter whose religion—is absolutely not to be used. That one was sort of mortifying to learn about when saying, “My God” in the kitchen during supper reduced the room to complete and utter silence.

Understanding it is harder. Salazar tells him that to speak of a god is to invite their attention.

Harry just stares at him. “Uh, but…Sal, I’m not religious. I don’t know if I believe in God. Any sort of god.”

Salazar rubs the bridge of his nose, but it’s not his gesture of frustration. He usually insults modern Hogwarts’ lessons for that. This is Sal trying to figure out concepts that neither of them have ever had to discuss with another living being before.

“Much like swimming, I’ve never met anyone who does not believe that there is not some sort of divine being watching over man and magical being alike,” Salazar finally says. “No one can force you to believe such, but you may one day experience things that change your mind. This doesn’t mean you must name them, or take up a particular religious calling. If you are fortunate, or
unfortunate enough, to meet a deity in person, ask what they would prefer to be called, as is polite for greeting anyone new.”

Harry waits nervously for Salazar to make light of the situation, but it never happens. “Sal? Have you ever…met…something?”

Salazar sighs and puts his arm around Harry. “I have sensed something before. I did not pursue it; I’m a mortal man of fragile flesh, and I tempt the fates enough as it is.” Then he says, “To be polite in this time, never speak the name of a god if such is known unless you literally desire to speak with them. Do not use the term God before Christians, as they feel you are summoning their Maker directly. It is a rare thing to hear another swear upon their god, reserved for holy occasions, or when there is a desire to draw forth divine blessing.”

“That’s weird. I mean, it makes sense, but it’s weird,” Harry replies. Salazar smiles, but Harry doesn’t think he finds it weird at all.

It’s still weird.

Swimming lessons are really not going apace, since Harry doesn’t care about swimming, never wants to try it again, and fuck swimming for good measure. He’ll live in a bloody desert if that’s what it takes to avoid that set of lessons.

Somehow, despite all of the hissed conversations and translations and utter multitudes of questions, Harry never quite got around to telling Salazar that “sort-of swim” meant “swimming with magical plant-based assistance.” Everyone learned this the hard way when Godric, completely unaware of Harry’s utter lack of swimming, picked Harry up during a duel and chucked him into the Black Lake.

To be fair, Harry sort of deserved it. Godric really needed to specify every time whether snakes were allowed in a duel or not.

The only thing that prompted Harry to wildly claw his way up like a drunken swan was the fact that the lake was cold. He surfaced just long enough to tell Godric he was a complete fucking arsehole. Then Harry learned that he didn’t know how to tread water by promptly sinking again.

Godric fished him out with magic. Salazar yelled at Godric for being stupid and at Harry for not being more specific before he broke down into Castellano to yell at Godric some more.

Harry decided to make the day better by promptly having flashbacks about every single horrid part of the Triwizard Tournament, which was most of it.

That is when Harry learns that Calming Draughts already exist in 990. He recognizes first its distinctive flavor. Then he realizes he’s inside, warm and dry, and his chest aches like he just ran across most of Little Whinging to escape Dudley’s gang.

“Was it the water?” Orellana asks. She’s kneeling in front of him. Helga is sitting next to him, leaning against his arm while holding his hand. Harry glances up long enough to watch Salazar stalk back and forth at the far end of the Receiving Hall.

Harry shakes his head. “No, not really. I didn’t have time to…to think about it.”

“Considering you were more concerned with cursing Godric than swimming?” Helga squeezes his hand. “I admire your priorities, but swimming would have been the better choice.”

Harry feels his face heat. “I can’t—I can’t actually swim. At all.”
Salazar whirls around, bits of green and silver light flicking in and out of existence around his eyes. “Not at all. Then what created ‘sort-of-swimming?’”

“Gillyweed.” Harry tries ducking his head, but that doesn’t help. It just means he’s staring at Orellana. “No one actually…no one ever bothered to find out if I knew how to swim before deciding what the Second Task for that stupid Tournament was going to be. Everyone just assumed that I knew.”

“Just as we did.” Salazar heaves a sigh. “I thought you meant a bare understanding of swimming, not a complete lack. I’m sorry.”

Harry gives Sal a baffled look. “Why? I could have actually said.”

“What made you panic?” Helga asks before Salazar and Harry can lapse into hissing that would be part-discussion, part-argument.

“I wasn’t panicking. I was—” Harry pauses; he doubts a term like flashback will translate in any language. “I was remembering panic.”

“Oh!” Salazar starts to look calmer. “Like a soldier who has seen battle, and still remembers it at odd or badly timed moments years later?”

Harry nods. “Yes. Exactly like that.”

Salazar finally walks over to sit down on the other bench. “Hari. Have you ever had such about the magician you spoke of? This Quirrell?”

“Not…not really?” Harry hedges. “I mean, not him at all. The fact that he had a disembodied version of Voldemort stuck on the back of his head? That I have nightmares about.”

“That is…” Orellana’s nose wrinkles, but she doesn’t turn away. “That sounds unpleasant.”

“He was drinking unicorn blood,” Harry supplies, and listens to the musical quality of Helga losing her temper in Norse.

“What about this slain monster in your second year of schooling?” Salazar asks.

Harry shakes his head. “I only ever dream that I’m too slow and my friend dies. The rest of it just sort of…I think it happened too quickly.” He is not about to tell Salazar that he has nightmares about a basilisk killing him. He doesn’t think that conversation will go well, and he’s definitely not in the mood.

“And the werewolf?” Orellana asks.

Harry snorts. “He’s my other godfather. It’s not his fault that he forgot his potion that full moon. No, I don’t have werewolf fears.”

“Godfather.” Salazar frowns. “God…father. God parent—oh! I know what you mean now. It isn’t translating into Parseltongue, as I think we are referring to different concepts! You mean a compater!”

That is not enlightening. “A what?”

“Gefædera,” Helga muses. “That is the English term. It means the male who sponsored your baptism.”
“We didn’t use the word that way?” At least now Harry knows why it wouldn’t translate into Parseltongue. He isn’t thinking about baptisms when he says godfather. He’s thinking about a guardian. “In my time, a godparent, a compater or my gefædera, was the man chosen by my parents to raise me, to be a parent figure, if something happened to them.”

“And they weren’t allowed to do so.” Salazar’s expression is flat with displeasure. “Due to your Council’s lack of granting one a trial, and the other for being a werewolf.”

“Yes.” Harry thinks on it. “What is a godmother called, then?”

“Commater,” Salazar tells him.

“If you had one, she would be your gefædere,” Helga adds. “Do you have such?”

“If I do, no one ever told me,” Harry replies.

Just like no one told him about Sirius until they had no choice.

To distract himself, Harry asks, “What about you? Have any of you dealt with this, uh, remembered panic?”

Orellana looks thoughtful. “I have fought in battle very few times. I am capable of defending myself and others, but it is not my strength. I think on it, sometimes, but not in a way that causes me remembered terror.”

“I am often too busy enjoying myself in a battle to think overly much on terror. But if one I care for is in harm’s way?” Helga nods. “That will cause moments of remembered panic, even if I or another kept them from harm.”

Salazar meets Harry’s eyes. “I saw true war at twelve and fourteen, and there have been skirmishes here in Moray since that time. Yes, I have them, both waking and sleeping.”

“How do you—”

“Mind Magic,” Salazar answers before Harry can finish asking. “It helps to keep wakeful moments of remembering at bay, under control, so I never lose awareness of where I am. It assists with dreams, as well, but not all of the time.”

Harry thinks that sounds a lot more useful right now than swimming lessons. “Am I going to learn that?”

The way Salazar, Orellana, and Helga all trade odd looks isn’t reassuring, but the only thing Helga says is, “Yes. You will.”

* * * *

His handwriting improves immensely when Rowena discovers another gap in his education, and teaches him how to properly sharpen a quill and keep it that way. Godric gives him a tiny knife in a leather sheath, perfect for quill-sharpening, which Harry keeps in his boot for lack of any other idea of where to put it.

Harry learns why Rowena sometimes makes him nervous when she sits down with him one day in
the Receiving Hall. Diego is chasing Hedwig and barking in delight while the owl teases him. Harry worried, at first, but Orellana says it is the only thing that has made their dog willingly exert himself in months. Hedwig thinks it’s a grand game.

“I shall tell you three things today, Harry Potter,” Rowena says, which makes all of the hair on the back of his neck stand up. It doesn’t feel like a threat so much as a portent he’s not going to be happy about.

“Of myself: I am from the Duchy of Bavaria, and hold an estate there. My eldest boy runs it in my stead.”

“You have a child old enough to run an estate?” Harry asks, and then apologizes.

Rowena merely smiles. “There is not a thing wrong with asking questions. Like Salazar, I was forced to marry early, though not so dreadfully early as twelve. I was fifteen. My husband was not a man I cared for, but he never harmed me, and for that I am grateful. Perhaps Bernardus feared that my magic was more powerful than his own. Perhaps he was merely a good man, but we did not speak much beyond what was required for child-making. He was away often, preferring to fight on behalf of the Empire. I gave birth to my eldest, Houdin, at sixteen. My son is now twenty, and is a married man with a good wife who has already borne their first son with no difficulties. My son is non-magical, which I regret, but Houdin does not mind the lack.

“I’m glad you met Alicia, as she is about to travel south to attend to her magical apprenticeship in Strathclyde. I was twenty-one at her birth. I bore Helena, my youngest, at age twenty-four. She is old enough to remember when her father went off to fight his last battle in the name of Christianity. It was a battle they lost, and his body was not returned to us. I came to Hogewáþ the moment I could escape Bavaria with my daughters to avoid forced remarriage to another noble. That was in Aprilis of 984. Houdin served his apprenticeship under a good man while a loyal steward retained the family holdings for Houdin to claim when that apprenticeship was done, all of which kept the duchy in our bloodline.”

“You’re telling me an awful lot that I don’t think you necessarily tell to others,” Harry says.

Rowena nods. “You are correct. I do not. I hold three magical masteries. Do you know what that means?”

“I’m starting to,” Harry replies. “Like one of these magical apprenticeships you’re talking about.”

“Yes, exactly. My masteries are in the magic of the Written Word, Magical Mathematics, and in Mind Magic.”

“Mind Magic.” Harry swallows. “So you can pry into my thoughts?”

“If I wished. It would be ill-mannered and unkind of me to do so,” Rowena says. “All magic-workers have a basic mastery of Mind Magic, Harry. One of our first magical lessons is on focus, concentration, the knowledge of how to keep our minds quiet, and how to keep others from intruding.”

Harry frowns. “I’ve never been taught any of that. I don’t even think I’ve ever read anything about that.”

“Which I find greatly concerning, but it is not a concern I can rectify for anyone else,” Rowena says testily. “I can only deal with what is in front of me now.”

“Which is what?” Harry asks, wary.
Rowena holds out her hand, palm up, in invitation, just as Helga did on his first night in the castle. Harry reaches out and lets his hand rest over hers. “You are learning magic from all of us, Harry. As you’ve already surmised, your magical training is not where it should be for a young man your age.”

Harry flushes and glances away. “No, it isn’t.”

“Stop that; this is not your fault,” Rowena chastises him in a gentle voice. “We will remedy that lack. It will be harder for you than others, as you must also learn to speak a variety of languages just to communicate with the residents of the isles, let alone the four of us. The hardest part comes first. You must learn Mind Magic, and you must learn it well.”

“Aside from the obvious: why?”

Rowena squeezes his hand and gives him a look of regret. “You must master your thoughts and recover your sense of self. For we four magic-holders of Hogewáþ to remove the soul shard from your body, you must have a true and firm grasp of what is you, and what is not.”

“Oh.” Harry tries not to wince. “You don’t think it’s going to be easy.”

Rowena shakes her head. “No. I think it may be one of the most difficult things you will ever do in your entire life.”

They must have been waiting for his language skills to get to a certain point. Now all six of the teachers in the castle, four Founders and two wives who should never have been forgotten—Harry is truly angry about this and resolves that he is going to fucking well fix it the moment he goes home—begin teaching him Mind Magic. Harry knows it’s step one in getting rid of the stupid Horcrux thing in his head, but he doesn’t understand it. So far, all that seems to be required is that he sit somewhere and listen to everything around him, but not anything inside his own head.

“Líce eemetiges min geþanc?”

“Ne. Eemetig,” Rowena bites out.

Not empty. Okay, then. Emptying his mind is bad.

“I’d just like someone to tell me why sitting and listening to other things is a...a thing!” Harry exclaims.

Helga is the one to finally put it into words that make sense. “You are listening to the outside world while also paying attention to what is within,” she says, though Salazar has to translate half of it for Harry. “If you—and only you—are paying attention to the sounds around you, you are not consciously thinking of anything except listening to those sounds. If you hear thoughts during this time that seem different, that try to distract, that suggest things you were not contemplating...that is the purpose of this. You must learn to know which thoughts are your own, and which are not.”

“That Horcrux can think?” Harry asks, horrified, and gets to watch two Founders give each other guilty looks as they realize they never quite explained that part.

A soul jar can not only think on its own, it can try to overpower his thoughts. A soul jar can attempt to control him by messing with his feelings. His mother’s magical protection keeps it from doing so, though if Voldemort had tried to use the connection of the soul jar—“The fucking what!”—to enter Harry’s mind, he would have been successful, if only for a short time. The sacrificial magic should have prevented Voldemort from ever doing so, but Helga tells him something weakened it. It was not weak to begin with, she reassures him, but something damaged
that protection.

Great.

“Shit, no wonder that old magician wanted me out of Surrey,” Harry whispers. “No one has ever mentioned anything like this!”

“Do you think it’s a matter of a lack of education?” Salazar asks.

Harry shrugs. He doesn’t know. He’s also not in the mood to contemplate the idea that someone did know, and then deliberately didn’t tell him. In his experience, people never keep secrets for good reasons.

Yes, but that old man didn’t tell you he was going to magically send you one thousand years into the past, his brain mutters traitorously.

No, he didn’t, Harry agrees, not sure if he’s talking to the soul jar or himself. But he probably saved my fucking life, so I’ll put up with the inconvenience.

He shared a connection to Voldemort. No, he shares a connection with Voldemort. The difference is that with a thousand years between them, Voldemort has no way of mucking about with Harry’s mind.

“He knew. He knew, or he guessed,” Harry says, feeling chilled. “That old magician knew Voldemort could do it. Voldemort could have used that connection and made me—hurt someone, probably. He sent me away so that couldn’t happen. I’ll have to thank him for that.”

Salazar raises an eyebrow. “You still speak of such as when you are going home, not if.”

“Well…that old magician did say I would come back,” Harry says. “He just said it would take a while.”

“A while’ is not a very specific period of time, Hari.”

“Maybe not,” Harry admits. “But I’d rather be stuck here for decades than have to deal with the idea that Voldemort used me to murder someone.”

He isn’t sleeping well again, something that seems to run with the change of season. He’s heard of people having trouble sleeping under a full moon, but his body doesn’t give a damn about the moon. It’s getting warmer, so he’s awake. It’s sodding awful.

The first time Hermione and Ron voiced envy over Harry’s ability to stay awake for days at a time, Harry let loose with such a rare (for him) stream of profanity that the older students in the Common Room applauded, Prefects included.

At least he doesn’t have to take his Invisibility Cloak with him anymore when he’s too restless to sleep. There is no curfew in the way he understands it. Cuevrefeu is the closest word anyone knows, a frances term that just means ‘cover fire.’ It took Harry a few minutes to puzzle that one out, since it definitely doesn’t mean what he learnt from a few illicitly watched Muggle action films. Hearth fires are banked at night to make sure there is hot ash in the morning, and to be certain popping embers don’t burn a house down; cuevrefeu means to do that.

The idea that anyone needed to be restricted to a set bed schedule drew incredulous looks from pretty much everyone in the castle. People here tend to wander off to bed once the music and talking after supper winds down, sleep for a while, get up for a few hours to do things, or just
gather to talk more, and then go back to sleep until the sun rises. Only the really young kids like Galiena tend to sleep through an entire night.

At first, his persistent insomnia loved this schedule. Then it decided that Harry was going to sleep through one part of the night or the other, but not both—when it let him sleep at all.

Harry is sitting on the lowest step of the Grand Stair after two in the morning, sulking, when Godric passes by and notices him. “Everyone else has returned to bed. Are you not sleeping?”

“No. I don’t sleep well. You?”

“Whenever I cannot sleep, I run. Do you want to come with me?” Godric offers.

“Okay. Why not.” It’s something to do that isn’t dwelling on things he can’t fix, or worrying about the soul jar, or actually wanting to talk with Hermione about corrected Latin and West Saxon English and Castellano and everything. He finally understands why she’s academically mad, and she’s completely beyond his reach.

Harry goes running with Godric that night and realizes that he has blundered. Godric is insane. It’s after midnight, and they’re running through the Forbidden Forest. Everyone calls it the Dark Forest instead of Forbidden, a name change he’s still trying to figure out. Harry follows Godric as the man chases up thestrals and cranky centaurs, most of his efforts centering on trying not to be left behind. Godric is bloody fast.

If Harry learns anything useful during that mad dash, it’s that his new ability to see more colors means he has excellent night vision. Before Helga fixed his eyes, he’d be tripping over every rock and root, but now he can see them—there are more shades of blue, violet, grey, and silver than ever. It’s still dark, but he isn’t fumbling around in blackness.

Harry is gasping for breath and feeling like he’s going to be sick by the time they stop on the outskirts of the local village, which Godric says is called Castleview. “Not Hogsmeade?” he asks once he can form words without vomiting onto his boots.

“Castleview,” Godric repeats, possibly because he has no idea what to make of the word Hogsmeade. “We will go back now.”

Harry takes off his jumper and ties it around his waist before he overheats on top of the potential vomiting. He’s probably going to regret this, but he definitely isn’t thinking about soul jars when he’s trying to keep pace with a lunatic. “Okay.”

* * * *

Rowena is still teaching Harry how to write in the language. That’s a lot harder than just learning to speak West Saxon, or learn the letters and the fact that some of them sound very, very different, even if they look the same. Stupid, nightmarish grammar.

He doesn’t want to forget how to write in his English, though. If he’s here long enough, with all of the languages he’s surrounded by—Harry thinks it’s a valid concern to have. Along with the West Saxon practice, Harry starts devoting scrolls for written letters to Hermione and Ron. He tells Hermione about languages and culture; he tells Ron about Shatranj, and how he is going to mercilessly slaughter Ron at chess as long as he doesn’t mix up the old rules with the modern ones.
Maybe Ron and Hermione will never read these letters because they won’t survive the centuries. Maybe they will, and it will fill in the gaps their friendship now has.

With every month that passes, that gap gets bigger. Harry thinks on “a while” often, and wonders if there is a point where kids and adults just can’t be friends any longer.

“I don’t see why not. We are friends, after all.” Salazar says in response to Harry mentioning it.

“Yeah, but you’re only five years older than I am. It’s different,” Harry argues.

“True, but I’m also your teacher.”

Harry blinks at him. “You are?”

Salazar rolls his eyes. “I hound you about your education, and you think I am not your teacher? You are very unobservant, hermanito.”

“¡Que te den por culo!” Harry retorts.

Salazar just grins. “Better.”

Harry fidgets his way through dinner—supper, fuck, he keeps forgetting—and afterwards, he can’t recall if he ate any of it. He hangs around for that evening’s socializing, which is at least more sedate than usual. Harry gets the feeling that everyone is saving their energy for something big, and he’s the only clueless idiot who has no idea what it is.

Salazar has several musical instruments, and he can play them all, but the lute seems to be his favorite. If he’s playing it with his eyes closed, though, he’s thinking on something. Harry waits for Salazar to open his eyes, focusing on what’s going on around him again, before he walks over and sits down on the floor next to him.

“Oh, so we’re not lingering off in a corner tonight, are we?” Salazar asks, his fingers still dancing over the strings. Harry has no idea how he can pull full notes out of that lute and yet mute the sound at the same time, but he does it.

“When we first met, you talked about trading,” Harry says. “I guess it’s finally occurred to me, what with everything you’ve done…what are we trading for?”

Salazar rests his hand across the lute’s strings to silence them. “Your companionship,” he says, smiling. “That is a coin far more valuable than the pittance I’m offering in return.”

* * * *

Harry practices his language skills by sitting down with Helga and learning the story of her flight from the Orkney Isles, an Earldom in the north still controlled by the Norse. Helga also tells him the fascinating tale of her lineage, most of which seems to involve who killed who for the right to take boats south to kill yet more people. Harry is just glad that if he gets to meet real Vikings, he got Helga and not her grandfather.

“My mother was the Princess Eithne, from the Kingdom of Osraige in Óireann.”
“Where is Éireann?” Harry asks.

“It is the great isle to the west of England and the Cymru kingdoms,” Helga answers.

“Oh! Ireland!” Harry exclaims, and then feels stupid for not recognizing the vocal similarity right away. Helga tilts her head and then nods her agreement.

“My father was Hlodvir Thorfinsson. I am his firstborn daughter, and magical; were I to marry, I would be the preferred Heir to the Earldom of Orkney.” Helga keeps the pace of her words slow so that Harry can keep up. “While women among my people are powerful, it is expected that men will inherit, as they are most often our war leaders. My brother, Sigurd, is the eldest male child, and was next in line to rule when our father died, but he has not yet wed. If I were to marry and bear children, or even adopt them, then in Sigurd’s mind I would become a true threat to his inheritance.”

“He doesn’t understand that you don’t want to marry a man at all, huh?”

Helga smiles and shakes her head. “He believes it a falsehood meant to dissuade him from acting against me. He first tried to kill me in the summer of 984, while our parents were away from the Earldom to visit our overlord, the king of Noregi. My mother died during that journey, and my father, heartbroken, joined her in our ancestral halls soon afterwards.”

Harry tries not to cringe. “I’m really sorry.”

“Thank you,” she replies gravely. “But they are with my kin, and I do not grieve them.”

_I don’t think I’ve ever stopped grieving mine, and I can’t even remember them_, Harry thinks, but he isn’t going to say that to anyone. “Noregi—do you mean Norway?”

Helga makes a face. “Your pronunciation is abominable if you are intending the English interpretation. It is more properly Nahr-hway.”

“Nahr-hway,” Harry repeats dutifully. “All right, so you don’t want the Earldom, Sigurd doesn’t believe you…but you aren’t speaking like Sigurd is in charge of the Earldom.”

Helga smiles again. “He is not. He has spent most of his efforts since our parents’ deaths in fighting three of our uncles, each of whom are trying to claim the Orkney isles over Sigurd. They have wives and Heirs, while Sigurd cannot yet claim to have either.”

“Which means he’s left you alone,” Harry guesses, grinning.

“It is hard to worry about distant competition that is of no bother when you’re at war with three others who each have a small army at their backs,” Helga replies. “But I know Sigurd; he will succeed. We only have one uncle left of those three who challenged him. Sigurd wants the Norðreyjar, Harry, and will do whatever it takes to get them.”

Harry frowns. “You think that once he has the Earldom, Sigurd is going to try to get rid of the rest of his competition.”

“Perhaps. I’m more concerned that he will wish to wage war against Moray to claim more land, but yes, Sigurd’s idea of rivalry may mean that he resumes his attempts to kill me.”

“You know, if I was placing a wager on someone to win a fight, it definitely wouldn’t be your brother,” Harry says. “I have a feeling you’re a lot scarier than he is.”
Helga tilts her head again. “Perhaps, but I do not want the Earldom. Even without braving the potential of dying in childbirth, I still have children to teach. I am far more interested in teaching magic than I am in ruling an earldom whose most common trade is often slaughter. That pleases me, Harry.”

Harry smiles. “I’m glad it does.” He is truly starting to hate what Helga’s reputation has become in his time—as if wanting to teach is some stupid joke.

“I will confide in you something that I haven’t yet considered telling anyone else.” Helga leans in close with a secretive smile.

“All right.” Harry leans forward. “I’m listening, and I won’t tell a soul.”

“You can barely ask for a meal, Harry. I believe you,” Helga says dryly, but her smile is kind. “I wish to change my name. There is no reason why my father should be credited with what I shall do in Hogewáþ. I would prefer to remove myself as far from him, and from Sigurd, as I possibly can.”

“Have you thought of anything yet?”

“In Norse tongue, hugði is a word for belief—for strong thought,” Helga says. “But I am not truly Norse any longer; I am of Hogewáþ in Moray. Le in the Latin is useful for connecting two words. In English, there is puf, which means a quick attack. The full word would be Hugðilepuf—fierce, quick-thought defence.”

“I like it,” Harry says. Helga seems thrilled at his approval; Harry is trying not to feel strange at how he just affirmed a word that will eventually be mauled into Hufflepuff.

Harry has gotten into the terrible habit of chasing Godric through the woods at night. It’s nice to finally have another insomniac around, even if Godric is a lunatic. By the time Harry leans over one night, dry heaving, Godric congratulates him on running through the forest for a solid hour.

Harry flips him off with two raised fingers, a gesture that everyone of this time understands. Godric laughs and then takes pity on Harry, choosing to walk back to the castle.

When he can talk without wheezing, Harry asks Godric how the Founders are supposed to be holding the castle’s magic. “It’s about the four of us,” Godric says. “Take me, for example. My father’s family, of House Griffin, remained here when the rest of the old Roman Empire retreated. This wasn’t the Imperial frontier for them—Briton was home. My father’s family eventually intermarried with a Saxon family, magicians who considered themselves guardians of the doorways.”

“What doorways?” Harry asks, confused.

Godric pauses, probably searching for terms that are easy for Harry to understand. “In certain parts of the world, such as the isles, there are places where magic is strong. Some of them are so strong that they can be used as passageways. Have you heard of the Green Folk in your time?”

“Just as myths,” Harry confesses. “I don’t know if anyone holds true to that in the magical world—but then, I’ve never been to Éireann, either. Unless goblins are Green Folk? House-elves?”

“Goblins are indeed of the Green Folk, but I have no idea what a house-elf is,” Godric says. “The Green Folk are rumored to use these places to pass from one land to the next. If you travel, and a stranger warns you away from certain places at night, be wary. They might be fearful, or they might be warning you of true danger. But that still has not answered your question.”
Godric draws in a breath. “Hogewáþ is a strong point of magic, one of the strongest in the north of the isles. Myrddin harnessed that strength to become a basis for a magical sanctuary. He lived through the worst of the Christian purges after Arthwy’s time. Once Myrddin witnessed the lengths frightened men will go to in order to destroy what they fear, he decided it would become his last task in life to make certain a school remained. There may always be those who wish to destroy magic, but magic has its ways of surviving.”

“The four of us are like points on a magical compass, Harry.” Godric tilts his head, as if listening. “We are tied into those four points. We feel the school’s magic like singing in the blood, whispers that reassure, even if we cannot make out what they say. Helga holds the north; Salazar holds the west; Rowena holds the east. I am of England—and in a sense, still of Rome—so I hold the south.”

“Yes, but why tie the four of you to that magical point?” Harry knows he’s missing something; he just has to find the right question. “Why not just tie the castle to it instead of people?”

“Hogewáþ is tied to that magical point,” Godric replies. “But I understand what you mean.” When Harry looks over at him, Godric is pressing his lips together, his brow furrowed.

“Magic on this isle has been dying since the slaughter at Hadrian’s wall in 532,” Godric says at last. “It is a loss of belief, as the Church converts all to their ways and then claims magic is either devilry or never existed at all. It’s a loss of our people, as the clans of the Picts and the Britons wither away like fallen leaves. Without those who will use it, without magicians to harness it, magic fades. Myself, Salazar, Helga, and Rowena hold the corners of Hogewáþ’s magic because, if all other magic fades from this isle, then there will still be this one last place where magic thrives.”

“Beyond the obvious, as losing magic would be terrible…why is it so important that magic survive on this isle?”

Godric gives Harry a surprised look. “I believe I understand Salazar’s ire with your education much better now. Without magic present in the land, Harry, that land dies.”

“Shit,” Harry whispers, so shocked that his skin is breaking out in gooseflesh. “I didn’t know that.”

“Do four magicians hold the magic of Hogewáþ in your time, Harry?” Godric asks in concern.

“We have four Heads of Houses that bear the Founders’ names, but…” Harry shakes his head. “I don’t know. The teachers in my school don’t really mention these things. It could be something they do, and I’d have no idea.”

Godric sighs. “Withholding knowledge helps no one.”

Harry doesn’t bother trying to sleep that night. He’s still musing over the idea of four magicians holding the compass corners of Hogwarts’ magic, trying to remember if he’s ever heard mention of it before. Despite Hermione’s frustration, he really did read Hogwarts: A History. It was just so dull that he doesn’t remember a lot of it. He doesn’t recall anything about Hogwarts having compass points or corners of magic, but that doesn’t mean the book didn’t mention it.

He has no faith whatsoever in having learned it from Binns. The ghost drones on so much that Harry has usually lost the plot within five minutes of class starting.

Harry finds Galiena sitting on the stairs after breakfast. She has a scroll resting on a board over her lap, a clay inkpot resting in a hole bored through the wood, and a determined scowl on her face as she scratches at the paper with her quill. He watches her for a moment, curious. Galiena is technically too young to be at Hogwarts, even by the Founders’ standards, but the others told him
that she had terrible incidents with magical outbursts—what he knows as accidental magic.
Galiena’s parents worried that Galiena’s magic would attract the attention of the local parish priest,
who is supposedly not an unkind man, but would feel himself duty-bound to report such
“witchcraft” to his superiors.

Harry vehemently disagrees with that opinion. Any man who would turn a child over for trial and
possible torture and burning is not a kind man—they’re a fucking fool.

“Hi there, kiddo.”

Galiena looks up and makes a face. “I,” she announces in a firm voice, “am not a goat.”

“Oh, you already speak Norse,” Harry says, sitting down next to her. “That’s not fair.”

“The Danes and the Norsemen both have settlements to either side of my home, even if those
places are now English again,” Galiena says in her precise way of speaking. It’s really cute. “Your
words have gotten better.”

“It had to happen eventually.” Harry looks at her scroll. “Oh, if we’re going to be that honest with
each other, then you have a mess on this paper.”

“What is a mess?”

Harry points at her scroll. “That.” He plucks the quill from her fingers and looks at it. “Oh, I see.”
He spends a few minutes showing her how to finish stripping the lower feathers from the primary
feather shaft properly so they don’t dip into the ink. Then he takes out the slim knife Godric gave
him and demonstrates quill-sharpening. “Try it now.”

Galiena beams at her handwriting, which is now clearly defined instead of scraggly lines and blobs.
“That is much better.” Then she frowns again. “I am trying to write my letters, but I can’t
remember them all.”

“It does help to have something to look at, yes?” When Galiena nods, Harry holds out his hands.
“Let me borrow that for a moment. Er, lend me that,” he corrects. He knows borrow is an English
word, but he doesn’t have the pronunciation down yet.

“In my language, there are twenty-six letters,” Harry says, rattling them off while writing down the
West Saxon alphabet. “They don’t sound the same, do they?”

Galiena shakes her head. “No.”

“It took me a while to get used to a, ash, be, ce, de, eth, e, eff, yogh, há, i, ell, emm, enn, o, pe, err,
css, te, u, wyn, eks, yr, and thorn.” Harry dips the quill in the inkpot and starts retracing the letters
so that they’ll stand out in stark relief at the top of Galiena’s scroll. “But I think thorn is a really
useful letter. We had to combine te and há.”

“Why would you not use thorn?” Galiena asks.

“I don’t know,” Harry replies. It seems like a really stupid thing to ditch from the English alphabet,
but at the same time, he’d really like West Saxon English to get its shit together and reintroduce J
and V as letters again. He can live without K, Q, and Z, but the others are useful; U and G are
currently doing two blasted jobs.

“We have a letter called Q, but West Saxon English uses ce and wyn. For me, queen is spelled Q-
U-E-E-N, but for you, it’s ce, wyn, a diacritic é, and enn. That’s a root word in your English, but
not the same way it would be for me.”

“Root word?” Galiena repeats, eyebrows scrunching up as she listens. “And what’s a diacritic?”

*If you’d asked me that three weeks ago, I would have been so confused*, Harry thinks. “A diacritic is that odd little uplift mark you put over letters if you want to change how they sound.”

“Oh.” Galiena frowns. “Why don’t they call it something simpler? Why that diacritic thing?”

“Rowena says it’s Greek. Every time Rowena says that something is Greek, I know I’m not going to like the reason why.”

“Why?” Galiena parrots.

“Because the Greeks had a long time to make up some truly stupid rules about grammar,” Harry mutters.

“Then forget Greek things. Tell me about root words!” Galiena insists, tugging on his arm.

“Well, cwén makes words like folccwén, who rules over a nation, or gúðcwén, a warrior queen like the story Godric tells about Boudicca. Dryhtcwén is a noble queen, sigécwén is a victorious queen, and þéodcwén is an empress. The English made up that last word just because a woman called Empress Theodora of Byzantium existed. She lived in Constantinople several hundred years ago.”

“Why did we make up a word for Theodora?”

Harry gives Galiena her writing tablet back. “A friend of mine named Hermione told me about her. Hermione was a…” He has to stop and think about the right words. *Gecnoden scolere.* “She was a dedicated student. Hermione said that Theodora had poor beginnings, but she educated herself, could tell stories, and she was a very good actress.

“The Heir to the Imperial throne, Justinian, met her and fell in love. They were married, and when he inherited the throne, Justinian made Theodora an Empress, not just his wife. She’s considered to be the most influential ruler of the sixth century. I liked the story because Theodora was the one to stand up and tell others to fight when they wanted to run away. Because of her, they fought, and they won. Oh, and she and Justinian built the Hagia Sophia, which is supposed to be one of the most beautiful buildings in the world.”

Galienna bites her lip. “I’d like to see that. Most of the buildings I’ve seen…they aren’t pretty. I like Hogewáþ, and it’s far grander than my home, but it’s…”

“It’s a fortress,” Harry says, smiling. Galiena ducks her head and nods. “Fortresses aren’t really designed to be pretty, are they? Though after seeing the fortress in London, Hogewáþ is absolutely gorgeous in comparison.”

“I haven’t seen London—oh, I need to go to class,” Galiena squeaks, gathering up her things.

Harry holds out the knife Godric gave him, back in its tiny fitted sheath. “Here. You keep this.”

“But it’s yours!” Galiena protests at once.

“Well, first it was Godric’s, and I would imagine he got it from someone else, too. Now you’re getting it from me,” Harry says. “You need a sharp quill, or you’ll have a mess again.”

Galienna takes the knife with a shy smile. “Thanks.”
“Go on. Hurry along, or you’ll be late, and then what will you do?” Harry teases her. Galiena sticks her tongue out at him and scurries up the stairs.

After supper, Harry stops by the library and goes upstairs with a book under his arm. He’s thought of Hogwarts as home almost from the first day he arrived, and that didn’t change just because the time period did. He feels like he fits here.

To be honest, he fits here more than he did in his own time. Harry isn’t certain if that’s his fault, or…or something else.

When Harry gets into the sitting room, Sal is leaning against the mantelpiece next to the hearth, an odd look on his face. “What? What did I do?” Harry asks.

Salazar’s brow furrows in confusion. “What makes you think you’ve done wrong?”

“I think that’s what I expect every time an adult is standing there waiting for me to turn up,” Harry admits. “What is it, then?”

Salazar shakes his head and holds out a sheathed knife, handle first. “If you are going to be giving blades away, you should be certain you’ve another that can take its place.”

Harry nearly freezes before he makes himself relax. “I can’t—”

“Consider it a necessary tool, like ink, paper, and a quill,” Salazar says flatly. “To refuse this would be idiotic.”

“It’s bigger than the other one,” is Harry’s ridiculous protest.

“That’s because it’s a proper boot knife, not a paring knife.” Salazar glares at him. “Take the stupid blade, Hari. If it makes you feel better to accept it, consider it a very late gift for your fifteenth birthday.”

Harry winces and reaches out to take the knife. It has a flat wooden hilt made from unvarnished wood that still looks almost black. The inlays decorating it look like mother-of-pearl. “Thanks,” he whispers, and then swallows to clear his throat. “Are those rowan blossoms? The pearl?”

“Yes.” Salazar seems pleased that Harry recognized them. “Tree of protection, Hari.”

“Yeah.” Harry puts his book down long enough to draw the dagger from its sheath. It’s got an edge on both sides, not just one side like most English blades; the metal has grey and black patterning instead of being solid iron. “Uh—thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Don’t give that one away,” Sal replies in a dry voice. “Even if it was a kind thing to do.”

“Give it away only if someone needs it. Got it,” Harry says, and grins when Salazar goes off in Castellano.
Mind Magic

Chapter Summary

_Hermione, sometimes your morals are really inconvenient._

Chapter Notes

I am sick (and so are the podlings). Have a chapter while I consider faceplanting here at the desk.

Mind Magic, Harry decides, is a special sort of hell. The others are all kind about it, but they are also all firm. The soul shard, the Horcrux, has to be removed.

Salazar is the one to sit Harry down and tell him, in hesitant Parseltongue, that Harry will never truly be the master of his own magic unless the soul shard is removed. Godric tells him that this task will all but grant him the same mastery in Mind Magic that Rowena has, and will be an excellent means of offence against anyone else trying to harm Harry’s mind. Rowena tells him to choose a mental focus, an object to concentrate on. Helga is the one who smiles and suggests that Harry be sure he likes to look at it; he will be staring at it often, and it will be lurking in his thoughts when he tries to sleep at night.

Harry can’t discuss this Horcrux shit with any of the other kids in the castle. He’s seen more horror in his life than they’ve yet to experience—he hopes they _never_ experience it. He doesn’t want to be the person who destroys their innocence. His was blasted away at wand-point, and then he burnt the rest of it away with his own hands. A basilisk fang was embedded in his arm before he used it to destroy what he suspects was another of Voldemort’s soul-shards in the form of that damned diary. He confirms his suspicions with Rowena; yes, a soul shard can also be inanimate. Inanimate objects are more common.

Great.

Harry goes outside to the apple tree in the field. The leaves are a richer green with more striations of blue along the veining, bright color splashed against the multi-hued blue of the open sky. The apple blossoms are in full bloom, just on the verge of shedding their petals as flowers become fruit. The petals aren’t solely white, but reflect all colors of the light spectrum when the sun strikes them.

_“I don’t know if I can do this,”_ he says as he recognizes Salazar’s approach.

_“Of course you can,”_ Salazar tells him. _“Why would you not be able to?”_

They’re back to Parseltongue again. Harry is trying, but emotional upset makes him backtrack on the new languages. It still sounds so foreign to his ears, English and Cumbric, the Gaelic he’s been introduced to, the Latin and the Pictish. Then there is Helga’s Norse, Rowena’s Bavarian, Salazar’s Castellano and Euskaran, depending on his mood…
“I told you. I’m not—I’m not very good at—at magic,” Harry says, his shoulders slumping.

“Anaia txiki.” Sal has a bright smile on his face. Euskaran, not Castellano, but the meaning is the same: little brother.

“You keep repeating this, but I do not believe it. Who has said such foolish things to you?”

Everyone, Harry thinks. Hermione castigating him for not doing his homework, not seeming to understand that he has no way to study over the summer, no other books, no help. Ron telling him they’ll just make things up; it’ll make no difference. Refusing to take classes that might prove any degree of difficulty because he’s afraid of doing so much worse than he already is. He’s okay at Charms, fifty-fifty miserable or successful in Transfiguration, and apparently can’t brew a proper potion to save his life, no matter how simple. He can cast a true Patronus, and that’s nice, but Defence and flight seem to be his only talents. No one cares about either unless he wins a game, anyway.

“Everyone,” he says, and realizes he’s glaring at the apple tree with tears running down his face. He wipes his eyes dry quickly, hoping Salazar doesn’t notice.

Salazar lets out a muttered sound that is definitely a curse, but it’s Euskaran, and Harry doesn’t know that very well yet. “Little brother, you are not bad at magic. You are untrained. There is a difference.”

“But—I’ve been in school for four years now!” Harry bites his lip. He should be better. He should have been able to do more in that cemetery.

Cedric should still be alive.

Salazar gives him a look of sympathy intermingled with irritation “And in those years, you have been taught very little. I am not impressed with the teachers of your time.”

“How are you so certain that I’m not the problem, Sal?” Harry asks in frustration.

“Because.” Salazar grasps his arms so that they are standing face to face. “Hari, your eyes burn with the desire to be better. That is the sign of an excellent student. You do not lack talent; you have lacked the right sort of teaching. The gift of Parseltongue is rare, little brother. If you were truly so terrible at magic, we would not be able to speak at all.”

Harry swallows hard and nods. “Okay. I have a mental focus. The tree. The apple tree. What do I do next, Sal?”

“Next,” Salazar says in slow, precise Castellano, “I will teach you to defend your mind. If you prefer it not be so, the others are just as capable.”

Harry lifts his chin. “I like the others just fine, but—but I’d be glad if it was you.”

* * * * *

The lessons in defensive Mind Magic extend through the weeks of June, but Harry never seems to improve. He can’t keep his thoughts quiet; his efforts at visualization are terrible; his defences to keep someone from prodding against his thoughts are nonexistent. Salazar is never cruel about it,
but Harry knows he’s frustrated.

Harry takes to using his Invisibility Cloak to hide during parts of the day. He hasn’t given up on learning the languages or writing properly in them—he wants to know, if only to be less confused all the time. He’ll take scrolls or books from the library and puzzle his way through West Saxon English or Cumbric, which is probably bad timing; Rowena says Cumbric and Pictish are slowly dying out in favor of Gaelic, Norse, and English. Latin is sort of twining its way through the Castellano, so those two lessons reinforce each other. English does the same for the Bavarian and Norse, and it’s still odd to see how those three languages are all woven parts taken from the same tree.

He utterly loathes Gaelic.

He really likes the Pictish, though, even if it’s the hardest to puzzle through. Something about the way they speak of magic by design instead of by words appeals to him.

It takes him even longer to realize that his disappearances with the Invisibility Cloak are driving the others mental. Harry walks by Salazar’s office while still under the Cloak, thinking about reading beneath the sunlit windows on the upper floors, when he realizes Salazar has company.

“I cannot find him at all!” Salazar is saying in West Saxon English. Harry can’t think of it as simply “English” without his brain wanting to give up in despair. “No matter how I search!”

“We know he is still here. He returns too quickly to be going elsewhere,” Godric says.

“If he were simply traveling elsewhere, I’d still be able to scry for him,” Salazar retorts.

“He always returns.” Helga sounds like she’s trying to calm the other two. “Let him be, Salazar.”

“I—I worry,” Salazar tells the others, and Harry bites his lip. “He is not young, and yet he is. I want nothing ill to happen to him.”

“Perhaps we are going about this the wrong way,” Rowena suggests, which is when Harry decides to keep going. He’s used the Cloak for spying in the past, but this feels like the sort of eavesdropping he shouldn’t indulge in.

No, it isn’t just that. The adults here tell him things. He doesn’t feel like he needs to bloody eavesdrop just to know what’s going on in his own blasted life.

Harry sits under the window on the fifth floor with his book, the wooden-framed glass hanging open so he can enjoy the breeze. He can’t concentrate, though. He had no idea the Cloak made him invisible to scrying, not when it hadn’t helped against Moody’s magic eye. It’s useful to know, but it isn’t as if he has a Dark Lord to hide from anymore—not that one, anyway. Godric is quick to point out that magicians with evil intent exist in every kingdom, as Salazar found out the hard way.

Why is he upset? He isn’t doing anything wrong. Rowena would probably be pleased at his reading efforts, even if his writing still needs a lot of work.

Harry closes the book as he has two realizations at once, and both make him very uncomfortable. He is desperately understimulated, if that’s the right word for it. He thinks so; he heard Ginny’s Muggle-born friend Edward mention it once or twice, when she wasn’t hexing the blazes out of anyone who tried to hurt Edward. Harry was still trying to figure out if Ginny had a new crush, or just a serious case of overprotectiveness, before the Triwizard Tournament interrupted his entire life.
Even if it’s not the right word, Harry is used to a full day of work, which often included some level of intrigue thanks to Voldemort. He doesn’t have much experience with things being so…dull. Learning only a bit of magic aside from Mind Magic, reading, and learning to communicate isn’t really enough. He has wide spans of time during the day with absolutely nothing to do unless he’s choosing it himself. Reading is a safe option, but he doesn’t know what else could be. The Founders treat magical training a lot differently than his Hogwarts. His school handed him a schedule and expected him to adhere to it; the Founders’ Hogwarts doesn’t even seem to have any sort of list of what is available to learn.

There is a makeshift Quidditch pitch, but he doesn’t have a broom anymore. Others do the cleaning and cooking he’d be performing at the Dursleys. The children are all in their own lessons, or Apparate home to help their families with the tasks of daily living if they don’t have anything else to do. Apparition is taught the moment you’re judged magically educated enough to learn it, regardless of age. Harry is envious, but doesn’t know how to ask to learn. He doesn’t feel comfortable asking for anything, really, and he’s going to have to figure out something about his clothes, soon, before they fall apart.

The more baffling realization is that Harry desperately doesn’t want to upset Salazar. That one takes longer to puzzle through than the understimulation bit, which was confusing enough. It’s not a crush, at least. That was Cedric, and that hadn’t…that didn’t turn out well. Harry asked Cho to the Yule Ball, then Parvati, because he thought that was what he was bloody well supposed to do. That night, he’d been watching Cho when he realized that his eyes kept drifting more to Cedric instead. That hadn’t made the evening any more enjoyable, or bearable. If anything, he just wanted the stupid ball to end sooner.

It isn’t merely friendship, either. Harry knows what that’s like, even if the only steadfast friendship he’s had is Hermione. Ron has mostly been the same, but the Tournament taught Harry that Ron can also hold a mad grudge.

Harry bites his lip. He doesn’t want Salazar to stop thinking of Harry as family because of his inability to learn Mind Magic. He doesn’t want to disappoint Salazar, but he has no experience with family that isn’t terrible.

What would Hermione do? He might not be able to keep up with her advice about school, but in other matters, she’s usually the only one with any sense at all.

Hermione wouldn’t hide.

*Hermione, sometimes your morals are really inconvenient,* Harry thinks as he gathers up his scroll and books. He tucks them all under his arm and makes the trek down the stairs, back to Salazar’s office on the third floor. That isn’t what everyone else calls it, but Harry isn’t picking up on the proper term yet. He’ll call the room what it most resembles until the correct word makes sense.

Salazar’s office is empty except for Salazar, who is resting his head on his table, his hands laced over his long hair. “Uh…Sal?”

Salazar lifts his head at once. “Hari—where are you?” he asks in bewilderment.

“Wait a moment.” Harry has both hands free, now that he’s witnessed cloaks worn by the adults and the children of this time and learned a lot about how to actually wear his own. Harry puts the scroll and books down on the table; Salazar’s eyes widen at their sudden appearance. Harry finally removes the Cloak. “Right here.”

Both of Salazar’s eyebrows try to climb towards his hair as he regards Harry. Then he glances
down at the bundle of invisible fabric that’s hiding part of Harry’s hands from view. “Witty and sneaky,” he finally comments. “How long have you had such an item?”

“Since I was eleven. It was given to me at Christmas—er, the people here are calling it Christmastide. It used to belong to my father.”

“May I?” Salazar asks, reaching out with one hand. Harry dithers for a moment before passing it over, not sure what he’s afraid of.

No hiding, Hermione would say. Harry bites back what would have been rude muttering under his breath. Hermione isn’t stuck one thousand years in the past with the Founders, and the most terrifying of the four is not Salazar Slytherin.

Salazar examines the cloth with his hands, brow furrowed in concentration. “This is incredible magic. I’ve never felt anything like it. I doubt any of us have.”


“I don’t know. It feels as if it doesn’t belong here,” Salazar murmurs in response, “except it most assuredly also feels as if it belongs to you. I suspect it must have been in your family for a very long time.”

Harry has to switch back to Parseltongue. He doesn’t have enough words to explain, otherwise. “I don’t know. Nobody—during the first war against Voldemort, he killed off entire families if he considered them traitors. My parents were the only two people left from both of their families before Voldemort killed them, too. There wasn’t anyone who could tell me anything about it except that it was my Dad’s—my father’s.” Dad should translate to Parseltongue, it really should, but it always emerges in Harry’s modern-day English. Languages, he has very quickly discovered, are irritating even if they’re interesting.

“I’ve handled other such Cloaks of Invisibility. The magic never lasts very long.” Salazar hands the Cloak back to Harry. “None were as fine, either, or as powerful. Don’t lose that.”

“You’re…you’re not angry?” Harry asks, surprised that the Cloak was so easily handed back. Would any of his other teachers have done the same, aside from Dumbledore?

Snape might have. After Harry turned seventeen and bloody well graduated from Hogwarts first. His primary concern had always seemed to center around Harry not roaming the halls and making trouble.

Right. As if Harry needed any help with that part.

Salazar is gazing at Harry as if he’s lost his mind. “No. Why would I be upset?”

“I heard you all speaking here earlier,” Harry admits. “You weren’t happy that you couldn’t find me.”

“Because I was concerned,” Salazar replies, still wearing that same baffled expression. “I apologize. I keep forgetting that you dwelled with others who did not remember that they should feel similarly.”

“It’s okay.” Harry tries not to scuff his boot along the floor like a first-year.

“No, it really isn’t. I was going to delay this decision, but in light of this conversation and others like it, I think it would be wrong to do so.”—Salazar hesitates.
“What?” Harry asks, trying to figure out what else he could possibly have done wrong in the last five minutes.

“I cannot teach you the other aspects of Mind Magic. Not because you are unteachable,” Salazar explains before Harry can panic. “I am too cautious; I do not wish to harm you. Much later, when you’ve mastered more of the talent, it might be possible for me to assist in those lessons, but right now I can’t bring myself to cause that harm, even though you wouldn’t see headaches or bestirred memories as such. Some of us know better.”

“You were holding back?”

“Probably,” Sal huffs out a breath, looking irritated with himself. “Rowena and I were discussing it. She will not do so, though she will do you no permanent damage.”

“I was almost eaten by a dragon last year for the sake of a tournament I didn’t want to participate in. I can probably manage all right,” Harry says.

Salazar is making that face again, the one that speaks of wanting to strangle people well out of his reach. Once Harry realized he was only seeing it on behalf of himself, or on behalf of Hogwarts’ students, he stopped finding it alarming. Besides, Helga is still the most terrifying when it comes to being overprotective.

“I can teach you other things, but Mind Magic is not one of them,” Salazar says.

Harry latches onto that at once. “Other things?”

Salazar smiles. “You feel as if you do not already have enough to do?”

Harry tries not to shift on his feet again. This conversation is definitely going to be a mix of West Saxon English and Parseltongue; he doesn’t know a lot of these words yet. “Sal, I’m…I’m þurhholod! I really am!”

“I really do not think that’s the word you wanted, but I understand your meaning.” Salazar gives him an incredulous look. “You wish for more to do.”

“I’m used to doing more. All the time,” Harry replies, feeling ridiculous.

“You are learning to speak, write, and converse in English, Cumbric, and Gaelic.” Salazar takes note of the two books. “And then you decided to add Pictish without telling anyone. You’ve listened to Helga and Rowena enough that you have a rudimentary grasp of Bavarian and Norse. Orellana and I are teaching you Castellano, and you are somehow picking up Euskaran by association—which I don’t claim to understand at all, as they are not similar languages. I haven’t even introduced Leónese. You’re learning Mind Magic in order to allow us to remove a soul shard…and you do not think that this is enough?” Salazar asks in disbelief.

“No!” Hurry winces at the near-shout. Half of the terms he wants do not have direct translations, so it’s back to Parseltongue. “I mean, I’d have to do all of that anyway. But Sal, my day was filled with Transfiguration, Astronomy, Potions, History of Magic, Divination—which is complete rubbish—Defence Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, Care of Magical Creatures, Charms…and that’s leaving out anything that Voldemort’s nonsense added to my day, not to mention the homework in every single subject.”

Salazar blinks a few times and looks like he wants to bash his head against his own table. “Dear gods, all at once? How were you supposed to learn any of it properly? Your magical education began too late as it is!”
“I…we just…did what we could.” Harry shifts uncomfortably. “I understand if it’s not something that can be done—”

“No. Not that.” Salazar rubs his face with both hands. “My little brother is insane.”

“Probably?” Harry offers.

“Seven years, though, you said. Your schooling was meant to last seven years. I heard nothing of writing, or other languages.” Salazar’s eyes narrow when Harry shakes his head. “Alchemy?”

“Elective. Optional,” Harry tries, when “elective” isn’t understood. “Uh…only if we wanted to.”

“Ah. And Desplazar—to, you said one had to be seventeen, which is foolish,” Salazar says. “Arithmantic studies?”

“The same as Alchemy; only if we wanted to. Divination and Magical Creatures, too, actually, along with Muggle Studies and Ancient Runes.”

Salazar makes an odd noise. “Rowena said, but—truly there was nothing of Mind Magic taught in your time?” Harry shakes his head. “Animagi, Metamorphmagi?”

“That last one can be taught?” Harry asks in surprise.

“Yes.” Salazar’s eye twitches. “History of Magic. Not merely history? Or is world history covered in that non-magical studies class?”

Harry thinks back on Hermione’s discussions of the subject. That class was inane, and often entirely incorrect, but he doesn’t remember history as one of her complaints. “I don’t think so.” Salazar makes that sound again and puts his head down on the table. “I loathe your schooling.”

“Sorry,” Harry apologizes.

“It still isn’t your fault.” Salazar lifts his head. “And Divination is rubbish, is it? How many types of divination are there?”

“Uh—probably more than the four I know of?”

Salazar stares at him. “Are you trying to cause me pain?”

“No! Though, uh, the faces you’re making are kind of funny,” Harry says.

Salazar shakes his head. “I suspect you had a terrible teacher.”

“She’s dramatic, awful, and predicted my death in every lesson,” Harry says flatly.

“And that would be how often?”

Harry sighs. “Three times a week,” he answers, and Salazar laughs outright.

“You do know that without a talent for the Sight, you can learn the mechanics, but it will never work for you, yes?” Salazar asks.

“Yeah, but it was an easy class. The more gruesome and terrible the fates we made up for ourselves, the better our grades were.” Harry hesitates. “We were judged as doing better, I mean.”
Salazar looks torn between more laughter and outright horror. “And you still try to claim the problem of your learning is with you? Hari, no. That is—rubbish. Yes, the more you use this slang of yours, the more I prefer its accuracy. Tell me the four means of Sight that you know.”

Harry has to stop and think about it. He usually tried to purge his brain of a full school term of Trelawney the moment he boarded the train back to London. “Dreaming, crystal-gazing, reading tea leaves, and…” He holds up his hand. “Palm-reading.”

“I do not know about reading leaves.” Salazar shakes his head. “But you’ve only been taught those four? Nothing of the stars, mirrors, bones, fire, the flow of liquid, or wood?”


Salazar nods. “Look here, hermanito.”

Harry ventures closer to the table, where Salazar has a gleaming, multi-hued silver bowl filled with water. He taps the bowl with his wand three times. The ripples eventually begin to settle back to stillness, but when they do, it’s not the bottom of the bowl Harry sees. “Hey, that’s outside!”

“You can see it because my magic is working with the water. This is basic scrying, which I can do with any surface capable of reflecting an image. Others read bones, which I can not do, or look at the stars, listen to their mind, study the flow of liquid on a surface, view fire, or háwaþ the way in which méos grows in a particular month.”

“Méos I understand; that’s moss. What is háwaþ?” Harry asks.

“They watch the moss,” Salazar clarifies. “Each of these are differing types of Sight, but one who Sees can offesiþ only master one or two.”

“Offesiþ—often?” Harry guesses in Parseltongue, gratified when Sal nods. “English is stupid.”

“There is nothing I can say in response to that which is not an insult to either you or Godric,” Salazar replies. “This method of scrying is how I was searching for a disappearing hermanito.”

“Sorry,” Harry apologizes. “I actually didn’t know my Cloak hid me from magical scrying.” He thinks about Trelawney’s odd moment during the fourth-year exams. “I don’t know if I’ve ever seen real scrying demonstrated before. Mind-listening, maybe, but with her it’s really hard to tell the difference between dramatics and…well, she was still predicting my death.” Harry frowns. “Okay, no, she was right about that one. Also, she was creepy.”

“Creeping?” Salazar repeats, frowning. “Not a serpent reference.”

“Uh—different scary without being scary. Odd,” Harry corrects himself. “She always claimed to be descended from Cassandra, the Greek fortune teller whom nobody believed.”

“From all you’ve said, it sounds to me as if she created her own curse rather than inheriting one.” Salazar shakes his head. “I can teach you something of Divination. I can sense you have some small talent for it, but not scrying. Perhaps…mindful awareness? Then no; that would be related more to Mind Magic, and learning to pay attention to your thoughts. Tell me, Hari: what do you wish to learn of?”

“When I first discovered that magic was real, and there was a school for it…” Harry bites back a smile. “Sal, I wanted to learn everything.”

Salazar lifts an eyebrow. “Everything,” he repeats.
Harry shrugs. “Silly, yes?”

“No, I do not think such.” Salazar switches back over to Parseltongue. “The four of us have discussed how quickly you’ve grasped Cumbric and English, and West Saxon is not an easy language to learn. It has odd rules that I think are stupid. We’ve praised this, and yet I think we were still gravely underestimating you.”

“Underestimating me? What do you mean?”

“I mean that we didn’t wish to overwhelm you. We know that while you do not miss the horror that is your remaining family, you do miss others,” Salazar says gently.

Harry glances away. “I do, yeah. But there isn’t anything to be done about it, is there? I just have to keep going.”

Salazar mutters something under his breath that is probably Euskaran. It seems to be his favorite resort for foul language. “I hate that such a concept seems to be your entire life’s philosophy.”

Harry smiles without looking up. “It’s an effective one, though.”

“It’s a battle philosophy, one that never stops.” Salazar sounds unhappy. “Worse, it is one that seems to have no place within it for your survival. We need to work on that.”

“Okay,” Harry agrees, though he isn’t sure how that’s possible. “I’ve been pretty good about not dying so far.”

“It helps to have a reason to survive,” Salazar says thoughtfully. “A purpose. A battle strategy requires the same, Hari. If that purpose is centered upon studying every aspect of magic it is possible to learn, then that is at least a good beginning.”

“I don’t want to see anyone else die because I didn’t know what to do,” Harry whispers, knowing that Salazar understands exactly what he means. Once June—Iulius—arrived, Harry repeatedly awoke everyone with screaming nightmares no one could understand. He finally broke down and told Salazar what had happened to Cedric in Little Hangleton, even if it was an explanation mostly motivated by guilt because he kept scaring Fortunata. Harry’s taken to sleeping with his face buried into the mattress. Salazar still wakes up if Harry makes too much noise in loud Parseltongue, but at least Fortunata doesn’t hear.

Salazar nods. “I understand. Hari, there is something else.”

Harry glances up at him to discover that Salazar is actually fidgeting with his beechwood wand, turning it over and over in his hands. “Yes?”

“It cannot happen until the soul shard is removed due to the magic involved, but…I want to adopt you. As my brother.”

“You want to—” is as far as Harry gets before his throat closes up and his sinuses feel clogged.

Salazar nods. “I do,” he says, not looking at Harry. He seems to be half-terrified about making the offer. It takes Harry a minute to convince himself that the terror isn’t about not wanting to do it.

Salazar is worried that Harry will say no.

Harry has dealt with Death Eaters, torture, three different instances of Voldemort, and years of acting as the Dursley’s convenient, live-in slave. He can talk, even if he’s right back to hissing.
“Do you remember when I said I didn’t object to you calling me your little brother?”

Salazar nods. “I do. That’s when I started thinking about it, though Orellana was first to suggest it. If we hadn’t kept such quiet from Fortunata, you’d know already. She and her aunt dislike each other; she’d be thankful to have an uncle whom she does like.”

“I’m not much older than she is,” Harry points out. “I’m fifteen, and she’s eight.”

“Trust me, there have been odder things.”

That includes me, Harry thinks. Then he reaches out his hand, palm up, the way he’s seen the others do when they want to impress upon someone else that they’re speaking truly. He waits until Salazar grasps his hand. “Sal, I can’t remember anyone in my life who ever wanted me, at least not in a way they could act upon,” he adds, thinking of Sirius. “I don’t know why you do. But I’d—”

His voice cracks. “You, Orellana, and Fortunata. I don’t remember my parents. I’d like to have a real family, Sal. I’ve never had one before.”

Salazar’s grip on his hand tightens. “Little brother, that is the least of things I wish to offer you.”

“Everything else is kind of just a nice addition, Sal,” Harry replies, and gets drawn into a tight embrace. He grips Sal’s tunic and tries not to cry. “I don’t actually know anything about magical adoptions.”

“They are magical, legal, and binding,” Salazar replies. “It does not change who you are or what you look like, but it will be as if you were always born of my family.”

Harry tries to wipe his face with his sleeve without escaping the hug. “Okay.”

Salazar leans back to peer directly into Harry’s eyes. “You’re certain?”

Harry gives him a dry look. “Sal, Rowena’s son wouldn’t like the competition, Godric is terrified of snakes, and Helga is too worried that her brother would come for a visit. If not you, then who else would even want a catastrophic mess of a magician?”

Sal scowls at him. “We’re fixing the catastrophic mess part. I do not know what those words mean, but I know that tone, hermanito.”

Harry grins. “Sure, whatever.”
Chapter Summary

“You’re a potions master?”

“Among other things.”

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the well-wishing! Thankfully it was a short-lived bit of BLAH illness instead of lingering fuckery. <3

“He wants more to do,” Godric says in disbelief. “He’s insane, and it’s your fault, Salazar. You found him; your responsibility.”

“I cannot be blamed for that until well after the adoption, thank you,” Salazar retorts in irritation.

“You asked him!” Helga clasps her hands and grins wide. “He must have said yes. You would be challenging Godric to manly contests of drink if he hadn’t.”

“Yes, and yes,” Salazar says, and spends the next several minutes being mauled by a Norse woman he suspects might have been an actual sarding badger in a previous life. “Thank you.”

“But truly—he thinks he doesn’t do enough?” Rowena asks when she has the opportunity again.

Salazar rattles off the entire list that Hari had given him of what the boy’s responsibilities were supposed to be, despite a much-delayed magical education, a loss of his entire (useful) family, and the adults who were readily available to be acting in his stead. “He says he is driven to dull sluggishness from a lack of things to do.”

“I still refuse to push too hard.” Rowena contemplates it. “I will remain his teacher in Mind Magic, writing, and reading. He was that fascinated by Pictish?”

“That is what he said,” Salazar replies.

“That might require asking Gedeloc to come to Hogewáþ. I’m not as familiar with their magic, but he is. He also does wish for the excuse to escape his grandchildren, who are demanding to know of their inheritance before he’s ready to put a single foot in the grave,” Rowena says. “Godric?”

“I started the fight. Might as well see if he has any more terrifying tricks up his sleeves,” Godric says. “More dueling, but perhaps with other bits thrown in as we progress.”

Salazar bites back a few dozen inappropriate words. “He is terrified of being trapped, Godric. If you practice anything involving that aspect of attack, please make certain I’m present.”

“That bad?” Godric asks. “I didn’t think he’d been a prisoner in truth.”
“Worse, I think, at least by the Council’s terms.” Salazar considers on a proper comparison. “That cupboard in the kitchen that rests on the floor—he was locked into something very much like it by his aunt and uncle every night throughout his entire childhood.”

“I cannot kill people who live a thousand years hence. I cannot kill people who live a thousand years hence,” Helga repeats under her breath. “He needs to learn how to magically travel from one place to another. Such a lesson is long overdue. I shall start with that, and then review his knowledge of enchantments in full before we move on to new lessons. You, Salazar?”

“Brewing,” Salazar says, trying not to grimace. “He mentioned it as being a different lesson from a knowledge of herbs, which makes me suspect they’ve been separated in a way that will be frustrating on all sides.”

* * *

On the fifteenth of June, Harry discovers what everyone seemed to be quietly preparing (or bracing themselves) for. It’s the Solstice tomorrow—they were all gearing up for the Summer Solstice, another holiday that is a big deal for everyone in Britain, not just one group or another.

Harry consoles himself with the fact that at least it’s only one day. He checked; Salazar told him that it was not a week. Just one day.

The Norse consider it a festival about activities that make them powerful, which means trading, exploring, or raiding. He’ll be avoiding that last one, thanks. The Gaels, Picts, Britons, and English treat it as another feast and fair day, with more bonfires come evening.

The Summer Solstice is also a Quarter Day if you’re English, which Harry is absolutely clueless about. Sedemai explains that there are four set days of the year in which business is to be begun or concluded. The Gaels use a different set of four days, and the Picts think the Gaels and the English are stupid for relying on only four days out of a year to get anything done. That sounds so perfectly British that Harry doesn’t bother to ask why no one could agree on which four days to use.

He doesn’t realize that there is any sort of gifting tradition. It’s not like Christmas, but more of a family thing. He finds out when Orellana and Salazar present him with two gifts. Harry stares at them, appalled, because he didn’t know.

“Questions one does not think to ask, or tales one does not think to tell.” Salazar sighs and rests his face on his hand. “To give gifts on the Summer Solstice is more of a Euskaran tradition, though it seems to be dying out. I’m not sure why, unless it’s simply the inroads the Church is making into the way of life for my father’s people.”

“Yeah, we don’t…nobody does this in my time. Not that I know of,” Harry says, swallowing hard. “You don’t mind? That I didn’t know?”

Orellana gives him a fond look and then swats the back of his head, like she would a younger sibling. “Of course not. Besides, you are not the adult in our household. This was our responsibility. Fortunata is already outside in her new gown.”

One of the gifts is a cloak, which is…well, he’s needed one since he got here. It’s black with copper swirls and metallic copper embroidery along the edges, made from linen blended with wool, lightweight for the season but still capable of keeping him protected from Scottish weather.
The broach that clasps it at his shoulder is silver, shaped like a crescent moon with a bar through the center. “A Norse lunar pendant,” Salazar explains. “Helga likes the summer tradition I brought north, and wished to give you something.”

“They’re both, uhm, lovely,” Harry says, his throat feeling too tight. The other gift is some sort of musical pipe, but instead of a single reed, it’s two bound together. “I really don’t know how to play anything like this.”

Salazar rolls his eyes. “It is called learning, Hari. No one knows how to play an instrument until they have practiced at it.”

“Oh. Yes. I guess you’re correct—fuck, no, that sounded rude. Thank you.” Harry is relieved when Sal and Orellana look pleased. He’s less thrilled when it’s insisted that he wear the new cloak, and absolutely mortified when he’s told that he should, since most of the castle has considered Harry to be running around underdressed since March.

“Why didn’t you say something?” Harry asks, aghast.

“And hand you something of mine, only for you to react like you are at this moment?” Salazar snorts. “I am not that foolish, and I do not care what others think.”

Harry takes a breath and lets it out. “Right,” he says, and wears the cloak. He spends the day and the evening wondering if there is magic in its weaving, since he never feels too warm despite it being a hot summer day. He thanks Orellana again after midnight. She smiles and hugs him.

When Harry walks up the stairs to the third floor that night, it doesn’t feel like he’s lifting the latch to enter someone else’s house to take up space in their guest room. He can’t figure out what it feels like.

He sits in his window for half the night, wrapped in his cloak against the hint of chill breeze. Familiarity? Check. The sitting room, this bedroom, and that bathroom are all familiar by now. Living with people he likes, who also like him in return? Check. Being educated instead of mocked? Huge bloody checkmark.

Is this...is this what a home feels like?

He doesn’t know. He doesn’t remember ever living with his parents. He never thought of Privet Drive as home, even before Hogwarts.

Harry rests his head against the wooden window frame and makes himself think the words: This is my home.

The only thing he feels is a suffuse, glowing warmth that makes him smile while hiding his head under a blanket.

* * * *

Alicia departs the day after the Summer Solstice celebration, though Harry wonders if they’re going to have to literally pry Helena off of her sister. Then Alicia is on a horse, off to Strathclyde to pursue an apprenticeship under a Votadini magician to earn a mastery in healing magic.
After Alicia is gone, Harry lowers his chin as he walks back into the castle. The others have been testing his knowledge, finding gaps and neglected lessons. Things are about to get a lot more difficult.

Godric is pleased by Harry’s ability to not panic during a duel, but less than pleased by the very limited repertoire of spells Harry has learned for dueling. He also bans *Serpensortia*, properly *Vocare Colubrum*, until Harry learns something that is not throwing snakes at people. Those lessons earn Harry a list of spells that is written out in Old English; Harry has to get a quill and ink and write in the full translations next to them with Salazar’s help.

Salazar picks up the parchment when Harry is done, frowning at the English translations. “The letters truly have not changed much, but I suspect the structure of your English is entirely different from what we know. Oh, and there is the francês influence.”

Harry’s lessons with Rowena won’t change, though he suspects the Mind Magic is going to become unpleasant in a hurry. Helga is willing to teach him how to Apparate, among other things, but she is completely appalled by the fact that Harry knows no healing spells at all. “I loathe your schooling,” Salazar mutters under his breath.

Harry sighs and listens as Helga demonstrates a few of the more basic healing spells using Latin. That gets him another scroll, and another list of spells to translate. The same thing happens when he visits Sedemai, who is calm, but Harry suspects she wants to break something over his half-arsed knowledge of Charms and Transfiguration. Yet another scroll; yet another hissed batch of translations.

“What’s that look for?” Salazar asks when they’re done.

Harry realizes he’s smiling. “I’m happy, which is odd, because I’m not happy very often. But I am. People are actually telling me things.” He hasn’t changed his mind about this being difficult, but it doesn’t seem so bad when he’s surrounded by adults and students who want him to succeed. He hadn’t realized how tense that atmosphere in his Hogwarts was, all the time, until the sensation of being surrounded by people who were waiting to laugh at his failures was utterly gone. The funny thing is, he isn’t even thinking about Snape in that regard. (For one thing, Snape never laughed.) Harry is thinking of the students, mostly, but none of the teachers—none of them—did much to make the students give a fuck about each other, even within Houses.

“Did they not, before?” Salazar asks.

“Not really. *Not in any useful manner, most of the time,*” Harry says in frustration. “It would be nice to try Potions now that I can understand more of what everyone is saying.”

Salazar grins at him. “*And that would be where I come in.*”

Harry looks at him in surprise. “You’re a potions master?”

“Among other things,” Sal admits.

“Why didn’t you tell me that before?” Harry asks.

“And push you into yet another thing you were not yet prepared for? No. One does not brew while stressed. *Forgive the pun, but that is a recipe for accidents and disaster.*”

Harry thinks about Neville’s constant state of terror any time he enters the Potions classroom and winces. “Yeah, I’ve seen that happen.”
Salazar takes Harry to his primary teaching room. “I want to see what you can do with what I have in this room.” Salazar looks up at a drying rack of herbs. “We’ll focus on other aspects of this craft later. For now, look among what I’ve gathered or have stored, decide upon a potion, and brew it. I’ll watch, and I won’t interfere.”

* * * *

It does not escape Salazar’s notice that Hari is half-panicked at the idea of simply crafting a potion based on what is available. Did that future Hogewáp not teach their students the nature of each ingredient? Or were all ingredients available, all the time, and the idea of teaching from the very first step fell out of favor?

Salazar focuses on Hari, else he is going to spend the entire time muttering insults about distant schooling. Hari is walking around beneath the drying rack, peering up at the plants before he goes over to Salazar’s shelves to inspect what is protected by glass. Then his gaze drops to the potted mandrágoras resting along the stone ledge before the window, soaking in sunlight.

“Are any of those at least at the juvenile stage?” Hari asks, and then frowns when Salazar shrugs his lack of understanding. “Juvenile. Uh…not infancy. Older child.”

Salazar nods and points. “That one, on the far right end.” He’d planned to use it for a different purpose, but another of the plants will be approaching that stage of maturity soon. “And now there is such a look on your face, Hari.”

“Trying to figure out how to harvest a mandrake without passing out,” Hari admits. “We had earmuffs that muffled sound.” He demonstrates with his hands over his ears.

“They made you rely on a device but didn’t teach you the spell?” Salazar asks in disbelief.

“I guess they didn’t want to take any chances.”

“They should have taught you both,” Salazar mutters. “To protect your hearing: defendat auditu. To end the spell, finis defendat auditu.”

Hari nods and uses his wand to cast the spell. His brow wrinkles up before he turns around and says, “Say something.”

“Something,” Salazar offers dryly. “And it must be working, as you are now ignoring me again.” He casts the spell upon himself before Hari yanks the young mandrágora from its pot with a practiced hand.

They taught you something, at least, Salazar thinks, watching as Hari uses another, inaudible spell to remove all traces of dirt from the mandrágora, which is still screaming. At least the door to this room is also spelled to keep sounds from invading the corridor, and chopping off the plant’s leafy crown ends the terrible racket.

“Finis defendat auditu,” Salazar murmurs, and sound filters back in so quickly it makes his ears pop. He opens his jaw to relieve the pressure. “Hari?”

“No longer deaf,” Hari assures him, regarding both leaves and muted root before he gets one of the cast iron frames Salazar had specially constructed by a blacksmith in London. Hari explores the
recesses of the cup in the center. “What goes here to supply heat?”

“My own creation.” Salazar retrieves a bottle filled with purple liquid. “I collected tar from a natural tar seep near the marshlands in the south, refined it, and introduced it to the blood of a burning salamander and dragon scales. It burns hot, clear, odorless and smokeless.”

“Cool,” Harry says, and carefully pours until the iron cup is not quite full. He lights it with his wand and then grins at the sight of the blue, green, and violet-shifting flame.

“And it means I do not need to open a window in the winter so as to not smother to death on fumes,” Salazar adds. He is still intrigued by this slang, especially the concept of using temperature to denote approval. It’s very bard-like, and the idea that bardic traits are in common use appeals to him. He grew up educated, surrounded by poetry and sound. That is something he, Rowena, Helga, and Godric all agree should be an experience shared by all.

Hari nods, putting a cast iron cauldron over the frame before calling forth water to fill the cauldron three-quarters full. Salazar crosses his arms, deciding for now that he isn’t going to mention that Hari calling forth water with such ease is not an easy task.

Chopped-up slices of mandrake root go into the water; after a pause, Hari pulls the leaves from the stalk and drops those in, as well. While that slowly heats, Hari gathers two different bundles of wermod, one fresh and one utterly dry.

“Now I’m curious,” Salazar says as Hari hesitates over the plant bundles.

“Now I’m hoping I don’t brew something poisonous,” Hari counters, frowning down at the wermod. “You don’t have turmeric—and by the look on your face, you’ve never heard of it. I’m having to substitute eyebright and rosemary, which might work. Or it might explode.”

“And the wermod?”

“I’m used to wormwood that’s already been turned into a liquid or an oil, not fresh.”

“Ah. Then know that fresh plants are the most potent. Dried plants retain the qualities of the fresh plant but the strength is diminished. An infusion or a reduced essence of a plant will gain the aspects of what it is infused with or reduced by, or have its properties changed completely by that blending.”

“Right.” Hari looks at both plants again, his lips moving soundlessly. “Water,” he finally says. “Not an oil. If it’s infused with water, does it gain strength, lose strength, or is it more concentrated, so that less is needed?”

Salazar might end up biting through his lip trying not to smile in absolute joy. Intelligence; he worships at that altar. “It is concentrated, so less is needed, but it is not necessarily more powerful. It depends on if you believe this potion needs power, or if it needs, say, concentrated doses of what the dried plant will bring.”

“I’ll have to think about it.” Hari leaves both plants lying on the wooden cutting board, adding fresh rosemary, eyebright, and dried blueberries before wandering off again. He comes back with a mortar, pestle, and a full length of shed unicorn’s horn. That is turned into a fine powder while Hari continues to glare at the wermod bundles. Then he fetches two stirring rods: one of Salazar’s few precious glass rods, and one of mæsling that was gifted to him by Godric when he discovered that Salazar was seeking one. It’s older than the old Roman Empire, kept by Godric’s family even after the talent for brewing veered away from their lineage.
“Mæsling?”

Hari glances up and blinks a few times. “Brass. It's made from copper and zinc, right?”

“Yes, and fortunately of magical making, or it would not be pure. Eight parts copper and two parts calamine, which I suppose is your zinc,” Salazar says. “Why mæsling?”

Hari looks unhappy. “I’m just going to hope that calamine and zinc are the same thing. Brass is supposed to be better for medicinal potions. Anti-bacterial, I mean it kills bacteria, I mean—fuck.” Hari sighs. “Germs? Pathogens? Never mind. Let’s just stick with ‘better for medicinal potions.’”

Salazar tries not to laugh at Hari’s feeling use of a word that once caused him to blush. “That is possibly for the best at the moment.”

The glass stirring rod goes in with the stew of mandrágora. Hari sets up a second cauldron half-filled with water, chops up the fresh wermod after another glaring study of both plants, and tosses the entirety of it into the second cauldron. He also crushes up the dry plant, but puts it aside. Then the mæsling rod is placed into the cauldron, stirring the brew exactly once before Hari stops and frowns. “Uh oh.”

“What?” Salazar asks, wondering if Hari has misstepped on his mystery potion already.

“Sal, I’m not used to colors looking like this. I’ve never brewed this way, and all the instructions I’ve used list very specific colors!”

“Then you’ll have to go by instinct and feel.” Salazar winces when Hari drops his head to the tabletop with a heavy thud. “Or bruise yourself on the table.”

“I don’t know how to do that, Sal!” Hari says in a plaintive muffle.

“Listen. That’s all. You’ll know when it’s right if you’re paying attention.”

“This isn’t what I’m good at.” Hari lifts his head and resumes stirring—carefully.

Salazar really wants to refute that, but Hari gets very adamant about odd things. “What are you good at, then?”

“Not dying, apparently.” Hari quips, and pauses after adding the blaeberries. “Is that purple?”

“You’re asking me?” Salazar grins, takes pity on him, and peers into the cauldron. “That is predominantly purple, yes.”

“That’s good. This part will be harder. Reds are confusing.” Hari mutters, and starts adding ground unicorn horn a dusting at a time without stirring. Sort-of-red is achieved, followed by eye-gouging bright yellow.

“What potion needs to go through so many color changes?” Salazar asks, still trying to blink the spots out of his eyes.

“It’s Oculus. I think that’s supposed to be part of the point,” Hari says, and calls a ball of snow to his hand, using a word that is not Latin accompanied by a single touch of his wand. He studies it, uses his wand to knock half of it off onto the table, and dumps the rest into the cauldron, followed immediately by rosemary and eyebright. “I can’t even go by color any longer. Blue-green doesn’t really narrow it down.”
When Hari adds the dried wermod, Salazar sits up and takes notice. He can feel aspects of that potion now, and it’s fascinating.

Then he has to look away when reds and pinks become horrid orange. “Not again!”

Hari laughs at him. “You’re the one who told me to go by feel instead of looking at it, and what are you doing? Looking at it!”

In goes half of the mandrágora, then more dustings of ground unicorn horn and a fresh batch of called-forth ice. This time Hari adds the entire handful for reasons Salazar isn’t comprehending except to feel that it’s right. He has learned his lesson, though; he stops looking into the potion. He’s blinded himself twice today, and that’s enough.

Hari adds the remainder of the stewed mandrágora and then uses his wand to extinguish the flame underneath the cauldron. “There. One Oculus potion. Maybe.”

“It didn’t explode. It’s quite pretty, actually,” Salazar grants him. Instead of that eye-bleeding bright orange or horrific yellow, the potion is the color of a sunset—soft orange touched by violets, pinks, and reds with hints of gold, pale green, and muted yellow. “What does it do?”

Hari stares at him. “It’s Oculus.”

“I know Oculus is Latin for eye, Hari.” Salazar goes to find a ladle to put the potion into a blown-glass flask with its matching stopper. “Otherwise, I do not know what this is. I’ve never heard of it.”

Hari looks horrified. “Oh, good. I just brewed something that hasn’t been invented yet.”

“Something complicated, no less.” Salazar stoppers the flask and passes it over to Hari. “What does it do, and who taught you?”

“No one taught me,” Hari says, leaning against the table and its cooling cauldrons. “My glasses—those magnifying lenses—they didn’t work right, not completely. My friend Hermione found this potion for me when I asked, and towards the end of my second year I memorized it and tried to get it right on my own. I did, after several tries, but the potion didn’t work. Not for me, anyway. It heals wounds in the eyes, but for every eight in ten people, it will also restore eyesight. I wasn’t one of the eight.”

Salazar peers into the cauldron again. Now that he knows its purpose, it feels correct. “That was well-done.”

“It couldn’t have been,” Hari protests.

Salazar resists the urge to glare at him. “Let me be the judge of this skill, thank you. Who has convinced you that you’re such a terrible brewer?”

Hari tilts the warm sunset orange brew back and forth in its flask. “Maybe it was never about skill at all,” he says under his breath.

“What was?”

Hari frowns and places the flask in a carved wooden rack meant to hold all of that size. Salazar has a rare access to glass in the isles; he is still attempting to bribe a glassmaker from León so that the man will feel the need to conduct business in the north. “My Potions instructor. He hates me—I’m not exaggerating, either. He made it clear on the very first day we met in a lesson. He always,
always told me what I’d done wrong, but nothing about what I’d done right, so I assumed I must have
been doing a bad job. Maybe it wasn’t that at all.”

“You mean he was a man who did not know how to give praise, so therefore he pointed out only
mistakes?”

“I think that’s part of it,” Hari says after a moment’s thought. “I know he’s capable of doling out
praise because he always gave it to S—to other students.”

Salazar raises an eyebrow. He has an idea as to this teacher’s role, but is willing to put it aside if
Hari doesn’t yet wish to discuss it. If the politics of the situation are as complicated as he suspects,
that is a conversation that may take days. “What is the other part?”

“Politics,” Hari says, which confirms his thoughts. “Not between Houses, but about Voldemort.”

“And how would that behavior relate to your ill-named idiot Vol de mort?” Salazar asks.

Hari smiles; he always takes heart in someone mocking that foul magician. “If you were a spy who
wasn’t certain about your enemy’s defeat, would you become best friends with your enemy’s worst
enemy?”

“Oh, I don’t think so,” Hari says, which confirms his thoughts. “Not between Houses, but about
Voldemort.”

“Only if I thought it would become a safeguard and not a hazard,” Salazar replies. “You think he
believed it would be a hazard.”

“Maybe. I’m not even certain about the spy bit. It’s—something happened at the end of my fourth
year, and I heard my Potions teacher and the Headmaster talking afterwards. The words they
used…the only thing that made sense to me was that it must have had to do with spying on
Voldemort. The conversation was really vague, and usually they aren’t vague when speaking to
each other at all. Or—or maybe he just hated my father that much. I’m supposed to look a lot like
him,” Hari says, but he doesn’t sound happy about the comparison. Salazar wonders how many
times the comparison has been made to his little brother’s detriment.

Helga is thrilled with the idea of an easily transportable potion that repairs damage to the eye. “And
it corrects eyesight?”

Salazar glances at Hari and gives him an expectant look. “It’s supposed to. It didn’t work on me—
it’s only effective for vision correction on eight out of ten people,” Hari says.

Helga nods. “Not as efficient as my healing and corrective work, then, but not everyone in the isles
has easy access to a magician with a wand. Let’s experiment,” she declares, and then sends for
Godric.

Godric arrives in a sudden display of Desplazarse. “Sorry,” he huffs, leaning over to rest his hands
on his knees. “I was out on a run, and almost to the next village when your Patronus caught up to
me. What is it?”

“Does your vision still trouble you?” Helga asks, and holds up the sunset-colored potion.

“Only for things I try to view closely.” Godric eyes Salazar, who points at Hari.

“Not my work, Godric,” Salazar says, “but you should consent to test it. I think you might be
surprised.”

“I don’t know…” Godric tries to defer.
“Let him test the damned potion!” Helga snaps. “You won’t let me near your sarding eyes with a wand, so you will sit down and deal with a potion!”

Hari is biting his lip when Salazar looks at him. “How much of it?”

“About half,” Hari answers, still trying not to laugh at the expression on Godric’s face. “And I’m glad I’m not the only one who finds the Viking amazing and terrifying.”

Godric looks at the potion, lets out the resigned sigh of a man awaiting a morning execution, and then drinks half of the flask’s contents. “How soon does it—sarding—” Godric breaks off, wide-eyed. “It does as the boy says! Helga, you’re absolutely beautiful.”

“Don’t start.” Helga smiles as she rescues the flask from Godric’s hand. “Excellent vision, yes?”

Godric nods, still staring around in amazement. “Such delightful clarity, and there is a significant lack of itching I’ve been dealing with of late. How long does it last?”

Hari shrugs when the others look at him. “The vision correction is supposed to be permanent.”

“Amazing! We’re drinking a barrel dry tonight,” Godric declares, pointing at Hari.

“I think you can get pissed, and I will watch you do it,” Hari counters, smiling. Salazar has never heard the term pissed before, but the context defines it nicely.

Godric does exactly as he claimed, but his problematic spilling habit is gone until he is direly into his cups, swaying and slurring. At least drinking with the man will be less messy, Salazar reflects.

What is more interesting is that Hari’s claimed eight of ten ratio for the Oculus potion doesn’t seem to apply. Helga takes flasks of it out when she visits the local villages, and says that every person who tries the potion reports that their vision is restored.

“I don’t know how that could be,” Hari frets, looking at the bottled remains of the rest of his Oculus experiment.

“Did you change its formula?”

Hari bites his lip. “Only in the sense that you didn’t have water-distilled essence of wormwood, or turmeric.”

“What is turmeric?” Salazar asks, curious.

“A root from…uh, the East. I think,” Hari answers. “I was just guessing with the eyebright and the rosemary substitution, and the bilberries felt right.”

Salazar frowns. “Bilberries? Oh—the locals call those blaeberries. Is that the extent of your changes?”

“No,” Hari says after a moment. “The ice, the first amount. That was less. The mandrake, too—the second half is only supposed to be added until the potion achieves a certain color, but I just added all of it.”

Salazar smiles. “Because it felt right.”

“Yes.” Hari glances at him. “What does that mean?”

“It means, brother, that you are not ‘rubbish’ at brewing potions, after all.”
Chapter Summary

"I’m going to kill your history instructor."

“I’d pay to witness that.”

Chapter Notes

Not up on comments and still sort of emotionally hungover...so I'll emotionally happen to the rest of you! :D

Their second attempt at a potion is a disaster before it even starts. Salazar spends a painstaking amount of time translating one of his potions from its written Castellano into understandable West Saxon English.

Hari dutifully reads through the list before he glances around the room. “I see most of the ingredients here. Where do you keep the rest of it?”

Salazar nearly drops an iron cauldron on his foot. “Outside,” he says, and then takes in the expression on Hari’s face. “Tell me you know how to collect herbs.”

Hari shakes his head.

“Parts of a unicorn?” Salazar tries, and gets another headshake.

“You can identify stones, yes?” Salazar asks in desperation. It seems he’s found the lack in Hari’s education, after all, and it is a very large one. He has never met a magician who knows nothing of how to collect herbs, stones, or acquire magical ingredients. The crafting of basic healing poultices and brewed drinks is known even among the non-magical.

“When they’re cut and polished and I bought them pre-labeled,” Hari says.

Salazar tries not to kick the cauldron across the room. That would hurt as much as dropping it on his foot. “Did anyone ever teach you how to do this?”

Hari winces. “No. Sorry.”

Salazar places his hand over his mouth and breathes. He will not kill people he will never meet. He will not. “What were you doing in these herb lessons you mentioned? This Herbology.”

“Care of dangerous magical plants, mostly,” Hari replies. “I can hear you grinding your teeth, by the way.”

He utters an angry gurgle before he can manage words again. “How—how does...the future is stupid!”
“Not all of it,” Hari tries. “I mean, we have vaccines against diseases that kill people here. Uh, medical injections that convince the body never to have those diseases.”

“Well—that’s—” Salazar puts his face into his hands. A crafted immunity against dangerous illnesses is, at least, not stupid. “One problem at a time. Tomorrow I will begin showing you how to gather herbs.”

“I hope that involves identifying them, or I’m going to bring you a lot of weeds”

Salazar nods. “You will learn each of them, first, and craft your own guide. After that, there is a book I will copy for you that identifies every stone, plant, and parts of magical creatures that can be used. I will merely review what you bring afterwards to ensure you don’t kill us all by accident.”

“That’s probably for the best,” Hari mutters.

Salazar wakes Hari up at dawn the next morning. He hates mornings; he is a complete bastard if he has to be awake before the sun is properly in the sky. “Pack up for traveling. You’re going to want a very long scroll, quill, ink, wand…at least one change of clothes, and that cloak Orellana gifted you,” he decides, while Hari is still glaring at him in utter loathing.

“I don’t have a fucking change of clothes, Sal.” His little brother is also not a morning person. This will be an interesting bit of traveling.

“Ah.” He’d forgotten that, and Hari’s refusal to let him correct that problem might drive him to drinking to an excess that would see Godric unconscious on the floor. “Oh, and do you know how to draw?” Salazar asks.

Salazar is now being glared at by Hari and Hedwig both, since the owl sleeps on Hari’s windowsill. “I have no idea, Sal.”

“I loathe your teachers and your schooling,” Salazar growls in Euskaran. “After you’ve gathered your belongings, ask Helga to show you. She has far more patience for such things than I.”

“I thought we were just going to be looking for things near Hogewáþ,” Hari says after their first bit of what he calls Apparition. It’s a stupid word. Salazar wonders where the English language stole it from. Perhaps it hails from *apparere* in the Latin, but that word does *not* mean travel.

“Yes, but then I realized that I refuse to be a terrible teacher,” Salazar tells him. “We’ll be gone for a week, which is why I suggested you bring Hedwig. I don’t think she’d actually allow you to leave without her.”

“Probably not,” Hari agrees, glancing at the owl on his shoulder, who resolutely *slept* through their magical Desplazarse. “Where are we going?”

“Everywhere it is possible to reach by Desplazarse without needing to do so again to go further on the second day,” Salazar replies. “I will show you how to find herbs, stones, and magical creatures, as well as the markets that will sell you things beyond easy reach.”

“That sounds like fun, actually, though I really miss tea right about now,” Hari says. “Caffeine. Uh…a drink that helps you wake up faster.”
“That exists? I want it, too. Mornings are sarding awful.” Salazar turns himself around in a circle, placing their current location. “Where can such a drink be found?”

“I think it’s from China and India,” Hari says.

“I do not know those names. Where are they?”

“Far to the east,” Hari tells him. “I really don’t…south of Russia?”

Salazar frowns. “That is also unfamiliar. Do you know of different names for these places?”

“I’m sort of realizing that History of Magic is a useless subject, actually,” Hari says, irritated. “I should know this, right? I mean—if they’re going to teach us about the founding of Hogewáþ, shouldn’t that include what the rest of the world was like at the time?”

“Logically, yes, but your Hogewáþ does not seem to function logically,” Salazar says. “I do not have the opportunity at the moment to travel East. Perhaps it’s a journey we can make when the children go home for harvest in Augustus. They’ll be gone until October, and I want to explore this idea of tea.”

“I hope you speak Chinese,” Hari says.

Salazar rolls his eyes. “That word also means nothing to me. I’m going to kill your history instructor.”

For some reason, that makes Hari laugh. “I’d pay to witness that.”

“Rowena has a map of the East,” Salazar says after he’s introduced his brother to most of the plants growing in the Cumbric region. “Perhaps you can label these places, and we’ll know what to properly call it.”

“I hope I remember enough primary school geography for that.”

“Half of those words made no sense. Again,” Salazar says.

“Oh, sorry.” Hari switches to Parseltongue. “My schooling before magical schooling. They taught us geography—maps. But I don’t know how much I remember. I think I recall that India is sort of obvious, and Russia is gigantic, but our maps were a lot more…accurate.”

“How so?”

“Our maps included the whole of the Americas: North, Central, and South, for starters,” Hari says.

Salazar glances at him. “Yet more places I’ve never heard of. I would definitely like to see them drawn out on a map in comparison to our own location on this isle.” He thinks on it. “Unless…you mean the landmass that is far to the west?” he asks, and Hari nods. “Then Helga’s people have explored in the north of that land, but I do not know how much mapping was done. Most of our knowledge of the Far West survives only in the magical communities, among the travelers in the south who crossed the ocean and returned.”

Hari shoves a bundle of adreminte into a basket with a disgusted expression, but Salazar doesn’t think it has anything to do with the plant. “I’ve just learned more about magical history in just a few minutes than I have in an entire year of class.”

“You are still not causing me to have any fondness for your Hogewáþ, Hari.”
Hari seems surprised to discover that instead of sleeping outdoors, they are staying in taverns or in the occasional farmhouse. Salazar always pays well, and the tavern keeps remembering that.

“Oh, God,” Hari says the first time he emerges from a tavern privy. “Why?”

Salazar laughs at him, understanding at once why Hari resorted to calling upon a deity. “Did you not remember to use the breathing charm?”

“I’m used to Hogewáp’s privies!” Hari says. “I didn’t remember—our privies in my time are not holes in the ground, Sal! I am never going to get that smell out of my nose!”

“Just keep it in mind for next time. There is not a magician in every dwelling to perform purging charms. Castles,” he adds, grinning, “will be worse.”

Hari cringes. “Great. Something to look forward to.”

It was a good season for beer; the flavor is decent after aging through the winter, though the hint of beech and oak in many batches is stronger than Salazar prefers. There is also good mead from last season’s honey. Salazar has to coax Hari into drinking by explaining that it is safer than the water—that Hogewáp’s clean water is a rarity, not common. Even when a dwelling or village has a proper well, there is no way to know if their bodies will be sickened by something within that water that doesn’t affect those who are used to drinking it.

“What is your difficulty with the mead?” Salazar finally asks.

“I didn’t grow up drinking anything that had alcohol in it,” Hari replies when no one is close enough to their table to hear the hissing. “Sal, I will fall on my face if I drink more than one of these.”

“What did you drink, then?”

“Juice. Water. Butterbeer,” Hari replies, giving the mead a concerned glance. “This is really, uh, strong.”

“Then stick to one for the night. You’ll have to work up a tolerance. The women brew beer and mead for travelers who would be sickened by local water,” Salazar advises, wondering what “butterbeer” is. It sounds as if it is either awful or intriguing.

“Why can’t they just boil the water?” Hari asks.

Salazar pauses. “What difference will that make?”

“It’s, uh, distillation, I think. Boiling kills the tiny creatures living in the water that make you sick,” Hari explains. “If the liquid boils when they make mead and beer, that will do the same thing. The alcohol from fermenting it would just kill anything that might be waiting in the storage barrels.”

“We are going to have fun over a cauldron,” Salazar says, sipping at his mead while flirting with their server in Cumbric. He knew that boiling water made it safe to consume, but not why. Knowing why is thrilling.

“Sal, stop flirting with her. She has a very large man who wants to beat the shit out of you,” Hari says, scowling. “And you’re married!”

“I am married, yes, to a wife who knows that I would never dishonor her.” Salazar takes another look around and discovers that their server has a hulking brute of a man that is definitely seeking
out a brawl. Salazar lifts his eyebrows and puts his wand on the table next to his trencher. The brute’s interest in fighting Salazar immediately vanishes, and he moves on to find another victim.

Hari’s eyes dart between brute and wand in a way that tells Salazar that Hari understood at once why Salazar performed such an action. “Like…like Godric does to Sedemai?” he asks.

Salazar blinks a few times, caught off-guard by the question. “What—no. Hari, Sedemai is well aware of Godric’s activities with other women, and approves of his choices before he is allowed to bed them.”

Harry looks startled. “That’s a thing? I mean, people do that?”

“It isn’t to my preference, but yes, some people do,” Salazar replies.

“Right.” Harry frowns and returns to the more important subject. “Why are we going to have fun over a cauldron?”

“I say that we’ll have fun because if you understand concepts such as this distillation, then you already have the talent to brew all potions well, not just a few.”

“Never seemed like it,” Hari says, stirring the stew around in his bowl.

“Again: please allow me to be the judge of that,” Salazar retorts indignantly.

That expedition is also how Salazar learns that his little brother doesn’t speak a word of frances. Somehow, it had never once occurred to him that such was even possible.

“How?” Salazar asks in disbelief. “How can you not speak the language of the people who live less than a day’s travel over the ocean? We trade with them so often that speaking frances is all but a requirement for living in these lands! Even I learnt frances in Court!”

Hari winces. “We’ve already established that my education was terrible, Sal. I know how to say ‘Hello’ in frances, and that’s it.”

Salazar takes a moment to reflect upon the pros and cons involved in tearing out his own hair. “It’s fine. I can rectify this. I hope you’ll like knowing half of the languages in northern Europe.”

Hari rolls his eyes. “I really don’t think I have much of a choice, Sal.”

* * * * *

During the first weekend of Iulius, Harry watches the students and some of the teachers play another Quidditch match. He was horrified during the last game to realize that there is no Golden Snitch—and of course there isn’t. They haven’t been invented yet. They’re still using Golden Snidgets.

“What a face you are making,” Salazar comments from the air. “What is it this time? Have the rules changed? No one is dying quickly enough?”

Harry stares at him. “You’re joking about that last part, right?”

“Yes, though Godric will tell horror stories about gladiator games astride brooms that are legends
passed down through his family,” Salazar replies. “Well?”


“That they are. It is why we established a rule that if one kills the Snidget, instead of earning one hundred fifty points, one loses their team those points. That also ends the game, and often means the team losing those points has lost. Thus, everyone is very careful not to kill them.” Salazar flies closer to him, distracted from the game—which means Tholy is yelling at him to pay more attention; thus Tholy doesn’t notice Branwyne’s approach and gets smacked with the heavy leather Bludger. “Why are you so surprised by the birds’ use, Hari?”

“Because we don’t use birds. We have a mechanical device that acts just like a Snidget,” Harry says.

“Mechanical,” Salazar repeats, frowning. “Mechanicus? As in maquina?”

“If that means machine, then yes.”

“Machina, then.” Salazar looks thoughtful. “I wonder how one would create that.”

Harry shrugs. “No idea, but you might want to start playing again before Wander and Branwyne beat you to death with a Bludger.”

The Britons from Strathclyde chase Salazar for the rest of the game. Harry knew he liked those kids for a reason.

It’s while watching the chase that Harry belatedly realizes that the brooms they’re using don’t have foot grips. When he asks when the game is done, no one even understands what he means.

Harry has to draw them out on a rough sketch of a broom for Sal, explaining that the foot grips on his last broom were made of Goblin-crafted iron. He has no idea what to tell Sal about their creation other than the fact that the grips were supposed to help quickly stop a broom’s flight—aside from giving him a place to put his feet instead of letting them dangle in the air.

“I like the idea of having a place for my feet, rather than this ‘dangling’ you mention.” Salazar picks up Harry’s sketch and frowns. “If I were to have this made, would you accept it?”

Harry’s stomach knots up. If he says no, he has to learn how to fly without foot grips. If he says yes, then he…he’ll figure out some way to pay Sal back. Those grips are worth far more than the mere ten Galleons he has. “Y-yeah.”

Salazar nods and wanders off with the sketch. Harry doesn’t think any more of it for a while, still more concerned with lessons, language, and fucking Mind Magic.

At the end of the third week of July, Salazar presents him with a leather-wrapped bundle that holds silver-cast foot grips, not iron. They’re shaped almost exactly like the foot grips on brooms from Harry’s time. With no excuses remaining when it comes to broom-making, Harry finds Orellana on a day when they’re both free. He, Orellana, and Fortunata go into the Dark Forest, hunting for trees.

It’s always dimmer and cooler in the wood, but Harry can easily make out details of leaves, color variations and bark textures. He knows enough West Saxon English now to take a guess at why the name changed from Dark to Forbidden—the English word for dark is deorc, but it also means gloomy (still accurate) or sinister. Sinister is a synonym for forbidden, or at least close enough for it not to matter all that much.
Granted, no one in this time has to worry about stumbling over man-eating Acromantulas. In 1995, Forbidden is probably the more accurate name.

English is really stupid, and he’s no longer certain which version is worse. He can speak it, but he has to be careful to keep his words precise. It still likes to end up blended with Castellano, but at least Orellana, Salazar, and Fortunata can understand him when he forgets.

“Well, Hari?” Orellana asks him, ducking under a low branch before gazing back up at the trees. “We have discussed trees until I am hoarse. Do you know them now?”

“I do, but I’d still rather hear you say that I’m choosing correctly.” Orellana is really sensitive about trees, claiming they whisper, think, and even gossip. He doesn’t want to chop off the wrong tree’s limb by accident and then have to do the same to the correct tree.

“All right, then—Fortunata, please do stop riding the unicorn!” Orellana calls.

Fortunata gives them a miffed look from her spot on a unicorn’s back. “I asked first, and he said I could!”

Orellana sighs and waves them on. “She is fearless.”

“It is a good trait to have,” Harry replies. He thinks so, anyway. “She did ask, at least. I’m not certain I would have thought of that.”

“You are a man. They tend to be shy of men,” Orellana says.

Harry finds a stand of black elder trees in a particularly rocky part of the forest. The trees are covered in white flowers that are shedding their petals, ready to produce elderberries. The flowers and petals littering the ground make it look like it snowed on just this particular bit of forest. “That is the broomstick itself.”

“Elder.” Orellana gives the wood a thoughtful nod. “You are fortunate to find it this far north. Black elder does not like such cold weather, but the land around the school shelters many things.”

Harry walks around the small copse of black elder trees until he finds a young one that has the right amount of flex and thickness to it. He puts his hand on it, and while he feels stupid asking the tree if it minds being cut, he doesn’t feel anything that tells him it’s a bad idea.

He aims his wand at the base of the tree and murmurs, “Cortar.” That one is Castellano, not Latin, but the Latin word for cutting takes longer to say. He’s getting really fond of efficient magic.

“Now I need a birch,” he murmurs. “And a hazel tree.”

“Two different sorts of twigs?” Orellana asks.

“Yes.” Harry isn’t ashamed of the fact that he’s trying to rebuild his Firebolt, even though he doesn’t think he’ll succeed. He doesn’t even hope to attain a Nimbus 2000’s capabilities. He knows the wood his Firebolt was made from, though. Even with Orellana’s lessons, Harry can’t see a reason to choose anything different. He’ll be happy if the fucking broom actually flies.

“My old broom had birch twigs, or that particular type could be made with hazel twigs. I’m wondering—those are two different flight properties. Why not both?”

“Indeed.” Orellana looks pleased. “You are a very good student, Hari.”
Harry makes a face. “That will only be true if the broom flies when I’m done.”

He chooses silver birch because he’s always been fascinated by that tree’s bark, even when he didn’t know what kind of tree he was looking at. Hazel is harder to find; for all the adages about hazel and moaning in his time, the trees like to hide unless it’s the season for them to start dropping nuts everywhere. He finds one and gathers enough branches to have extra twigs. Assembling the tail is going to be a process that will involve blood, sweat, swearing, and possibly tears. He knows all the spells and has the tools he needs, but that still doesn’t mean he’s capable of building a broom.

Harry finds an empty room in the castle with a trestle table inside, the ends charred from either a spell or potion-brewing gone awry. He spends the evening stripping the elder wood of its bark and then studies it while frowning. All brooms in his time had the same shape. Unless a girl was buying a broom designed for women, they were all the same size. He knows from wearing Dudley’s clothing for ten years that the idea of one-size-fits-all is complete bullshit. Harry is short, and he’s old enough that he doesn’t put much faith in suddenly growing six inches taller.

Well, he’s short for his time. Harry is still getting used to the idea that in 990, he’s no longer the shortest person in the room. Helga is considered tall for a woman, since she’s of his and Salazar’s height; Godric is Viking levels of tall because of his Saxon heritage. The other men and women in the castle are Harry’s height or Orellana’s height, and she’s a full head shorter than he is.

He uses his wand and his very sharp boot knife to create a broom that has a lower seat than his Firebolt. That gives him an easier reach for the grip—not only will he be able to lock his arms on his broom handle without having to stretch for it, he’ll be able to tuck in and present a smaller target much faster.

If it flies.

Harry runs his hand along the smooth wood after rubbing it down with first oil, and then beeswax. Both protect the wood and help it retain the flex a good broom needs to keep from snapping from minor incidents. His broom had been a dark reddish-brown, but natural black elder wood is pale, full of creams and golds that play along the striation lines. He likes this better; it looks more wild and less like a piece of furniture.

Godric gave him a ream of deer sinew to bind the twigs to the broom. Harry works on that the next evening, trimming down hazel and silver birch twigs until he has an equal amount of both types of wood, all the same length and size. Then he casts the corrected Unbreakable Charm, *Infragilis*, so that the twigs won’t crack and break as he works with them.

When Harry has wound the sinew leather around and around the twigs, he looks at the mess, sighs, undoes it all, and then tries again. This time he is more careful to keep the sinew from twisting or crossing over the previous wrapping, so he gets a smooth line of leather cord from the beginning of the twigs to the end of the broom shaft. He uses a permanent sticking charm to keep leather, twigs, and broom all bound together properly. Between the *Infragilis* and the other protective spells, he won’t need to worry about twig maintenance or replacement.

Harry unwraps the silver-cast foot grips and sits them on the front edge of the leather-bound twigs. Then he frowns and moves them back a few inches. He’s never liked flying while feeling like his knees are trying to tuck in under his chin. It was a good placement when he was younger, but he’d felt the difference when flying during the Triwizard Tournament last year. How tall adults fly on brooms with the foot grips so close, he has no idea.

“Why silver?” he asks himself, tapping his fingernail on the metal. “Why not iron?” He knows the
answer to this; it was in one of Rowena’s lectures on a day she veered away from language and into magical theory.

“Because the Green Folk don’t like iron, and iron reduces magic,” Harry murmurs. “Silver likes magic and increases it.” If these foot grips have been properly spelled with braking charms, then they should be more responsive than the iron castings.

That makes him wonder why broom-makers in his time insist upon iron. In retrospect, it seems like a stupid idea. Maybe that’s why the goblins are always going on strike over iron workings.

He spends another few days inspecting the broom every evening, making sure the charms are holding, adding the newer magic one spell at a time. No one told him this, but Harry feels like casting all the spells on the wood at once would be overwhelming—for the broom, not for him. Broom-building is treated as a specialized craft in his time, so Harry is going to treat it that way, too.

“Vos semper volant,” Harry finally says, casting the last spell. He can feel the magic settle into the wood, and when he puts his hand on the grip, the broom feels right.

Maybe it will fly.

Harry places it on the stone floor of the empty room and holds out his hand. He doesn’t have to issue a verbal command; the broom jumps up and smacks against his palm. He closes his fingers around it, feeling his heartbeat speed up.

Maybe.

He goes outside, where dusk is already giving way to dark, but it doesn’t matter. There are no other fliers at the moment, not with everyone off to supper, and besides, he already knows he can see well in the dark. He holds out his hand, lets the broom jump up against his palm again, mounts it, and kicks off.

It flies. It actually fucking flies!

Harry realizes he’s laughing in delight as the wind caresses his face and flattens his hair back. He’s built a broom. Ron would never believe this!

He goes over to the makeshift Quidditch pitch to test the broom’s speed. The length of the pitch hasn’t changed, and he can count the seconds in his head as he flies at full speed from one end to the other.

Then he brakes hard at the opposite side of the pitch, startled. Not only was his braking smooth, despite the rapid stop, the count was only about four seconds less than his Firebolt’s time across the pitch. That puts this new broom at a speed just below the Nimbus 2000.

“Okay. I can work with this,” Harry mutters, and goes for the rings to test how well it turns.

That nearly causes him to leave his heart behind in the third goal hoop. The idea about the hazel and the silver birch twigs blended together was a good one—the broom turns on a fucking sixpence.

“Wow.” Harry coasts through the air in the dark, grinning. Now he really wants to play bloody Quidditch. He wants to know what it would be like to chase a Golden Snitch on this broom. He wants to play with his team—
One day, he will again. Maybe.

Right now, Hari would be chasing a Snidget. He hopes he can catch one without killing it. Maybe some kind of buffering shield charm around his hands so that it cushions his grip, but only in regards to Golden Snidgets? He’ll have to find out if the others would consider that cheating.

He’s still darting around the pitch, enjoying the freedom of flight, of feeling like he isn’t trapped, when Sedemai interrupts him. “You did not attend supper.”

Harry glances over to find that Sedemai is hovering in the air nearby. Her magic always spreads out behind her like a great, misty blue wing. Godric’s magic is scarlet, Helga’s is gold, Rowena’s is a brilliant sapphire blue, Salazar’s is emerald, and Orellana’s is copper. Harry wonders what color his magic is, but maybe he doesn’t have a color. The Founders, Sedemai, and Orellana are all powerful magicians. He’s just a half-trained kid who was turned into a Horcrux by an arsehole.

“I know,” he says. “I was distracted.”

Sedemai grins and flies closer to get a look at his broom, lifting her wand to cast light upon it. “So I see. It is beautiful work, Harry.”

“Thanks,” he says, ducking his head as his face heats. “It’s only because Orellana is a good teacher.”

Sedemai lets out a brief, delighted laugh. “One can teach until one is blue in the face, Harry, but unless the student listens, there is no point.”

“She had to repeat herself a lot,” Harry mutters.

“That is because your English is terrible,” Sedemai teases in response. “Of course she had to repeat herself. Come flying with me?” she invites, and Harry nods.

They don’t get back to the castle until long after everyone else has gone to bed for the first half of the night. Harry is so exhausted he all but stumbles his way up the Grand Stair, but it was worth it.

Fortunata trudges out of her small chamber and rubs her eyes when Harry latches the door behind him. “It is late,” she says in a grumpy mutter.

“It is. Why are you awake?” Harry asks.

“I wanted to know when you got back. Good night, Uncle!” Fortunata chirps, and goes straight back to bed.

Harry stands there for a minute, feeling like he’s been punched. “Good—good night, Fortunata,” he whispers, and flees to his room.
Chapter Summary

“Are you well?”

“Just having odd thoughts.”

“And a longing for those who aren’t here.”

Chapter Notes

I think I’m finally writing the last chapter of Part III. *points at finally having a chapter count above* This one kind of got out of hand, because history and nerditry and culture and THINGS.

All hail @norcumi & @jabberwockiepie for cheerleading reading, and @mrsstanley and @sanerontheinside for beta-work!

During the last week of July, just before the students go home for the season, Helga corners Harry in the kitchen when he’s still trying to eat breakfast. “You need clothing.”

Harry looks up in alarm from the sandwich he’s trying to eat. Godric thinks sandwiches are a brilliant idea and is trying to figure out everything sandwichable in existence, while the others are much more bemused (or enthused) by the rough forks that now litter the kitchen storage, joining the spoons and blades at mealtimes. Harry is just grateful that breakfast is an accepted part of life in a magical community, whereas in most other circles aside from the peasantry, breakfast as a concept doesn’t seem to exist. It’s *odd*, but he’s not sure it’s polite to ask why everyone else decided breakfast was terrible.

Helga smiles at him. “You have the expression of one who has just heard he is to be marched to the executioner’s ax.”

“I never really liked dealing with the…the necessity,” Harry says. “I, uh, well—no, you all have enough reason to want my aunt and uncle dead. I had to sneak out of the house to buy clothing that fit me, but that was only after I started school and could get to my vault.” At least he didn’t have to explain vaults. Harry was only surprised to find that Gringotts has a banking branch in every major city on the island. That would be so blasted convenient in his time instead of needing to go into London. “And—I don’t have enough money.” Not when he has to pay for the cloth and for the tailor to make things.

Helga lifts an eyebrow and gives him a look of amused tolerance. “That won’t be your concern, and I’ll hear no arguments from you. Come; we’re going to spend part of our morning in Eidyn Buhr.”

“What’s Eidyn Buhr?” Harry asks, which seems safer than trying to protest about money. He has
yet to have a disagreement with Helga, and he’d like to keep it that way—especially today. He woke up with a headache that doesn’t want to go away, probably from yesterday’s Mind Magic lessons.

“It’s one of the strongholds of Alba, the port, though they’ve not held it very long. It’s a good trading center due to its location, though. An excellent place to begin searching for cloth fitting for life in the north,” Helga explains, escorting him from the castle while Harry tries to finish cramming the rest of breakfast into his mouth. He used to naïvely think it was just Salazar who was excitable, but no—once any of the four Founders decide they’re going to do something, it happens. If you can’t keep up, they’ll drag you along in their wake.

“You needed clothes ages ago, but sometimes we forget that you are not exactly used to things done our way,” Helga says. Harry smiles; it’s a nice way of saying he would have been a right mess over it, and he appreciates that she isn’t mocking him. “After Eidyn Buhr, we’ll go down to London. Sometimes they have lovely bolts of fabric for warm weather.”

“Warm defined by who?” Harry asks.

“Admittedly, by my standards,” she replies in wry acknowledgement. “To find cloth designed for weather that I would find intolerable, that will require a trip to León, though Salazar has been muttering about traveling east to find tea. What is tea?”

“Bliss,” Harry says, who never realized exactly how dependent on tea he was until there was none to be found.

The market in Eidyn Buhr is fascinating. Harry can make out bits of Gaelic and Pictish now, but Pictish is dominant, and there isn’t a hint of West Saxon English.

Harry follows Helga to a particular stall she seems to be hunting for, where the fabric is placed out in large rolls: linen, wool of varying thickness and softness, small and large furs, and thick leather tied in bundles, with a smaller selection of muslin and cotton from the East. Harry is still trying to figure out where “East” officially begins, but no one seems to have a clear answer beyond the fact that Jerusalem is in the East. Harry wants to say that a lot of things are in the East, but half of them might not even exist yet.

“We have a tailor, and we can dye most fabrics ourselves,” Helga says to Harry in Norse, which is a language that makes this particular set of shopkeepers perk up. That explains why Helga was looking for them; she knows them, which might mean a discount. Not that anyone knew what Harry meant by “discount” until Salazar shouted “Descompte!” when he finally recognized the Catalan mutation from a Latin word.

“I really, really can’t pay for this,” Harry replies in English.

Helga glares at him. “What did I say? This will not be your concern. You will likely need cloth of every type, which is far more than you could afford right now even if we’d the sense to pay you from the very first moment you lifted your wand to begin showing other students how to cast spells. You will also need good leather, which adds to the cost. The boots you wear will not last forever, and you have no proper belt for holding a weapon.”

Fuck, Harry thinks, trying not to cringe. He’s going to be in debt up to his eyeballs through the next year, at least. “Why would I want to carry a weapon?”

“Think of it as a determent against fools, if nothing else. Godric does not wear a sword beyond Hogewáþ’s walls because he needs it, though he is rather fond of a decent blade,” Helga explains.
She grips the handle of the knife on her belt and pulls it forth, revealing a blade and hilt which would be one continuous line but for the leather wrapping the hilt. “Do I need it for my defence? No. Is it a useful tool? Yes.” She tilts her head at the larger furs. “The castle keeps us very warm, but the same cannot be said of the grounds and the hills. Do you know anything of furs?”

“You make an animal dead to get one.” Harry isn’t really fond of the idea of wearing it. Probably too many telly commercials about animal cruelty, though he imagines everything here was also in someone’s soup pot.

“Reindeer,” Helga decides, which gets them a massive single cut of leather that still has its original hair, not to mention an entire additional bolt of what is definitely not cow leather. Deer, maybe? There are still a lot of deer in Britain in 990, wandering around in droves.

Harry convinces Helga to add in a bolt of the cotton, which is soft and familiar. If he’s going to be forced into owning more clothes, he wants fabric that he won’t hate wearing.

He’s dreading carrying it all—that reindeer is heavy—when Helga takes out her wand and startles Harry by shrinking everything down to something that fits inside her robe pocket. The Norse shopkeepers don’t even blink at the performance of magic.

Helga then engages in spirited, rapid Norse haggling before smiling and handing over the agreed-upon coin. Even the shopkeepers look pleased, so Harry assumes it was a fair bargain.

Harry restrains himself until they leave the stall. “You just cast magic right in front of them?” he asks in disbelief.

“Yes. Why wouldn’t I?” Helga asks. “They are of my people. All women in my homelands know some form of magic, Harry, even if they are not a vǫlva.”

Harry has no idea what to say in response to that. She’s right; why wouldn’t she? He now lives in a castle that has magical and non-magical residents. The non-magical residents don’t bat an eyelash at the magic they see. The kids go home at night to parents who are aware of what they are learning at Hogwarts; they have siblings who aren’t magical, but think it’s great that they’ll have a magic-worker in the family. Myrddin isn’t a mythic figure because of Arthur—he thinks—but because the old magician apparently refuses to die.

There is so much crossover between magical beings and regular people in this time that Harry doesn’t understand, and he doesn’t know how to even begin to ask about it. He’s trying to cope with a mishmash of information that doesn’t make sense when put together. The International Statute of Secrecy wasn’t made official until the 1600s, but that was supposed to be in response to witch-burning—except that started a lot earlier. The Fat Friar was burnt as a witch for curing the pox by poking it with his wand, and got caught by the wrong people. That was some time after Hogwarts’ Founding, but not that long afterwards. Myrddin wanted a safe haven for magic learning, but anyone non-magical can find and enter the castle. If the Statute had nothing to do with witch-burnings, then what was it for?

“I’ve never heard you mention vǫlva before;” Harry says as they roam through Eidyn Buhr. The more he repeats the name, the more certain he is that this is Edinburgh, but it’s his first visit no matter the century. “What is that?”

“Vǫlva is the Norse term for wand carrier, or one who carries a magical staff,” Helga replies. “The vǫlur are most known to practice seiðr, which are magics specific to my people. There is also galdr, which is magic such as what you learn in Hogewáþ as well as ritual singing magics, and spá, which is the art of prophecy. I am not so good at spá; that is more Salazar’s talent than mine. I am
Harry nods and wonders if prophecy and Divination are the same thing. Helga talks about prophecy like it’s a valid magic, so maybe Trelawney really was just completely mental. He’ll have to speak to Sal about that later, along with about a million other topics.

Harry should probably figure out how to prioritize the massive list of things he doesn’t know. “What are sálögöng Fólk?” he asks.

“The equivalent…you would say soul walkers,” Helga translates, which is when Harry decides he doesn’t want to know anything else about it. Helga’s voice took on a certain timbre when she spoke those words, something definitely not normal.

Helga seems to know London’s outdoor markets as well as those in Eidyn Buhr. “Oh, good. London does have silk!” she exclaims, picking up a bolt of black-patterned gold and spinning around in a circle with it. Harry bites back a smile; there is no doubting where Hufflepuff’s House colors will come from. “We don’t have the means to dye a single bolt of silk at home unless we desire a solid block of color, so what you choose will be as it looks when it is tailored. You will need silk for hose, lighter cloaks, tunics, and undershirts aside from those made from linen. The silk layers are usually reserved for Court visits.”

Harry would be worried about the size of that list, but he’s too busy being horrified by one item in particular. “Bloody hose?”

“No hose? Hmm.” Helga glances down at his denims, which are starting to tear at the knees. “No, I suppose you wouldn’t prefer to be dependent on them, though they are normal garb. Sturdy material for truis and silk for all else, then, but you will be required to wear full hose at Court. This shop keep also has excellent weaves of woolen silk—if you find a color you like, purchase the entire roll. It is comfortable and excellent for the weather, and you do not yet have any sort of proper robe or coat. Orellana crafted you a fine summer cloak, but you’ll need more than one of those.”

Harry sighs. “Okay. I’ll go look.”

A lot of the silks hurt his eyes. There are rolls of solid bright color, like Helga mentioned they could make in Moray. There are many more patterned silks with bright colors that might be pleasing if everyone’s favorite base color for those weaves wasn’t eye-gouging yellow. He skirts past them all to find muted, blended colors that are not patterned weaves at all, but dyes where one color seems to bleed into another. Harry lifts the edge of a blue silk whose edges melt into creams and then back into blues again. The design is…peaceful.

The dying process is mindful of some of the awful tie-dyed shirts he saw kids in primary school wear, but this isn’t tie-dye. This is…

He frowns, recognizing the tingling feel beneath his fingertips. Magical weavers. The color blending was done magically. Now there is a process that he would love to watch.

Harry asks one of the shopkeeper’s kids about the silk and finds out that these bolts were all imported from the true Far East, well beyond Persia’s borders. Fuck. His chances of seeing how this is done just shrank drastically.

The magic-dyed silks are amazing, but expensive. Harry chooses just one in black; hidden within the silk is an excellent range of colors, like the green, blue, and violet end of a rainbow. He’s given up on the woolen silk weaves and has just chosen rolls of solid black and a green that is sort of a
dark, muted emerald when Helga finds him again, bearing another roll of fabric in her arms. “This is the closest match to make new truis for you,” she says when Harry looks confused. “It is a very thick weave of cotton, the best I could find.”

Harry fingers the edge of the fabric. It doesn’t feel like denim, but it’s definitely a thick, rugged cotton that should pass as perfectly respectable trousers—probably why Helga chose it. “Okay. We can dye this, yes? Not certain I’m fond of dung brown.”

Helga laughs aloud. “We can dye it black, if you prefer. You and Salazar do seem to share a love of that color.”

Harry tries not to blush. “You like black, too! Besides, a lot of the bright colors hurt my eyes. Black has plenty of color in it without needing to hurt my head.”

Helga nods. “Fair enough. You must still search out embroidering material.”

“What?”

“Edging material. Decoration.” Helga places their purchases onto a wooden table, giving the shopkeeper a very specific sort of nod, before all but dragging Harry over to wooden spools that hold varying colors of carefully embroidered ribbons, metallic bands, and even more silk in thin strips. “You are a magician, and you will dress like one. We’ve let you get away with dressing as the poorest of the downtrodden for long enough.”

“Nothing wrong with peasants,” Harry says defensively, feeling like it’s not fair to decry an entire class of people.

“I didn’t mean peasants. They have better clothes than you do,” Helga says dryly. “Pick something, or I will pick it for you, no matter if it is an eyesore or not. You will need at least three: one for your robes, one for tunics, and one for your cloaks. I would prefer it be more, but we’ve all observed that you are not fond of decoration.”

“It’s not necessarily a lack of fondness,” he says, looking over the spools. “Clothes aren’t really…it isn’t the same in my time, Helga. Until you gave me that silver cloak pin, I’d never owned jewelry a day in my life.”

“None?” Helga looks aghast.

“Do you need another reason to hate my relatives?” Harry asks dryly.


Harry rolls his eyes and finds a flat silver that is heavier than he expected until he realizes the threads are composed of actual silver. “Oh, uh—”

“Don’t you dare put that back,” Helga orders. “That will do nicely.”

Harry gives up, selects something in a silver set against black, and then finds a wide silk ribbon of bronze, its pattern picked out with blue thread. It looks a lot like the Pictish circle magic he’s been studying. “Oh, definitely that one,” he says, eyes widening.

“It’s protective magic,” Helga murmurs in a low breath, smiling. “Good choice. Now go select threads for further embroidery work.”

Harry sighs and finds more great wooden spools covered in varying types and colors of thread.
“How many?”

To his complete dismay, Helga says, “As many as you find tolerable to your eyes.”

Harry selects a few shades of greens and blues, a grey the color of pre-dawn fog, a red that isn’t Gryffindor scarlet, but blood garnet, silver, gold (Sal and Helga are terrible influences, Harry thinks), black, and a deep, inky violet.

Helga approves of his choices with a brief nod. “Good. Now find another roll of silk. One is not enough.”

Harry scowls; he’s still panicking about the cost, but gave up complaining about it. He’s resigned to the fact that Helga is terrifying, and is going to have her way in the matter of clothes. He goes back among the silks until he finds something in the magical dye-blends that pretends to be dark green, but he keeps catching hints of blue, scarlet, gold, and violet within it that makes it not truly green at all.

Harry bites his lip against a sudden fit of laughter that no one would understand, and that he would be hard-pressed to explain. Suddenly, all Harry can think about is Dobby and his socks.

While Helga argues over the cost with a wide smile on her face, Harry wanders back outside. If there is one thing Hogewáþ lacks that Eidyn Buhr and London have in plentitude, it’s the smells: rancid food of all sorts, human waste, animal droppings, cooking food, fresh blood as animals are sold and slaughtered, human sweat, and so much underneath those harsher scents that he can’t identify it all. He tries to stick out the experience before giving up and using one of Helga’s breathing charms to filter out the stench. He wonders if the others notice the smells, or if it’s Hogewáþ that’s considered unusual.

The sound of a smith’s hammer striking steel captures his ears, so he goes that way. It hasn’t stopped being a fascinating process. This one is not only beating the life out of what looks like a future sword, the smith is also a woman. Harry isn’t baffled by this anymore, not after he realized that he grew up on a lot of history that was complete nonsense. It’s less that Wizarding Britain gained gender equality and more that the rest of Britain forgot it existed in the first place.

“You can have a look, young sir, if you like!” the blacksmith calls, wiping sweat from her forehead with a rag before she tosses the sword-length of hot iron into a cooling trough. “It’s all my own work.”

“It’s beautiful,” Harry says in complete honesty. “What’s your name?”

“I’m Rose, sir,” she says, smiling. “Are you flirting, or looking to purchase?”

“Not flirting?” Harry offers, baffled. “I’m younger than you are, and definitely not a sir.”

“You’re a magician. That means you’re granted the title of ‘sir,’ even if you’re still not quite grown yet,” Rose replies.

“How did you—”

Rose taps her temple. “Sight. Never got much else out of my magic, but I can tell when someone else is magical. Now, tell me what catches your eye. You don’t seem to have a blade on you.”

“I have a boot knife, but my friends are disappointed that I don’t have anything else.” Harry glances down at a black-handled knife. From handle to blade point, it’s about the length of his elbow to his wrist, maybe a bit shorter. There are vivid blues and violets within the silver, and
Harry doesn’t think he’s mistaking the wave-pattern on the blade, either. “I’m thinking you could give a goblin competition.”

“Oh, not at all. They have the means to forge silver blades as strong as iron and steel, and I don’t. I’m not bad, though,” Rose says, smiling at the compliment. “You have a good eye, even if it’s an ignorant one. Do you know what the patterning on the blade means?”

Harry shakes his head. “No, I don’t.”

“That means I took the time to temper it, over and over again. It’s one of the strongest blades you’ll find in England, if not the entirety of the isles. Not many in my craft take the time to re-forge the iron over and over again. They put their effort into pretty battle anthems in runes. I just want to craft a blade that won’t shatter the first time it strikes another,” Rose says. “It’s twenty pound in silver, but I do work for all sorts. Ten Galleons in gold, young sir.”

Ten Galleons wouldn’t be that bad in 1995, but here he’s learned that it’s a decent price, bordering on steep. He doesn’t mind, though. If she forged the knife that many times, he’s paying for a lot of work.

Harry glances over his shoulder, but sees no sign of Helga yet. She does seem to enjoy ceap quite a bit. He’s still amused that the West Saxon term for bargaining became his modern English’s term for being stingy, but here it’s nothing to do with being cheap.

He’s never liked stinginess, not after living with human examples of it for ten years. He gets out the small pouch he’s kept all this time and eyes what’s within. “Do you have enough business on both sides that sickles and knuts are all right, too?”

Rose makes a face. “I’d prefer gold, to be honest, but let’s see what you’ve got first.”

Harry empties the contents of the change purse into his palm and hands it over. “That’s ten Galleons, eight of it in gold,” he says. “I hope that will suit.”

“You’re supposed to—you can’t just—you’re—” Rose sputters. “Ceap, you lout!”

Harry shrugs. “We don’t have that sort of bargaining where I’m from. You said ten Galleons, so that’s what I gave you.”

Rose looks like she’s considering beating him to death, and Harry knows she’s probably capable of doing it. The woman isn’t much older than he is, but she has muscles that any athlete would envy. “Foreigner or no, I can’t simply take what you’ve given me without compensation. Do you have a sheath for this blade?”

“No, but that’s not necessary.” Helga probably bought enough leather today to make a dozen.

“I disagree. Wait here.” Rose gives him another glare before heading back into her smithy. A few minutes later she comes back, looking gleeful. “Knew I had something that would be fitting. Traded for it with a leatherworker up in York. Nasty man, that one, but he knows his craft.” Rose picks up the black-handled knife, sliding it into a leather sheath so new it’s letting out the squeaks of untouched leather. “There,” she says, presenting it to Harry. “Now it’s an even trade, sir.”

Harry examines the Futhorc runes set in the leather, but they don’t seem to say anything. “I’m still learning this language, but I’m almost certain this is nonsense.”

Rose smiles. “Not nonsense at all. Wear it for a fortnight but for bathing, and the inscription will change to fit who you are.”
“Oh, that’s really—”

“Harry!”

“Sorry, I’ve just been caught escaping.” Harry smiles as Helga approaches.

“Greetings, Lady Helga,” Rose says cheerfully. “I can’t believe this one is out and about with you, and you didn’t think to teach him how to have a proper ceap!”

“I might have missed that lesson, yes, but we’ve had other things to do.” Helga’s eyes drop down to see what Harry is holding. “That is a very good choice. Your blades are excellent as always, Rosalina.”

“Rose!” Rose protests. “Rosalina is a fancy Lady!”

“You are a Lady of Wessex blood,” Helga retorts, smiling. “But I’ll continue to ignore such so that your family will continue to ignore you, dearest. Come along, Harry, We should get back before the castle is eaten clean of the midday meal.”

“Okay.” Harry clutches the sheathed knife in both hands as they walk. “How—how am I to repay you for all this?”

Helga turns her head and glares at him. “By educating yourself within Hogewâþ’s walls. That is all.”

“But—”

“Harry.” Helga puts her hand on his shoulder when they reach what she considers a safe Apparition point. “You are my student and my friend. It is my absolute pleasure to ensure that you are well-set for this life.” Then she smiles. “If it worries you so much, then know that Salazar provided the coin.”

Harry nods. “It—okay,” he says, when nothing else occurs to him. He can’t argue further with Helga and not have it become an insult. Besides, he’s not sure he knows exactly what’s wrong, only that something is.

Dinner is much easier to contemplate than the horrific amount of fabric waiting for Harry afterwards. “I have no idea what to do with any of this.”

“Nothing confining,” Orellana says, which Salazar agrees with.

“Those truis are confining!” Helga protests. “But he said no to proper hose!”

“I think those are less a confinement and more durable comfort,” Salazar counters. “Besides, I won’t even wear the damned hose unless we have to visit someone’s Court.”

Harry wonders if he can simply hide under his Invisibility Cloak and pretend he doesn’t exist when it comes to things like royal courts.

“That is because you are a Castilian barbarian,” Helga counters, rolling her eyes. “Your truis are also short. His are not.”

Godric leans in close to Harry. “Just let them take your measurements for tailoring and run,” he suggests in a low voice. “I’ll give you a legitimate excuse. We’ve not dueled today.”

“You mean you haven’t run shrieking from serpents today,” Harry says innocently.
“Go on, keep up with that, and you’ll be dealing with this lot on your own.”

“No serpents today,” Harry promises.

Godric smiles. “Trust the peacocks. They’ll get it right without offending your sensibilities.”

“You run away too, huh?”

“Absolutely I do,” Godric mutters under his breath. “There’s the knotted cord now. Go get it over and done with, and I’ll make sure we escape the horror.”

The tailor, Drust, is eying Harry’s denims in confusion. “I’ve not seen the like of that in truis before.”

“Special design,” Salazar cuts in. “Not to be copied elsewhere, and I’ll pay to ensure it.”

Drust glares at Salazar. “I wouldn’t even wish to make those for anyone else. That cut is not what I’m used to sewing, and looks difficult, besides. I don’t have any of that metal they’re sporting, either.”

“The metal isn’t necessary, and laces are fine,” Harry says, “if the rest is similar.” He’s seen other trousers of this era, and a great deal of them have legs and a waist but no crotch, which seems indecent despite those not-pants beneath. Even when the trousers are intact, like those that Salazar wears, the trouser legs end at the knee and are paired with good socks or hose in a way that looks Scottish. Maybe it’s an early form of that kind of dress, and the Scots were the only ones insane enough to keep at it.

Which means he’s now officially in the insane category, too. Harry can’t keep his trousers ankle-length, not if he wants any other pair of boots made in this century to fit comfortably.

He glances over at Salazar and looks down at the bolt of fabric meant for truis. Salazar tilts his head, glances down at the cloth, and nods his understanding. If Harry has to get used to laces over zippers, he can get used to binding his stupid socks and trousers at the knee.

“I’ll need those truis you’re wearing to compare for the pattern and cut,” Drust says. Harry goes upstairs to his room, trading the denims for the shorts—braies—that Sal gave him to sleep in. The others sleep in long shirts, but trying to wear just that for sleeping made Harry feel exposed, and prone to more stupid nightmares.

At least the braies are considered proper outerwear, too. He can go back outside with Godric and get his arse handed to him in repetitive duels, but that’s fun.

* * * *

The next day, Harry wakes up and realizes he’d lucked out so far. Yesterday’s headache was a bloody warning sign; he’s sick.

He hasn’t felt this miserably ill since…well, probably since before Hogwarts, when he had to steal Paracetamol from both the upstairs and downstairs bathroom medicine cabinets in tiny doses so Aunt Petunia wouldn’t notice they were missing. Uncle Vernon takes the load of them for his “stress headaches” anyway.
Godric sits down across from Harry while he’s trying to convince himself to eat. “You look intensely displeased by this particular morning.”

“It feels like someone replaced my sinuses with concrete, Godric,” Harry mutters, scowling.

“Sick, then? You’ve such good health that I’d scarcely credit it happening.”


“Oh, you sound to be in a pleasant mood,” Helga says as she arrives. Harry groans and puts his face down on the table. Coming to breakfast was a terrible idea. He should have hidden under his quilt and stayed there.

Someone nudges Harry’s shoulder sometime later. That means he’s probably running a fever, too, since he didn’t notice anything around him had changed. “What?” he asks without lifting his head.

“Do you wish to feel better, or would you prefer to suffer?” Salazar asks caustically.

“I’m used to suffering,” Harry mumbles into the table.

“I heard that. Sit up and drink this. If you’re feverish, you don’t want it to progress. Sickness is dangerous, Hari.”

Right. No hospitals or doctors, just healers and potion-brewers. He sits up and observes the goblet in Salazar’s hand, which is emitting curls of steam into the air. “Is that going to make my ears steam?”

Salazar looks momentarily baffled by the question. “That’s ridiculous. Drink it, idiota.”

Harry sighs and drinks the potion in his usual rush, though he doesn’t taste anything horrible. He can barely taste anything at all except a hell of a lot of mint. “I’m surprised Helga didn’t clobber me with her wand.”

“It depends upon the sickness,” Salazar replies, sitting down next to him while Harry rubs at his nose, then his itching eyes. “The minor things—if she were to heal them immediately, your body would not learn how to tolerate their presence. She reserves her healing for the mending of the body, or for the truly dangerous sicknesses, those which are known to kill with ease.”

“I’m all but certain this is just a cold,” Harry says, and then grabs his napkin and presses it to his nose when it suddenly begins to run. “What the fuck?”

“That means the potion is working.” Salazar’s voice is stone dry. “I do not know what you mean when you refer to ‘a cold’ but Godric said you spoke of your head feeling like concrete. Fluid in the head accompanied by fever is easily dealt with, though you may still feel discomfort for the next few days. There are potions for that, as well. Now: why did you not ask for assistance?”

“I’m used to going to the school’s nurse,” Harry says. “Uh, accustomed.” Hermione and Ron would physically drag him there if they thought he really needed to see Pomfrey. He usually didn’t agree with them, but it made them happy, so Harry would go. Besides, he could walk into the hospital wing and Madam Pomfrey usually knew what he needed without Harry having to say a word. “Er, we had a devoted healer in her own space in the castle,” he adds when Salazar asks why Harry would be seeking out a wet-nurse for physical ailments. Stupid language.

“A healer sat down at your side, and you didn’t ask for her assistance,” Salazar points out.
Harry glares at him, the expression mostly obscured by a napkin that is quickly becoming very, very damp. “It’s just a cold.”

Salazar sighs. “Hari. You cannot afford to be so heedless of your health. It is not merely a minor sickness. It is a suffering that one does not have to endure when there are solutions available.”

Harry steals Salazar’s napkin to replace the unfortunate, soggy mess he’s turned his own napkin into. “Okay,” he says, hoping Sal will drop the subject.

“You would not ask for assistance even if you awoke suffering from something dire, would you?” He turns to look at Salazar, but Salazar is staring across the room, a pensive, worried, unhappy expression on his face.

“Sal—” Harry tries, but he doesn’t really know what to say.

Salazar shakes his head and then smiles at Harry. “I suppose I shall just have to ply you with potions until you are in a better mood.”

“Oh,” Harry agrees again, and wonders how someone can feel so relieved and so guilty at the same time.

Salazar wasn’t joking about the potions. Harry deals with them, three times a day, until overwhelming mint starts to taste like other things, like tartness and a back-burn of something bitter. It’s sweet, too, brewed with honey. The potion is nothing like any of the cold remedies he’d have to endure in his time.

Harry is really glad Pepper-Up is not a known potion. He isn’t going to suggest it to Salazar, either. He learned his lesson with the Oculus potion, the one they’ve taken to calling Sana Visio to distinguish it from Oculus: do not accidentally invent things other people made. He always hated the ear-steaming effect from Pepper-Up, anyway.

One magical tailor with no other custom at the moment presents Harry with a full wardrobe at the end of the week. The only thing keeping Harry from panicking at the sheer amount of clothing delivered is that even Godric assures him that this is normal. Harry retorts that he’s never owned so many clothes in his life. Then he and Godric have to spend the next ten minutes talking Helga out of killing someone who won’t be born for another nine centuries.

It’s just as well. Harry has worn so many holes through his original pair of socks that they would make better fishing nets. The new batches of cotton and wool socks he receives don’t have the same toes and heels to them that he’s used to, but once he puts on his boots, it doesn’t really matter. There is a second pair of new, knee-high boots, ones with softer, flexible soles. They’re flatter than he prefers, so he steals the insoles from the Transfigured boots the old wizard made and stuffs them into the new boots when he wears them. That works; he’s going to have to figure out how to get another set of those insoles made.

He also has a pair of shoes. They look like slippers, and have laces that are meant to wrap his legs up to his knee to bind his stockings and truis in place, just like the simpler leather bands beneath his boots. Harry isn’t against slippers, per se. They’re comfortable shoes for castle-roaming, but the idea of going outside in them just feels wrong. He knows that’s a response to what his time is like, but he has enough to deal with. Besides, nobody cares if he wears them or not.

Harry goes back out to the sitting room, which only holds Orellana at the moment. “I wonder how stupid I look.”
Orellana glares at him and then drags Harry into hers and Salazar’s bedchamber. “I have a mirror of polished silver,” she says, shoving him in the direction of a large mirror in the corner of the room. It’s as tall as Salazar, framed in a vine motif of copper that’s been allowed to oxidize so it’s blue and green.

There is a stranger in that mirror, one who just happens to have his eyes. Harry blinks a few times, copied by his reflection. His hair is doing something it never did before—it’s growing longer. He holds out one of the unruly strands of black hair and wonders why. It’s now long enough to touch his shoulders, even if it’s still a bird’s nest disaster.

He’s grown a little since he got here, and he’s now Sal’s height. It’s the first time Harry has been able to really see it, though. His face is longer, and he’s putting on actual muscle from following Godric on his mad runs through the forest. The tunic he’s wearing is made from the green silk, and the play of color in it is still just as fascinating as before.

Green, silver-edged tunic over black shirt, black truis, and black boots: he has to admit, he doesn’t hate it.

“Huh.” Harry tilts his head. “Either I’ve become used to everyone else’s clothing, or I don’t look stupid.”

Orellana rolls her eyes and leans against him, grinning into the mirror. “You do not look stupid, Hari. You look as if you belong here. You look like you.”

It takes a while to get used to the length of the new shirts with the long tunics over them, the cloak over that when he goes outside, the idea of a belt, and the weight of the black-handled seax in its leather sheath. The fur cloak is suffocating during the heat of summer, but will probably feel grand in January. His new robes are meant to go over only the undershirt and truis, so at least he won’t overheat while wearing them.

The not-denims truis are comfortable, though laces instead of zippers are confusing for a few days, especially since no one in this era believes in pants. Binding the tall socks and truis at his knees is such a frustrating thing to learn that Harry seriously considers going barefoot for the rest of his life.

At least no one expects Harry to be an expert at folding clothes. In fact, it’s more common for items to be rolled up as tightly as possible for storage. “Moths,” Orellana explains as she helps him figure out how to put everything away in the wooden chest that sits at the foot of his bed. “A magician’s charms keep out all pests but those. They like magic, or they are merely too stubborn to let a simple charm keep them from feasting. You will need to choose an herb to store within the chest to keep them out.”

Harry has no idea what plants keep moths at bay. At least mothballs don’t exist yet; he hates them. “What do you use?”

“Lavender.” Orellana holds out her arm. “That is why you will find the scent on mine and Salazar’s person all the time. Fortunata favors a certain type of rose, while Helga prefers powdered iris. Sedemai, Rowena, and her daughters use rue. Godric, the odd man, likes anise.”

“That explains a lot, actually,” Harry says, and Orellana laughs. “Uh, lavender, I guess. I didn’t even notice the scent when I first met you both, so at least I know I’m not allergic or offended by it.”

“Why would lavender be offensive?” Orellana asks.
Harry explains as best he knows how. By the time he’s done, Orellana is all but rolling on the floor, she’s giggling so hard.

“Men in your time really find flowers to be so offensive? Truly?” Orellana grins up at the ceiling.

“Not all of them,” Harry says, but he’s laughing, too. Explaining it just makes it that much more ridiculous, like Ron and his complete horror over lace-laden dress robes. Harry thought the lace was far more interesting than the modern robes, even if burgundy on a ginger wasn’t the most flattering color.

Fred and George would have been able to figure out how to pull off burgundy lace dress robes, Harry thinks idly, and they would have made themselves look like princes in the process. Then he has to blink away tears; he does miss an entire batch of gingers, Sirius and Hermione, Remus, Hagrid, Professor McGonagall, and a few others who’d been smart enough to ignore the Daily Prophet.

He doesn’t miss Professor Dumbledore so much, really. That’s sort of surprising, but maybe it isn’t. He’s listened to Helga rant long and loud about how Harry’s Headmaster expected too much of children—untrained children. He’s starting to think that she…that she might be right.

There. Traitorous thought accomplished.

Right on the heels of that thought is another one: he actually misses Snape more than he does Dumbledore. That is entirely mental. Why?

Because he was actually teaching you something, even if he buried it in sarcasm and vitriol, Harry thinks. Salazar has yet to find a problem with any of his potions work; Harry just can’t identify plants very well. Like it’s his fault they keep changing shape with the seasons. He’s doing better with unpolished stones, at least.

Harry frowns. If that’s all true, then what did Dumbledore teach you?

It really bothers him when he can’t think of much at all.

If anything, he’s realizing that everything Dumbledore told him were things explained after the fact. Harry learned about the sacrificial protection his Mum gave him from Dumbledore, but only after he used it to kill Quirrell. Dumbledore only talked about the Sword of Gryffindor (which Godric doesn’t have yet) when Harry had to pull it from the Sorting Hat and fight a basilisk. Dumbledore sort-of told Harry and Hermione how to save Sirius from the Dementors by using the Time-Turner, but everything else—everything—Harry figured out on his own, or Hermione and Ron helped him to find out.

“Are you well?” Orellana asks.

Harry glances at her and finds only sympathy in her dark brown eyes, which blaze with warm reds and golds if the sunlight strikes them at the correct angle. “Just having odd thoughts.”

“And a longing for those who aren’t here,” she says.

“Yes.” Harry closes the wooden box, resolving to find lavender while there is still daylight. He’s almost certain he knows that one. “That, also.”

Harry takes the new broom when he heads out to collect lavender, knowing it’s best to harvest herbs far from both the castle and the village so the plants have time to regrow. (He did learn that from Herbology, at least.) Hedwig goes with him, soaring along at his side and enjoying the fact
that she can fly with him again.

Harry also just wants to be in the air to think…or maybe it would be better to call it not-thinking. He doesn’t want to dwell, not right now, and the Mind Magic he’s learned helps ensure that he doesn’t. He concentrates instead on the feel of the wind through his hair and over his skin, ruffling his clothes; the coolness of the air; the colors of the sky as the sun lowers in the west and the brilliant blues gain violets, oranges, greens, golds, and yellows. He always just thought of a sunset as dark blue, purple, and orange, but it’s so, so much more.

Harry is returning to the castle with a bundle of lavender tied to his broom handle when he starts thinking again, but this time he’s not dwelling. He’s remembering Hermione’s nervousness about brooms, and how even the old school brooms for flying class could be temperamental, too quick—not really great for first-time flyers.

*Cedar, Harry muses. Cedar for stability. Walnut for strength...* 

Harry finds Salazar teaching Branwyne, Fairman, Tholy, and Eneko how to make a basic healing draught for superficial injuries and bruises. He hangs out in the back of the room, watching. It’s the kids who made him realize that he’s learning Potions entirely out of order. They learn to identify what herbs, stones, and magical animal parts they didn’t already know, then how to collect them, how to dry them, when to use them. When those lessons are imparted to Salazar’s satisfaction, they start brewing.

Salazar doesn’t mind teaching backwards except for his muttered refrain about loathing Harry’s schooling, but Harry is well aware of that lack now. The only use Herbology has been to him is that he can actually tell the young kids about how to care for dangerous magical plants—and how to defend yourself against them. Devil’s Snare and Venomous Tentacula both grow wild in the Highlands.

The kids bottle up their successes, plus one dramatic failure that might prove useful in a different way, and scamper off once Salazar has told them what he expects them to bring to their next lesson. “You’ve been lurking here for nearly an hour, Hari.”

“I was waiting for you to finish.” Harry swallows and tries to come up with the right words, which is going to be difficult even with Parseltongue. “**Salazar, I’m not trying to insult you, but I need to ask something.**”

“You’re learning,” Salazar counters, lifting the bottled failure up to the sunlight to peer at its contents. “Therefore, it isn’t an insult.”

“But it could be,” Harry insists. “**Salazar, I have no money. I spent what little I had on this knife—seax, I mean. I don’t regret the purchase or anything,**” he hurries to say, “but that was it. I don’t know how to...to do anything. To earn it.”

“Why the concern?” Salazar asks, lowering the flask to look at Harry. “**I am not royalty, but I am of a wealthy family, Hari. You will never want for anything.**”

“That’s not...” Harry nearly bites through his lip. “**Salazar, I was helpless for eleven years! Completely helpless. The only thing that helped me cope with that when I turned eleven was**
finding out that I had the money to do things for myself.”

Salazar puts down the bottle and walks towards him. He searches Harry’s face before reaching out and clasping Harry’s arms in a gentle grip. “You’re panicking about this.”

Harry nods. “I have been since I put an empty purse into the chest in my bedroom—sleeping chamber, I mean.”

“And you would feel beholden if I were to simply give money to you.”

“I’m sorry, I know how that…” Harry swallows again. “Look. Logically, I know that family does that. The money in my vault didn’t just appear out of nowhere; my parents left it to me. You’re wanting to adopt me, so you would be family and doing the same. But…”

“But you wish to be able to provide for yourself.” Salazar smiles at him. “I do understand that, and it’s nothing to feel shame over. What you must also learn to understand is that you now have family and friends who wish to care for and provide for you. Is there shame in that?”

“No,” Harry manages, but his throat is feeling too tight. “It’s not, but I just—” He is completely appalled when he bursts into tears.

Salazar only sighs and pulls him into a hug. Harry buries his face against Salazar’s tunic and tries to breathe through stupid, choking sobs.

“Little brother,” Salazar murmurs. “You are not alone anymore. You are surrounded by those who love you.”

“I know,” Harry whispers, even if he still can’t figure out how to make himself believe it.

Salazar rests his hand on the back of Harry’s head, his fingers sliding through the bird’s nest that likes to pretend to be his hair. “As for earning it, little brother: you’ve been teaching students within Hogewáþ. I do believe that entitles you to payment.”

“What?” Harry leans back and stares at Salazar, trying to wipe his face with his robe sleeves. “What are you talking about?”

“When the students ask you questions, you answer them. When they need help in arts of magic you already understand, you teach them. You demonstrate and assist in their learning. You have taught the older students things that even we did not know.”

Harry shakes his head. “I’ve just been telling them what I was taught.”

Salazar smiles. “Hari. That is exactly what it means to be a teacher.”
Chapter Summary

"Hermanito, you may say that Helga is terrifying, but she is in good company."

Chapter Notes

Time for an update of nerdity and Feels!

On the last day of July, most of the students go home for Lammas, Gŵyl Awst, or Lughnasadh (which all happen on first August), off to help bring in the harvest with their families or village. It’s also the equivalent of summer vacation, but Harry always knew he was going home in the summer to work. It doesn’t seem all that different, really.

_Iulius. Augustus._ Learn the Latin, idiot!

Harry spends some of that time figuring out how to join several scrolls together so that he has a wide and long roll of paper, maybe four feet high by six feet long under the Imperial standard. Measuring was less important than attaining the size, and making certain that the paper blended together so there aren’t any seam lines at all.

The only table big enough to hold the new overlarge scroll is in the kitchen. Once dinner has been put away until supper preparations begin, Harry cleans and dries the table before spreading the sheet of paper across the wood. He uses four dry stone goblets to hold down each corner and then walks around it in a full circle.

He can do this. He built a fucking broom; he can cast these charms, too.

“What is this?”

Harry looks up and grins at Anselmet. He’s the youngest of the castle’s paid servants at age nineteen, and like Oriel, he’s a magician. Sal warned Harry not to expect Anselmet to linger on, as he’s fond of wandering. For now, though, Anselmet is the castle’s groundskeeper as well as their architect for any further changes they make to the castle. “I’m making a map.”

Anselmet frowns and comes closer, his near-black skin gleaming under the torchlight. “This is quite large for a map—unless you mean for it to be very detailed. What are you mapping?”

Harry takes a breath. “The globe. I hope.”

“Globe?” Anselmet’s grey eyes dart up to meet Harry’s. “I do not know that word.”

“Uh, _globus,_” Harry corrects himself. “But I don’t think that’s the correct term. I meant that this is going to be a map of the eorþe.”

“Of the earth. The entire realm of Midgard.” Anselmet’s eyes widen. “You’ve seen all of it?”
“Only in pictures!” Harry hurries to say. “I always wanted to show Salazar where tea is from.”

“In the Far East,” Anselmet says dryly. “Salazar would know this if he traveled farther than the easternmost reaches of the Eastern Roman Empire.”

“Yes, well, not everyone went on a mad hike across Europe and Asia when they were ten years old like you did, Anselmet,” Harry replies. “I had to wait before I could make a map, though. I’m not an artist, but Rowena…she taught me a charm that sort of acts like a Pensieve.”

“Instead of viewing thoughts and images in a Pensieve, then one is…copying an image to paper.” Anselmet nods. “Rowena owes me a lesson. I don’t know that spell.”

“Well, if it weren’t for her lessons on Mind Magic, I wouldn’t be able to do this at all. I have to be able to focus on that image I saw long enough for the spell to finish.” Harry hesitates before putting his wand to paper. “Do me a favor? If anyone tries to interrupt me before I’m done, hit them. I don’t want to have to start all over again.”

Anselmet grins at Harry. “If anyone complains, I’m telling them you ordered me to do so.”

“Fair enough.” Harry breathes in, out again, and closes his eyes. He had to dig for this memory; he hasn’t seen the map since his last year in primary school. On the wall in the classroom had been a great map of the globe, split so that the Americas were on one side, with Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and the Pacific islands on the other.

“Cogitationes meas revelaro. Create hanc imaginem in ipsa propagatione quoquoversus terrarum atramento.”

The Arctic and Antarctica followed the curve of the bottom of the Earth. Countries and states within countries had been defined by color and line. Major cities were marked in stark black clarity by dots or by stars.

Harry concentrates on that image and sees the complicated edges of every coastline, revealed by satellites overhead years before. The depth of the ocean is revealed by lighter and darker shades of blue. Then there are the famous rivers that flowed from south to north instead of north to south. The rivers that brought life to the cradle of civilization. Swaths of texture on the page of that great map showing mountain ranges.

Continent by continent, he focuses on each one at a time: North America, South America, Africa, Asia, Europe—or is it Eurasia? It’s one land mass; why did they teach him it was two continents? He shakes off that distraction and thinks on all of the islands and island chains of the South Pacific that lead to Australia. South America’s tail and an Antarctica branch of land almost kiss. The peninsulas of India, China, Greece, Italy, and Iberia branch out over the water. Greenland and Iceland float in the North Atlantic like serene buffers between Canada and the other Nordic countries…

…and that’s it. Harry can’t remember anything else.

Harry opens his eyes and the ground tilts sideways. If Salazar hadn’t been right there, catching him by the arm, Harry would have landed on the kitchen floor in a painful sprawl.

“Hello. Why is everything spinning?” Harry asks, baffled.

“Because that’s a massive magical undertaking you’ve just done!” Salazar retorts. Then his expression softens. “It is also amazing, hermanito,” he says, and kisses Harry’s forehead before slinging his arm around Harry’s shoulders.
Harry blinks a few times and looks around. At some point, Helga and Sedemai also joined Harry and Anselmet. Helga is studying the map with her hands over her mouth, wide-eyed. Anselmet is tracing the lines of countries in the East with awe. Sedemai is grinning down at the map in what looks to be barely restrained glee.

He looks down at the map and stares at it. “Wow.”

He’d expected a recreation in black ink. Instead, the magic took his memory of that classroom map and turned it into a literal recreation of color, texture, and line.

“I didn’t think it would look like that,” Harry whispers.

“It’s incredible.” Helga eyes are moist with tears. “That’s the whole of our world? All of Midgard?”

Harry nods. “We had a way to—to take pictures from space. From high above the earth, I mean, so that you could see all of the Earth as it rotated with the days. The markings for countries and kingdoms aren’t what anyone here would be used to, but the land—that’s all the same.”

“This is a treasure.” Anselmet points at the center of Africa. “Here, near the beginning of the River Nile’s journey northward. This is where my family is from.”


“And Rome is still present. Of course.” Anselmet rolls his eyes.


Helga touches the large country marked Norway. “The land of my people. I never realized how vast it truly is.”

Salazar turns his attention to the east. “You said tea was in China and India. This ‘China’ holds the realm of the Khitan Empire, the Tibetan kingdoms, and the Song Dynasty. India—that is the land of the hindavī.” He looks up at Harry. “This is…the distances between one city to another. Is that accurate?”

“It’s to scale, if that’s what you mean. Uh—” Harry scrubs at his head, trying to think. “Yes, it’s accurate.”

“I’ve decided that the caravans who travel to the Far East every year are mad. The roads of trade may be established, but that is a very, very long way,” Helga says.

Anselmet shakes his head. “Magical travel, Helga. It is not that bad. The difficulty lies in languages. One can cross a distance of a single league and find that the words spoken behind you are nothing like the words spoken ahead of you.”

“But this is it.” Salazar looks shaken. “This is what the world will be in a thousand years.”

“Well, yes,” Harry says, glancing at Salazar in confusion.
“Hari…we can’t keep this. Not in the form it is now.”

Helga lets out a regretful sigh. “Salazar is correct. The lands we can keep. The cities we know now that still reside in those places in your time. The names of the great oceans.”

“But not the countries,” Harry realizes. “Not even the boundary lines would be the same, would they?”

“Given that this shows a whole kingdom of Alba named Scotland, with no signs of the Earldom, Moray, or Strathclyde?” Sedemai shakes her head. “No. We can’t—I almost regret seeing this. I am English, but I’ve grown to love Moray, and knowing that it will one day be gone saddens me.”

“The Western Roman Empire won’t last. That part would please Rowena,” Salazar says. His voice is bright and cheerful, but the expression on his face is the complete opposite.

“Can you—I hate to ask, but can you do it? I’m really dizzy,” Harry says.

“That is because it took you an hour to build this, idiota,” Salazar tells him. “It’s a wonder you didn’t fall on your face before this work was completed.”

Harry nods and sits down while the others take out their wands, removing the lines that separate one country from another. That will probably take longer than the effort it took to make the map in the first place, but Harry has done what he once promised—he showed Sal a map of their entire world.

He wakes up in his own sleeping chamber, still wearing his clothes but lacking his boots. He yawns, stretches, and realizes that there is morning sunlight streaming in through his windows. “Oh.” He must have put more energy into making that map than he thought. He doesn’t even remember making it upstairs to his room.

Harry takes a bath and scrubs himself clean. Shaving with a very sharp, thin blade is an experience. He didn’t have to shave much during fourth year, but he had a safety razor then, even if it was the magical version. This isn’t magical at all, and not slicing his face means relying on his own steady hand. It well and truly sucks, and it’s a good thing he mastered Helga’s healing spells quickly. He bloody well needed them, pun intended.

At least he has a toothbrush again. Trying to learn to clean with thin sticks acting like toothpicks, and rubbing ground herbs along his teeth with strips of silk…it was effective, but it was also a pain in the arse. Salazar took several of Harry’s crude drawings and came back with a wooden-handled brush with short, stiff boar’s bristles emerging from tiny holes in the wood. He can sanitize it in hot water, the herb paste works just as well with the brush, and his teeth have probably never been cleaner. Having an inventive, multi-talented Potions Master for a pending-adoptee brother is brilliant.

Harry washes his face again and tries to run the wooden comb through his hair. He manages to detangle it before giving up. His hair might be growing for some odd reason, but it still has a mind of its own.

“So, lead poisoning,” Harry says when Salazar stumbles out of his and Orellana’s sleeping chamber.

Salazar glares at him. “Good morning to you as well, pendejo.”

Harry laughs. “Good morning. How can you still be groggy after the bath?”
“Because it is early,” Salazar growls, pushing his damp hair away from his face. “Why are you talking of poisonings?”

“Well, in my time, we know that if you use lead the wrong way and ingest it, it’s toxic,” Harry says. “I was thinking on it and remembered that it’s not the pipes that are the problem, but if you mix an acidic substance in with lead…like, say, wine.”

“Romans drank wine from lead goblets…and tended to die at relatively young ages, even in the magical community.” Salazar plasters his hand over his face. “Could you not have mentioned this sooner?”

“I wasn’t sure what caused the problem, and if I spoke of it, I wanted to be correct,” Harry points out. “No one in Hogewâþ drinks wine from lead cups, anyway.”

“No, we do not. We drink from stone, wood, horn, and for certain occasions, silver or gold. Not lead. I do not even use pewter cauldrons, as its making is often suspect; crafters will add lead to the tin and copper mixture to reduce cost while still selling them for the price of true pewter.” Salazar drops down into a chair and yawns. “Most do not drink from lead containers anymore, and honey has replaced the boiling of wine in lead containers to create that particular method of sweetening drinks or dishes. Still, it is interesting to know. What does lead do to the body, Hari?”

“Causes damage to the brain, if I’m remembering it correctly,” Harry replies. “They used to put lead in fuel for a type of, er…a machined carriage, and they made laws that the lead had to be taken out of that fuel. They also had to stop using it in paint. I’d like to be more useful, but that’s all I know—lead and acid are not friends.”

Salazar clasps his hands under his chin. “I wonder if one could craft a more fast-acting poison by brewing acidic substances in a lead cauldron.”

“Sal!”

“What?” Salazar gives him an innocent look. “You can’t give me such information and expect me not to think on it.”

“I didn’t tell you about lead poisoning so you can go out and poison other people, you twat!”

Salazar frowns. “What is a twat?”

Harry sighs and gives up. “It’s me realizing that I’m using female body parts as insults again, you prick.”

“Piercing?” Salazar is starting to look bewildered.

“Fuck English!” Harry yells, and Salazar bursts out laughing.

Harry finds the map on the wall in the Entrance Hall, where he knows the portraits of the four Founders will one day hang. After he left the kitchen (or passed out and Sal took him upstairs, whichever) the others finished removing all of the lines and city markers for the whole of North, Central, and South America. There are instead mentions of other peoples that explorers from the west of Africa encountered after crossing the Atlantic, like the Olmec, the Maya, and the Toltecs in Central and South America. Harry read about the Maya in a primary school library book, but he has no idea who the other two groups are. In the north, Greenland and Iceland are marked, as is Newfoundland and three small areas west of Greenland: Helluland, Markland, and Vinland.

Europe’s major cities are largely unchanged, especially in Britain, but the kingdom names and
boundary lines reflect 990’s current state of affairs. It’s good to finally see Salazar’s home of Burgos in the north of Spain, which is currently not Spain at all. The Caliphate of Córdoba takes up most of the Iberian Peninsula and some of northern Africa. The Western Roman Empire consumes much of Europe, obliterating most of the countries Harry is familiar with. The Kingdom of the Franks—that’s going to be France, along with the kingdom of Burgundy and part of the empire. He never knew Croatia was a kingdom, or that Hungary and Poland had once been gigantic countries, not the tiny blobs on the map he knows. Russia is the Principality of Kiev, and there’s a Bulgarian Empire above the Byzantine Empire, which is also labeled as the Eastern Roman Empire.

Asia, the islands in the South Pacific, and Australia are largely stripped bare of cities and boundary lines. What remains, in Anselmet’s handwriting, are boundaries for major kingdoms like the Song Dynasty, the Khitan Empire, Tibet’s kingdoms, Dali, Palas, Japan, and others, more than Harry realized there would be. A lot of Asia doesn’t have territory borders at all, but names marking where groups of people are known to live. There are a lot more of those, too. Anselmet really, really took his geography seriously when he decided to travel. By himself. At ten years old. Because he’s completely barking mad.

“It is an excellent piece of work,” Rowena says when she finds Harry studying the map. “Our magicians will be well-educated as to the geography of our world, thanks to you.”

“I suppose so,” Harry replies, smiling. He points to the three kingdoms of the Cymru. “That is Wales. Or it will be, one day. Ireland, though—that is currently a disaster.” Ireland isn’t one kingdom, but a multitude. No wonder everyone gossips about the squabbling on the western isle.

When Rowena walks on to go downstairs to breakfast, Harry frowns, feeling leery and discomfited. There is no map like this in the Hogwarts of his time. He can’t recall seeing any maps that show the whole of the world at all.

Harry goes downstairs and joins Rowena at the breakfast table. “Can I ask you something about government?”

“As long as you explain what ‘government’ means,” Rowena says, spearing at a sausage with the end of her knife. Too early for forks, then. Helga might be a Viking, but Rowena early of a morning is very much a Gaul, according to Salazar.

Harry had to ask what a Gaul was. Salazar made that strangled noise of angry bafflement.

“A ruler. Er, a system of ruling or leading?” Harry tries, and Rowena nods her understanding. “I’ve heard some of you mention a council, but I don’t know what that is.”

“The Council is a magical group who are chosen among the magicians of a kingdom to oversee trials of a magical nature,” Rowena says. “Sometimes they also gather to deliberate on decisions regarding the policies of the kingdom we live in and how it might affect magicians, but otherwise, their purpose is to oversee criminal trials.”

“You don’t have a Ministry of Magic, then.”

“Ministry…as in an office of service?” Rowena frowns. “No. Why would we need such? Magicians follow the laws of the kingdom in which they reside, Harry.”

“Magicians don’t have a separate form of rules and leaders.” Harry stares at her. “Really?”

“We do not. I assume that is the purpose of your Ministry of Magic,” Rowena says.
Harry nods, rubbing at his head. “Yes, but…there’s something wrong about all of it, and I can’t figure it out. I don’t know enough about history or politics.”

“Politics.” When Harry looks up, Rowena has paused in eating to give him a contemplative look. “Hmm. That sort of knowledge will be necessary, won’t it?”

“What? Why?” Harry asks. He’s still plotting ways to get out of the Court visits that are supposed to happen during the Solstice and over Christmas.

“You are willing to be named Salazar’s legally and magically recognized brother.” Rowena’s smile is patient, amused tolerance. “He is a Marqués, Harry. You will not be able to escape Court or its politics.”

“Shit.” Harry puts his head down on the tabletop. “I’m going to kill Salazar,” he says while Rowena laughs.

* * * *

With all of the students gone except Harry, Fortunata, Matty, and Helena, there are no official classes, but Harry is still learning Mind Magic from all of the adults. He puts up with mental attacks and learns to keep them out of his head, which is…well, he’s always been pretty good at Defence, and that definitely counts. The last time he forced Sedemai out of his thoughts, she was flung onto her backside. Harry tried to apologize, but she was already laughing and telling him he’d done well.

Harry is also getting better at truly discerning what’s his, and what’s other. Voldemort. It took a long, long time to figure that out, which made him angry and even more determined to succeed. The magical core bit is harder, mostly because he didn’t even know what the hell a magical core was before Rowena and Godric explained it. Helga learned of that gap in his education and declared that she would greatly prefer to travel to 1995, if only to hex the bollocks off of every single supposed teacher in Hogwarts.

Harry had stared at her before saying, “I’m not sure if I’d pay to see that, or if I’d pay just to be able to stay far, far away from you and a wand when you’re in the mood to remove everyone’s testicles.”

Mind Magic training gives him the means to be able to view his own magical core with his mind’s eye…once he’s able to find it, anyway. The others could only give him vague instructions for that, as it’s supposed to be different for everyone.

“It’s green,” Harry tells Salazar the first day he is able to focus on it for more than a few seconds. “Green with a halo of gold around it. It’s the same emerald green as yours.”

Salazar looks surprised before frowning. “Hari. I want you to cast the most powerful spell you know, even if it’s a curse. Concentrate on fueling that spell with all of your strength.”

Harry thinks on it before leading Salazar outside. “Does Anselmet still want that boulder there to be moved away from the castle?” he asks, pointing at a great stone that is mostly buried in the earth. Digging it out with shovels would take days.

Salazar points towards the place that will eventually host the school’s iron gates. “Anselmet
wishes to use it there."

“Okay.” Harry lifts his wand and concentrates on adlevo with all his might. This isn’t about speaking the word out loud. This is about strength, intent, and…and he can feel it, a warm sensation spreading out from his chest and down his arm, creating a corona of green surrounded by gold around his wand. Harry grits his teeth, holding onto his focus, and jerks his wand up.

The boulder rockets out of the ground like it’s been blasted by explosives. Harry hurriedly waves his wand so that the boulder flies off towards the place Anselmet wants it, and then drops the spell. The boulder crashes to the ground with enough force that the sound of it echoes off the castle walls.

“Holy shit,” Harry gasps, and then bends over, hands on his knees, when dizziness strikes.

“I tell you to cast the most powerful spell you know, and you decide to fling boulders. Hermanito, you may say that Helga is terrifying, but she is in good company.”

“I wanted to do something harmless!” Harry protests.

“You flung a boulder capable of crushing a man.” Salazar lets out an amused snort. “Harmless. Of course.”

“Whatever.” Harry slowly stands up. “That was my first nonverbal spell.”

“Nonverbal…unspoken.” Salazar raises an eyebrow. “When you choose to act, you always do so to your fullest potential, don’t you?”

Harry shrugs. “Probably. Why did you want me to do that?”

“I wanted to see the shine of your magic. Just being told of a color is not enough.” Salazar looks pensive. “It is not merely emerald. You carry the magic of my father’s family, Hari. That magic has survived for a thousand years.”

“Is that odd?”

Salazar nods, his eyes darting around to examine the new hole in the earth. “When two magicians have children, those children will have magic that is the color of one parent or the other. Sometimes that magic combines, as it did for me—the silver you see when my magic shines in my eyes is from my mother’s line. Fortunata’s magic has only shown in sparks from accidental magical outbursts when she was younger, but she took solely after her mother. Her magic is copper. That is part of the reason why she wishes to be named Heir to Orellana’s House.”

“Then…” Harry has to swallow. “That gold would probably be my mum’s magic.” It’s still just a suspicion, but it feels right.

“Yes, and…” Salazar looks at Harry before lowering his head. “If I adopt you, the gold may depart, Hari. It would not be an intentional erasure, but a side effect of the magic that comes into play.”

“Oh.” Harry puts his wand back into his sleeve, making sure it’s tucked through the leather straps wrapped around his arm. “I…that’s okay. That’s not as important to me as other things, Sal.”

“No?” Salazar lifts his head. “Why not, Hari?”

“Because…because you, Orellana, and Fortunata are my family,” Harry says, biting his lip.
“You’re not the family I started with, but you’re the family I have now. I’m happier about knowing what my mother looked like, and that I know the sound of her voice. If I lose that hold on her magic, then I do, but it doesn’t mean I’ve lost her.”

Salazar walks over to ruffle Harry’s hair before kissing his forehead. It’s still an odd gesture to receive, but Harry sort of likes it. “My little brother is wise.”

“I’m not,” Harry protests. “I’m just trying to do my best to make good decisions.”

“What do you think being wise means?”

“You making fun of me.” Harry grins when Sal rolls his eyes.

When they go back inside, they’re nearly run down by Matty and Fortunata. Harry catches Matty before she can stumble and fall directly into the moat. “Got you.”

“Thanks,” Matty says, unfazed by her close call with icy water that never warmed up over the course of summer. “We were just going out to play in the new hole you made.”

“Of course you were,” Salazar replies, crossing his arms as he stares at Fortunata. “Is that a gown that should be worn when one rolls around in the dirt?”

Fortunata huffs out a sigh. “Okay. I’ll go find a different one. Wait for me, Matty!”

Matty gives the hole a forlorn look. “Okay, Fortunata.”

“Everyone is starting to use this ‘okay’ term of yours.” Salazar’s expression is mock-annoyance. “You have infected our languages with it.”

“Had to happen sometime. You’re the one who keeps saying fuck instead of sarding,” Harry adds in Parseltongue.

“What are you still doing here?” Harry asks Matty while Sal hisses insults at him. “Why aren’t you at home for the harvest season?”

Matty smiles. “My mother and father are awful. I don’t like them. Besides, they are tanners, not farmers. If I went home, I would be in vile company, and I would have nothing to do.”

“I truly understand how you feel,” Harry says.

“I’m back!” Fortunata shouts, returning in a rush and wearing in a gown with far less embroidery on the cloth. “Let’s go, Matty!”

Inside the Entrance Hall, they pass by Constantinius, who performs maintenance tasks in the castle. Harry knows that he’s from York, but that’s about as far as the association goes. He does his best to avoid the man.

“You don’t like him,” Salazar says after they go into the Receiving Hall so Harry can check on Hedwig. She’s abandoned his windowsill and started nesting next to Helga’s snowy owl, Sierida, who came back at the end of summer from a long task Helga had set her to and promptly decided that Hedwig is her new best friend. Godric’s falcon, Hardwin, is insanely jealous for reasons that Harry can’t figure out. Even Godric is confused by Hardwin’s reaction; the falcon has been sulking ever since. Sedemai just laughs, says that Hardwin is spoiled, and his mood will improve soon enough.
“Who, Constantinius?” Harry strokes Hedwig’s head, eliciting a happy trill from her before she goes right back to sleep. “No, I don’t. He reminds me of someone I didn’t like very much, a magician named Gilderoy Lockhart.”

“What was this Gilderoy like?” Salazar asks.

Harry scowls. “He was an idiot, a fraud, and he tried to Obliviate me and my friend.”


“Yes. He’d steal other people’s accomplishments and then Obliviate—Obliviscatur them so that they didn’t remember those accomplishments anymore.”

“Most kingdoms would consider such a spell to be an abuse of magic,” Salazar mutters. “It had never occurred to me that it should even be attempted.”

“Yes, well, he tried to cast that charm with a wand that not only wasn’t his, it was three-quarters broken,” Harry says. “The spell backfired, and now Lockhart has no idea who he is.”

Salazar’s smile is not a very nice one, but Harry agrees with the sentiment behind it. “A just punishment, then.”

Harry ducks as Bertram flies into the hall, landing on the mantelpiece and then cawing as loudly as possible to announce that he’s home. “We heard you, you idiot,” Harry says, ruffling the raven’s feathers before he retrieves the message tied to Bertram’s leg.

“Alicia’s seal,” Salazar says, noting the bronze edging to the sapphire blue Raven’s Claw emblem.

Harry grins. No one has heard a word from Alicia since she sent a brief message informing them that she’d arrived safely in Strathclyde. “I’ll take it upstairs to Rowena, Sal.”

With no students running about, and the teachers practically on vacation, the castle servants are using the opportunity to give Hogewáþ a thorough cleaning. Harry passes by Maurius and Richessa on his way up the stairs, but both of them are deep in conversation and don’t hear his greeting.

He shrugs and moves on, reflecting that there is a lot he didn’t know about medieval castles. Hogewáþ has minimal staff compared to other castles its size, but it’s full of magicians who can do a lot of things for themselves.

Maurius is from Burgundy and acts as a sort of constable, securing the castle by conventional means that are meant to work with the wards. He literally oversees the gate; his quarters are right above the doors for the Entrance Hall. Richessa is local and very Gaelic, so it’s hard for Harry to understand the Steward when they speak. Meraud is Head of Staff and Master of the Kitchen, which would normally be the jobs of two different people. She’s also in charge of obtaining all of their food and budgeting for purchases, which Harry thinks is an insane amount of work, but Meraud likes it. Oriel is Head Maid, second to Meraud. Since she’s magical, she’s pretty much irreplaceable for helping Hogewáþ keep up with kitchen cleaning and laundry. Eadburga is Meraud’s kitchen assistant, and she serves during meals, too. So does Bausan, a jack-of-all-trades sort of bloke. He makes all of Hogewáþ’s candles, acts as an attendant for guests, helps Eadburga during table service, and is a Stable Master to the horses kept in an enclosure next to the castle that doesn’t exist in Harry’s time.

Harry stays away from the horses. They don’t like him, and the feeling is mutual.
Blanchette works under Oriel as a maid and a weaver, though her loom is entirely non-magical and a thing of terrifying complexity. Milon is both a fire-tender and an actual Chamberlain, which would be cool except that Milon is exceptionally fussy about everything. His attempts at sorting Harry’s wardrobe, trying to cram furniture, art, or rugs into Harry’s sleeping chamber—they drive Harry mental. He likes his room the way it is. He’d ban Milon from entering, but Milon is also really sensitive, and Harry doesn’t want to make someone cry for stupid reasons.

He likes most of the staff, but Anselmet is admittedly his favorite. Anselmet traveled to a lot of different places and has interesting stories. He also shows Harry all of his architectural designs, jokingly asking if they look familiar.

Harry was presented with the designs for oversized bathtubs, like the Prefect’s Bathroom, just the other day. He told Anselmet that he’d hex the man if he didn’t add those Roman-style bathing pools to Hogewāþ. Anselmet grinned and took it as confirmation that the baths belonged in the castle. Harry just wants him to hurry up and build them so he can swim in one.

He knocks on the door to Rowena’s office; Rowena calls for him to enter a moment later. He lifts the latch on the door and enters, smiling at her. “Hello. I thought you’d like to know that Bertram is back.”

Rowena literally drops the stack of parchment she’s holding. “Alicia sent word?”

Harry hands over the sealed scroll. “Do you think it’s good news?”

“All I want to read is that she will be able to come home for the Solstice,” Rowena replies, breaking the seal so that she can read the letter. Harry knows at once that Alicia will be at Hogewāþ for at least one winter holiday; Rowena’s eyes light up before she smiles. “She won’t be here for Twelvetide, but she’ll be able to attend us on sixteenth December.”

“It’s still odd that the Solstices are ten days earlier than I’m used to,” Harry says. He’s heard the astronomy explanation about how the Earth’s orbit around the sun means that the Solstice dates change, but astronomy was never his best subject. “What’s Twelvetide?”

“The twelve days of Christmastide. The English refer to them as Twelvetide,” Rowena explains. “Oh, and Jul, the Festival of Twelve Nights, the Norse New Year, begins a few days before the Solstice as well. Helga will be celebrating it, and most likely ensure that we participate. It’s her favorite holiday.”

“Great,” Harry says, resolving to make certain he finds out in advance what Jul is going to be like. He already looked up the festivals that happen at the end of September, and the 990 version of Hallow’een takes place over five days, not just one. He’s been trying to figure out how to explain that he doesn’t want to participate on the thirty-first. It still feels like he’d be celebrating his parents’ murders.
"If a mere fragment of this Voldemort’s soul is so potent, so terrible, what must the man himself be like?"

“He is ready,” Rowena announces one morning at the breakfast table.

Salazar is not awake enough yet for that sort of declaration. “Who is ready for what?”

“Harry is ready.” Rowena takes pity on him and pushes a water goblet closer. “It might be more effective to spill it out over your head.”

Salazar thinks about it before deciding not to. It’s chilly in the kitchen, even with the fire burning. Wet, damp weather settled in like some sort of terrible vengeance and refused to leave, despite the fact that it is first September, not Ianuarius. It’s put the whole of the castle into a mood; the magic of Hogewáþ herself is also displeased by the ill weather.

“I am more awake, if only out of intrigue. What is Hari ready for?”

Rowena places her hand on his arm. “For us to begin the steps that will lead to the removal of the soul shard.”

Salazar sucks in a breath, startled. “This soon?”

“It seems he was correct about his need to do other things. Once Harry had other lessons to concentrate on, it made the Mind Magic lessons easier. When he has more freedom to move about, to vary his thoughts, his focus is clearer. He is not yet a master of Mind Magic, but he has been diligent and fierce in determining what is himself and what is other.”

“Very well.” Salazar gulps down ice-cold water and considers crawling into the fire. These are the moments in which he misses his homeland with a fierce passion. The weather would never be this cruel in Castile. Too hot, perhaps, but not damp and frigid. “Tell me what to expect. I think he should have full warning.”

“I agree.” Rowena nods her thanks to Eadburga when she sets a fresh basket of warm bread onto the table. “I think we are looking at months of work.”

“How many months?”

“We should begin soon, if not this very day.” Rowena frowns. “That will give Harry time to adjust to what I believe will be unpleasant sensations before our other students return.”

“That isn’t surprising,” Salazar says.

“I do not believe we will finish until planting season begins on second Februarius.”

That is shocking. “Are you certain?” Salazar asks her in disbelief. “It’s a soul shard! They are not that complicated.”
Rowena nods. “As Helga said on the day of our first meeting: this particular soul shard is very, very strong. You will soon experience such for yourself and understand the time that will be necessary. It will require all four of us to remove it. This one is going to fight back.” She glances away, discomfited. “It will not be pleasant. Harry has mastered his sense of self, Salazar, never fear…but this shard. It may well be a living being on its own, such is its strength.”

That makes an unpleasant cavern try to open itself in his midsection. “Then for Hari to still be who he is…”

“He is stronger, yes.” Rowena manages a faint smile. “The sacrificial blood protection he bears did help, but Harry has instinctively fought the soul jar’s influence all his life, refusing to be what the shard demands.”

“And what does this shard demand?”

Rowena purses her lips before answering. “Evil,” she finally murmurs.

Salazar nods, neglects breakfast, and goes to find his brother. He finds Hari lurking in the bócgestrēon—the room Hari calls their library. He is still utterly fascinated by the Pictish diagrams of magic. Gedeloc spent most of Augustus in the castle, tutoring a new pupil in a way of magic that is dying out as swiftly as Cumbric and Pictish. The old magician informed Salazar and Rowena that Hari was nearly ready to attempt his first works in the complicated magical mazes, but such a thing should wait until after the soul jar’s removal.

“Hari.”

Hari glances up at him and tucks a strip of torn parchment into the thread-bound book he is looking at. “Hello—and you look unhappy. I suppose my question can wait.”

“We’ll trade.” Salazar seats himself at the table cross from Hari. “You may go first.”

“I was thinking about the adoption,” Hari says. “I have to take your House’s name, yes?”

“That you do. There are ways around it, if you do not wish to give up your family name, but the magic is easier to bind the familial ties if we do not.”

Hari nods in understanding. “I thought as much—and I don’t mind giving up my name, Salazar. I don’t remember my parents. Potter doesn’t mean much to me beyond the fact that it was my name. I actually do like Deslizarse.”

Salazar tilts his head. “That is not your only question.”

“No, but now it’s time to trade.” Hari grins at him. “What do you want, Sal?”

Salazar tries to smile back; it’s a miserable failure. He tells Hari all of what Rowena told him, resorting to Parseltongue so there is no chance of mistranslation.


“Helga and Rowena both say that the sacrificial magic protects you from the shard’s full power,” Salazar says in a gentle voice. “Your mother gave up a great deal of strength in order to safeguard you the only way she could.”

Hari bites his lip, a habit Helga is desperately trying to convince him not to indulge in so that he doesn’t suffer bleeding lips from winter’s cold. Godric keeps reminding Helga that the mountains
of Moray do not get as cold as the Orkney Isles. Neither idea is taking root with any great swiftness. “That makes sense. This won’t be easy, will it?”

“Rowena expects not. She wants to begin this process at once, so that you are accustomed to what it entails by the time the students return in October. Rowena also believes that removing this shard will require all four of us who hold the castle’s magic. Orellana and Sedemai will not be involved; they know Mind Magic, but such as this is not their strength.”

Hari nods. He seems far less concerned by the difficulty than Salazar. “I am so bloody sick of picturing that flowering apple tree in my head, Sal. I’ll be glad when it’s over.”

“Just survive it,” Salazar begs, feeling his heart ache at the thought of losing his brother.

Hari looks surprised. “It could kill me?”

“You are stronger,” Salazar emphasizes. “But I will not lie and tell you there is no chance of it. This will be as harsh on your body as it will be on your mind. You may be ill for weeks just from a single hint of interference from us.”

“Just in time for influenza season, too. I’m glad I found the free clinics every year for getting influenza vaccines,” Hari says thoughtfully. “Maybe those will help fend it off.”

Salazar is too bewildered to wonder about influenza. “You seem very lighthearted about this.”

Hari shrugs. “I was meant to die when I was an infant. Then I was meant to die at age eleven. Age twelve. Age thirteen. Age fourteen. I’m familiar with this, Sal. I don’t have much fear of death left within me.”

Salazar has to change the subject, or he might honestly consider going to weep in Oreellana’s arms. His brother should not be so acquainted with the threat of imminent death that the idea of it bothers him so little. “What was the other thing you wished to know?”

“Can I—can I change all of my name?” Hari asks hesitantly. “I don’t know if that’s proper or not.”

Salazar did not foresee that question, not in any manner. “You can decide that, yes, though it is tradition that you allow the adopting family to choose what is new. You can say no, of course, and another name will be decided upon. Is that what you want?”

“I’m not sure yet. Maybe I’ll be certain after the soul jar is gone.” Hari tugs at a loose string from the book’s binding. “Besides, it probably won’t be the best idea for my name to show up in a history book a thousand years from now.”

“Not as it stands, no,” Salazar realizes. “I hadn’t yet thought of that.”

“And it’s a possibility, since a Founder of Hogewälp wants to adopt me.”

“That is true, yes.” Salazar hesitates. “We still can’t perform that magic until the soul shard is removed, but I would be honored if you would let me consider your new names,” he whispers.

Hari smiles at him. “I’d be insulted if you didn’t.”

“And such an agreement has nothing to do with your utter unfamiliarity with names from my homeland.”

“Of course it does. That’s called good planning,” Hari replies.
The first investigation of the Horcrux has the solemn weight of ritual. Helga asks Hari to choose the place of battle; to Salazar’s surprise, Hari chooses the Receiving Hall.

“It’s familiar to me, even if it’s changed,” Hari says. “I spent more time in here happy than I did anywhere else in the castle except my dormitory, and that doesn’t exist yet.” None of them know what a dormitory is, and Salazar is not in the mood to ask.

“You’re to lie on this table,” Rowena instructs Hari, using her wand to remove the servingware from the tabletop. “You will close your eyes and focus on that apple tree you adore so much.”

“Stupid apple tree,” Hari mutters, but does as asked. Rowena coaxes him into closing his eyes, slowing his breath, until he appears to be slumbering. Then Rowena gestures the rest of them closer.

“One fingertip from each of you will rest upon a part of this scar,” Rowena says in a low voice. “The moment we begin, it will be aware of what we’re attempting. No matter how Harry reacts, you will not stop unless I say. You must all be certain in this.”

Salazar trusts Rowena not to kill his brother. “I am.”

“Certain,” Godric says with a grim set to his jaw. He looks to be preparing for battle…but then, they are.

Helga nods at Rowena. “Now, dearest.”

Rowena is correct. The moment the soul shard feels the touch of four different magics, it shrieks like a living thing. It is no sound in Salazar’s ears, but a terrible echo in his thoughts. He scowls and grits his teeth; he has heard such things before. Just because this one is louder does not mean he will fear it.

* * * * *

We are learning to recognize its shape, Rowena says in his thoughts. Her mental voice is clear and pure, hidden from the shard’s notice. That is today’s only task, and we will not finish.

Even that simple act leaves his brother unconscious. The scar beneath their fingertips is slick with blood. “Dear God, that was awful.” Godric gasps out, sitting down on the bench. “You were, perhaps, not being specific enough as to how horrid this shard truly is.”

Rowena frowns. “How is my describing it as evil an act of dishonesty, Godric? The man who placed a soul shard in this child had little left to him but evil deeds and foul purpose.”

When Rowena finally rouses Hari, he is sharp-eyed and intense, not lost in the shard’s actions at all. “How do you feel?” she asks him.

Hari takes a breath. “Really, really sarding angry, but it’s not my anger.” He swallows. “I don’t know if I would have been able to tell the difference without learning Mind Magic first.”

“No, I really don’t think you would have,” Rowena agrees. “It would have taken constant exposure to the shard attempting to become a more purposeful entity for you to discern its differences otherwise. It has, until now, been quiet.”
Hari stares at her as Helga helps him to sit up. “Is it going to be active now? Alive?”

Rowena considers it. “Yes, but you know your own thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and cares. Keep all of that in your heart, and its attempts to misdirect you will be useless.”

It takes the entirety of September for the four of them to even find the whole of the shard’s shape. Rowena was correct; it has had a long time to integrate itself within Hari’s magic. Hari can divide his sense of self from the shard, but his magical core is another matter. Even though Hari has been working at that task for weeks, it is still a tangled mess, a morass in which the shard hides itself in parts instead of a whole.

Salazar glances at the peculiar, lightning-like scar on his brother’s forehead and wonders, If a mere fragment of this Voldemort’s soul is so potent, so terrible, what must the man himself be like?

“Are we going to need Myrddin for this?” Helga asks in blunt honesty after Salazar returns from taking his brother to bed. Hari protested sleep just long enough for it to claim him; he left Hari in Orellana’s care.

“Myrddin would mock us for bleating any time a problem arose that seemed troublesome,” Godric responds dryly.

“I don’t care if he would mock us,” Salazar snaps at him. “Do we need his assistance, Rowena?”

“If we do not succeed by the first of summer?” Rowena considers it. “Then yes. We will send for him, and I will care not if he mocks us. Myrddin would recognize the dire need the moment he witnessed our difficulty.”

Those weeks are not kind, but Rowena spoke truly when she said it would give Hari time to become accustomed to their work, and to the pain the shard causes him if it feels differing magics. It means they can continue the process of the soul jar’s removal once their students return after Mabon and Michaelmas without fear of distressing the others.

Salazar risks one single glance down to see Hari clenching his jaw, refusing to voice the agony the shard is creating, before he dares not look again. That alone might convince him to stop, and no one, least of all his brother, would thank him for that weakness.

He still cleans his hands for a solid hour each time the scar breaks open and bleeds. The blood is never black, as he has seen in some inanimate Horcruxes, but it is not Hari’s blood that he is wishing to remove from his hands.

Vile magic, Salazar thinks, staring into the bit of polished silver that hangs over the sink basin. Hari might look bruised and pale after each session with the soul jar, but Salazar does not look much better. None of them ever do. Godric was correct; simply knowing the shard was evil did not prepare them. Salazar does not know of any word in any language that would be descriptive enough for that shard of Vol de Mort’s soul.

Hari stubbornly continues every single lesson he’s chosen to pursue under their guidance. He never complains, but the battle is wearing his little brother down to hollow-eyed exhaustion. Salazar spends his free moments over the mæsling cauldron he acquired just after Harry explained why the metal was beneficial for healing potions.

“Drink it,” Salazar says, often, as the days of Samhain approach. “It’s a replenishment, the best I can offer you until the work of removing the shard is done.”

Hari stares at the dark green liquid in its goblet, but makes no move to swallow it. “Must I repeat
myself?” Salazar asks.

“I know what a Replenishment Potion is, Sal,” Hari says in a dull voice, but he does finally drink it. His eyebrows lift in surprise. “This doesn’t taste nearly as foul as I’m accustomed to.”

Salazar rolls his eyes. “From what you’ve said, the non-magical people of your time have made great strides, but the magicians have fallen far in their skills if they don’t know how to make a potion not taste like the remnants from a kitchen composting pile!”

Hari’s eyes have a bit more life to them when he gives back the empty goblet. “You’ll have to teach me, then.”

“Discern the means for yourself, little brother,” Salazar teases, doing his best to smile. “It is not that difficult.”

“Would it be considered rude if I hid in my room on Hallowe’en—er, Samhain Night?” Hari asks on the first of the Samhain days. He’s lurking in the doorway of Salazar’s office, but hasn’t moved to come inside the room.

“It would be an absence that would be remarked upon,” Salazar replies, looking up from the scroll he’s trying to read. “Also, please teach Leifr how to write with a quill the way you did for Galiena.”

“I’ve tried. I think Leifr’s handwriting is a lost cause,” Hari says, but he isn’t smiling. “I know nothing happens until dark, and I don’t mind the days before or after. Just not thirty-first October.”

“Why?”

Hari avoids Salazar’s gaze. “My parents were murdered that night. I don’t want to—I don’t like celebrating on that day. I couldn’t get out of attending at Hogwarts.”

Salazar puts down his quill, thinking how amusing, odd, and frustrating it is that Hari has truly begun to think of his Hogwarts and their Hogewáþ as two entirely different places. “Celebrating,” he repeats. “Perhaps you should tell me of what Samhain Night is like in your time.”

Hari glances up long enough to bite his lip before looking away again. “In the non-magical world, it’s a reason to dress up in costumes, go to parties—sort-of-feasts—view frightening moving pictures or visit frightening places for fun. A lot of children go visiting neighbors to knock on their doors to ask for treats. It’s treated as a lark.”

Costume and lark are two words that Salazar doesn’t know; he has to ask Hari to explain them. “I see.” He frowns. “Samhain Night is not such here, Hari. The traditions involve honoring the dead; of observing the close of herding season for those with grazing animals; bonfires lit to chase back both darkness, evil spirits, and the chill of winter; of relighting one’s hearth fires from the bonfires in recognition of the fact that the Britons consider Samhain Night to be the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. The veil between the living and the dead is considered very thin on Samhain Night. It is also an excellent time for Divination of all sorts.”

“That…that doesn’t sound too bad,” Hari admits after a moment. “No one ever seems to use it as a day to honor the dead in my time, and that’s…well.”

“It feels cruel,” Salazar guesses, and Hari nods. “Does no one ever allow you to honor your parents on that day?”

“Everyone pretends that nothing is wrong,” Hari answers in a flat voice. “That nothing bad ever
happened.”

“We call it Noche de los Muertos in Ipuzko,” Salazar says. “We light fires in recognition of the thinning of the veil, and drink licor mulled with herbs set ablaze to purify the body. That’s all.”

“I can probably do that. Thanks, Sal.” Hari wanders off without waiting for a response.

On Samhain Night itself, Hari joins them for what is to occur, but warns everyone with a too-bright smile that he’s really tired, so he might need to leave early. Salazar feels like rolling his eyes, as his little brother just told the truth without explaining anything properly at all.

Salazar is doing as he usually does, scrying on the water for those who ask, when Fortunata drags Hari through the milling crowd around the castle. “You have to!” she’s saying, grinning. “He’s never wrong!”

“Help,” Hari requests, though his smile is easier now than it was before. This is not a day for boisterousness, and it has eased him. “I have no idea what she’s talking about.”

“I told you that this was an auspicious day for scrying. Many in the village and castle come and ask me specific questions, though they are only allowed to ask one,” Salazar replies. “It is exhausting, otherwise.”

“I really don’t want to—” Hari tries, but Fortunata stamps her foot.

“You have to,” Fortunata says, crossing her arms and glaring up at Hari. “It’s tradition.”

“What if I don’t want to know anything about my future, bratling?” Hari retorts, mimicking Fortunata’s posture and expression. “What then?”

Fortunata shrugs. “Don’t be specific, then.” She’s promptly claimed by Matty and Leoric, who are intent on locating more wood for the bonfire. The children take the Moravian custom of fetching the wood very seriously.

“You do not actually have to do so,” Salazar says, trying not to feel irritated with his daughter. Her intentions were innocent, if naïve.

“Fuck it,” Hari says, sitting down on the tree stump opposite Salazar. The silver bowl rests on a stone between them, placing it in contact with the earth. “What am I doing in five years, Salazar?”

“That might not be vague enough,” Salazar warns him, but taps the bowl three times. An image forms almost at once, whereas for others that night, it has often been slow to appear. Hari is getting used to Divination being a true form of magic rather than the nonsense he was taught, and leans forward to see the water.

“Who is that?” Hari asks of the man who is shouting at what looks like an overly frocked priest. The man in question is dressed predominantly in dark green, like the needles of an evergreen tree, with long and curling brown hair. His skin appears to be bronze, but his stature, his features, however—those are unmistakable.

“That is you, hermanito,” Salazar murmurs. “And it seems you are picking a fight.”

“I’d wager you he started it,” Hari grumbles. Salazar knows it has nothing to do with the Church, that response. During their work with the soul jar, Salazar has often seen in Hari’s memories that Hari tended to attract trouble merely by breathing. “My hair is the wrong color.”
“Perhaps a glamor,” Salazar offers as the green-clad man in the water all but shoves his wand up the red-faced priest’s nose before he bolts. The image shifts abruptly to a small home that has smoke pouring from the windows and flames licking at the roof.

Hari looks away. “End it, please? Whatever is going on, I’d rather find out instead of…of… expecting it.”

Salazar taps the bowl once to clear the water. “Done.” He takes in Hari’s slumped posture. “Are you disappointed?”

“No really.” Hari straightens up. “I wasn’t lying about being tired. Sorry. It looks like I’m still here in five years.”

“So it does,” Salazar agrees. “Does such a thought disturb you?”

Hari sighs. “Not near as much as it probably should.”

* * * *

On twenty-first November, Salazar witnesses Hari produce a basket for Fortunata. “For your ninth birthday. Er, day of your birth?” he tries, and Fortunata smiles. “I know today that it’s usually meant to be your parents giving you something, but it’s a little bit different where I’m from. Also, I —” Hari hesitates. Salazar knows when Hari speaks again that what he originally meant to say was quite different. “My friends sent me food on my birthday. I think it’s a nice tradition. I made these for you myself earlier this morning.”

Fortunata is given a basket of honey-sweetened and berry-laden rolls for breakfast. At least she does remember to hug Hari before she starts cramming the treats into her face. She also remembers to share; the rolls are very good, and quite possibly an addictive substance.

Orellana smiles. “You are spoiling my daughter.”

Hari doesn’t smile back, his gaze distant. He’s still thinking on what he did not say. “I don’t think you’ll ever need to worry about that, Orellana.”

A teaching session prompts Salazar to make a decision that goes against their winter plans. Hari hasn’t given up on showing the other students magical spells, charms, hexes, and curses that he knows—knowledge he brought with him, and knowledge he has acquired since then. Halfway through that practice session, Salazar notices Hari sit and begin rubbing the scar on his forehead.

“So are you well?” Fairman asks. He, Elspeth, Galiena, and Eneko have crowded around Hari’s seat in concern.

“I—” Hari breaks off, looking baffled. “Shit. I just forgot how to speak English. Both versions.”

Salazar sets Branwyne, Wander, Tholy, and Jeph to dueling against each other under Godric’s watchful eyes before he approaches Hari. “Are you unwell, Hari?” he asks. Jeph always jumps in surprise whenever he hears Parseltongue spoken from behind, but it’s a fear the boy is doing his best to overcome.

“I feel like shit.” Hari stops rubbing the scar to pinch the bridge of his nose.
“You’re bleeding!” Wander blurts out in surprise.

“Oh, not again.” Hari retrieves a bit of folded linen from his belt pouch. Salazar is relieved; at least his brother has not forgotten how to understand English as well as speak it. Hari presses the linen to his forehead and grimaces. “This? This is not my favorite.”

Salazar frowns. “Has this happened before? Outside the bounds of the Mind Magic sessions?”

Hari nods. “I’m tired. I think the shard is attempting to take advantage and is trying to scare me with a bit of blood. I eat too many greens to worry about anemia. Voldemort might be powerful, but he’s not that intelligent.”

Salazar releases a choked laugh before he can quite restrain himself. “You think Vol de Mort is foolish?”

“He has to be,” Hari says, returning to English as if he’d never had difficulty at all. “Who is afraid of a bit of blood, anyway? There are worse things.” Then he looks at the younger students. “I’m sorry. I’m afraid I’m not going to be able to finish helping you today.” Hari lowers his voice. “Practice your Disillusionment Charm—no, sorry, that’s the wrong word. Your Invisibilia in Oculis Vestris Charm. If you succeed in sneaking up on Godric and pounce from behind, that means you’ve won.”

The moment the four have scampered off, ready to stalk Godric and lay him out on the floor, Salazar glares at Hari. “Be. Honest.”

“I was. I’m just tired, Sal,” Hari replies, lowering the bit of linen and frowning at the blood staining it. “It isn’t getting through my mental barriers, so the shard keeps trying to alarm me in the few methods it has. It’s not very inventive.”

The moment the evening meal is complete, Salazar seeks out a private audience with Rowena. “I know that I said I would remain here for Twelvetide, for Hari’s sake, even if it meant angering my king,” he says. “I’ve changed my mind. I think my family should go to León, and Hari must go with us. He needs time to recover, or I fear he might succumb to one of the illnesses that seem to like floating down with the snow upon winter’s arrival.”

Rowena sips at a goblet of steaming mulled wine before she nods. “That is a good idea. You are not the only one who has noticed Harry’s growing weariness. You can terrify him with the politics of León while letting him recover from our battle with the soul shard. Such will be a good distraction, I think.”

“I believe he will find my sister far more worrisome than the politics of my kingdom,” Salazar replies, and turns to go.

“That map. The one Harry created.”

Salazar hasn’t yet lifted the door latch. “What about it?”

When he turns, Rowena’s mouth is quirked in a faint smile. “Are you going to be the one to tell Harry that he took my instructions for that particular charm and created something none of us thought possible?”

“And have Hari believe he’s done wrong and attempt unnecessary corrections? Absolutely not.” Salazar hesitates with his hand still in place, fingers resting on blackened and oil-polished cast iron. “Do you think the Pictish magical training informed the changed form of the charm?”
“It’s the only magic Harry is learning that none of us are versed in.” She rests her chin on her hands. “And then there are the moving pictures he has spoken of, ones that are animated and colorful. I imagine that knowledge might also be altering the manner in which he thinks that charm should be used.”

“Or it was Gedeloc’s influence, introducing Hari to the magic of a Pensife,” Salazar says.

“Introduction?” Rowena shakes her head. “Gedeloc doesn’t believe so. He thinks it was still a new magical item for Harry, but not one entirely unfamiliar.”

Salazar huffs out an annoyed sigh. “What my brother doesn’t speak of might drive me to drink as much as Godric in a single sitting.”

“You’re from Castile. You might actually kill Godric if you sat down with the true intent of becoming lost in your cups, as he will be unable to resist the urge to attempt to keep up,” Rowena says dryly.

“Helga is Norse and you are Bavarian,” Salazar responds, grinning. “He should have learned his lesson the last time he made that attempt!” Then he goes to inform Orellana and Fortunata that they will be seeing León for Christmastide, after all.
It took him eight months to decide that The International Statute of Secrecy is *stupid.*

Forgot to mention earlier due to tired (I am apparently trying to hibernate my way through 3 hurricanes???) but this is the point in Part III where LOTS AND LOTS of real people turn up. However, these dead historical figures are being used in a fictitious manner, even though many of the events surrounding them really happened.

*tl;dr* I am a nerd and it is awesome.

Salazar tells him about their altered plans for the winter over supper. “León? Cool. I’ve never been to Spain,” Harry says in Old English. Almost everyone is used to what few bits of slang he’s deemed safe to continue using, such as Sal’s dreaded *okay.*

“León,” Salazar growls. “Not. Spain!”

Harry smiles at him. “Same place.”

“No, it is not—” Salazar breaks off and stares at him. “You are such a complete *sh*t,*” he declares, flinging a bread roll at Harry’s head.

Harry catches it—he was a Seeker for a reason, after all—and politely thanks Sal for the extra bread. Godric and Sedemai nearly fall off the trestle bench from laughing so hard.

“They’re perfect for each other,” Rowena says in drawling aside to Helga. She nods and then gives Salazar an innocent look when he glares at them.

Orellana smirks at Salazar while Fortunata darts off to the second table to inform the other kids as to what has Salazar so miffed. “Are you angry that they are correct, or angry that Hari was so easily able to fool you?”

“Anger is not the correct word.” Salazar eyes him. “Hari. I grew up in a Court that breathed intrigue. You are a better teller of falsehoods than anyone I have *ever* met.”

“Is that a compliment or an insult?” Harry asks.

“Continue to use it as a tool to everyone’s benefit and I’ll call it a compliment,” Salazar replies.

Orellana frowns. “A better liar than Alfonso, Sal?”

Salazar’s brow furrows as his gaze drops down to the table. “The signs were there. I chose to ignore them.”
Harry catches Orellana before she can go upstairs to bed, since he doesn’t think he’ll be doing the same. “Am I correct in thinking that this Alfonso and a particular magical prince are the same person?”

Orellana nods. “You are correct, yes. Salazar does not like to speak of it. The more he thought back on those later years, the more he blamed himself for not seeing what now seems so obvious.”

“Should I—should I not do that to him?”

Orellana places her hand on Harry’s arm. “Hari, you have only ever spoken falsely in play, or to protect yourself. Neither of those things are bad, even though it is our intent to teach you how to do both without ever uttering a falsehood at all. It’s more fun that way.”

“Oh.” Harry wonders if that’s what Rowena meant during one of her new lessons on politics. “That…that is sensible.” He’d rather say “That makes sense” but the language’s grammar would change the meaning of the statement. Stupid grammar.

Orellana smiles. “Do not change who you are because someone else chose to be vile.”

The Winter Solstice is almost as a big deal as the Summer Solstice, if only because of how many people in Britain still celebrate it. It’s lost some of its power to Christmastide and Twelvetide, which are still fairly new but taking over the winter holidays anyway. Neither Solstice nor Christmas stops Helga from celebrating her Jul, which is actually kind of nice for a Viking holiday.

It helps that, in comparison to what every other holiday has been like, Jul is so bloody normal. Freya rides over the earth on the eve of the Solstice to bring love and light back into the world while Woden does the same on eight-legged Sleipnir. Children leave shoes by the hearth that night filled with hay for the horse, and Woden leaves them treats or a gift for the kindness.

“Like Father Christmas,” Harry says, drawing a blank look from Helga. “Oh, uh—sorry. I’m just realizing that the winter holiday in my time is a patchwork monstrosity, but we like it anyway.” He then utterly fails at explaining the word monstrosity.

Harry finds out from Rowena’s intensifying lessons in politics that Hogewáþ has developed a tradition of using Twelvetide as an excuse to meet with the various rulers on Brittonic soil. Rowena explains that such visits allow them to determine which kings consider the school to be an ally, a neutral body, or if they’re thinking on starting a war with a castle full of magic-users.

“Twelvetide is a respected set of holidays among a non-magical populace that is now predominantly Christian. To attack a guest is considered to bring on ill fortunate; to do so on days meant to celebrate their God and their saints is an act doubly cursed.” Rowena smiles. “Even if they do not like us, there are few who wish to tempt a god’s wrath. Those who attack regardless learn quickly that we of Hogewáþ are not helpless.”

“Has anyone ever done that?”

Rowena’s smile widens. “Just the once. Helga introduced him to a curse that did not kill, but ensured terrible suffering, along with the additional benefit that such a fool would never again sire children.”

Harry loves Helga, but she’s still terrifying. He resolves to ask about that curse.

He does say to Rowena that anyone would be stupid to try invading Hogewáþ. Rowena agrees, but then reminds him that there are magic-workers everywhere, not just in Hogewáþ.
Mercenary magicians exist, and there are a lot of them. Great.

The traditional pre-midnight wandering is when everyone seems to prepare for Solstice the next day. The kids put their shoes next to various banked hearths, some empty, some filled with hay. Whether they’re fond of being visited by a six-legged horse or by other mythical figures, the end result is still supposed to be the same: 990’s version of candy.

As someone who grew up half-starved, the idea of getting food for the Solstice really appeals to Harry. He visits Castleview—by now he’s certain that it’s Hogsmeade—and stocks up on fruits and nuts, intent on using his new mastery of a certain charm to deliver them while the kids are asleep.

Children. He has to stop using the term kids. Kids are goats. Goats are not children.

That one has been the hardest to shake, unlike neat and its fucking oxen. Saying children makes him sound like he’s trying to fake being an adult.

Harry doesn’t put out a shoe because it quite honestly doesn’t occur to him that he should, even after he places an orange into Fortunata’s slipper. She and Helena both have a fondness for oranges (naranj, Salazar says). Those are a lot harder to get than apples since they’re imported and sell out the same day they arrive, but that’s one of the reasons that Preservation Charms are useful. It makes trade a lot easier than Harry always read about. No wonder fruits, nuts, and spices are still edible by the time they journey across an entire continent, what with magicians making certain the cargo won’t rot.

It took him eight months to decide that The International Statute of Secrecy is stupid.

Harry wheezes his way into sudden consciousness when Fortunata lands on his bed, bruising his ribs. “Wake up!” she sing-songs as appalling morning brightness assaults his eyes. “It’s morning and Solstice and there are presents!”

Harry pulls his pillow over his head. “It will still be Solstice an hour from now!” he whines.

It’s too late. Fortunata won the moment she woke him up. Harry negotiates for bathing time and the chance to put on real clothes, and reminds her that no, he still isn’t wearing a shirt. Fortunata meeps and flees his bedchamber, making certain to latch the door.

Harry flops back down onto the bed. He had no idea what the tradition is for adult presents, and wrapping paper isn’t a thing here. He tied nametags to each item, and just hopes it isn’t offensive. Well…even if it is, then too bad. Salazar has been telling Harry that he shouldn’t completely abandon aspects of his own culture—he should sort of try to slot them in with what he’s dealing with now.

Leery of Fortunata demanding his presence again, Harry takes a quick bath and shaves; he cuts himself twice and has to use Helga’s healing spell for minor wounds. That’s an improvement from the days when it looked like he was trying to carve his face off, at least.

Godric sitting him down and showing him how to properly sharpen any blade had also been a big help. It hadn’t occurred to Harry that the blade he devotes to shaving might need the same treatment.

When Harry goes out to the sitting room, Fortunata is greedily peeling the orange with her fingers, and half of it is already in her mouth. “You don’t look as if you want everyone dead,” Harry says to Salazar.
Sal shrugs. “I learned to wake early, today of all days.”

“Did she bruise your ribs, too?” Harry asks.

“No. My. Ribs,” Sal replies, and Harry tries his best to turn a snort of laughter into an innocent-sounding cough.

Orellana has picked up the bolt of white fabric, the softest woolen-cotton weave Harry could find. That was an apprehensive visit alone to London, but he didn’t die, so he counts that as a success. “This is fine material, Harry, but why this?”

Harry scratches the back of his neck. “It felt like the correct thing to gift you.”

Salazar raises an eyebrow. “Do either of you know something I do not?”

“I would know if I were pregnant, Salazar Deslizarse,” Orellana responds, rolling her eyes. “If it’s meant to have a use, I will discern it soon enough. Thank you, Hari.”

“You’re welcome,” Harry croaks. He hadn’t thought about pregnancy or babies at all, and now he’s going to panic about that for the next year.

“No. Pregnant,” Orellana repeats, scowling, while Salazar unrolls the scroll that Harry marked with his name.

“You were at it again, I see,” Salazar murmurs. “An entire world for our castle, but my home for myself.”

Harry blushes as Fortunata abandons her newest magic-animated toy to scramble over to see Salazar’s gift. Even Orellana is craning her head over to look. “You were so…when you saw the cities that still existed in the Iberian Peninsula on the original map. I thought maybe you’d like to have your own copy of that section, even if it’s just marked for what is happening now.”

“You were correct.” Salazar re-rolls the scroll and slides the leather band back over the paper to hold it closed. “After the madness that is our holiday season, it is going to be framed and hung in this sitting room.”

Fortunata’s eyes grow big before she rushes off to see what Harry got for her, forsaking the last gift of her parents to do so. Then her eyes grow even wider when she pulls a golden hair clasp from its simple wooden box. “Wow.”

Harry smiles at her delight. He’d heard Orellana and Salazar discussing the fact that Fortunata was old enough to wear her hair up in Court. He ran with the idea all the way over to Rose in London while he was cloth-hunting, which is how Harry learned that Rose made jewelry in the months leading up to Solstice and Christmastide just for gift-giving.

“Oh, Estefania is going to loathe you.” Salazar grins. “Without grandparents, it’s meant to be her place to gift Fortunata with her first of such treasures, and you did it first.”

Harry shrugs. “It isn’t as if Fortunata will suffer from having two of them. Maybe Estefania will get silver. Color coordination is supposed to be a thing, yes?”

“Sometimes the way you speak is truly baffling, even when it is understandable.” Orellana smiles. “I might send along a discreet suggestion, if you will allow me to borrow Hedwig.”

“Hedwig is bored out of her mind and would probably love you forever if you ask her to fly a letter
to Spain.”

“Hari—!”

“Burgos,” Harry says without blinking, and then adds, “España,” just so Salazar will growl about it.

Fortunata puts her hair clips back in the box, stretches up on her toes so she can put the box on the mantelpiece, and then grabs another small box from the hearth. “This is for you,” she announces, thrusts it out for Harry to take. “From all of us.”

Harry stares down at the small wooden box. Its lid is larger, fitted and carved to fit over the bottom half. “You got me a box made out of applewood. Sal, you’re kind of evil.”

“I don’t think being reminded of your Mind Magic focus is a bad thing at this juncture. At least it is not the tree and its blossoms that emerge with the birth of summer,” Sal replies.

“I’m proud that you recognized the wood,” Orellana says dryly.

“Open it!” Fortunata insists. “They did not get you a box with nothing in it, Hari!”

Harry tries not to wince as he lifts the lid. He wasn’t actually…he wasn’t expecting anyone to give him anything. Not even four years of presents showing up on the foot of his bed at Hogwarts has prepared him for the idea that someone would.

Inside is a silver ring with a wide band resting on a soft fold of green velvet cloth. He swallows and picks it up, turning it around in his hand until he finds the engraving that graces the front. Within the silver band is Salazar’s family crest for Casa de Deslizarse. The background is a rowan tree in bloom, the tree of protection. In front of the tree is the image of a horned basilisk, curled in vague approximation of the letter S.

“What—what does the basilisk mean?” Harry asks, proud when his voice doesn’t tremble.

“Basilisks are creatures of protection and defence,” Salazar replies. “They have long been attached to my father’s side of my family. They protect our homes from vermin both magical and mundane, and defend us if ever we are attacked.”

“I was taught that basilisks are evil,” Harry whispers, trying to still his whirling thoughts. The basilisk he’d slain in Hogwarts had been there since the time of the Founders, according to the legend.

That stupid statue in the Chamber of Secrets, the one that was supposed to be Sal, doesn’t look like Salazar at all.

The only murder the basilisk ever caused in all its years of existing in Hogwarts was done on Tom Marvolo Riddle’s order.

“I loathe your education,” Salazar mutters. “No. They are only a danger if you seek to harm what they consider theirs. They are intelligent, and as they grow, collect wisdom over their long lives.”

“Oh.” It takes all of his willpower to say the next part. “Can you…I’d like to meet one that isn’t… can you show me a basilisk that’s like that?”

“Of course. Hari—”
Harry shakes his head and eyes Fortunata in a pointed way. Salazar and Orellana both glance at Fortunata, whose lip protrudes as she realizes she’s about to be left out of interesting conversation.

“Sorry, Fortunata,” Harry says. “I just…when you’re a little older, I’ll tell you, but that day is not today.”

Fortunata sighs. “Okay. As long as you’re actually going to tell me.”

“Absolutely. I promise. I like being told things, too.” Harry draws in a deep breath. “I…the ring. It’s significant, isn’t it?”

“I tell you I’m adopting you, you agree to it, and still you ask me if a gift that bears the family seal is significant?” Salazar teases him. “Put on the ring, little brother. It’s a bit early for such a gift, but as we’re going to Court, I felt the need to advertise my intent. I want none mistaking it as a whim when it is an impending truth.”

Harry makes a face over the reminder that he’s going to have to face Salazar’s home Court and tries different fingers until it slides onto his left middle finger in a perfect fit. He looks down at the wide band and tilts his head. It doesn’t look out of place at all, which is odd. Even with the basilisk on it, he rather likes it. “I read once that people wore signet rings to stamp their letters with instead of having to worry about using a separate wooden seal.”

“It can be used for that, yes, though the impression would be raised over the wax instead of impressed. I have not been in the habit of wearing my own ring,” Salazar admits. “I had too many concerns of forgetting it on my finger and having a potion interact with goblin-minted silver.”

“Why not put a Shield Charm around it?” Harry asks, still turning the ring around on his finger. He feels like his heart is in his throat, but not in a bad way. “Like I suggested for Snidget-catching.”

“There is still the problem of forgetting. But…maybe…”

Salazar dwells on the idea of Shield Charms and rings for so long that Orellana and Fortunata have to all but drag him out the door. Harry follows behind him, bemused.

“You realize that you do not have to get us anything,” Rowena says when Harry presents her with his first gift for the others. “Solstice traditions among adults are most often confined to family.”

Harry scowls at her. “That’s a stupid tradition. Besides, you’re all my family. If I gave all the children nuts and fruits, why should I stop there?” he asks, and shoves the leather-bound scroll into her hands. “Set it on fire if you like,” he mutters, and stomps off in irritation. These people are just going to have to cope with the fact that he bought them things, even it ate half of his meagre savings from sort-of-teaching to do so.

The jug of wine is imported from the Caliphate in the south, and Godric accepts it with a delighted grin. “Now there is a gift from one who knows me well!”

“You’re easy to please,” Harry replies, and Godric laughs.

“I heard you muttering about needing a new cloak,” Harry says to Sedemai, and then presents her with a roll of reindeer fur. The tanner somehow bleached both leather and hair a solid white. “You’ll have to make your own cloak; a tailor is out of my budget.”

Sedemai crushes him in a strong embrace. “Thank you. I was dreading the trip to Eidyn Bur to find such for myself. I hate the winters in the north!”

“In my time, you’re what we’d call a clothes horse,” Harry says to Helga, making her expression
wrinkle up in bafflement. “I don’t think you really need it, but when I saw this, it made me think of you.”

Helga coos over the long roll of thin and narrow black leather he gives her. The tanner cut out designs that are Norse symbols with a smattering of Pictish for good measure (they don’t conflict, at least) before painting only the designs with liquid gold—gold against stark black. Helga subjects him to a hug that’s even more bone-crushing than Sedemai’s embrace. “Thank you for understanding me, dearest.”

Harry smiles down at the floor. “Thank you for learning to understand me,” he replies.

In turn, Godric and Sedemai present Harry with a heavy wooden sword that is the same length, width, and handle-grip as the seax he bought in London. “Uh…why?” Harry asks.

Sedemai makes an amused sound. Godric grins at him. “Because you’re going to learn to wield the blade you purchased, of course. It’s all but a short sword in its own right. There is no sense in owning a tool and not knowing how to use it!”

“Oh. It’s made of wood so we don’t kill each other,” Harry realizes. Godric claps him on the back for catching on so quickly. “Thanks!” It’s not magic, but Godric has been teaching him unarmed combat to go with the magical dueling of late. Learning how to fight with a short sword sounds like fun.

He deliberately doesn’t think about the idea that he might have to use that short sword.

Helga gives Harry a scroll tied with a thin strip of silk ribbon. He unrolls the small note, which is labeled as Fyrir Mesta Móðgun. A spell, not a charm. The incantation is listed in West Saxon English, Norse, Norn, Castellano, Gaelic, and Latin…followed by an explanation of what the spell does.

Harry cringes at the description before looking at Helga. “Never unless I really, really need to, correct?”

“Given that it is permanent? Yes.” Helga’s smile is that of the Völva: delightful, battle-fueled glee. He’s only seen a hint of it in duels. During a real fight, that’s the expression of someone who can send grown men running in terror.

He really likes Helga. Probably in ways the people in his time would disapprove of, but they’re not here, so they can go hang.

“Harry.”

Harry steels himself and turns around. “Yes, Rowena?”

Rowena is giving him a look that is both apology, sympathy, and curiosity. “You have my apologies for the way I spoke earlier. I do not know the customs of your time and assumed you would keep to ours, even though…even though we all thought to gift you with things, as well.”

“Is it my age?” Harry asks bluntly.

“In part,” Rowena readily admits. “You are a student, but you are also all but a man grown. Sometimes that line blurs for me.” She holds up the scroll he placed into her hands. “A moving, colored picture of Alicia.”

Harry nods. “I thought you’d like to have a nice reminder of her while she’s in Strathclyde.”
“Given that she is late appearing for the Solstice…” Rowena smiles. “I do appreciate it, very much. It will have a fine home in my office, Harry.”

Rowena gives him her present to settle the peace between them: five pre-sharpened new quills and a pot of fresh ink. “You use quite a bit of both.”

Harry bites his lip and smiles. “Yes, I really do. Thank you.” He was almost out of ink, anyway. He writes down bloody well everything just so he doesn’t forget it.

The rest of the day goes smoothly. Alicia cheers everyone’s spirits by Apparating directly into the castle at midday, apologizing for her tardiness, and then burying the children in another round of imported nuts and fruits. Harry steals a naranj from the pile and eats it while sitting on the steps.

He’s smiling. It’s hard not to; everyone is actually happy to be here, and there is celebrating going on all around him. There is no lurking resentment or resignation. These people take joy in every holiday in a way that he’s never really experienced before.

He rinses the stickiness off of his hands and finds a spot on the steps again. Some of the kids, their pockets bulging with fruits and nuts, ask Harry why he isn’t playing the reed pipe.

“Because I’m still learning.” It took him a long time to discern a means of figuring out and then remembering the notes. He doesn’t know much about music beyond the basic C-scale he was taught in primary school. This involved trying every single open-hole and finger combination until he figured out which notes recreated the C-scale, and marking them down on a series of diagrams. He can play a basic scale now, and he’s working on writing out a couple of other things that are stuck in his head.

“Pentecoste,” Harry tells them. “I’ll play it for you at Pentecoste, but not a moment before.”

“Harry just doesn’t want to admit he’s as terrible at pipe as he is at swimming,” Jeph says.

Harry swats at the boy’s shoulder. “I don’t mock your potions, do I?”

“You should,” Eneko says while sliding away from Jeph. “They’re really, really bad.”

Vigi laughs when Jeph tackles Eneko. “Dead fish smell better than Jeph’s potions.”

Jeph gets up from rolling around on the ground with Eneko, who hasn’t stopped laughing. “Let’s talk about your charms, shall we, Vigi?”

It’s the wrong sidestepping attempt; Vigi doesn’t care. “I have plenty of time to get better at wand-waving,” he says proudly.

Harry has to excuse himself, immediately, or he’s going to start laughing. It is not his job to explain euphemisms to ten- and eleven-year-olds.

Everyone enjoys the rest of the Solstice, but seventeenth December begins the task of preparing for Christmas. It doesn’t take long for Harry to privately start thinking of it as planning for battle.

Hedwig is off on her first trip to Burgos. Harry told her to just wait there for him, even if Salazar’s mysterious sister complains about her presence; Orellana is mentioning the necessity of hospitality to Estefania.

“Not that she would violate such a custom.” Orellana scowls at her gowns as she tries to decide which will be worn at Court. “She is simply not in the habit of applying such customs to messenger
Harry is so bewildered by the idea of needing different clothes for all twelve days that he plans on just shrinking the fucking box at the foot of his bed and taking all of his clothing with him. Maybe once he’s in Castile, making that kind of decision won’t feel so completely overwhelming…or maybe he’ll just make Salazar do it.

Harry would rather spend more time worrying about his Castellano. At this point, he’s all but rehearsing scenarios in his head. He is not going to screw this up. If he has to put up with Court, then he’s going to do it right. He got through the publicity of the Triwizard Tournament without murdering anyone, not to mention the first dance of the Yule Ball. Someone’s royal court could not possibly be any worse than a dragon, the ball, the Black Lake in bloody February, the hedge maze, Pettigrew, Voldemort, Cedric dying in front of him, or fucking Barty Crouch Junior.

Actually, Court sounds a hell of a lot safer than his fourth year at Hogwarts.

Fortunata decides that since Harry got her the gold hair clips, Harry has to be the one to help her figure out ways to wear her hair. She is less than impressed to discover that Harry has never braided anything in his life.

“Did you not have a female friend?” Fortunata asks, glaring at him.

“Yes!” Harry retorts, trying not to bury his face in his hands. “But she…she doesn’t like that sort of thing.” Minor panic averted; he almost referred to Hermione in the past tense. “Hermione’s hair is, uhm…okay, you know what Anselmet looks like if he takes his hair out of those braids and combs it out?”

Fortunata nods. “His hair looks like dandelion fluff before the seeds are blown away.”

“Probably not a flattering description, but yes, that’s accurate,” Harry replies. “My friend’s hair is a lot like that, but she hates to tie it down or braid it.” He might have practiced on Ginny, but Bill, Charlie, Fred, George, and Ron all got there first. Ginny braids her own hair to keep anyone from putting something vile in it.

Not knowing how to braid does not let him escape. Fortunata determinedly sits down in Harry’s lap with three pieces of string tied to a hairpin, which she then stabs into the rug like a stake.

Harry pays close attention to Fortunata’s serious explanation and demonstrations, and promptly turns those three lengths of string into a massive knot. Fortunata falls out of his lap and lies on the rug, giggling.

Salazar pokes his head into the room, noting the string, Harry’s sheepish look, and Fortunata. “I do not see thread magic in your future,” he says dryly. “Also, please do not braid my daughter’s hair.”

Harry decides, scowling, that Fortunata has to take after her father. She doesn’t give up on trying to teach him how to braid, saying that he has to know how by Christmas. Harry tells her that this is a terrible idea, that she doesn’t want to go to Court looking like a haystack.

Fortunata cheekily replies that going to Court with the appearance of a haystack is going to be his task unless he makes his hair behave itself.

Harry decides that Fortunata also takes after Orellana, and possibly this mysterious Estefania. Whichever it is or whoever is to blame, Fortunata enlists Edessa, Galiena, Helena, Elspeth, Branwyne, Elesande, Matty, and Wander on her quest to teach Harry how to braid. Even Leifr and Vigi are included.
Helga finds them sitting in a cluster on the Grand Stair. “Help,” Harry mouths at her, hoping he looks sufficiently wide-eyed and pleading enough to be offered an escape.

“What an effective means of keeping most of the young ones occupied while we all prepare for the holiday!” Helga says instead, and leaves him to continue to tie things into knots.

“You’re really, really doing this wrong,” Elspeth says.

Harry sighs. “Believe me, I am aware of this.”

Galiena has been glaring at his latest attempt to make a mess instead of a tri-braid, scowling. “Why are we making him braid with his hands?” she asks the others. “Why aren’t we making him do it with magic?”

The others all blink at her. “Because…because you’re supposed to learn how to braid!” is Leifr’s argument. “Everyone must learn this!”

“No, wait, I think Galiena is correct.” Helena chews on the edge of her thumb. “Harry, why not try it with a wand?”

“If the thread explodes, please do recall that this was not my idea,” Harry says, retrieving his wand from his sleeve. He knows what he’s supposed to be doing, but there isn’t exactly a spell for hair-braiding.

Harry nearly slaps himself in the face. Of course there is a spell for hair-braiding! There is no way on Earth that thousands of years of magicians carried wands about and never once thought about braiding charms.

“There,” he announces a few seconds later. That is not a disaster; that is a successful braid. Then he looks at Galiena. “You’re going to be a Ravenclaw.”

Galiena perks up. “You think so?”

“After figuring that out?” Helena huffs out an annoyed sigh. “Yes, you are going to be mother’s apprentice.”

“What about you?” Galiena asks Helena. “Aren’t you going to be her apprentice?”

“I’m her daughter,” Helena responds, frowning. “I have to put up with her all the time. No, I’m going to choose one of the others.”

“I’m almost certain it’s the other way around,” Harry says.

Helena shrugs. “It doesn’t have to be.”

Slytherin, Harry thinks, biting back a smile. If she’s already thinking like one, then Salazar deserves the pleasure.

Harry escapes once he has the other children suitably convinced that at least with a wand, he can braid. He even cast a charm that put Wander’s hair up in a style he once saw on a picture of a Greek statue. “Would you think it odd if I called Helena as your apprentice a year early?” Harry asks Salazar.

Sal lifts his hand and tilts it back and forth. “Perhaps; perhaps not. Why, do you think so?”

“Yes, I really do. I think you’re doomed. Not only does she share certain traits, she was raised by
Salazar glares at him. “Thank you for ensuring I will have nightmares about this in advance.”

“You’re welcome!” Harry replies, smiling.

“Who else?”

Harry’s smile fades. “Who else what?”

Salazar begins casting Preservation Charms on everything hanging on the drying racks in his classroom, so that there will be no change—and no chance of rot—while they’re gone. “We have fifteen students in this castle, Hari. Have you such thoughts about the others?”

“Well…Leoric’s practically running straight for Godric, and he hasn’t even thought about his apprenticeship yet,” Harry says after thinking about it. “Elspeth and Eneko, too. Galiena’s for Rowena. So is Elesande, Leifr, and Tholy. Fairman, Wander, and Vigi are going to be Helga’s rampaging little problems. You’re probably going to have Branwyne and Jeph along with Helena—are you writing this down?” he sputters.

Salazar continues with what he’s doing, as if he’s ignoring the scroll and busy quill hovering in the air. “Of course I am. I want to find out if you’re accurate or not.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “I don’t have a Divination bone in my body, Sal!”

“You’re also not yet a master of Mind Magic, so do be quiet and let me be the judge of that,” Salazar replies. “What of Fortunata and Matty?”

Harry shrugs. “I hadn’t thought on them as much. Matty would probably be Godric’s. She’s fearless.”

Salazar turns around and notices the expression on Harry’s face. “You have thought of Fortunata’s apprenticeship.”

“No. Not at all.”

“Ah; there would be the tell,” Salazar says. “You are an abominable liar when you’re embarrassed.”

“Fuck you.”

Salazar grins. “You are thinking of you.”

Harry puts his face down on the nearest workbench. “I’m fifteen, Sal. Fortunata is nine years old.”

“Which gives you five years to put together a proper list of magical masteries, doesn’t it?”

Harry sighs and lifts his hand, displaying two raised fingers. It’s really annoying when Salazar laughs in response.

*     *     *     *
By rights, there are seven recognized kingdoms on the isle that Hogewâþ is trying to make nice with. England is ruled by twenty-four-year-old Æthelred, whom Salazar says several dozen impolite words about. “I met him when he was eighteen, ruling in truth after his recognized majority.” Salazar shakes his head. “He has not improved since that time.”

“Unfortunately for my kingdom.” Godric intends to do his duty by presenting himself for his king over Christmastide, a responsibility he holds as Magical Eorl over Griffon’s Door in Somerset.

It’s kind of obvious that no one is going north to visit Sigurd. Aside from the blatant lack of invitation, Sigurd just finished securing his claim over the Orkney Earldom and took the opportunity to annex the Hebrides practically uncontested.

“How?” Harry asks. “I thought the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, and the Firth of Clyde were all under the Kingdom of the Isles?”

“Well, they’re supposed to be…” Sedemai trails off, grimacing. “I hate speaking of it; it feels as if to do so is to invite trouble. Gofraid mac Arailt was king of the Isles until he died last year. No one quite knows what felled him, and there has been no information on a successor of any sort. The resulting rumors have been troubling.”

Godric sighs. “It’s like they’re waiting for the Almighty to send them a sign. One would hope that Sigurd snatching up parts of their kingdom will be sign enough.”

“Then no one will be doing political things in that kingdom. Got it,” Harry say. No one objects.

“Orellana and I are already spoken for, given the need to see to it that Bermudo doesn’t forget our existence,” Salazar says.

For some reason, that makes Godric grin like a wolf. “As if he’d ever be allowed to do so.”

Salazar tilts his head. “I made my position clear. If he chooses not to listen, that is my fault how?”

“Thus we have four kingdoms remaining, and only three noted adults.” Rowena scowls down at their map of Briton. “All I can say is that I’m glad only one king controls the lands of the Cymru at the moment, rather than needing to deal with three.”

Helga smiles. “I will deal with the Cymru and Moray. All I need do is send word to Findláech that I will not be able to attend his table for the first days of Christmastide, but I will be there to see the latter half. He is the most patient and tolerable of our collection of rulers, and will know what words to say to prove to his nobles that we intend him no slight.” Helga looks to Harry. “You will likely meet him next year when you attend Pentecoste, as we celebrate such in his chosen home of Inverness.”

“And the new king of the Cymru, Maredudd ab Owain, will thus not feel slighted.” Rowena nods. “Yes, that will do nicely. Sedemai? Do you wish for the hostility of Strathclyde, or the hostility of Alba?”

“Oh, to give me such a choice warms my heart,” Sedemai replies dryly. “I’ll take Strathclyde and Máel ab Dyfnwal’s company. He favors me due to my resemblance to his first wife. Cináed mac Maíl Coluim of Alba often needs a soothing hand and more patience than I hold.”

“That he does,” Rowena agrees, but her brow furrows in distaste. “I do dislike the fact that I wish him to be assassinated. It’s not polite to wish such.”

“He’s angered enough people. It will likely happen sooner or later, regardless of your wishing,”
Godric says. He steps back from the map and cracks his knuckles. “Well, then. Time to prepare for battle.”

“What is that expression for?” Helga asks Harry when the others are out of earshot.

Harry grins. “I’m just glad I’m not the only one who was thinking that we’re off to fight a battle.”

“Oh, we all think that.” Helga grasps Harry’s arm long enough to press her cheek against his shoulder. “But in this battlefield, words are our weapons, and our enemies feed us well while we use them.”
Chapter Summary

Salazar realizes a minute too late that introducing Hari to his sister was a terrible idea.

Chapter Notes

I'm caving and I'm posting thenext chapter a day early. Castile!

As usual, all hail the betas on the HP work, @saneronthesinside the grad student (WOO!) and @mrsstanley the chemistry professor!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Unless there is an emergency, Salazar always takes his family to Ipuzko first, using Desplazarse to travel from Hogewâþ to London, and then across the channel to Nantes. From Brittany they go to San Sebastián, where it is only a short journey to reach the cliffs in the west.

“The ocean!” Fortunata yells, and drags Orellana to the cliffs that overlook the sea.

Salazar breathes in the tang of sea air blended with heady greenery and feels himself relax. This is home, a connection that will always sing in his blood. His mother was of a noble line, but his father’s line was ancient, and this place has been their home for so long that no one knows when it became such.

He tells Hari this while Hari looks around, wide-eyed, his mouth slightly parted. He’s been gazing about in fascination since they first crossed the channel into Brittany, but Ipuzko has caught Hari’s attention in a way that Salazar finds delightful. “I’ve never seen anything like this before. It’s beautiful.”

“It is,” Salazar agrees. “It is also blessedly warm.” He quickly sheds the cloak he wore, meant to shield him against the snows in Moray. Here the weather is cool, but not intent on frost.

“Oh. Yeah. I wondered why I was suddenly stifling,” Hari mumbles, undoing the clasp for his cloak before balling it up in his arms. His eyes haven’t once left the green lands before them.

“You can feel it, can’t you?” Salazar asks quietly.

“I feel something, yes, but…” Hari’s eyes track the sharp crags and the swooping green bowls of the valleys. “Sal, I’ve never been here before. I’ve never left Britain before!”

“It doesn’t matter. You’re of the blood, no matter how it came to be. This land will always welcome you.”

“I’m really not sure what to say about that,” Hari says.

“Then say nothing of it,” Salazar suggests. “Nothing is necessary. What does stifling mean?”
“Really fucking hot.” Hari pauses. “No, more specifically, it’s a shortcut for saying that it’s so hot it feels like you’re drowning in heat.”

Salazar glares at him. “Is the entirety of your slang meant to be a lazy shortcut to using real words?”

Hari gives him a bemused look. “What do you expect from a language that complicated Old English with French and worldwide word theft? Of course we use slang. Why utter sixteen words when one will do?” He takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. “If this is your home, what about Burgos?”

Salazar smiles. “Burgos was the place my father had to live by choosing to marry my mother. My father was a mere lord of these lands, the younger brother of Ipuzko’s Magical Marqués. It was my mother who held the title of Marquésa over Castile. He went to her home, but certain aspects of his home accompanied him. Then he proved himself in battle, protecting the land again and again, and became the Magical Alférez of King Ramiro III. Thus I spent a third of my childhood here, a third in Burgos, and the other third, annoyingly, in the royal court.”

“Alférez,” Hari murmurs. “Staff-bearer. You mentioned that was really important, but I don’t know what that means.”

“The Magical Alférez is the war leader to every magician who fights for the crown.”

Hari stops staring at the valley and turns to stare at Salazar instead. “You told me you replaced your father as Magical Alférez! You were a fucking general when you were twelve years old?” he asks in blank astonishment.

Salazar grimaces. “Not by choice!”

“Hari, come look!” Fortunata calls, insistent on gaining Hari’s attention. Hari musters a smile before he joins Orellana and Fortunata at the cliffs, though he is not faking his interest. Despite it being just past midwinter, the valleys are calm and green. The ocean is wild in comparison, and will be offering up a new array of colors his brother has yet to experience.

One last journey of Desplazarse for the day takes them to the family estate, the home that once belonged to his father’s family. Many of his cousins reside here with his blessing, but the home and lands belong to Salazar and Estefania by right of inheritance. Their father and all of their father’s siblings died—and the siblings were without Heirs.

Before he convinced Hari to allow him to use blood to trace their family lineage, Salazar feared that his family was dying out. He knows now that it does not. The name changes, but the blood and the magic remain true.

When Salazar mentioned such to Hari, he protested. “Sal, I’m an orphan. I don’t have any family left!”

“You may not have immediate blood relatives aside from the foul ones you lived with, no,” Salazar agrees. “But that does not mean there are not distant relations elsewhere.”

Fortunata at once runs off to play with her cousins, most of them hissing in Parseltongue to argue over what game shall be played first. Orellana gathers news from the ladies who oversee the estate, so Salazar uses the opportunity to show Hari his father’s home. This is not where he dwelled even before Hogewáþ, though Salazar would have preferred otherwise. It is too remote to easily attend to the duties of the crown, but this is the land that birthed his family’s magic.
“What is this place?” Hari asks as they roam the higher ramparts of the old stone. He is once again wearing his cloak to fend off the evening chill. Salazar is used to the winds here, which carry a cold that needles his skin but never threatens to freeze his limbs.

“It was once a fortress, built during the time of Eudo, Duke of Aquitaine. Then it was strengthened again when Charlemagne of the Franks brought war as he built his empire. My father’s ancestors went to war, just as many others did, in an attempt to repel these invaders from spreading their most unwanted influence. We were successful and we were not; we ceded rule to each in turn while utterly ignoring them. It made both men feel greater to think they had conquered these lands, but they never truly attempted to grind the Euskaldunak beneath their heels.”

“Someone warned them it might be a bad idea?” Hari guesses.

Salazar tries not to look smug. “We do have a certain reputation. The magic of these lands is so strong that the Moors call us ‘Pagan magicians.’ They are not incorrect, but it was amusing that the Euskaldunak were recognized as such without a wand lifted or a word spoken.”

Hari sits down on the stone of the outer wall. “Rowena says that there are only three Iberian kingdoms remaining in the north.”

“Technically, she is correct. Castile is a county with its own borders, but it is beholden to the crown of León,” Salazar says. “Of the others: the Kingdom of Viguera is an Euskaldunak kingdom to the east of Burgos, ruled by Antso Ramirez. Asturias was once its own kingdom, but is now part of León under King Bermudo Ordoño. We are standing in the Kingdom of Navarra held by Antso Gartzez, the second ruler to bear that name. Navarra once held Córdoba safe from the Caliphate, but did not succeed in keeping it. That is why the Caliphate is most often referred to as the Caliphate of Córdoba, rather than using the Arabic name.”

“Everyone is bitter about it,” Hari translates.

Salazar considers that. “More as if it is a reminder that those lands were once ours. We still call them by the names we know rather than the names given by others.”

“Bitter,” Hari repeats, smiling. “What is the situation between León and the Umayyad Caliphate, Sal? Are we at war, or…?”

Salazar resists the immediate urge to beam with pride; Hari said we. Not you or I, but we. “We are, and we are not. The borders are squabbled over by the Caliph and the northern kings. Despite this, you will find Moors visiting and living in the north, just as you will find northerners living in or visiting the south. As long as no one brings a fight, or there is no direct conflict, all are welcome to go where they please in peace. That has…been changing,” Salazar adds, frowning. “I don’t yet know what it will mean for anyone who lives in these lands.”

“Everyone is getting tetchier.”

Salazar glances at his brother. “Is that a real word?”

Hari shrugs. “It is now. It just seems odd, I guess, that everyone gets on so well.”

“Not so odd. What kings and rulers oft forget is that there are no walls along these borders. There is no visible line carved across the ground to spit across or hurl insults. Those who live on these borderlands are neighbors and friends. Each must pledge loyalty to a different king, but rely on each other for food, trade, and survival.” Salazar spits over the side of the fortress wall. “Besides, our borders change so often that there is no point to declaring one’s neighbor to be an enemy.”
Hari fiddles with the embroidery edging his cloak, the bronze and blue sewn to create sigils of protective magic. “Could we see it, while we’re here? The Caliphate, I mean.”

“Politically, things are tense once more,” Salazar replies. “However, there are places in the south we can visit in safety as long as one avoids Almanzor. My skin looks as if it belongs in either place. Yours, I think, could perhaps do with exposure to the sun on the southern coast.”

“Almanzor. Leader of the Caliphate but not actually its Caliph,” Harry says, revealing that Rowena has done an excellent job of rushed political tutoring. “Did you anger him, too?”

Salazar rolls his eyes. “Not exactly. Come downstairs. It’s time for supper, and my cousins have missed my family just as much as they wish to welcome you.”

Orellana and the ladies have definitely been plotting. Supper is an early holiday feast, composed of simple food made excellent by use of spice and herb. There is music afterwards, played on instruments so familiar that it leaves Salazar with an ache in his heart. He does not regret anything of Hogewáþ, but he misses his home. Damn Bermudo and his foolish ruling, with strength enough behind it that even Antso Gartez abides by it.

Fortunata drags Hari into the forming group of dancers and insists he mimic her steps to learn how the lines move and bodies twirl. His brother is biting his lip, exceptionally nervous, until his eyes dart around enough to realize that no one cares if his steps are perfection or not.

“You’ve already been on display,” Salazar thinks. Perhaps not in a Court, but Hari was tasked to perform a public duty of importance beyond the scope of a Tournament.

“What is that?” Hari asks when he can escape the dancers. He’s so sweat-soaked that his hair is all but plastered to his head, though several strands desperately keep attempting to stand. Hari points to one of the instruments being played. “That horn pipe.”

“Oh. That is an alboka,” Salazar answers him.

“How the hell is that woman playing it without stopping to breathe?” Hari asks, staring.

“Come with me,” Salazar says. “I’ll show you.”

Salazar takes Hari below ground, where none but the families who claim ownership of the home may dwell. Everyone else lives in the chambers upstairs. “This has been my sleeping chamber since childhood,” he explains, unlatching the door and pushing it open. A servant already placed his and Orellana’s belongings inside; Fortunata is old enough to have her own sleeping chamber, though she is next door to them.

“You lived down here?” Hari asks, glancing around the chamber with interest. He pushes open another door to discover the bathing chamber and its separated privy. Then he turns his attention back to the bed, the shelves, the rug beneath their feet, and the tapestries on the walls.

“You all did, yes. In Burgos, our quarters are all on the ground floor in deference to my mother’s wishes.” Salazar pauses in the midst of wiping a bit of dust from the wooden case on its carved stone shelf. “Will you be comfortable enough to sleep underground?”

Hari nods. “Oh. Yes, that will be fine. If the room is like this, then I won’t feel…” He swallows. “Trapped,” he whispers.

Salazar doesn’t comment; he merely opens the lid to the box and removes the alboka stored within. “My father granted this to me. It is insisted that all nobility learn to play an instrument, yet another
means to show how we are cultured, civilized, and educated.” He drops down onto the edge of the bed and checks the instrument for hints of too-dry wood or cracking horn, but it is as pristine as he left it.

He explains how it is played, much like the dual reed pipe gifted to Hari over the summer. The more complicated aspect is of breathing, since the notes are pulled from the intake of breath just as they are from the expelling of it. He demonstrates with a very short tune, a bit of warm-up before engaging in the longer, complicated ballads.

Hari turns the alboka over in his hands several times before putting it to his lips and creating an immediate, terrible racket that sets them both to laughing. “That’s terrible! You could torture someone with this.”

Salazar snorts. “Not so much. Like all things, it merely requires practice. Keep it,” he says, surprising his brother. “I prefer my lute or other stringed instruments these days, not pipes.”

“But it’s yours—”

“You showed interest,” Salazar interrupts, giving Hari a stern look. “If it makes you feel better, consider that you are borrowing it from me so as to learn to play it. If you learn, you can then purchase an alboka of your own.” He pauses. “However, I would be honored if you would keep it. I already consider you my family, even if the magic of the adoption will not occur until the Summer Solstice. You holding that alboka would mean that it is still passing through family hands.”

Hari glances down at the alboka, running his fingers along the beeswax-coated rosewood. “I’ll— I’ll think about it.”

“There is something else, which I wished to discuss with you in private.” Salazar notes the way Hari’s grip tightens on the instrument and wills his voice to sound pleased and accepting. “Though the adoption has not yet happened…do you recall your concern for keeping your name out of history books?”

“Yes.” Hari’s brow furrows in suspicion. “How are you going to avoid that at Court?”

“You asked me to choose your name,” Salazar replies. “I have done so, with consultation from Hedwig.”

Hari is startled into laughing. “From Hedwig? She had opinions?”

“Very strong ones,” Salazar confirms, smiling. “She gave it a great deal of thought before signaling her approval.”

“Okay. What is it, then?” Hari asks.

“On that, I ask you to trust me. Will you?”

“I already do.” Hari frowns. “You’re not going to tell me until you announce it at Court, are you?”

Salazar shakes his head. “I am not.”

“Why?” Hari looks bewildered. “Is that something that is normally done?”

“I don’t actually know. What I do know is that it feels correct.”
Salazar shows Hari to the room he will be dwelling in that night, just beyond Fortunata’s, before they both go back upstairs. The revelry is beginning to die down, but it is not yet over, and he and Orellana must remain until it is done.

By the time all involved have removed themselves from the Receiving Hall, it is an hour before midnight. Salazar asks Orellana to see Fortunata off to bed. He wishes to go outside once more before sleeping, to taste the salt of the ocean on the wind. Orellana smiles and indulges him, as she always does. She is not as fond of the ocean as Salazar, but understands his love for his home. She feels similarly of Burgos.

He’s surprised to discover that Hari had the same idea. His brother is sitting cross-legged atop a corner rampart, playing a haunting tune on the dual reed pipes he was gifted in the summer. Hari must have been hiding his practice from everyone; Salazar hadn’t realized his brother had gained any skill with the instrument.

“What is that?” Salazar asks when the mournful notes fade away.

Hari jumps in place before he looks over his shoulder at Salazar. “Shit! I didn’t know you were there.”

“My apologies. What was that tune?”

Hari bites his lip before answering. “It was a song I heard a lot the summer after—after my friend died. It’s called ‘Into Dust.’ The lyrics are…they hurt, but they feel proper. It’s more like poetry than a story.”

“Tell me?” Salazar requests softly. “I know you prefer not to sing.”

Hari lets out a brief laugh. “That’s because I can’t sing at all,” he says, but then he tells Salazar the words of the song—in Parseltongue.

“Still falling
Breathless and on again
Inside today
Beside me today
Around, broken in two
Till your eyes shed
Into dust
Like two strangers
Turning into dust
Till my hand shook
With the weight of fear
I could possibly be fading
Or have something more to gain
I could feel myself growing colder
I could feel myself under your fate
Under your fate.”

Salazar draws in a breath. He rarely hears poetry of such subtle meaning, but he understands what is being spoken of. “Your friend died next to you.” That, Hari had not yet mentioned.
Hari nods. “Yeah. I was afraid that I was going to die next to him, and then I was afraid I would die near him. He was just…Pettigrew betrayed my parents to Voldemort. Pettigrew is the reason they’re dead. When Voldemort ordered him to, Pettigrew cast the Killing Curse on Cedric. It was so fast—and then he was lying there, and I could—I could feel that whatever made him Cedric was just gone. His eyes were open, though. Staring. I think about it a lot.”

“Your first death?” Salazar asks gently.

“I killed Quirrell, but I didn’t see the moment he actually died. I killed a—a monster, and a Horcrux’s magical projection of itself. I probably saw my mother die, but I don’t remember it in detail. So, yeah. Cedric is the first death I witnessed and remember.”

“He meant a great deal to you.”

Hari shakes his head. “Yes. No. I—I wanted him to. I don’t know if he liked men or not, but I had…feelings. But that isn’t—Cedric was a good person. He didn’t deserve to die like that. He didn’t deserve to be murdered for no reason at all.”

“Mine was a warrior of the Caliphate,” Salazar says. Hari looks up at him, distressed, but doesn’t speak. “I was twelve, and it was the first siege of the summer. I knew how to cast the spell, of course, but I refused to use it. I bound the enemy in chains and ropes, left them unconscious, hexed them into confusion so they would not realize they needed to swing a weapon. Then I realized I faced not a non-magical soldier, but a magician of the Caliphate. I knew by looking into his eyes that he meant to kill me. I raised my wand and cast the curse first, and then the battle continued. I could not stop to think about that man’s eyes staring up from the ground until much later.”

“What did you do?” Hari asks in a whisper.

Salazar leans against the stone wall. “I cried,” he answers bluntly. “I cried like my heart was broken, and to this day I still could not tell you if I cried for me, or for the dead I’d had to leave in my wake in order to defend, in order to survive.” He looks up at the stars glittering overhead, taking solace in the violets, blues, and greens he can see in what others say is a black sky. “The danger of the Killing Curse is that it becomes easy to use. Easy to cast. Then you must learn to restrain that impulse. You learn not to let that power rule you.”

Hari looks down at the pipe in his hands. “Does it? Rule you?”

“No. But if any friend or member of my family were being endangered by another, I would not hesitate, and I would not regret.”

* * *

Harry knows from his creation of the map that Castile is just as mountainous as Ipuzko, but he didn’t realize it would be both colder and drier. They arrive by Apparition in Burgos around mid-morning—Harry already misses Salazar’s calibrated hourglass—to a city within the mountains. Homes are built in stacked tiers on the hillsides; tall buildings in the valleys between the mountains host larger stone buildings that are probably public spaces. The cathedral, with the bell tower at its height, is the easiest to identify.

Salazar’s home is one of those built onto the side of a mountain, but it’s only a few flights of carved stone steps to reach it. The roof is made of green-painted clay tiles, not the more prominent
reds, tans, and oranges. It has a large open…veranda, he guesses, half open to the sky and half-covered with more tiled roof supported by thick wooden columns. Even though it’s winter, all of the house’s doors and windows are open. Harry tilts his head as they approach the house; it looks like it’s built into the mountain, so it’s probably much larger than he thinks. Maybe it’s too warm inside unless the doors and windows are open. Volcanic? Geo—warm. Fuck, he needs Hermione’s brain. There is a real, proper term for it that doesn’t necessarily involve a mountain blowing up, and he can’t remember it.

Harry hangs back, watching as Salazar greets a woman that could pass as his shorter twin, given that they both have bronze skin, similar faces, and near-black hair. Her eyes are yellow, gold, and brown, though, not Salazar’s prominent green with its blend of browns and golds. Standing next to her is another bronze-skinned man with dark eyes. He doesn’t seem to be much older than Sal, but his brown hair is already beginning to turn white in wide strips.

Salazar steps back and turns to the side so that he is capable of looking at both his sister and Harry. “Hari, this is Estefania Esteñne, Marquésa of León, House of Wise Women of Castile. She is my younger sister by two years, and is our mother’s Heir in magical strength, and now also by title. Her husband is Andoni Indar, Lord of Araba in the kingdom of Navarra. He is two years my elder, and Heir to his father’s House of the Bronze Sword.”

Estefania gives Harry a look that is flat with what looks to be more pretense than genuine displeasure. Harry dealt with Snape for four years; he’s pretty good at knowing the difference. “You are him, then. You do not seem much to look upon. Our brother would adopt the disreputable and shame our House once more.”

“Maybe I’m not much to look at,” Harry agrees, deliberately keeping his voice cool. “At least I’m not rude.”

Estefania’s eyes narrow. “I am the Marquésa of León, and should be addressed as such.”

Harry shrugs. Rowena has been teaching him what she calls diplomacy. Harry just thinks of it as the art of fucking with people. “I’m not a subject of León. I don’t have to be polite to someone who has no manners. I suppose that means you don’t want the wine.”

“If she doesn’t, I do,” Andoni says. Harry likes him already.

“What are you speaking of?” Estefania asks, her expression not flickering at all.

“A hosting gift,” Harry says, giving her a wide-eyed, innocent look. “If you’re being impolite, that must mean you don’t wish to receive it. I don’t give nice things to rude people.”

Estefania peers at Harry for another minute before she turns to Salazar and gives him a decisive nod. “We’re keeping him,” she declares, turning to stride back into the house.

Harry lets out his breath in a sudden whoosh of air. Estefania is kind of terrifying, but definitely not like Helga.

Andoni is giving Harry an amused look. “Did Salazar coach you in your words?”

Harry glances at Salazar, who has his face buried in both hands. “No. Our friend Rowena has been teaching me about politics. It’s fun.”

Andoni nods. “You have essentially discovered one of the few things that will gain my dear wife’s approval. Welcome to Burgos, young Hari.”
“You could have warned me,” Harry tells Salazar before they follow Andoni inside. Fortunata is already at Andoni’s heels, begging for gossip and treats.

Salazar is still rubbing his face. “What would I have said? That my sister can be one of the coldest of women on this Earth? Those are not the sort of words that give one a desire to come here.”

“Voldemort,” Harry says.

Salazar lifts both eyebrows. “A good point, yes. I should have thought of that, but…she is Estefania.”

Harry reads that as Salazar has always found his sister baffling. Percy Weasley finds all of his siblings baffling, and from what he’s seen, Harry is pretty sure the feeling is mutual. “History really vilified the wrong Slytherin, though.” Orellana overhears and immediately clamps her lips shut in a valiant attempt not to giggle at Estefania’s turned back.

“I still want to hear a decent explanation for my vilification,” Salazar says.

“The more time I’ve spent here, the more I’m convinced you never were a villain. Not so certain about your descendants, though,” Harry replies.

“If I had the intentions your history claims, I wouldn’t be able to hold Hogewáþ’s magic,” Salazar mutters. “She would reject me.”

Harry glances at Salazar again. “That’s interesting to know.”

Salazar scowls. “Sometimes what you don’t say is just as infuriating as the things you do speak of, Hari.”

“I know—hey.” Harry pauses just inside the doorway when he’s struck full in the face by comforting warmth. He glances up at the archway, steps back outside, and immediately discovers that yes, it’s still bloody cold outside. “Warming charms attached to the doorways?”

Salazar smiles, appeased. “If we were to seal the doors and windows, the house would not get enough wind through its halls, and the air would turn oppressive. The same holds true in the summer.”

“The doors and windows are only sealed if there is a siege upon the city,” Andoni says.

“Has there been?” Salazar asks, giving the other man a sharp look.

Andoni sighs. “Not this year. Our city is not as tempting as other targets…and Estefania has been corresponding with Almanzor in a way that can only be seen as the Marquésa performing political overtures on behalf of her kingdom, were one without knowledge of her talents to read them.”

“You mean Estefania has cultivated a friendship with Almanzor in order to continue the Deslizarse tradition of scaring him witless,” Orellana translates, smiling.

The inside of the home isn’t as massive as Hogwarts, but it’s close enough to palatial that he’s trying not to feel uncomfortable. Harry is dressed to Salazar and Orellana’s standard and still feels like he doesn’t belong in this place. The house has several public floors, including the smaller uppermost storey devoted to living quarters for the servants. The floors are all marble or glazed ceramic tiles softened by Persian rugs—real Persian rugs from honest-to-God Persia, and the difference between these and the “real” one his Aunt Petunia has in her parlor is amazing. Everything is as wide and open as it’s possible to be when half of the dwelling is carved into the
mountain: tall ceilings, wide hallways, and large rooms with giant open or magic-crafted windows that allow in sunlight and wind. The ceiling and walls are soft white with lurking colors; the floor tiles are dark; the wooden support columns are smooth bare wood coated in beeswax; the art is limited to either portraits or beautiful mosaics that don’t seem to make any specific designs at all.

“Moorish art. Those who follow the ways of Islam take the prohibition against idols of worship very seriously,” Estefania grants him the explanation when she catches Harry staring at the blues, greens, violets, silvers, and golds that make up one of the glass-chip mosaics. “You will find no depiction of man or beast in their art.”

“And if you have, say, a Moorish visitor, they can see that you appreciate their art and maybe they think more highly of you, too,” Harry says.

The corner of Estefania’s mouth curls up. “You are a sly one. I wasn’t certain if Salazar was exaggerating or not. Of course, such art is also beautiful for its own sake.”

Harry nods. “It really is.”

Hearing the house referred to as the Seat of Wise Women is also weird until Harry remembers that Salazar and Estefania’s mother had been of that House, and that the Marqués title passed through her line. Salazar is Marqués because he was eldest, and Estefania is now also Marquésa because the king is an idiot.

Rowena explained that the situation between Bermudo II, Salazar, and Alfonso is far more complicated than that, but Harry is not convinced. It’s a good thing he’s practiced at pretending to like people, because Harry doesn’t like King Bermudo, and he hasn’t even met him yet.

Part of the tour involves being shown the family’s private floor, where all the bedchambers and attached bathing rooms are. Harry hadn’t even realized that garderobe was more of an English or francois term until last week. Orellana was kind of enough to inform Harry of the difference before they left Moray: in pretty much every other kingdom in Western Europe, a garderobe is the cloakroom near a home’s entry, or an actual room off of a sleeping chamber for storing clothing instead of the more familiar wooden chests.

Harry keeps the realization off of his face, since he doesn’t want to make anyone feel awkward, but he had no idea that Salazar and Orellana sharing a sleeping chamber all the time is considered abnormal for nobility. Estefania has her mother’s suite of rooms; Andoni has his own (smaller) suite of rooms next to hers. Salazar has the suite that used to belong to their father; Orellana has rooms similar to Andoni’s but for the difference in location and decoration.

“Not that we sleep separately, even here,” Salazar says to Harry in Parseltongue, which seems to truly annoy Estefania. Harry suspects that’s half of the reason he’s speaking that way. “But appearances must be maintained, even when we don’t dwell in Burgos for most of the year.”

“Okay,” Harry replies, while thinking, Nobles are an odd lot. Granted, he kind of likes the idea that Estefania and Orellana both have more autonomy, and their own personal spaces. Harry thinks about Arthur’s shop in the back yard of the Burrow and wonders for the first time if Molly has her own special space, one that is just hers to go and do things in. Given the size of their house, it doesn’t seem likely.

“These were Salazar’s rooms when he was a child. Consider them yours until you marry,” Estefania instructs, showing Harry to another sleeping chamber. Actually, it’s a sitting room. He suspects the sleeping chamber, an actual garderobe, and the bathing room lie beyond it.
“Uhm. Thanks?” Harry tries not to squeak his response. That is a lot larger, and a lot more grand, than anything he’s ever slept in before. “But I’m not in any hurry to get married.”

That’s the only thing Harry has said so far that prompts Estefania to look down her nose at him. It’s impressive how she manages it, considering she’s shorter than he is. “You are fifteen, and will be sixteen next year. By our standards, you are due to be contracted to wed, if not wed already.”

“You were forced to get married when you were twelve. Your standards are kind of stupid,” Harry retorts. “Besides, am I allowed to marry a man?”

Estefania blinks a few times. “No. Not by any law of our kingdom. Sal, I do so hope that you and Orellana are still trying to produce another Heir, or that will complicate matters.”

“What does that mean?” Harry squeaks, but Salazar is too busy rolling his eyes at his sister to notice.

“And of course, there is the matter of Fortunata,” Estefania says.

Orellana gives her a flat look. “She isn’t to be contracted to wed, either.”

Estefania seems surprised. “Of course not. Even I would not allow such a contract to be made until she is twelve, even if something ill befell you both. That gives ample opportunity to push a marriage back until age fifteen.”

Some of the outright hostility leaves Orellana’s posture. “Very well. What is it, then?”

“She is nine years old, and as she can wear her hair bound in Court for the first time, that also means…” Estefania points to an open doorway beyond Orellana’s suite. “She is old enough for that, as well. If Fortunata wishes,” she hurries to add.

Harry just finds himself relieved to see that this suite is actually more suited to a child, rather than being another massive suite like Estefania foisted off on him. While Fortunata roams around the rooms, lips pursed in thought, Harry looks at Orellana. “I should have asked before. What is with the hair thing?”

“Thing.” Estefania makes a noise that Harry eventually figures out is not derisive, but a sound of amusement.

“When a girl is of age to become contracted to marriage, even if she does not need to marry until later, she wears her hair bound in Court to signify this,” Orellana explains. “Before that time, a girl is expected to always wear her hair unbound.”

“How does a girl signify she’s married, then? Or does being contracted count?” Harry asks.

“A married woman returns to wearing her hair unbound to signify she is not available for courtship or marriage negotiations between families,” Estefania answers him. “As to a contract…it often depends on how final those involved feel the contract to be. Sometimes it is not too late to earn a girl’s favor and make her family a better offer for her hand.”

Harry makes a face. “Wait. Men are paying for their brides?”

Salazar chokes on a startled laugh, and even Andoni is chuckling. “No,” Salazar gasps out, wiping at his eyes. “Oh, but if Mother could have heard that—!”

“It is actually we who are paying for the privilege of being allowed to marry,” Andoni says,
“There are barbarian customs forming in other lands, though.” Estefania’s glare of displeasure is eerily similar to Salazar’s. “Whereupon the woman’s family is expected to pay the husband’s family an exorbitant sum in gold or trade so that the husband will take the unwanted daughter from the family’s home and lands.”

“So…” Harry glances at Fortunata and discovers she’s testing the bed by jumping on it. Smart kiddo. “Here, a husband paying for a wife is a way to say thanks, but in other places, it’s a bribe?”

Orellana nods. “Exactly that, yes. Helga is so very glad her fellow Norsemen have not adopted that barbaric custom the same way they adopted Christianity.”

“Does the word dowry mean anything to you?”

Everyone gives Harry confused or thoughtful looks, but Salazar has the most experience translating bad Latin. “Dowry. Dotare. To endow. Yes?”

Harry sighs. “Yes, that sounds correct. At least they don’t do that anymore in my time.” He thinks. He hopes not, anyway. He’s certainly never heard Hermione complain about it, and if that were still a requirement of marriage, Hermione would be sounding off on it at length—even if she decides to never get married.

They probably don’t do that anymore in Muggle England, but Pure-bloods have odd standards even compared to ancient noble family standards.

“Mother, if I sleep in here, what about my sleeping chamber in Hogewáþ? Does Harry have to move out?” Fortunata asks.

“I can—” Harry starts to offer and then wilts when Salazar, Orellana, and Estefania glare at him. “I can be quiet now.”

“If you choose it, we can enlarge your current sleeping chamber to suit,” Salazar tells Fortunata, glaring at Harry again for good measure. “Hari does not have to bestir himself from our home when there is no need.”

Harry stares at Sal. “You can just—you can just magically change the castle.”

Salazar looks baffled. “Can we—of course I can! I hold a corner of the castle’s magic. Have we not yet sufficiently explained what that means, Hari?”

“You have a bloody architect on staff!” Harry retorts. “I thought builders—”

Salazar buries his face in his hands again and lets out a muffled sound of frustration. “No. Anselmet designs changes, and perhaps he helps us to implement them, but to make true changes to Hogewáþ’s structure, one of the four of us must be involved.”

Oh. That makes sense. “Like adding new rooms, or new towers?”

“If one is adding a room within the space of an existing room, a magician needs only to know how to do so. The same applies to crafting additional magical space,” Andoni says, surprising Harry. “To construct something out of nothing but pure magic, as with your mention of building a new tower? That is a rare gift.”

“And gave Salazar great status when Bermudo would have tried to take what status my brother still
“held,” Estefania mutters.

Harry shakes his head. “I told you I didn’t like your king, Sal.”

Estefania looks at him. “Can you pretend to like His Royal Highness for twelve days?”

“What not?” Harry shrugs and plasters a bland mask onto his face. “I’m pretending to like you just fine.”

Estefania lets loose with a laugh that is just shy of a cackle. “When Hogewáþ frees you from its grasp, come and apprentice under my wing, Hari. You will not regret earning a mastery in the play of words.”

Harry grins at her; Salazar is wildly shaking his head. “That sounds like something everyone else might regret.”

Estefania sniffs. “How unfortunate for them.”

The last stop on the tour, before they use Apparition to travel to León’s Court at noon, is to go to a nursery room housed within Estefania’s sleeping chamber. There, Harry gets to meet the reason why Salazar went completely barmy on the second day of the month and tried to drink everyone under the table.

“This is your niece,” Estefania announces, handing Salazar a bundle swaddled in a lot of wispy grey lace and soft fabric. “María Andonica, future Marquésa of León over Castile and Heir to the House of Wise Women.”

“Invaluable beloved,” Salazar murmurs over the infant, who makes a lip-smacking sound. “Oh, no, you have a wet nurse for that, little one.”

Harry is surprised when after Orellana and Fortunata both get a turn holding the baby that he is next in line. “I’ve never held a baby before!” he protests, but Orellana is already sliding baby María into his arms, adjusting his hands and explaining that infants must have their heads supported until they are capable of lifting their heads themselves.

He stares down at a baby with a slightly squashed face and feather-soft black hair. She has Sal and Estefania’s bronze skin, and that is definitely going to be the Deslizarse nose gracing her tiny face. The baby’s eyes are gold, or maybe green, or—maybe they’re just hazel to people with normal vision. “She’s beautiful,” Harry says, and hopes he sounds convincing. María is his first infant, but she’s certainly not hideous.

“Get used to such. You are her uncle, after all,” Andoni says.

The expression on Harry’s face must be as horrified as he feels, given that Salazar starts laughing and even Orellana is smiling at him without remorse. “I’m not even used to Fortunata calling me that!”

“How sad for you,” Estefania drawls, and Harry glares at her. “Now give me back my child so that we may depart.”

Chapter End Notes
Song courtesy of the illustrious Mazzy Star - Into Dust
León

Chapter Summary

In which Salazar wants to stomp on Hari’s foot, but his idiot brother is standing too far away.

Chapter Notes

Still with the real historical people hanging about.

“One last thing before we leave. Hari?”

Hari rolls his eyes at Salazar. “If anyone asks me, I’m supposed to tell them that Estefania isn’t magical, Andoni is, Marfa is not, but if the king asks in private, Estefania and the baby are magical and I’m telling everyone exactly never.”

“Those words were all understandable but for the order they were spoken in,” Estefania says crossly.

Orellana smiles. “One gets used to it. This is much improved over even a month previous.”

“It’s in the correct order if I’m concentrating,” Hari protests. Salazar decides to commit them all to Desplazarse before the conversation can scatter into language difficulties. He is merely impressed that his brother has restricted himself to one language since arriving yesterday. Hari is more often prone to using three different languages in one sentence. Such is not a problem in Moray, where languages blend as common coin—unless Hari forgets himself and resorts to Castellano among the Gaels and the Pictish-speakers.

Hari turns in a circle after they arrive, even though Andoni and Estefania have already begun to stride towards the royal palacio. “We’re in the city of León in the kingdom of León.” He sounds amused. “That’s creative.”

“Blame the Romans.” Orellana takes Fortunata’s hand as they join others who are walking towards the center of León. “That is what everyone else does.”

“León is an old city. The kingdom takes its name from the city rather than taking a new name. Since my kingdom is very young, this gives it a certain prestige it would otherwise have yet to earn,” Salazar says.

Hari frowns. “Yes, but—you and Rowena both say that people like Almanzor aren’t stupid. Fake prestige isn’t going to impress him.”

“And it didn’t. The city was sacked by Almanzor three years ago.” León shows signs of richness and poverty in equal measure. There is still rubble on the ground from Almanzor’s visit, which causes Salazar to growl under his breath. “This is a city full of magicians. Such repairs should have
been completed that same year!”

“Our king has had some wise words to say on that matter,” Estefania calls back over her shoulder. Salazar nods and falls silent, hearing the hint intertwined in that statement.

Hari gives the massive church a doubtful look. “The cathedral’s pretty?”

“They will feed the poor today, at least,” Orellana murmurs under her breath as they pass by. “The bishop’s Mass is held within the King’s Great Hall on Christmas Day. Other times of the year, it is something that often does not occur to them. I do not miss this city.”

“Castile does seem nicer,” Hari says. For some reason, that causes a wide, pleased smile to grace Estefania’s face. Salazar gave up trying to understand his sister when they were still young. They truly love each other, but they have never found a peace in each other’s presence that would enable them to be friends as well as family. Salazar feels guilt that he has discovered that ease of family and love in Hari, but tries to dispatch that emotion quickly. Guilt will not serve any of them. He, Hari, and Estefania cannot help being who they are, and that is the fault of no one.

Salazar glances at his brother several times after they arrive and enter the stone edifice of the royal seat of León. That careful blank mask is on his face again, the one Hari demonstrated for Estefania, and he uses it with terrifying ease. That, Salazar knows, was not a lesson he practiced with Rowena.

The chamberlain shows them to the suite of rooms always granted to the Magical Marquésa or Marqués of León and their accompanying family. When the door latches behind the man, Salazar pulls his wand from his sleeve, as do Estefania, Andoni, and Orellana. Hari notices and hurries to do the same, though he seems baffled. Fortunata glances at her mother for permission before retrieving her rowan wand from the sleeve of her gown.

“Ridding the rooms of listening spells, searching for dangers, and then placing protective wards,” Salazar informs Hari in Parseltongue. Hari nods and joins them on the hunt. Estefania destroys part of the sitting room’s graceful glass candelabra when she finds a particularly stubborn listening spell attached. Globs of hot wax and glass rain down on their heads.

“Do people just not really like you?” Hari asks, holding up a cushion from the padded bench. “This is full of needles, and I think they’re poisoned.”

Estefania shakes her head and Vanishes the cushion. “They truly never learn. That did not work when we were twelve!”

“Someone tried to poison you with needles in a cushion when you were twelve?” Hari asks, appalled.

“It was my first year as Magical Alférez. I would have been more concerned if they had not,” Salazar replies, finishing the warding spells. Those will keep any but family or servants of good intent from entering these rooms for the next twelve days. “Such a lack might have indicated a more dire plot against me.”

“What does it indicate now?” Hari asks.

Salazar looks at his sister. “Estefania?”

Estefania emerges from magically disarming any traps or spells within the second sleeping chamber. “I’m not certain, but there is one possibility. They are pretending that Prince Alfonso V, Duke of Oviedo, never existed. They are wiping him from the family records.”
Salazar lowers his wand in shock. “They are doing what?”

“I did not wish to tell you in a letter.” Estefania gives a chair one more firm prod with her spruce wand. “But yes, they are doing so. I am not certain if the Church prompts the act or if it is shame, but it is telling that your punishment remains.”

“I’m still not hearing anything to make me like this arsehole,” Hari mutters.

Estefania eyes Hari but doesn’t disagree. “My brother’s informal banishment from the kingdom might end soon. Bermudo does not hold his people’s favor.”

“Have any of them ever?” Andoni asks in a tired voice. “Your king is cowardly and mine is spineless.”

Orellana taps her wand against her palm and then begins reassembling the chandelier while Fortunata gleefully Vanishes the wax globs littering the floor and carpet. “It’s a wonder Almanzor hasn’t conquered the whole of the north.”

“We of Euskaldunen blood would stop him, if no one else,” Estefania says. “We must all change clothes. I will assist Fortunata, if no one is opposed. I found the silver hair ornaments I wish for her to wear today.”

Hari grins at her. “I wouldn’t dream of usurping all of your shining moments.”

“Good. Go and change clothes,” Estefania orders Hari, and then leads a half-sulking Fortunata into her sleeping chamber.

“Why?” Hari asks Orellana, who he turns to the most when it comes to clothing and advice on how to cope with it all.

“We have been seen entering the royal residence in these clothes,” Orellana says. “Thus it would be remarked on and seen as a sign of either rudeness or potential poverty were we to enter the Great Hall still dressed as we were to travel here. We can wear these clothes again on the last day and it would not be considered impolite at all.”

“At least that isn’t complete nonsense,” Hari says, making Salazar grin. “Anything else I should know? Wand? Weapons? Hair?”

“Today you wear your wand openly at your wrist by tying the leather strapping over your shirt sleeve—no, you have only the one for combat still. You’ll borrow one of mine,” Salazar decides. “A boot knife is expected, as it will assist you during the feast. Wear the sword at your side, and if anyone asks what the runes on its scabbard mean, tell them it says that you are a warrior.”

Hari raises an eyebrow. “That isn’t what it says.”

“Consider it hair-splitting, as a warrior also protects,” Salazar responds dryly. “Green and silver should be colors you keep in mind today, little brother.”

“Show off. Got it,” Hari says, and goes into the sleeping chamber that Orellana points to.

Salazar judges his brother’s timing—he tends to dress swiftly—and enters the sleeping chamber when a knock on the door is answered with an invitation to enter. Hari allowed them to make full hose, but only in black. The hose, his long black shirt, and the green vest with its heavy silver embroidery are all in silk. With his hair grown out long enough that it is no longer quite capable of standing directly upright, Hari does look impressive, and Salazar says so.
“I feel like a dingbat,” Hari replies. Salazar isn’t familiar with the word, but the tone it’s spoken in is informative.

“You will do fine, especially with your mastery of such a politician’s mask,” Salazar says. “Are you waiting for another to choose a cloak?”

“I wasn’t certain if it was needed.” Hari watches Salazar pull out the other of his lightweight cloaks, black woolen silk, clasped by Helga’s lunar cloak pin. “You’re wanting to know about the face thing, aren’t you?”

“Yes.” Salazar turns around and helps his brother to settle the cloak properly, including the trick of threading the pin through vest and shirt so his cloak does not wander from its placement at Hari’s right shoulder. “But only if you wish to speak of it.”

“My aunt and uncle. I wasn’t always great at it, but if I managed to keep my face expressionless, they wouldn’t…punish me more. It was one of the few…” Hari seems to wince. “It was one of the only defences I had, so I used it. That and lying through my teeth.”

“There is no shame in either, and both may prove useful through this holiday.” Salazar ties the black formal wand sheath to Harry’s left arm so that his wand is worn on the inside of his wrist, in full view of any who look. Hari examines the sheath, shrugs, and slides his wand into place before flexing his left hand several times to make certain it isn’t too tight. It’s a close fit; his brother is putting on muscle from his insane attempts at following Godric around in the dark when neither can sleep. Salazar does not think Hari has any chance of growing taller, but it is nice to see that he is no longer terrifyingly thin.

Hari turns around in front of the mirror and makes a face. “Hose. I still feel naked, even though I know better.”

“Tunics used to be much, much shorter than this,” Salazar says.

Hari scowls at him. “That is not helpful!” Then he looks up. “What is that on your head?”

“A requirement of any royal function in a Court.” Salazar removes the coronet from his hair and lowers it in his hands. It’s a thin band of silver etched with lines of gold meant to resemble the branches of a rowan tree. Emeralds decorate it in tiny clusters, mimicking the tree’s flowers. “No male is allowed to present themselves to the Court bare-headed. Those of us of noble rank must wear ostentatiousness such as this, though it must match our standing, and never be more gaudy than the crown upon the king’s head. Those not of noble rank must wear hats.”

Hari gives him a suspicious look. “I don’t own a hat.”

Salazar grins at him. “No. You do not. Nor do you need it.”

“Salazar!”

He puts the coronet back on its head, where it pins down his hair. Cushioning charms keep it from being uncomfortable, but do not help much with the extra weight. With his hands free, Salazar reaches inside his black vest and retrieves a simple, hammered silver circlet. “I did warn you.”

“Dingbat levels increasing,” Hari says in a flat voice.

“They should not be. Hold still,” Salazar orders, and places the circlet upon Harry’s head so that it pins his hair but does not disappear into his black curls. A single tap of Salazar’s wand ensures that no amount of jostling will cause it to slide off—far easier than trying to pin one of the cursed
things into place.

Hari’s expression is positively mulish when he looks in the silver mirror again. “I look like someone else.”

“You are you,” Salazar tells him. “But Hari: what if the person you see now is who you always have been?”

Hari bites his lip. “That might be worse.”

“Why?”

“Because…because I do feel like I fit here. I’ve never felt that way about anywhere, not even Hogwarts, even though I loved it. What if I’m really supposed to be here?” Hari asks.

Salazar turns his brother around and rests his hands on Hari’s shoulders. “Then you were, and you are, and that is all that matters.”

* * * *

The king’s Great Hall is decorated for the Christian holiday—subdued today, out of respect for their Savior’s birth, but tomorrow the décor will become more garish until the holiday ends on the Epiphany. Trestle tables all have clusters of white candles surrounded by magically Preserved holly and berry, hopefully with sticking charms that will keep children and fools from trying to eat the berries.

They do not arrive in any particular order, but stand at the tables when they find their appointed places. The dukes, infante or otherwise, hold pride of place at the king’s table. The Marqués and Marquésa of each township, as well as Salazar and Estefania’s place as Magical Marqués and Marquésa of León, hold the tables closest to the king. The ranks proceed thusly; those of least importance but still fortunate enough to receive the invitation have tables at the rear of the Great Hall.

Bermudo is in blatantly ill health, at least to Salazar’s eyes. No one in Court seems to notice Bermudo’s ghastly color beneath torch and candlelight, greyish-green when it should be orange and rosy. Hari shifts on his feet and glances at Salazar; he has noticed, then.

“Gout, I think,” Salazar murmurs under cover of a sudden rise in scuffled feet and muttered conversation around them. “If I am correct, he will not be comfortable with standing for long.”

Hari nods. “I’ll watch,” he says, but his eyes are also straying to the others seated with the king.

“That is Cristina Bermúdez,” Estefania tells Hari in her brilliantly hushed Court voice. “She is Bermudo’s daughter by his first wife. She and whoever she marries will inherit the throne unless Bermudo has issue with contracted wife-to-be, Elvira García—that is her, seated with her father, García Fernández of Castile.”

“Oh—Cristina and Elvira look like they’re the same age,” Hari says in a soft whisper.

“Elvira is Cristina’s elder by perhaps three years. It is not uncommon,” Estefania says, unconcerned. Salazar glances at his brother and knows that Hari worries, and does not blame him.
Elvira is only twelve years of age. Bermudo is thirty-seven. Perhaps it is not uncommon in noble or royal weddings to have such a gap in ages, but Elvira is a child. At least Salazar and Orellana were both of an age, and chose each other. Salazar doubts Elvira had any say in the matter at all.

At his side, Orellana suddenly straightens. She takes Salazar’s hand and looks him directly in the eyes, an invitation that she rarely grants.

Salazar tilts his head to signal that he is looking and finds a single thought before him: Cristina is contracted to wed Ordoño Ramírez.

“She’s nine,” Salazar hisses in anger, nearly forgetting to lower his voice in his outrage.

“So is Ordoño,” Orellana reminds him, squeezing his hand again. “They are friends, and from the whispers I’ve heard, it will be a long contract before they marry.”

“Why?” Hari asks at his other side. “If they were in such a rush to marry the two of you, why wait for Cristina and Ordoño?”

Salazar looks at the king’s table to see that while Ordoño is not facing in their direction, his head is cocked. Ordoño heard his name spoken and is now listening with avid interest. “Ordoño Ramírez is an excellent infante, well-educated, well-spoken, of good temperament and manner. However, the Court would shun him because he is blind.”

“That is stupid,” Hari says, which causes a ghost of a smile to cross Ordoño’s face.

“Yes,” Estefania says in agreement. “They wish to delay the marriage to ensure that Elvira produces issue first. If that occurs, the king’s first child with his new wife will be Heir instead of Cristina, as she has not yet married or proven capable of bearing children.”

“That is such a pile of underhanded shit,” Hari mutters. “I’d admire that sort of plotting if it weren’t bullshit.”

“I’m keeping him,” Estefania says.

“No, sister,” Salazar retorts, smiling. “You will have to be satisfied with sharing.”

Bermudo barely lasts until the last guests arrive before he sits heavily in his ornate, gilded chair. Definitely gout, and the inflammation must be fierce. Salazar looks to Ines, who now acts as Magical Alférez to the king. She lifts her shoulders in a helpless shrug, her eyes flicking to the king once before she resumes her neutral gaze that takes in the whole of the Great Hall.

Bloody hell; Bermudo’s gone stupid. Hari’s slang feels so appropriate in this moment.

They wait for the dukes to pay homage to their king. As always, those few who bear the title of Magical Duke over their lands pay tribute last, though at least Bermudo does not require the flashy bits of magic that Ramiro delighted in. Then come the Marqués and Marquésa families, more than there had been a few years ago as children finally grew old enough to claim their parents’ vacant Court seats.

Salazar’s family is last. Estefania and Andoni step forward with María Andonica cradled in her father’s arms. Salazar listens with pride as Estefania declares María to be a healthy girl born first December and named Heir both to the title of Marquésa and to the House of Wise Women in the County of Castile. Nothing is spoken of magic, not when the bishop’s presence looms near.

“Salazar?” Bermudo looks to him. “You are eldest, and also hold that title. What say you?”
“Your Majesty, the title of Marquésa passed through my mother’s line. I find it proper and just that the Marquésa Estefania’s daughter should inherit both.”

Bermudo looks baffled by the decision, but then, he came to power by seizing the throne from his own cousin. Ramiro being an incompetent ruler does not change that truth. “Very well. For as long as María Andonica, daughter of the Marquésa over León draws breath, she shall be Heir to the title of Marquésa over León and recognized Heir to the blood of the House of Wise Women in the County of Castile. So may it be.”

“So may it be,” the Court chimes in. Salazar murmurs the words under his breath and wonders if those around him will be willing to say such thrice today.

Marquésa over León, though, rather than Magical Marquésa of León. Salazar ponders the change as the bishop decides his niece requires an extra blessing for missing out on an early baptism. For now, such will keep the Church from being overly concerned, but there may come a day when the other nobles of that rank grow angry at one of his family being declared Marquésa or Marqués over the whole of the kingdom. There is already a Marqués of Castile, but not of Burgos. Perhaps his grandniece or grandnephew should be told to convince the Crown to alter the family title.

Estefania and Andoni step aside. If Estefania is biting back a grin of triumph, there are few who would blame her. Some might think of rivalry between herself and Salazar, but he is about to prove them wrong.

“Salazar Fernan,” Bermudo says. “Magical Marqués of León, son of the Ancient House of Serpents in Castile and Ipuzko. Magical Alférez to King Ramiro III. So named Emerald Flame of the West by both the Caliphate and our own people. Founder of Hogewáþ’s Schola of Magical Learning, and Keeper of its Western Magic.”

Salazar steps forward and bows at the waist, ignoring the bishop’s glower of disapproval. “Your Majesty. You look to be of excellent health.”

Bermudo gives him a narrow-eyed look. “Thank you, Salazar,” he says with dry politeness, and turns his head. “Magical Marquésa Orellana Constanza of León, daughter of the House of Sunlight in the County of Castile. Teacher within the Schola of Magical Learning called Hogewáþ in the north of Moravia.”

Orellana steps forward, her deep green gown with its copper thread reflecting light from the torches so that she appears to glimmer like a beautiful, black-haired goddess. Her bow is sweeping perfection, one Cristina would do well to learn to emulate given her own sloppy curtsey. Her father does her no favors by not seeing that corrected. “Your Majesty. Happy Christmas Day to you!”

Bermudo blinks once at Fortunata’s enthusiasm and then smiles. “And to you.” Bermudo replies, eased by the lack of sting in Orellana’s words. “Fortunata Constanza.”

Fortunata bounces forward, her copper dress shifting like moving metal. Emeralds grace the silver clasps that bind her hair, and a matching silver cuff with an emerald cut to resemble a single rowan tree’s blossom is on her wrist. She copies her mother’s bow with brilliant precision. “Your Majesty. Happy Christmas Day to you!”

Bermudo blinks once at Fortunata’s enthusiasm and then smiles. “And to you. I have been told that you wish to be named as your mother’s Heir, not your father’s. Is this true?”

Fortunata nods and then holds out her hand. Her brow furrows and her lips thin as she concentrates, but she produces a brief burst of copper sparks over her hand. “My magic is just like hers, Your
Majesty. I should be the Heir for the House of Sunlight in Castile.”

“Given the news your father sent to me by letter, I see no reason why it must be otherwise. So may it be,” Bermudo intones, and the whole of the Court repeats it. Salazar hides a smile as he hears mutters of curiosity and confusion arise. The bishop, he notes with no small amount of pleasure, has taken a few steps back.

Hari is giving Salazar such a baleful look. His little brother isn’t stupid.

Salazar waits for Bermudo to nod at him before he steps forward again. “In the spring, I came across a distant relative of my father’s bloodline, one whose magic holds true to that of my forbears. He is five years younger than I, and a powerful magician. On the Summer Solstice, I will perform the magical rites of adoption that will make Nizar Hariwalt both my brother, and Heir to the Ancient House of Serpents until such time as my wife and I bear another child. Nizar?”

Hari’s expression is composed of utter stillness, but his eyes are burning with what appears to be a fierce desire to hug Salazar and then rend him limb from limb. However, that does not stop him from acting like he was born to this life. Harry bows from the waist with a simple greeting of, “Your Majesty.” The gesture reveals both the wand on his left arm and the silver signet ring on his left hand.

“Lord Nizar,” Bermudo intones, which makes Hari’s eye twitch. “You consent to this adoption, and all of the responsibilities it will entail? I trust you have been informed of what those responsibilities are.”

“I have been informed, and they are not responsibilities beyond the scope of what I am already accustomed to, Your Majesty,” Hari replies.

Bermudo narrows his eyes. “You should prove yourself worthy of such standing.”

“Why?” Hari counters, which makes Salazar want to step on his idiot brother’s foot. Unfortunately, he is standing too far away. “I am of Moravia, not of León, Your Majesty. As an invited guest, I am essentially a diplomatic envoy of that kingdom. Perhaps it should be you proving yourself to me.”

To Salazar’s relief, Bermudo smiles, amused by Hari’s answer. “Why would I wish to retain the good graces of a kingdom such as Moravia? It has nothing to offer León, Lord Nizar.”

“Maybe not at the moment, but things change quickly in the northern isles,” Hari says in a bland voice. “Tomorrow might bring cause that makes Moravia vital to your kingdom. Or it might not, Your Majesty.”

Bermudo inclines his head in acknowledgement. “That much is certainly true.”

“As for proving myself…” Hari pauses long enough for members of the Court to start leaning forward, holding their breaths as they wait for an answer. Salazar is going to hug Rowena and purchase an entire barrel of her favored ale for teaching Hari about timing.

“When I was eleven, I killed a vile magician intent on stealing a stone crafted by alchemy that granted its user immortality,” Hari says. “I did so with my bare hands. This kept him from his goal of renewed terror and murder of both the magical and non-magical alike. I destroyed a monster that threatened children at age twelve with nothing but a sword that was not crafted for my hand. When I was fourteen, I participated in a Brittonic-hosted Triwizard Tournament. I won.”

The Court is all but gasping already, but the mention of the Triwizard Tournament is an especially
masterful stroke. It might not be a welcome tourney on Britonic soil, but Europe holds the tournament every five years. It is a difficult set of tasks for grown magicians to complete, let alone someone of Hari’s age.

“How have we not heard of such a thing?” Bermudo asks.

“Well…” Hari hesitates just long enough to show his true regret and sorrow. “One of the competitors died, not due to the tournament’s challenges, but because another interfered and murdered him. It’s given everyone in the north a distaste for the Tournament. Perhaps they’ll try again at a later date, but for now, they’re against it.”

“That is quite understandable,” Bermudo says, while Salazar madly plots on how he’s going to convince or bribe Findláech into telling Bermudo that yes, the Tournament was held, and yes, it went badly, and no, it will not be repeated while he is king.

Maybe Salazar can just find the young man a willing bed partner for an evening. Findláech often doesn’t have time for such pursuits. It will be a minor miracle if he ever fathers an Heir, bastard child or not.

“Will you vow to protect the people of León, young Lord?” Bermudo asks, pinning Hari with a stern look. “For we are threatened at all times by the south. To be named Salazar Fernán’s brother in truth, you must be so willing.”

Hari lifts both eyebrows and stares back at Bermudo. “To protect others always comes first. Your Majesty.”

Salazar doesn’t know whether to applaud Hari or to strangle him. Bermudo leans back in his chair, frowning. He dislikes being reminded of Alfonso; the fallout from that event damaged Bermudo’s reputation when he handled it poorly.

“Very well. When your family returns here for the celebration of Christmastide next year, I will greet you by name and title as Salazar’s brother, Heir to the Ancient House of Serpents,” Bermudo finally says. “So may it be.”

The vow is echoed by the Court, and Salazar feels horrible tension in his shoulders, unnoticed until that moment, begin to relax. This could have gone badly in so many different ways, and it did not. Salazar was prepared to divest himself of all of his holdings in León to adopt Hari, but he’s glad he does not have to impoverish his family to do so.

Maybe Bermudo hasn’t decided upon a course of stupidity. Perhaps he’s just decided to be foolishly stubborn, instead.

When they’re all seated, Salazar gives in to the urge to stomp on Hari’s foot. “Ow!” Hari hisses in Parseltongue. “What the fuck, Sal?”

“That was both brilliant and awful, and I am so very proud of you, and I can’t believe you said those things!”

Hari stares at him. “You’re stepping on my toes because you’re happy?”

Salazar considers it. “Fuck, you’re correct. I am. I’ll hug you later. At the moment it would seem improper.”

“If you turn stomping on my toes into some odd code, I’m hexing you,” Hari promises.
They wait as the rest of the nobility, highest ranked to lowest, pay tribute to the king. Hari brushes his finger along the tabletop, leaving golden-green magical lines behind, and shows Salazar how to play a game called Tic-Tac-Toe while they wait. It’s a strategy game for children, he realizes, but Salazar has to admit that it does help to pass the time. He also didn’t know Hari could do such with his magic.

Hari glances at him. “Blame Gedeloc. It’s Pictish, part of how they write out their magical symbols when casting. I’m not really sure how I’m doing it except that I am.”

“I think I will be thanking him, instead.”

The aging bishop does not host Mass. Instead, it is the younger priest who officiated Estefania and Andoni’s wedding on first May several years ago. By the gods of the earth and air, that idiot can drone on without end!

“Did he just say we’re all sinners until we’re washed in the blood of Christ?” Hari asks when the prayer is (hopefully) nearing completion.

“Yes,” Estefania confirms.

“That’s really negative, and really gross. I thought God and Jesus were supposed to be about forgiveness and love?”

“They are,” Estefania replies again, irritated. She doesn’t seem to remember the priest fondly, either.

“I was not born evil, and I am not bathing in a dead man’s blood just to be…whatever it is he’s promising. I really don’t think I understood half of that.”

Salazar bites back an inappropriate snort of amusement. “It is meant to be symbolic, Hari. You are correct that the man they call Christ preached love of one’s neighbor, would hold with no house of religion being used to make money or take coin from the poor, held court with any company who would accept and treat kindly with him and others…and yet what we most often hear is meant to bestir fear.”

“That really explains a lot.” Hari sounds sad. Salazar isn’t certain he ever wants to find out why.

The meal is excellent, but if Bermudo has never failed in one aspect of his rule, it is his feasts. Everyone always leaves well fed and tipsy on properly aged, spiced, and mulled wine. Fortunata enjoys her first taste of it, though a taste is all she’s getting. Salazar remembers what happened the first time he drank, and he does not want to deal with a hyperactive nine-year-old just after a long meal, one that is fortunately not soured by politics. Not yet, anyway.

They have been in their rooms for only a few minutes before the king’s Steward arrives to say that Salazar’s presence is required by the king. Salazar nods at Orellana; he’d expected this. She smiles and bids him to hurry back so they may all rest in safety.

Donato narrows his eyes. “Are you insulting His Highness’s hospitality, Marquésa?”

“I doubt our king’s hospitality not at all,” Orellana replies with another of her disarming, charming smiles that fool the uneducated. “But one among the staff has twice now left cushions in our chambers stuffed full of poison-tipped needles, Donato. You can see how we might find that cause for concern.”

Donato looks appalled. “Yes, Marquésa, I can see that being exactly so. I will find out who is
violating the sanctity of the king’s halls and hospitality. My word on it.”

“Thank you, Donato,” Orellana says, inclining her head. “You are most gracious.”

As Donato escorts Salazar to the king’s private chambers, he asks in a low voice, “Your wife spoke truly, not in code? Such was done in your family’s granted quarters in Bermudo’s home?”

Salazar nods. “The first time, I was twelve. Now that my family has returned with Heirs for three of our bloodlines, with Andoni and Estefania intent on making certain Andoni’s line has one as well, the threat resumed itself.” He does not mention other such traps left for them to discover over the years. He suspects they were attempts made by differing hands, and two of those people are now dead.

“Very well.” Donato opens the door and gestures for Salazar to precede him. “Your Majesty. Salazar Fernan, as Your Highness requested.”

Bermudo is seated on a padded bench, a slanted desk shoved to one side with a half-written missive on its top. “Thank you, Donato. You may go.”

Salazar waits until Donato closes the door. Except for Bermudo, they are alone in the room. If listening spells reside in these chambers, they will be of Ines’s creation alone, as it is one of her tasks. “You do not look well at all, Bermudo.”

Bermudo sighs heavily. “I know. You were kind to suggest the opposite. The word of a Magical Marqués still carries weight in this kingdom.”

“You are implying that it soon will not.”

Bermudo shakes his head. “If such happens, it will not be my doing, but one of my successors. Pressure from the Church regarding a magician’s devil ways has grown. It is a gentle strength, but there is much power behind it.”

Salazar nods. “As I told you would happen.”

“You did, yes.” Bermudo sighs again. “Our kingdom has not forgotten what you did on our behalf.”

“I would hope not,” Salazar replies. “Interesting, though, that while Prince Alfonso’s existence is being erased from royal records, my banishment remains.”

“Consider it a political decision,” Bermudo says. “That banishment will cease with my successor, and I fear that may be soon. What say you, Magical Marqués of León?”

“If you carry on as you are now, with whatever horrid treatment you are accepting for the gout? You’ll be dead in less than two years,” Salazar tells him bluntly.

Bermudo pales. “I see.”

“However,” Salazar continues. “If you take the potions that I send to you, and find yourself a competent magical healer to deal with the swelling, you may live long enough to see the new millennium begin.”

“That gives me enough time to father another Heir,” Bermudo muses. “I love Cristina, and Ordoño will grow to be a good man. I do not need magic to see that. But he is blind, and León will appear weak for having a blind man as its king. I must have an Heir, Salazar. Send me your potions, and I
“Will drink them.”

“Do you need assistance in the matters of fathering children?” Salazar asks.

Bermudo does not bluster or make pretense, which is a sign that he still has at least some of his wits. “Not as yet. If it becomes a difficulty before Elvira bears a child, I will say so. What is your price for this, Salazar?”

“I will not linger in the south, but my brother does need to learn of his inheritance, and see to the structures and lands that will be his if Orellana and I were to perish. Such is important. Do you not agree?”

Bermudo eyes him. “You wish permission to come down here at your whim, but on the pretense of your adoptee’s education. You wish to effectively end the banishment without ending it in truth.”

“Essentially, yes.” Salazar smiles. “It is not a pretense; Nizar does need to be educated as to the holdings of my family, Your Majesty.”

“True.” Bermudo waves his hand. “You have my blessing for such education to take place. Do not make it seem as if you are doing anything more than that, Salazar. I cannot afford to weaken my position, not now.”

“Oh course not.” Salazar bows. “Good health to you on this Christmastide, Your Majesty.”

Bermudo gestures for him to depart. “And to you, Marqués.”

Salazar doesn’t return to the family’s quarters right away. Instead, he goes out to the open courtyard. In warm weather it is filled with courtiers, and hosts many events. Tonight the air is chill; everyone remains indoors but for one other person.

“He listens to you, but not to me.”

Salazar looks at Ines Ildaria, Magical Marquésa over what is now the land of Asturias, not the kingdom, and is Alfonso’s successor as Magical Alférez to Bermudo. She is ten years older than Salazar, and yet did not once fail to support him when he was placed above her as their leader in war. “Does he listen to you not at all?”

Ines scowls. “He listens to me in matters of the military, and of strategy,” she admits. “And in truth, that is where my skill lies.”

Salazar smiles at her. “I do recall, yes.”

“You might recall, but I have not forgotten who has a valley in the south named after them,” Ines teases.

Salazar directs them back to the difficulty at hand. “Bermudo will not listen to you in the matter of his illness.”

“No.” Ines crosses her arms over her chest. “There are no competent healers in León, Salazar. There are few competent magicians remaining at all.”

“Tell me why. I already suspected there was a difficulty based on the amount of destruction remaining from Almanzor’s last visit.”

“Many of us have been lost in battle,” Ines says. “The rest, unless they have direct favor of a king,
are beginning to hide. You were wise to ensure that your mother’s title passed along non-magical lines.”

Salazar shakes his head. He cannot trust Ines with the truth of his family’s status. “I feared so. What prompted such hiding?”

“There was a burning this spring. In Santiago,” Ines murmurs.

Salazar feels his stomach turn over. “They violated the holy city to—” He bites off the rest, unable to voice the words.

“Yes. It makes others realize that León is not safe, not as it was last year. Certainly not as it was ten years ago, or twenty before that. I am glad the northern isle has the shelter of your school, Salazar. I fear others may need it before long.”
The first thing Harry did upon entering the sleeping chamber he was supposed to live in for the next eleven nights was cast Purgo on the horrific disaster that was the bathing room’s privy. He’s pretty sure that was supposed to be the freshly cleaned version, but it stank in ways that defied explanation. Then he flung open the windows and figured out how to cast the warming charm so that he got airflow without the icy wind. Afterwards, he worried about clothes and politics.

By the time he gets back into the room once the first combined dinner-supper feast for Christmas Day is concluded, the stench from the privy is gone. Maybe casual god-calling is impolite, but Harry still says a quiet prayer of desperate thanks.

Unlike before, a fire is blazing in the hearth. There must have been servants in while they were gone, ones smart enough to leave magicked windows alone. Harry hopes they got to eat, too.

He takes a closer look at the bed, which is trying to pretend to be a four-poster but is some monstrous precursor that’s just bloody weird. There doesn’t seem to be an underneath to it at all; the posts run from floor to ceiling, and it has pillows at both ends. He’s not certain which pillows are for sleeping and which ones are for decoration. Maybe he can get away with hurling them all into a corner…and possibly offend someone.

Shit. Maybe he can get used to being crowded out of his own bed by beaded pillows.

No one tampered with his chest or bothered with the protective spells on it. Harry lifts the lid and digs through bundles of clothing until he finds the dual reed pipe. He needs to do something to distract himself that is not pacing circles until he wears down the expensive rug in this chamber. Making a terrible racket while sitting on the wide seat in front of the window sounds like a good alternative. Everyone else is probably choosing to sleep so they can roam around at midnight—if they do that in León—but Harry is usually wandering at midnight, anyway.

It works and it doesn’t; he’s memorized how to play this tune now, so his brain still has thoughts even when he’d rather it shut up. Nizar Harivault? What kind of name is that? That is a name for nobility. He isn’t—okay, yes, by adoption, Harry is going to be nobility, but not that way!

Nizar. Nih-zahr, emphasis on the second syllable like in Euskaran, but not Castellano.

Harry frowns. What does that name even mean? Is it actually Basque, or is he mixing up his
languages again? He hopes Nizar doesn’t mean anything stupid.

No. Harry trusts Salazar. Hedwig wouldn’t approve of something stupid, either.

He knows Harivault can’t be Euskaran or Castellano, which means it’s something English—or related to West Saxon English, like Bavarian. It isn’t spelled Harivault, then, not with English insisting that there is no such thing as a letter V. Stupid alphabet. It has to be a W, which probably means it’s spelled as Hariwalt.

Harry frowns. He doubts that Salazar chose it just because it begins with Hari. Salazar probably enjoys the coincidence, but wouldn’t let that finalize his decision.

When there is a knock on his door, Harry lowers the reed pipes and makes certain his right hand is free to go for his wand. “Come in,” he says, but to his relief, it’s only Sal.

Salazar raises an eyebrow. “You are making such a face at me.”

“Oh, not at you. I was just thinking.”

Salazar nods and looks at the open window. “You had to do the same, yes? Purgo, and then air out the rooms?”

“Yes.” Harry watches as Salazar narrows his eyes. “I take it that isn’t normal.”

“These are the rooms that belong to the Magical Marqués and Marquésa of León. These rooms are only to be granted to the family holding that title. For the privies to require such cleansing proves that non-magical guests have roomed here. Donato is a good Steward and would not be so ill-mannered, but he is not the only Steward in the royal household.”

“So, someone is…” Harry tries to get his words right. “Someone is using property that isn’t theirs, and forgot to clean up after themselves.”

Salazar looks amused. “I admire the play on words. Essentially, yes. It is why I felt no shame whatsoever into manipulating Bermudo to confirm not merely one of our family’s Heirs, but all three. Such is not usually done in a single evening.”

“You mean it would have been more polite to space it out over three days, but if he wanted to make up for being rude…”

“Then he would confirm all three, or risk that I tell others that their family’s rightful places within Bermudo’s palacio were being usurped by others.” Salazar looks pleased with himself. “I was then kind enough to help keep the idiot from dying long enough to father Heirs.”

“Gout is that bad?” Harry asks, shocked.

“It can be, yes. Wait.” Salazar holds up one finger and tilts his head, listening; a moment later, someone raps on the door. The noise is soft enough not to disturb a sleeper, but loud enough to gain the attention of someone still awake. “Come in, Elenora.”

A servant enters, one who looks to be Harry’s age, but she has Orellana’s extremely pale skin instead of the more common warmer tones and deeper bronzes. “My Lord Salazar.” She dips into a shallow curtsey. The jug of wine and goblets on the tray she carries don’t even wobble.

“Thank you. Onto the table is fine,” Salazar says. “You’ve been on your feet all day. Go sit down, or I’ll have words with your mother that she’ll not like hearing.”
Elenora blushes and stares down at the rug. “As you say, Lord Salazar. Good night, and a pleasant Christmas to you.”

“And to you.” Salazar waits for the girl to depart before he all but launches himself at the tray. “Do you want to join me?”

“Maybe,” Harry says. He’s still not certain what he thinks of wine. Mulled and spiced isn’t horrible, but a lot of it is rather dry.

“It’s from good lands to the west, near the coast. Sweeter than most, not dry,” Salazar tells him. “Yes, I pay that much attention to what you will and won’t drink.”

“Twerp. Then I suppose I will.” Harry sips at a wine that is so pale it’s almost clear, but it’s sweet and crisp, not dry. “Not bad.”

“I told you that it would be to your preference. What is a twerp?” Sal asks.

“I have no idea,” Harry says, and starts laughing before he rests his forehead against his hand. “Why are you drinking in my room, Sal?”

“Tonight, I’m joining you in your termed ‘insomnia.’” Salazar’s smile is brief. “I haven’t slept comfortably within these walls for several years now. I doubt I’ll sleep well until we return to Burgos.”

“And we don’t have to get up early, anyway,” Harry points out. Orellana already warned him not to expect breakfast in a royal household. Bermudo won’t even see it supplied to the magicians in the castle, which Harry thinks is yet another reason not to like the man. Having underfed magicians is a really stupid idea, considering they all tend to be grumpy, temperamental bastards without a morning meal. “Politics is sort of a give-and-take thing, then?”

“Not always. With my king, it is more as if he owes me a great debt that he doesn’t want to pay, and I refuse to let him forget it exists.” Salazar’s smile turns sharp. “Thus I have gained the leverage to lift my unofficial banishment until his death ensures that banishment is politely forgotten.”

“How?”

Salazar glances at him. “You, little brother. On the supposed pretense of educating you as to your inheritable holdings, I can thus return here whenever I like so long as I am in your company, and we have suitable cause.”

“Wait. That part.” Harry drinks half of the wine in the shallow goblet and puts it down on the window seat. “What is this Heir shit, Salazar?”

“It isn’t shit. Fortunata wants to be Orellana’s Heir and deserves to be so, but I couldn’t allow her to be named until there was an Heir to the older line—my line.” Salazar rolls his eyes as Harry continues to stare at him in dismay. “Do relax. The moment Orellana and I have another healthy child, you will not need to be my Heir. In the meantime, it serves its purpose.”

“Yeah, but…what if you don’t, Sal?” Harry thinks of Orellana and the quiet way she spoke of nearly dying in childbirth. “I haven’t gone out snogging to prove it, but I’m pretty sure I don’t like women.”

“Then you adopt an Heir.” Salazar pours a second glass of the wine. “That is a difficulty easily overcome.”
“Wait. Just like that?”

“Just like that, yes.” Salazar smiles. “Just as I am doing for you, but instead of a sibling, you would claim a child. The magic works in the same way as I’ve told you. The one you adopted would possibly even gain magical traits from the Deslizarse line.”

“Like Parseltongue,” Harry says. “Does that mean I might magically gain something from you?”

“You’re already of my father’s line. Besides, I rather doubt you would suddenly develop the ability to keep plants alive,” Salazar replies dryly.

Harry glares at him and decides he’s going to finish drinking his wine instead of replying that that. He tries, but the poor things die anyway. Harry does not see a brilliant Herbology career in his future.

Salazar undoes the row of loop-and-eye closures on his vest, which Harry kept mistaking for buttons until he had to deal with them himself. If Harry was going to admit to having taste in clothing at all, that vest is one of his favorites. It’s solid black silk with no lurking colors in it at all, embroidered with real silver and what Sal claims is literal emerald gemstone thread. Harry half suspects Sal is trying to pull his leg on the emerald bit, but it’s still pretty.

“Ask, idiot,” Salazar orders, refilling Harry’s goblet. “I can tell that you want to.”

“I let you surprise me with the names and with this Heir stuff, even if I’m glad Fortunata gets what she wants out of it. But what do the names mean? They’re not stupid, are they?”

Salazar grips his hand. “The fact that you resort to Parseltongue tells me you fear they are. Let me tell you that they mean nothing foolish here.”

Harry bites his lip. “Okay. Fair enough.”

Salazar leans back against the wall, his goblet held loosely in his hand. “The magicians of your time wished for you to fight a war. It was wrong of them to ask a child to do so, but they were not wrong to recognize that you could. You hold such fire within you, and you do almost nothing with it unless it’s for the sake of another.”

Harry presses his lips together but doesn’t argue. Sal just has to bring up Quirrell, monster, or Voldemort, and all of Harry’s arguments are toast.

“It would have been poorly shaped potential.” Salazar scowls out into the darkness before his expression clears again. “It will not be such here. Hereweald is West Saxon English, a term for one who leads an army, but it sounds better in Rowena’s Bavarian. Thus, Hariwalt.”

“I’m not really leading any armies?” Harry tries. “I’m not saying no to the name, even though you told me I could—but now I’d have to think of a political reason for it to be changed because you announced it in front of everyone, you complete shit.”

Salazar grins. “You could succeed at it, if you wished. And, you are still young enough to learn that there is more to know about leading others into battle than having an army at your back.”

“Yes. Okay.” Harry doesn’t like the odd fluttering he feels in his stomach at Sal’s words. It’s too much like hearing one of Trelawney’s prophecies, but without the creepy voice thing. “What about Nizar?”

“Hedwig thought quite a bit about this one before she approved, as it has dual meanings, and I
think one is considered to be an insult in your time.” Salazar takes another sip of wine, which makes Harry realize he’s emptied his goblet again. He isn’t feeling tipsy at all, which means this is either stealth-wine, or he’s finally getting a head for alcohol.

“Nizar,” Salazar says, “is a Euskaran adoption from Arabic, the primary language of the Caliphates. One of its two definitions means ‘little.’”

Harry snorts out a laugh. “Yeah, that would be why Hedwig would have been hesitant. I’m short, Sal.”

Salazar gives him a puzzled look. “You are my height.”

“Uh, in my time? An average man’s height now is an average woman’s height in the future. Men average about four to six inches taller,” Harry explains.

“Helga would be pleased. She is considered to be unnaturally tall unless she’s among her own kin.” Salazar refills Harry’s goblet again as well as his own. Harry would be worried, but he’s seen Salazar drink Godric under the table. Literally. (He always thought that was just an expression.)

“Nizar also means something that is rare or unique. You are definitely unique, Hari.”

“No, I imagine there aren’t a lot of time-displaced magicians roaming around,” Harry says.

Salazar smirks. “Not only for that reason, but you argue with us and insist upon how ordinary you are.”

“Shut up,” is Harry’s brilliant rebuttal. This is definitely going to be his last cup of wine. Maybe.

“Nizar Hariwalt, youngest Heir to the Ancient House of Serpents of Ipuzko and Castile. That is not too terrible, is it?” Salazar asks.

“No, I rather like Nizar—” Harry stops speaking in shock. “Oh. Fuck. I really would have been, even without the adoption. I was the youngest Heir to the House of Slytherin.”

*          *          *          *

Salazar keeps asking Harry over the course of Twelvetide what is so disconcerting about being the youngest Heir of his House in the future as well as in the present. Harry puts off answering with half-truths and blatant insistent that he can’t, not yet, and besides, he definitely doesn’t want to discuss it in the middle of an arsehole’s royal palace.

“Burgos, then,” Salazar requests. “Please.”

“Only if you tell me about basilisks when everyone is too busy pretending they know half of what the priest and that bishop are talking about when they discuss saints and martyrs,” Harry counters, and Salazar agrees.

Harry would actually like to listen to the discussions about the saints and martyrs, if only to be educated, but he figured out on the second day that neither priest nor bishop can tell the same story the same way twice in a row. Maybe those saints really existed—Harry remembers that Saint Valentine was supposed to be a real person—but if so, Harry wants to hear these stories from people who aren’t stupid.
He says that loud enough for Estefania and Andoni to overhear. Andoni nearly snorts quail meat from his nose. Estefania mocks her husband constantly through the rest of that particular feast, which means nothing else happens except for Harry learning some really inappropriate jokes about birds. Harry tells Estefania that he never, ever wanted to know that much about his sister’s marital shenanigans, which leaves Estefania sputtering and Salazar so viciously pleased that he’s all but trailing magical sparks.

Salazar turns twenty-one on twenty-eighth December, a birthday that is unacknowledged by the Court—normal, Harry is told. That day is also the Feast of the Holy Innocents, Childermas, which Harry enjoys at first, especially since a small boy dressed up like the bishop is the one performing the Mass. He does a better job of it, too.

Then Harry discovers that the feast is centered on the infanticide of Jewish children by Herod I, a Roman-appointed King of Judea, who was apparently terrified of losing his throne to an infant Jesus. “What.”

“The slaughter is not being celebrated. They are considered Christian martyrs,” Andoni says, but he doesn’t look happy, either.

Newborn king. Right. Harry’s appetite takes an immediate nosedive into Hell No territory. “It’s still a feast about dead children.”

“Oh, then you’ll be such fun on New Year’s Day. That is the Feast of the Circumcision,” Estefania tells him in a sweet voice.

Harry refuses to be baited that easily. He’s circumcised, even though it’s not common in Britain. It’s probably something Hindu-related; Salazar is almost certain someone in Harry’s father’s family must have married someone from that land, and circumcision is apparently something Hindus do, too. Or did? Will do?

Whichever. Feasting to someone’s religious foreskin removal is still not as horrible as feasting to dead infants.

At first, Harry hadn’t been able to figure out a physical object to gift to Sal for his birthday. Salazar is wealthy in ways Harry can’t quite comprehend. He was lucky he’d thought up the idea of the map…but it also reminded him that Sal loves information.

For Salazar’s birthday, Harry tells him all about Rubeus Hagrid, Gamekeeper, Groundskeeper, and Care of Magical Creatures teacher in his time. Half-giant, giant-hearted, and the first person Harry could look up at and think, I trust this man. Can’t keep a bloody secret to save his life or anyone else’s, but would immediately do anything and everything to save someone’s life if necessary. Knows pretty much everything about every magical creature on the planet, but can’t quite see the crack-brained problem of trying to raise a baby dragon inside a wooden hut.

“You miss him,” Salazar says.

Harry nods. “Hagrid is the only person I know who never once cared about me being famous.” Hermione had been excited about it for about three seconds because Harry was in a book and then was promptly distracted, and he’s always loved her for it. Ron can’t forget, but Harry loves him for the fact that Ron does his best to treat Harry just like everyone else, anyway.

He doesn’t say the next part to Salazar, if only because he suspects there would be concepts involved that he has no idea how to explain. Hagrid was the first person Harry thought of as a friend, something he never dared tell anyone—he hadn’t wanted to get either himself or Hagrid
into trouble, not when Dudley had once used a very similar bit of nonsense to get one of their good primary school teachers fired. Granted, Harry now realizes Dudley was implying that other things happened, and it sickens him. Dudley might’ve wanted temporary revenge for a punishment, but he probably ruined that man’s entire life. He doesn’t know, and probably wouldn’t care if he did.

After all of that pours out, Salazar looks at Harry, thanks him, and then asks why it is such a scandal that Hagrid is half-giant. They’re everywhere, often boisterous and harmless as long as they remember their own strength.

Harry can’t think of anything to say to that except, “I loathe my schooling,” which makes Salazar burst out laughing.

Thankfully, there doesn’t seem to be any other devoted feasting themes until Old Year’s Day (that is taking a while to get used to) and the Feast of Saint Sylvester, whoever he was. Harry uses the time to listen to Salazar, Orellana, Estefania, Andoni, and even Fortunata talk about basilisks, either in Euskaran or in Parseltongue. They get a few dirty looks about both languages, but Harry suspects that’s because it makes it harder to eavesdrop. Too bad for them.

Basilisks have two sets of eyelids.

Harry feels like his stomach and heart traded places and tied themselves into knots for good measure. The basilisk in the chamber. He saw its face after Fawkes clawed its eyes out. He didn’t see any hint of reptilian eyelids. He remembers that clearly. No eyelids.

Basilisks are protectors.

Salazar mentioned that before. Harry thinks often on the fact that only one student died because of “Slytherin’s” monster, and decides he probably hates Voldemort a little bit more.

There are two different kinds of Petrification. That’s new.

“Well, of course there are.” Salazar looks baffled at having to explain it. “There is the sort that is curable with mandrágora root if one meets a basilisk’s unlid stare by way of a reflection. Fatal Petrification is when a basilisk turns their enemy to stone.”

“Oh,” Harry realizes. “Like Gorgons.”

“Exactly like. They are distant cousins, after all,” Estefania says.

Harry takes a breath. He has a bad feeling he already knows the answer to his next question.

_Come…come to me. Let me rip you… Let me tear you. Let me kill you….  
So hungry…for so long…_

He is never going to forget that voice.

“Can a basilisk eat things that have been Petrified? Either version of Petrification?”

“One is literal stone. The other, though trapped in a state of Petrification, is immune to being damaged, which includes an immunity to being digested. No, they cannot eat what is Petrified.” Salazar eyes Harry. “I loathe your schooling.”

“Oh, I can make it so much worse than that,” Harry says, trying to make light of the subject before he has to leave the Hall and find a convenient privy to vomit into. “We were taught that you can
only get a basilisk from a chicken egg hatched by a toad.”

Estefania howls with laughter while Salazar puts his head down on the table. Harry forces a smile onto his face, but he really doesn’t feel like laughing.

The basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets was starving to death.

Harry sits in the cramped bathtub in the bedchamber’s bathroom that night, studying the scar on his right arm. He’s never shown it to anyone in this time; even rolling up your sleeves beyond a certain point can be seen as improper, anyway. The scar is high up, near his elbow. Even with Fawkes’s tears, it scarred as a noticeable messy gouge with a pink tinge. He can trace over the scar and feel the dip in his skin from the impact of the basilisk’s fang.

What does he tell Salazar? That Salazar leaves a protector behind to guard the school, and then Voldemort will use that protector to terrorize everyone and murder poor, miserable Myrtle?

*Can* he tell Salazar?

Harry lets his head thump back against the uncomfortable metal rim of the tub. He doesn’t know what to do.

* * * *

Harry is so fucking glad when the Feast of the Epiphany arrives on sixth January. It always signaled the end of winter vacation in Hogwarts; here it signals the end of these stupid daily feasts dedicated to some really odd concepts.

He actually knows quite a bit about some Biblical things, but not from the bishop and his idiot assistant priest who are favored by Bermudo. Godric gets really religious when he’s well and truly pissed, and will wax poetic about the nature of sacrifice, faith, the strength of one’s maker bringing you new life from the waters of baptism, and so much more that went straight over Harry’s head.

Which is why the Feast of the Epiphany makes him angry. It isn’t more feasting to dead babies, but the fact that it’s a day dedicated to the Feast of the Circumcision and to Jesus being baptized as an infant.

“You know, I’m pretty sure that’s wrong,” Harry says in flat voice, glaring at the priest. The priest doesn’t notice Harry’s attempts to set him on fire with his eyes. “Didn’t that John the Baptist person earn his name because he could baptize people, and he did that for Jesus when he was an adult or something?”

Estefania smiles. “You are trying to apply logic to the Church, Hari.”

“The Epiphany celebrates the Magi’s visit to the Christ child in his infancy, and it is the Magi who confirm that the child is the new incarnate of the Hebrew God,” Orellana says in her teaching voice. “The baptism refers to the day the child was circumcised and given his name according to Hebrew tradition, and it also refers to the adult’s plunge into the water at the hands of John the Baptist.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “Those are three different things. We have feast days that just happened that aren’t tied to anything significant. Why does it all have to happen on the same day?”
“Dear brother,” Estefania says, patting his arm, “you are still attempting to apply logic to the decisions of the Church. Such is doomed to failure.”

Since it’s the last day he has to put up with it, sixth January is also when Harry finally says, “Half of the food they’ve served is amazing, and the other half of it is vile.”

“It’s the Frankish influence upon the Empire,” Andoni says, popping something Harry can’t identify into his mouth. “It seems as if they’ll eat anything, and once they’ve decided it’s fitting, the Church goes out to convince other royal households to eat the same.”

“At least no one seems to care if we eat the vile parts of this meal.” Harry never wants to eat snails, no matter how delicious they’re supposed to be. He has plenty of other foods on this table that are identifiable. He isn’t picky, and if snail was all they were served, he would eat it…but he doesn’t have to, so he won’t.

“We just sit here,” Fortunata mutters, stabbing at a bit of toasted bread in her trencher. “I feel like a decoration, Mother.”

It’s the first time Harry has seen a grim edge to Estefania’s smile. “That is exactly what nobility is to a king, my niece: décor. Rulers are fond of overlooking the fact that their noble families run the country, and thus we are the ones truly in charge.”

Salazar grimaces. “If you are plotting to oust a monarch, please do not tell me. I want to be able to claim no foreknowledge if it goes badly.”

“It won’t go badly so long as this idiot does as he should as king of León,” Estefania replies. Harry plans on pestering her with questions later; that sounds a lot more interesting than twelve days of food and priest-droning.

They have to wait for King Bermudo to make his slow trek out of the Great Hall before anyone can leave. Harry has watched the king every night, and it seems like his progress gets slower every day. Maybe it’s supposed to look like a stately gait, but Harry sees the way the king hesitates to put each foot on the ground and thinks the man is in a lot of pain. Salazar says that gout is horrific, painful swelling of the joints, and it can become hard to even move.

“How can it be cured?” Harry asks in soft Parseltongue. He’s getting really good at mimicking Estefania’s famed Court Whisper in every language.

Salazar glances at him. “It can be managed, but healing potions will only do so much to treat the condition if the one suffering it does not alter their diet and remove foods that are known to increase the swelling.”

“He won’t, will he?”

Salazar shakes his head. “No. Bermudo would rather die appearing to be hale than live a long life surrounded by his idea of what makes a ruler appear to be weak.”

“He’s still an arsehole, then,” Harry decides. Salazar stomps on Harry’s foot while he chokes down a laugh.

“We can go now, yes?” Fortunata hisses. “I’d like to have a real dinner. Today’s feast wasn’t so good.”

“Real food?” Estefania asks Salazar for translation.
“That is what she said, yes,” Salazar replies.

“I am in full agreement. Fortunately, I planned for exactly that. I remember our childhoods, Salazar.”

“They are really not that distant, Estefania.”

Burgos is a welcome relief. If Court is like that all the time, then it’s no bloody wonder Salazar doesn’t like it.

“Dull?” Estefania considers Harry’s words while the family servants—who are not terrified out of their wits, unlike most of those in León—bring out a late evening meal. “Not typically. Christmastide is unusual in that there is often nothing going on at all. The Church thinks it impolite to have a spirit of revelry during those holy days, so the king limits the events to feasts without dancing or other opportunities to speak to one another.”

Harry realizes with a jolt that he’s still hearing the word wrong, no matter the language. No one is saying holiday. They’re all saying holy day. He just didn’t recognize it until Estefania used the plural term, which changes the word. That means West Saxon English’s haligdæg is also supposed to be holy day. It being one word is probably where the shortcut of holiday originates from, but they aren’t using it yet.

When he writes to Hermione later, he’s telling her that. Whenever she gets to read the letter, she is going to laugh at him, and then commiserate, because languages are really fucking difficult.

If he’s still alive to write to Hermione later.

That thought nearly sours his appetite again, but he knows better than to skip a meal when there is one. There were too many times when he didn’t have food at all.

*If my mother’s sacrificial protection is supposed to protect me, why didn’t it protect me from Aunt Petunia and Uncle Dursley?* Harry wonders again, stabbing viciously at a slice of citrus with his boot knife. Andoni laughs and tells him that the fruit has caused him no offence.

Harry smiles back, but it feels wooden on his face. He’s been thinking about his life at Privet Drive occasionally from the moment Helga told him about the protective magic—mostly because Harry didn’t understand it before. Dumbledore only explained that he had his mother’s protection by dying for him, but nothing else. He never once told Harry that it only worked against Voldemort; Harry figured that part out for himself just fine when a basilisk nearly killed him.

The fact that his mother’s sacrifice is actually a form of Blood Magic has done a lot to change Harry’s point of view about certain kinds of magic. Learning that the majority of things you can do with Blood Magic are related to healing helped with the rest. Salazar grumbled about not thinking of explaining it that way in the first place, but that’s part of the problem. There are so many stupid gaps between what is standard learning in Harry’s time, and what’s expected to be part of a magician’s standard education here. They don’t really line up very well. Salazar and the others say Harry is doing well, but he’s spent half the year feeling like he’s sprinting to catch up.

*Now you’re just delaying,* Harry tells himself angrily, and then plasters another smile onto his face before he stands up to excuse himself from the table. At first, he worries that Fortunata might have the same idea, but then she’s distracted by the baby and resettles herself so she can make faces at Marfa.

Harry wanders along until he finds the wide stairs that take him down to the private area of the
house, with all its suites and sleeping chambers. He stops by the suite in his room long enough to put the chest of his belongings against the wall and unshrinking it.

When he goes back out to the hallway, he licks one finger and holds it up. The left side feels colder than the right, so he goes left. Just because he learned the trick from a film doesn’t mean it doesn’t work.

“Or maybe I didn’t need to do that,” Harry mutters, staring up at the large woven tapestry hanging on the wall at the end of the hallway. On it is an image of a basilisk with blue-green scales and ridges upon their head—horns. The basilisk is rearing up in front of a full-sized rowan tree in bloom. The basilisk’s eyes are open, and the artist embroidered them in vibrant blue thread.

Harry pushes the tapestry aside and discovers descending stairs carved directly into solid stone. The air smells dry but it isn’t thick, so there has to be plenty of air. He puts his foot down on worn stone, then takes another step and lets the tapestry hide the opening for the stairwell again. This is probably the stupidest thing he’s ever done in his life, and he’s done a lot of stupid things.

He drags his hand along the cool stone as he navigates the stairs, blinking his eyes to adjust to light provided only by torches. Salazar would do this with him if he asked, but Harry doesn’t want to ask. He’d have to explain why he’s terrified, and…and…

At least if he dies, he’ll be too dead for Salazar to say, “I told you so.”

Not that Sal would, really. None of them would. No one in this time seems to delight in cruel teasing except for the very young, who get told off for it until they learn better, or the few true bullies who somehow make it into adulthood without earning themselves an arse-kicking for rudeness. Godric says it usually doesn’t take very long for the adults to offend someone with greater skill than they, even if they’re kings. There is such a huge emphasis on manners and hospitality that ignoring both can get you ostracized by your entire village, city—maybe even your entire kingdom if word gets around.

There are catacombs at the bottom of the stairs.

Harry feels a wide grin spread across his face. He knows what those look like, thanks to the time he escaped Dudley’s gang by scrounging up enough dropped spare change on footpaths to hide in the cinema when he was almost nine. There aren’t any skeletons in the rough-carved holes in the walls, but they’re still catacombs.

He’s glad there aren’t any skeletons, though. After watching as parts of Voldemort’s father were dropped in a cauldron, he isn’t in a great hurry to see more moldering bones.

There are three passages of floor-to-ceiling catacombs, each ending and turning at right angles into the next one, before he reaches the end of those carved and empty holes. Then a massive shadow falls over Harry.

Harry looks down, shoulders hunching on instinct as he freezes in place. Basilisk. He’d been smelling snakes, an odor that was getting stronger, but he hadn’t quite expected one so soon.

“And what are you doing down here?”

Harry bites his lip, braces himself, and slowly lifts his head.
Harry meets another basilisk. It goes about as well as one might expect.

Someone bribed me.

Salazar truly hadn’t slept well in León, no matter how much wine or late night conversation he indulged in. If the rooms had been clean of any attempts of outright murder, he might have taken a sleeping potion, but when Hari found another cushion of poison-tipped needles, that decided him—better to be able to snap awake in an instant than be a useless, slumbering target if an enemy made themselves known.

Estefania was also far more polite after her initial meeting with Hari in Burgos. Salazar recognized only after his sister’s opinion of Hari rose that she believed Salazar was introducing competition. He’d sighed and decided not to say anything of those thoughts; Estefania has often seen lies in truths and truths in lies. She spends far too much time in Bermudo’s Court if she believes that Salazar has come to speak the same language, and he told her so. Daily.

“Salazar!”

Salazar blinks a few times, which makes him realize he’d all but dozed off at the supper table. He looks over to see Estefania cradling her daughter in her arms. “You are staring at my daughter because she is beautiful, yes? Not because you were sleeping with your eyes open?”

“I refuse to answer that question with a truth that would have me beaten senseless,” Salazar replies. “Let my wife hold her, Estefania. Orellana is starting to get that particular expression.”

Estefania smiles and passes baby María into Orellana’s arms. “The two of you should already have another.”

“It was too early,” Orellana murmurs, gazing down at the infant with a rapt expression. “Perhaps soon.”

“I do not actually blame you for your caution,” Andoni says. “The local priest is still angry that we did not agree to have María baptized in the first week of her birth. Neither of us wished to risk an infant’s health with frigid air and icy water.”

“It hasn’t made us popular with the Church, though the nobility stood by us,” Estefania adds. “However, that is aside from the anger that my first Heir is not a boy.”

Salazar tries not to roll his eyes, but the urge is overwhelming. “Our kingdom begins to also sing of that nonsense?”
“We do.” Estefania’s lip curls in a beautiful display of disdain. “Church doctrine now infects every Royal House in Europe. It’s irritating.”

Salazar shakes his head. “They demonize women and wonder why we want nothing to do with them. Those thoughts are making their way north, as well. The best weapon we still have is keeping those ill thoughts out of magical circles.”

“I’m not certain it will be enough,” Estefania says. “Such is not a Seer’s prophecy, Salazar. Merely my suspicious nature.”

“We soothed the Church’s ruffled feathers. To inspire comfort rather than fear,” Andoni’s smile is fierce. “That fool of a bishop was satisfied by our vow that María will be properly baptized before she has passed her first birthday.”

“At least one of us is in favor with the bishop, then,” Salazar says. He’d been in the midst of a quiet, private feud with both his mother and King Ramiro when Fortunata was born, and refused to have her baptized in a church sponsored by the king. Besides, they are not Christian. His parents had both himself and Estefania baptized as infants to appease the Church, but Salazar has never been comfortable with the idea of allowing a priest to consecrate his daughter as part of the flock for a god they do not follow.

Salazar turns to ask Hari’s opinion on Church matters, as so far it has been highly entertaining, only to find that Hari isn’t there. At some point, his brother slipped out of the family’s private dining hall. “When did he leave?”

“Hari departed at least ten minutes ago. I don’t think the food at Court agreed with him,” Andoni answers. “It certainly did not agree with me.”

“I took my enjoyment from other places. For all our bishop speaks against consorting with devils, he has no objection to a magician checking to be certain his food is not poisoned,” Estefania says.

Fortunata sticks out her tongue at María, causing the baby to let out a pleased gurgle that is not yet true laughter. “Hari seemed really odd during the meal.”

“I hadn’t noticed,” Salazar replies honestly. “Are you worried?”

Fortunata purses her lips. “I shouldn’t be.”

“But you are,” Salazar says, and Fortunata nods. That is all the reason he needs; in truth, it would take less than that. “I did not sleep well while enduring Bermudo’s hospitality. I am going downstairs.”

“I think I slept too much, as if attempting to make up for your lack,” Orellana responds. “I won’t be down until later, dearest.”

Salazar nods and leaves the hall, trying to stir his mind to wakefulness. He isn’t concerned yet, as there is nothing in this home that will harm Hari. Outdoors is another matter, but even then, Salazar doubts his little brother would be caught off his guard.

Hari isn’t in his granted rooms, though the chest with all of his belongings is in the sleeping chamber. Salazar was so irritated with himself when he realized that Hari solved the difficulty of packing by simply bringing everything. He should have thought of such years ago.

Salazar turns his head when wind moves the tapestry at the end of the corridor. He walks up to it, thinking that a young man curious about basilisks would find it easy to explore a tapestry depicting
one, and then discover the doorway it hides.

He has never been able to resist the urge to run his hand down the cool, smooth stone as he descends the stairs, and wonders if Hari did the same. The catacombs beneath the home are left over from a time when the city was Roman, carved into the walls of a cave network that runs from the center of Burgos to the outermost edges of the city in the north. Salazar’s mother’s family wisely removed all of the skeletal bodies from their sepulchers when they claimed the original crumbling, abandoned residence on the hillside. A much younger Church had given the ancient Christian dead proper burials according to the new rites of entombment within a church or on a church’s grounds.

Salazar finds Hari at the end of the last section of catacombs, before the passage opens out into the first of the massive caverns. Hari is staring up at the matriarch for the Burgos Nest, wide-eyed, but he refuses to look away from Çinara.

He speaks in Parseltongue at once, so as not to exclude anyone from the conversation. “I see you have met Çinara, Matriarch of the Burgos Nest. Çinara, this is Hari, who will become my brother by magical adoption on the Summer Solstice.”

Çinara sounds amused when she replies. “He is of your family’s blood, and you think him your brother already. That is proper.”

“H-hello,” Hari whispers in a faint voice. “Sorry. I wasn’t trying to be rude.”

Çinara tilts her head. “I do not require an apology. You are frightened of me. I did not want to speak again and cause you harm.”

Salazar gives Harry a sharp look, cursing the fact that he didn’t recognize that his brother’s hands are shaking. “Hari?”

“She’s correct. I am afraid.”

“Why?” Çinara asks in her unhurried fashion.

Hari swallows hard, the sound audible enough that it echoes off the stone. Then he starts rolling up the shirtsleeve covering his right arm. He doesn’t stop until it is past his elbow, well beyond the bounds of decency observed in the north. “Th-this. This is why,” he says, and holds out his trembling arm for Çinara’s inspection.

Çinara rears back in horror. “One of my kind harmed you!”

Salazar forces himself to step forward, to see the scar that Hari revealed on his arm. It is a single, large puncture, too marred to be a perfect mark of intrusion. That would have been left by a basilisk of comparative size with Çinara.

All of Hari’s recent questions about basilisks, their nature and their ways, suddenly make sense. They also give Salazar terrible suspicions that he does not want to have to confirm.

“You were bitten, poisoned by one of my kind.” Çinara’s tongue is flickering in and out, her massive tail lashing in agitation. “Such an insult. We do not bite humans unless they are threats! Were you a threat to them? How is it you lived?”

Hari looks bewildered by the onslaught of questions. “I wasn’t a threat to the basilisk, but there was another Parselmouth who told it I was. If your kind are—are protectors, then it really wasn’t acting normal. If it weren’t for a phoenix’s arrival, I wouldn’t be alive.”
“A phoenix is a good ally to have,” Činara agrees, calming. “Yet you still fear me.”

“It isn’t your fault. It’s, uh…you’re as big as the other basilisk,” Hari stutters out. “I was twelve. It’s not a nice memory.”

Salazar feels his heart skip a beat, that odd combination of love and fear that only endangered family seems to bring forth. “You still feared me that first day, but you kept the truth of what sort of ‘monster’ you’d faced from me…to spare my feelings. You have done the same ever since.”

Hari bites his lip and nods.

“If anyone ever dares to imply that you are an unkind person, I might strangle them to death with my bare hands.” It is effort to keep the anger from his voice. “You should have spoken of this, little brother.”

Hari gives Salazar an unhappy look. “No, I shouldn’t have. Why do you think I came down here without telling anyone?”

“Because you are kind, but you are also insane,” Salazar replies.

Činara is back to scenting the air. “You are sad, Hari. Why are you sad?”

“Basilisks can pick up on feelings like that?” Hari asks.

“You are family. We are bound to the family. We know,” Činara explains. “Why do you feel grief?”

“Because…because I think someone does something in Salazar’s name that is really fucking awful, and I don’t want him blamed for it,” Hari replies, startling Salazar. “But they do. Everyone does.”

Činara blinks her massive eyes. “You do not. You did not even when you were supposed to.”

“I guess not,” Hari admits. “I was sort of worried about other things at the time.”

“Salazar is the grandson of my Chosen. He is wise, and fortunate to have chosen you…so I will also allow you to be Chosen. One day, you will carry one of my children with you, as will Salazar, but that time is not now.”

Salazar’s eyes widen. “You’ve never told me that!”

Činara is positively smug. “I am allowed my secrets. To be fair to my Chosen’s grandson, I was not certain if I would bear young during his lifetime. I have only done so once before.”

Salazar glances at his brother and is concerned to find that Hari is still shaking. “Hari?”

“I’m really not sure if all of what I’m feeling is me, or if some of it is the stupid soul jar. It’s really loud at the moment. It’s especially, uh…” Hari swallows. “It’s him. He drove that basilisk mad, and this shard is a part of what did it. It knows, and it wants to do it again. I won’t—I refuse, I won’t do it. But it’s kind of hard to think.”

Salazar considers the problem while Činara utters curses against such evil with every flick of her tongue. “I want you to picture Činara twined around your focus. See her wrapped around your favored apple tree, little brother.”

Hari reaches out and grasps Salazar’s free hand. “That actually does help. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”
Çinara eases closer as she senses Hari’s fear ease. “You are not vile, but you have the scent of vileness on you. You will be stronger when it is gone.”

“That’s what people keep telling me,” Hari says. “It’s nice to meet you, by the way. You have beautiful eyes.”

Çinara lifts her head and poses, the vain girl. “They are very nice, yes. Thank you, Hari.”

Hari reaches out, hesitating only once before he brushes his fingertips along Çinara’s scales. “Thanks for not eating me.”

“I do not eat people. They taste bad,” Çinara replies, miffed. “Rodents are much more to my preference.”

Hari manages to smile. “I hope there are plenty down here, then.”

“We will speak more at a later time, Çinara. I think I should take Hari back upstairs now,” Salazar says.

Çinara nods her great head. “I agree. Fears prefer to linger. It will be better conquered if done slowly.”

“She’s—she’s really intelligent,” Hari whispers when they’re halfway up the stairs.

“Çinara has very good hearing, and excellent understanding of both Parseltongue and Castellano,” Salazar replies. Hari has not offered insult, but these are good things to know, regardless. “Did this basilisk who harmed you not seem intelligent?”

“Can it wait?” Hari requests. He sounds truly despondent. “I’d rather be—I’d rather discuss this in my rooms. Behind a closed door. Maybe while hiding under the bed.”

“You would not succeed very well at hiding beneath that bed. It is not built to allow such.”

Salazar is the one to latch both the outer hall door to Hari’s rooms, and the one in the sleeping chamber itself. It seems Hari truly meant he wished for a private conversation, but at least he is seated on the room’s furniture instead of the bed.

He considers his brother’s tense posture. If Hari does not stop chewing on his lower lip, it will bleed even without winter’s chill interference. “A phoenix came to your rescue. Did you leave one behind in your year of 1995?”

Hari’s head jerks up. “What? Oh—no. Fawkes belongs to Dumbledore. Fawkes is the phoenix who came to help me.”

“Fawkes is still at the school in your time?” Salazar asks in surprise.

“Yes, he—you know who Fawkes is?”

Salazar nods. “He is Myrddin’s lifelong companion. I don’t know why Fawkes would choose to do so, but I suspect he is loyal not to your idiot Headmaster, but to the school itself.”

Hari frowns. “That’s not what Dumbledore says.”

“Then he is either lying, or he does not understand a phoenix’s ways,” Salazar replies. “I would be surprised by neither.”
Hari nods and ducks his head again, staring at his silver ring as he turns it around and around on his middle finger. “There is an old story in my Hogwarts by the time I begin school there,” he explains in Parseltongue. “It says that you created a room called the Chamber of Secrets beneath the school, and when your Heir returned, the Chamber would be opened. It would release a monster that would kill all the Muggle-borns and Half-bloods in the school, leaving only Pure-blood witches and wizards behind.”

Salazar frowns; Hari does not resort to using the improper terms very often, especially those involving magical blood. “I can be pretentious, but I have limits. Chamber of Secrets, indeed—that sounds ludicrous. Why would I desire the deaths of children born of mixed parentage or non-magical parentage?”

“That’s a part of the story of the school’s Founding,” Hari says. “The stories claim that you hate non-magical people, so you also hated magical children born to non-magical parents, or children born to mixed parents. Except you don’t. Not at all. I really don’t see you hating an entire group of people, Sal.”

“I could possibly develop a hatred of the Church,” Salazar says in a flat voice.

“Yes, but that’s hating an institution, not a people,” Hari points out, annoyed. “If you meant the people, you would have said Christians.”

“A valid point.” Salazar crosses his arms. “You told Çinara that you do not think it was actually I who put such a Chamber beneath Hogwarts—or at least if I did, I certainly did not place a basilisk there with the intent that it become a murdering, rampaging monster. Why do you believe so?”

“The basilisk was imprisoned in a statue unless it was called forth. The statue was opened using your name, and Voldemort claimed that the statue was of you, but…it doesn’t look like you,” Hari says, dropping his eyes again.

“What does that vile idiot have to do with this Chamber and its mad basilisk?” Salazar asks warily.

“You’re going to be disappointed.” Hari sighs. “Voldemort claims to be your Heir. He thinks he’s the last of the Deslizarse line, and thus the Heir of Slytherin. That’s what I meant during Christmastide, when I said that I was the youngest Heir of Slytherin.”

Salazar grimaces. The idea that this idiot Vol de Mort is of his bloodline is unpleasant. “Yes, that is disappointing to hear, but a man’s choices a thousand years hence are not my responsibility.” Offensive, most certainly, but a child of any man’s blood can choose evil ways.

“No, they’re not,” Hari agrees. “His choices are supposed to be my responsibility, but since I’m not there, I suppose a trained adult will have to figure out how to make the fucking bastard stay dead. Besides, even with the Heir thing, the basilisk wouldn’t listen to me, not after Voldemort got ahold of it. If what I’m getting from the soul shard is correct—and it’s too gleeful about this to be lying—Voldemort tortured him, removed both sets of his eyelids, and drove the basilisk mad.”

“You never mentioned facing Voldemort in your second year. You spoke only of the monster.” It’s easier for Salazar to continue using Hari’s term. A basilisk that would willingly harm a student who lived in the dwelling it was meant to protect was not truly a basilisk any longer, even if such madness was caused by another.

“It wasn’t really him. It was another Horcrux. When I described it, Rowena confirmed it.” Hari reaches up to rub the back of his neck. “It was a bound, blank book—a trap. He set it to ensnare people who wrote in it. Voldemort would use the connection between the book and the writer to
drain their energy. By the time I found the Chamber, the Horcrux had a corporeal form and a voice. If it had been able to finish killing Ginny, if I hadn’t stopped him…

“A Horcrux that would have given itself, all on its own, a physical form again.” Salazar feels ill. “It is madness to make Horcruxes at all, yet this Voldemort has made two. One is of a type I have literally never heard of before, nor did I think it even possible to create. Did you tell Rowena of this?”

“Not really. I just told her how I killed it. With a basilisk fang.” Hari glances up long enough to meet Salazar’s gaze before looking away again. “The scar on my arm. The fang got stuck and it came out of the basilisk’s mouth. I didn’t know what else to do, so I yanked it out of my arm and stabbed the book with the fang. The book screamed when it died.”

“And it bled black blood,” Salazar adds quietly. Hari nods, twisting the ring on his finger again. “Do you blame me? For what you lost to him?”

Hari looks at Salazar as if he’s taken leave of his senses. “Blame you—Salazar, even when I was mired in our bloody stupid incorrect history, I didn’t blame you. You were a thousand years dead. You didn’t make Voldemort what he is! He chose that himself, and he—” Hari swallows. “I hate him. I really do. But I don’t blame you.”

Salazar nods, thinking on a tortured basilisk with no means to close its eyes. No matter what Voldemort did to drive it to madness, the basilisk’s madness would have worsened as its hunger grew. The thought of such cruelty makes his eyes burn. “Once Godric’s fears of the reptilian lessened, I’d planned to ask one of the Burgos Nest to become a guardian to the school. I can’t alter that plan, can I? I have to allow this harm to take place.”

Hari sounds miserable. “I know Rowena and Godric say that time isn’t that fragile, but if there isn’t a basilisk beneath Hogwarts, it changes that entire year of my life. It might even mean I don’t come here, and that—”

Salazar feels a quiet sort of awe. “Hari, your friends, your family…they are a thousand years hence.”

“Yes, they are.” Hari clasps his hands together until his knuckles shine with whitened edges. “But you’re here, and you’re my brother.”

“That is the first time you have called me such.”

Hari smiles down at his clasped hands. “I already have been, in my head. I guess I forgot to say it aloud. Sorry.”

“I am not sorry at all.” Salazar changes the subject before he becomes overly emotional, or Hari feels overwhelmed. “I wish to help you overcome your fear of basilisks, especially as Çinara has already declared that you’re to carry one of her children. That is a great honor, one you should be prepared for when it occurs.”

Hari’s tight grasp on his own hands eases. “That…that sounds nice. Are we going to be here long, then?”

“Perhaps a week,” Salazar says while pondering what he’d like to show Hari.

“Sal, about my name.”

Salazar looks at Hari to find that he is sitting up, regarding Salazar thoughtfully. “Have you
decided you hate it, after all?”

Hari rolls his eyes. “No, not that. I was just wondering—I know we told the curious at Court that Hari was a short-name for Hariwalt, but…I have to get used to it sooner or later, don’t I?”

“You’re certain?” Salazar asks.

His brother shrugs. “I’ve been thinking about it since Christmas Day.”

“You have?”

Hari smiles. “Yes. I’d rather be used to it by the Summer Solstice. I don’t want to still be thinking that it sounds odd every time someone calls my name.”

“You continually surprise me.” Salazar shakes his head, unable to keep from smiling. “Very well. Nizar.” He waits a breath. “Is it still odd?”

“Yes, it really is.” Nizar grins. “Keep doing it anyway.”

* * * *

Despite his weariness, Salazar cannot sleep that night. He gets out of bed with the first hint of dawn bringing brighter color to the sky in the east and retrieves the silver bowl from his bag. He always travels with it; it’s convenient and lightweight. Anything that holds water is useful for scrying, but Salazar has always worked best with silver.

He uses Desplazarse to go straight down to the spring in the cavern bedrock. Both the basilisks and those in the home use its water for drinking, though the home’s water is delivered by magic-fueled pipes.

Salazar sits next to the font of bubbling water and fills the bowl, which reflects nothing but multi-hued silver and the colors of fire from the wall sconces. He doesn’t want to do this, and yet he has to know. Voldemort and his ridiculous francis mockery of a name had seemed a joke, an evil magician that was still just as fallible as any magic-worker. Salazar had assumed loss of knowledge to be the primary reason that Voldemort could stir such fear that people were too frightened to even speak his name. Without knowledge, they would have no way to ensure an easy victory.

The vileness of the soul shard Nizar carries has already given Salazar pause. After what Salazar learned tonight of a corrupted basilisk and the existence of a further Horcrux—one whose construction has truly dire implications—he is willing to admit that he may have badly misjudged the situation.

Loss of knowledge, he suspects, is not the only problem.

Salazar has to consider his words with care. If he speaks without thought, he’ll see Hari, youngest Heir of his bloodline.

He finally taps the side of the bowl three times, hearing the notes ring out and reverberate through the cavern. “Show me the one who claims to be the last of my line.”

When the water clears, he sees a boy, perhaps twelve years of age. He has the look of a native
Briton, with his pale skin and dark hair, but his vivid blue eyes mark him as Norse or Saxon as well. He looks nothing like a child from Ipuzko or Castile.

Salazar considers the image. Given the boy’s features, he has the potential to grow into a very handsome man…but there is also a terrible coldness in his eyes, a feeling that penetrates like ice into Salazar’s heart.

The boy stands before a set of doors. Both are marked with emerald green letters, shaped in an S with the hint of a serpentine curl as they twine together. Then the letters move like snakes, unbarring the door and allowing the boy to step forward into a massive cavern before Salazar begins to lose his magical grasp upon that moment.

Salazar taps the bowl again. “Further.”

The boy is grown, but not yet a man. He is wearing a white shirt, dark truis, and a dark robe with a green badge—Salazar has seen brief glimpses of a similar outfit in his brother’s memories during their work with the soul shard. Nizar’s Hogewáþ seems to believe in a uniform appearance for their students. Ludicrous, but not as important as the fact that the S on that badge is the same as the one that had been on those barred doors.

Sixteen years of age, at most, Salazar thinks idly, watching as the boy speaks to a basilisk nearly as large as Çinara. Tom Marvolo Riddle uses the murder of a tearful, tortured girl to create a soul jar with a bound book, and he does it with terrifying ease. No flicker of concern or remorse for the death; just dark glee in his success.

“That was not actually your first Horcrux, was it? That was the second.” Salazar shakes his head in disgust. “Well, you started young, didn’t you?”

How did one that age even know to craft such a trap as that book? All of the spells involved would have to have been finalized before the creation of the soul jar, not after.

No, that is not the more urgent question. How did one who had not even completed his first apprenticeship yet know how to create a soul jar in the first place? It is such a danger and temptation that none ever write down how it is done! It is knowledge passed on by word only, most often with the intent of teaching grown and educated magicians the means of safely removing soul jars from the living.

Gods, but the poor child does not leave the scene of her own murder. Salazar quickly taps the bowl again when he sees the murdered girl’s spirit mist into corporeal form. “Further.”

A slightly older Tom Riddle is in the home of someone with a fierce love of both pink and clutter. Salazar does not mind pink, but the clutter seems a bit excessive. An aging woman in ill health reclines on an odd piece of furniture, like a padded bench made by someone who did not know when to stop padding it. In that woman’s hands is Helga’s treasured golden cup, one Helga keeps locked away in her quarters. It was gifted to her by her father when Helga was still a child.

Salazar sees the coveting gaze on Tom Riddle’s young, handsome face, and an ill feeling settles over him. He suspects that aging woman will not hold Helga’s cup for much longer.

“Again. Further.”

Riddle is now a man several decades older, conversing with a grey-bearded magician in one of Hogewáþ’s towers. Salazar can see that they are arguing, but there is no sound. Given Riddle’s nature, Salazar suspects the man is asking for something.
Whatever Tom Riddle asks for, he is denied. He uses his anger to create another soul jar. The knowledge comes to him like a whisper in Salazar’s mind: that isn’t Riddle’s third crafted Horcrux, but his fifth.

Salazar nearly stops from the shock of it. To split one’s soul once is considered utter folly. The soul shard within his brother is Tom Riddle’s sixth Horcrux. The terrifying fool split his soul six times.

“Further,” Salazar whispers, and hopes he isn’t about to have cause for regret.

What he sees next is not Tom Riddle, not at first. It’s a burial ground enshrouded by darkness. A man with rat-like features is using magic to bind Salazar’s brother to a large burial marker. Salazar hisses in anger under his breath, attracting multiple young basilisks who wish to know of his sudden rage. Salazar tries to soothe them and himself; he cannot reach through this water to stop what his happening.

The long leg bones of a tall man go into the massive cauldron next to the burial marker, along with the tattered remains of burial garments. The rat-like man slices Nizar’s hand open and takes his blood—this is the necromancy ritual Helga detected the moment she and Nizar first met. The stolen blood also goes into a massive cauldron, followed by the rat-man’s own hand, which he removes himself with the same silver knife.

What rises from that cauldron is no longer Tom Riddle. Voldemort isn’t human enough for that. Human in shape, yes, but he is the color of a corpse, with a reptilian nose and eyes that gleam like rubies in the darkness.

Salazar has to pour out the water when Voldemort presses his hand to Nizar’s skin and burns his brother like he wields a branding iron. Even though there is no sound, he can’t watch his brother scream.

Nizar had been that same age when Salazar met him in Martius last year. The burial ground rite, the torture—it’s so recent it is a wonder Nizar’s nightmares are so few.

Never, Salazar thinks, swallowing hard. That bastard will never hurt you again, brother. I swear it.
Shaping Magic

Chapter Summary

“What are you reading about, anyway?”

“What potential mishaps can occur during or after a soul jar’s removal from a living being.”

Chapter Notes

And now, bribery aside, I DO have to chill for a few days so the other beta can catch up. <3

Harry really thought it would be hard to think of himself by a different name, to listen for someone calling him by an unfamiliar set of sounds. It’s definitely not easy. Finally he settles on trying to convince his brain to think of his name as Hari. He’s still listening for that, after all, as well as that new name.

Nizar.

He wouldn’t have chosen anything even close to that, but he wasn’t lying when he said he liked it. It’s foreign, about as far as you can get from an English name from his time. Nizar is from somewhere else—Nizar is someone else.

Or at least, he’s learning to be. He’s learning to be himself.

Maybe it’s the name that helps, but Hari—there, he did it!—understands now what Rowena, Godric, Salazar, Helga, Orellana, and Sedemai have been pushing for, each in their own unique way. Everything Harry had been, someone else dictated. First it was the Dursleys, dictating his slavery. He’s still uncomfortable calling it that, but…but it was. It was slavery and imprisonment.

The only reason he received an education at all was that primary school was government-mandated. Uncle Vernon claimed Hari on his taxes every year for the dependent write-off. Hari knew this because he was made to do the family taxes the moment his uncle realized he could read, write, follow directions, and do sums without botching it. Uncle Vernon couldn’t exactly claim to the government that Hari didn’t exist and keep him out of school. Hari really does have his uncle’s greed to thank when it comes to his education.

Then Hogwarts, the letters, and Hagrid rescuing him from that stupid island ensured that Hari got the other part of his inheritance. He learned he was more than his aunt and uncle’s abused house-elf, that his parents had died fighting a madman in a war. That they’d been heroes, not reckless drunks.

He’d never really believed that story, not deep down. It had always felt wrong, like one of the stories Aunt Petunia made up about one of their neighbors when Mrs. Wiggins gave offence by
telling Harry he’d done a good job on his aunt’s flowers, and his aunt should be proud of him.

Fuck, but he needs something else to think about. They’re technically on vacation now that they’re away from Court, and Hari’s brain ponders very uncomfortable memories when he’s not giving it something else to do.

Hari wanders around on the ground floor, looking at art, but his brain won’t shut up. Hogwarts dictated who he was, too. The Chosen One, Defeater of You-Know-Who, the famous Harry Potter. No one cared that their famous hero had been left alone, abused, starved, beaten, and permanently visually disabled when a frying pan wrecked his eyesight. He was just a nice and neat symbol, not a person to the Wizarding World at all.

When Hari arrived in 990, he could have continued to coast along on the bare minimum of a magical education, or let himself be educated on the Founders’ schedule…but he didn’t. Now that he has unrestricted access to people who want to bloody well teach him, Hari wants to learn, and he chose it. Even better: he can learn whatever the hell he wants and no one can tell him it’s a waste of time, that it won’t help him kill Voldemort. It’s like—it’s like no one cared what happened after Voldemort was dead, at least not when it came to Harry.

Maybe they didn’t expect him to survive.

Great. He didn’t need to think about that, not again. What if they really had expected Hari to die to make certain Voldemort stayed dead? What if Dumbledore never told him anything because he was afraid Hari would figure that out?

“Fuuuuuuuuuck.” Hari starts hissing Salazar’s name until he gets a response in Parseltongue on the next storey up.

Hari finds Salazar in a library. “Cool,” he breathes, looking at carved stone shelves that hold bound books and ancient scrolls from floor to ceiling. “This is a lot bigger than Hogewáþ’s library.”

Salazar glances up from the book he’s looking at. “At the moment, but none of us plan on allowing Hogewáþ’s library to remain small. We bring copies of books from our homes back to Moray and decide what is appropriate for a library meant for all students, and which books should be set aside only for those who are ready for them.”

“Like a Restricted Section,” Harry says.

Hari. Fuck. Forgot again.

Salazar lifts an eyebrow. “I do not like the sound of those words, but I suppose the meaning is clear enough.”

Hari thinks of how easy it is to get into the Restricted Section at Hogwarts if you have an Invisibility Cloak, or you’re a Hermione-level student. “The way you’re doing it now is probably better. Sal, is there any other way to get a soul shard out of a living person? Aside from Mind Magic?”

Salazar slams the book he’s reading shut, wide-eyed in alarm. “Are you trying to rush—”

“No!” Hari nearly takes a step backwards, startled by Sal’s reaction. “I’m going to take a guess and say that the other method is bad.”

“It is.” Salazar breathes out, calming himself, before he answers. “The only other way to remove a soul jar from a living being is the Killing Curse, Hari.”
“Fuck,” Hari says, and abruptly sits down in one of the library’s padded chairs. “Fuck.”

“Hari?”

Hari runs his hand through his hair. “Uh—I think…shit. I think that’s what they were going to do.”

Salazar’s expression goes stony as sparks of his magic appear in his eyes. “What?”

“I think they were going to let Voldemort use the Killing Curse on me to get rid of the soul jar. I think they were going to let me die.”

Salazar’s nostrils flare before he carefully puts the book down on a table. “Else I would destroy it on accident,” he murmurs. “What makes you think this, little brother?”

“Because no one ever told me anything!” Hari bursts out. “Especially not Dumbledore. If I could figure out the nonsense with the Philosopher’s Stone based on a few spaced out events that looked like coincidences to everyone else—and oh, did everyone tell me I was jumping at shadows over that one!—then he probably believed I’d realize that, too. No one cared if I was educated or not, Sal!”

“Well, not everyone was like that,” Hari amends, thinking that Professor McGonagall cares about him, or as much as she thinks is professional to allow herself, anyway. She’s really big on maintaining her professionalism.

He thinks Snape might care, too, in his exceptionally caustic and distant way. He wouldn’t have kept throwing information at everyone in class if he didn’t care. Snape could have set them to work a potion from the textbook and then ignored them all, every single class. That doesn’t mean he cares about Hari in particular, but it shows that he did concern himself with teaching, even if he was a bastard about it.

“No one ever seemed to be planning for what would happen after I supposedly killed Voldemort,” Hari says quietly. “I mean, if you have a famous symbol of the Wizarding World and he’s going to defeat Voldemort twice, you’d be grooming him for what came after, wouldn’t you?”

“You’ve been listening to Estefania. Granted, she is entirely correct, and so are you.” Salazar lets his head thump back against the hard edge of his wooden seat. “I really didn’t want to consider the idea that Helga is correct.”

Hari frowns. “Helga is correct about what?”

“Helga predicted this very same intended outcome,” Salazar replies. “The rest of us—we didn’t want to consider that the teaching master over your school would be so very callous in regards to the life of a student under his care. This goes quite a bit beyond your imprisonment with your foul relatives, shoddy education, or your forced participation in that Tournament.”

“You do realize I was hoping you’d tell me I was imagining things, yes?”

Salazar gives him a tight smile. “Would you have believed such an obvious lie?”

“No.” Hari slumps down in his chair. “How have we prevented Helga from traveling forward in time to kill Dumbledore so far?”

“A blessed lack of ability,” Salazar says. “Thank the gods for that. For Helga’s sake, not for your teaching master,” he adds when Hari gives him a curious look.
“It would be awkward trying to explain the rampaging Viking.” Hari studies the books and scrolls on the shelf again. “Can I look at anything in here?”

“All but the uppermost shelf.” Salazar retrieves his book again. “Those are reserved for magicians who are trained already, or those who are beginning to learn very specific types of magic. Even I didn’t approach that shelf until after my apprenticeship with Myrddin was complete.”

Hari nods. “Restricted Section,” he says again, just so Sal will twitch.

If he had tried to read the handwritten, glittering titles on the spines of these bound books six months ago, he wouldn’t have known what any of them said. Now he can recognize Latin, Castellano, Catalan, Leónese, Asturian, Navarro, Euskaran, frances, at least two different types of German, Norse, Greek, West Saxon English, along with characters that he can’t read that he knows are Arabic and Hebrew, respectively. There are a few other languages represented, but he has no idea what they are.

Formar La Magia catches his eye, one with a Latin subtitle written beneath it: Mutantur Magicae. Form Magic. Changing Magic. Hari pulls the book from the shelf carefully. It isn’t a scroll, but it’s not yet a real book, either, since its pages are bound together with what looks like deer sinew.

It only takes a few careful turns of the page to discover that the book is written in a combination of Latin, Greek, and an older form of Castellano that’s still sticking pretty close to Latin. Or the Latin is sticking closer to the Castellano. And people complain about how I can’t stick to one language at a time, Hari thinks in bemusement.

“Is there a translation spell for Greek? Rowena gave up on me in despair when it comes to Greek,” Hari says.

“Quia oculi, es Graeca e Latinam,” Salazar murmurs without looking up.

“Even I know that’s shit grammar,” Hari says, but he directs the spell at the book. It works, at least, and improves his ability to read it from down near zero up closer to fifty-fifty.

Transfigur Magia, the changing of the shape of the material world, is ancient magic from the days of Babylon and the kingdom’s famous Hanging Garden. This feat was not first achieved with Transfigur Magia, but was then replicated many times afterwards using spells crafted for that singular purpose. Shaping Magic is old magic, one of the first masteries attained by magicians before magicians ever picked up the tools of wand and staff.

“Wait. We don’t need wands for magic?” Hari asks aloud.

Salazar glances over at him. “A wand is a tool that creates a focus for more powerful magic. It is not necessary, but its symbol triggers the mind into easier, more precise casting.”

“Cool,” Hari says, and bends back down to translating the book.

A practitioner of magical Transfigur is properly titled a Transfigurare Magi.

Harry takes a moment to think that English is stupid for botching the Latin terms. Transfigure is now what is meant by transfigurare, and transfigur once meant transfiguration. Whose stupid idea was it that, anyway?

Transfigur is now considered three types of magic rather than a singular, though all are called by the name Transfigur to identify their forms as shaping magic. Transfigur itself is from the Latin, a verb meaning to change the shape. Broken down, Trans is Latin for a state, beyond, while the root
figura brings forth the meaning of to form or to shape. Transfigura means to convert: to add the
suffix re means To Change Matter. Transfigur is thus the art of changing the matter of life from
one form into another, a science of understanding that all matter is the same at the smallest level of
existence.

Hari blinks a few times. Whoever wrote this book isn’t calling them atoms, but that’s exactly what
they’re talking about. Awesome.

One is a master Transfigurare Magi if one has become learned in every form in one or more of the
three magics. Transfigur is the art most often associated with changing the inanimate form, though
learned magicians can change a living creature into an inanimate object. It is of note that it takes
a magician of some skill to turn the now inanimate object back to a living creature once more. An
apprentice should not practice these skills without a skilled Transfigurare Magi present to correct
the change. Transfigur is not to be used to cause death without due cause.

Harry scowls. He never actually thought of Transfiguration Class like that before, and he should
have. He also has no idea if McGonagall ever corrected their mistakes after class. He hopes so; he
left some living creatures in some truly awful transfigured states.

The second form of Transfigur is that of the magic of the Animalemorphe Magi. This is the name
given those powerful magicians who have mastered the art of transfigurare of the self. Animale is
of course the Latin term for any living being, an important distinction to make for an
Animalemorphe Magus, as that is their beginning state for any Transfigur. Morphe is of the Greek,
meaning form, shape, beauty, or outward appearance. (I have seen the term spelled Morph in the
Latin forms; this is incorrect.) An Animalemorphe Magus can change themselves into any living
shape they wish. These magicians often choose a favored dominant shape. Many magicians never
advance beyond the first shape-change that feels correct.

“Whoah,” Hari whispers, and keeps reading even though the translating is giving him a headache.

A Metamorphe Magi differs from the Animalemorphe Magi in the way that their Transfigur focuses
on the change of only the external. While they might be capable of appearing shorter or taller, and
can manipulate the external appearance of their body like changing water, the change is a focus
on the Morphe aspect, the outward appearance.

Transfigur and Metamorphe Magia are the easiest of the two disciplines to learn, as one is solely
directed outwards, and the other is also a focus of the outward. It is the inward reflection of the
Animalemorphe Magia that is most difficult, as it requires a willing understanding of the self. It
also requires a lack of fear of the Transfigur, or terrible magical incidents can occur that must be
corrected by a skilled Transfigurare Magus.

“Huh.” Okay, that does actually say a lot about his dad’s skills at Transfiguration, at least when it
came to being an Animagus. Sirius, too, for that matter. It even tells Hari that Pettigrew must once
have had some kind of backbone in him, or he would never have figured out how to be an Animagus in the first place. “You know, they don’t teach anything about Metamorphe Magi or Animalelmorphe Magi in my time.”

“What?” Salazar puts down his book and rubs at his eyes. “What are you reading, Nizar?”

Hari feels a moment of happy warmth and then makes himself concentrate. “Formar La Magia. It’s about Transfiguration. Shaping magic.”

“Of all the books, you select that one.” Salazar smiles. “What were you asking me? I was distracted.”

“Metamorphe and Animalelmorphe Magia,” Hari repeats. “They don’t teach it in the school in my time. My Transfiguration Professor is an Animagus—an Animalelmorphe Magus, I mean. But it’s not taught. My dad and my godfather learned it on their own when they were fifteen.”

Salazar raises both eyebrows. “It is good to know that your insanity is both genetic and potentially influenced by baptism.”

“Very funny.” Hari finds someone’s abandoned scrap of parchment and slides it into the book to mark his place. “It sounds like fun. To learn it, I mean. Aside from the terrible blunders bit.”

“You would need to find a different teacher,” Salazar says. “None of us teaching at Hogewáþ know anything of Transfiguration beyond our ability to Transfigure other objects.”

“Really? But the book says learning Metamorphe and Transfigur Magic is the easiest of the three.”

“I think the author of that book might have had a natural talent for either Animalelmorphe or Metamorphe Magic,” Salazar says in a musing tone. “Transfiguration is a magic that comes easily to many magicians, and can be taught even to the worst of students with patient tutelage. However, to learn and master Animalelmorphe or Metamorphe Magic requires a natural affinity. The stubborn can learn one or the other if they are devoted to it and nothing else, but a magician’s best chance at mastering those arts is to have a gift for it waiting dormant in their magic.”

“Well, then I might,” Hari says, not sure why he’s feeling defensive. “My father was an Animalelmorphe Magus at fifteen, remember?”

“He could also have been exceptionally stubborn. What circumstances drove your father and godfather to learn dangerous magic unsupervised?” Salazar asks.

“Oh, uh—they wanted to help my other godfather, Remus, with his lycanthropy during the full moon. They said it helped Remus if he had other animals with him that he thought of as pack, even if they weren’t other werewolves,” Harry explains.

“Why did your godfather Remus require such assistance?” Salazar looks baffled. “Why did he not ingest the potion for taming the wolf?”


Salazar pinches the bridge of his nose. “Wolf’s bane. Bane of the wolf. That sounds like a poison. We do not call our potion that. I will grant you that the potion is not very effective for some of the harsher aspects of the transformation, no matter what type of zoikóthropy one is infected by, but it helps the infected retain some sense of themselves during the moon so that they do not endanger others.”
“What is zoikóthropy?” Hari asks.

“When the shift on the full moon is not of a wolf. Lycan—*lykos*—is Greek for wolf.”

Hari stares at him. “There are *other* types of lycanthropy?” he squeaks.

Salazar rolls his eyes and sighs. “I utterly loathe your education.”

“Yeah, so do I.”

Salazar drops his hand and considers Hari. “You wish to be an Animalemorphe Magus, like your father?”

“Well—I don’t know if I’m all that thrilled at the idea of possibly being a deer,” Hari says honestly. “Being a deer in Moray really sounds like you’re asking for someone to try to shoot you for their supper.” Salazar snorts out a laugh. “But the Metamorphe Magus thing…not only does that sound fun, that sounds *useful*.”

“Useful?”

“Yes, useful,” Hari repeats. “How convenient would it be to hide in plain sight because you don’t look like yourself anymore?”

“It would require less carrying of a certain Invisibility Cloak everywhere one goes.” Salazar gives him an approving look. “Have you asked Godric about apprenticing to him for a Defence Mastery, little brother?”

“That’s a thing?” Hari asks.

“Yes. It is a *thing,*” Salazar retorts crossly. “I despair of your attaining a Potions Mastery, anyway. Your brewing is exceptional, and you are learning ingredients well, but such a mastery includes being able to grow and tend to your own ingredients.”

“Herbology is a different subject where I’m from,” Hari says. “That would be a different Mastery.”

Salazar waves his hand at Hari. “Go back to reading your book written by a highly intelligent magical lunatic, Nizar. I have studying to do that does not involve sputtering oaths about your previous schooling.”

“Okay,” Hari agrees. “What are you reading about, anyway?”

Salazar doesn’t look happy about it, but he answers Hari. “Potential mishaps that can occur during or after a soul jar’s removal from a living being.”

Hari swallows. “Oh.”

* * *

Hari tries to get to know Estefania better, but he’s pretty sure it’s something that will happen on her terms, or no terms ever. She’s warm and brittle, laughing and angry, smiling and vicious—seriously, history really missed the mark on which Slytherin was a complete pain in the arse.
Salazar claims that Estefania likes him, though, so there are times during that week in Burgos when she will randomly answer Hari’s questions. Like the non-magical thing. Hari wants to know a non-Salazar-filtered version of that story, and for some reason, phrasing it that way is what convinces Estefania to tell him.

“The Church.” For a moment, Hari is certain Estefania isn’t going to explain further. She fusses over the baby in her arms, smoothing back her soft tuft of black hair. Then Estefania says, “When we were young, the family recognized that the power of the Empire’s Church was growing in a way that would be detrimental to those of us with magic. We didn’t know the shape the danger would take, only that it would come to be.”

“How did you find out? Politics?” Hari asks.

Estefania purses her lips. “I believe I might have noticed, had I been older at the time, but I was only six years of age. Salazar accidentally scryed upon the water in the caverns below the home. He saw our deaths.”

Hari flinches. “He’s only two years older than you are.”

She nods. “Fortunately, our parents were versed in Salazar’s natural magical strengths and believed the words he spoke. What Salazar knew was that if the noble line of our house continued to be a magical one, it would be the end of both our familial lines. It was far too late for Salazar to claim not to be magical, not when noble families, tutors, and witnesses in the library at Córdoba in the Caliphate all knew otherwise. Myself, however—my magical training had not yet begun. Our father went to the king and bargained with him to make certain it was forgotten that I was my mother’s Heir in magic as well as name. All of my magical training after that point was taught only by the family. We knew there would come a time when I would take on the duties of our family’s title. Prince Alfonso ensured that day came, though my brother is still recognized as head of the family when he is in León.”

Hari really doesn’t like that he finds politics this fascinating, but he does. He isn’t sure who to blame for that. “Bargained how? It seems like a pretty important thing to just forget.”

Estefania smiles at him and undoes the first hooks on her dress front when baby María starts pawing at her breast with clumsy, balled-up fists. Hari politely averts his gaze until Estefania laughs and tells him to stop acting like a woman’s breast is a fearful weapon. At least when Hari glares at her, he can’t see anything because the baby’s head is in the way.

“Our father was already an old man when he married our mother, Nizar. It was considered quite miraculous that he fathered two children. The king was concerned with the lack of Heirs for our lines. The agreement made was that Salazar and I were to both marry by age fourteen, the better to make certain that multiple Heirs would be borne for both lines of the family.”

“And instead, your father died after Salazar turned twelve.” Hari makes a face. “That’s really inconvenient timing.”

“It was unfortunate and annoying timing,” Estefania corrects him, shifting the baby in her arms. “King Ramiro had just lost his Magical Alférez along with the Magical Marqués of León over Castile—which is the highest ranked of all the titled magical nobility in the kingdom but for the Alférez.”

Hari feels his jaw fall open. “Salazar complains that I don’t tell him things, but then he doesn’t say things like that?”
Estefania smirks at him. “King Ramiro demanded that a married male be seated as Magical Marqués of León over Castile at once, which of course meant my brother’s immediate marriage to Orellana. Ramiro also needed a new Alférez, so my mother chose the words that would cause Salazar to act as one in the king’s presence.” She pauses. “Just because my brother was and is capable of acting as the king’s Magical Alférez does not mean it was a wise decision…but it may have been the only decision. Do you understand?”

Hari thinks about it. “I’m certain the answer has something to do with that valley in the south that Ines kept teasing Salazar about—the one with his name on it.”

“Exactly.” Hari immediately stares at the ceiling when Estefania lifts the baby to burp her. “There is a reason Burgos has been free of Almanzor’s destruction, and it is not only because I maintain civilities between our Houses.”

“Why the House of the Bronze Sword?” Hari asks Andoni, continuing on his quest to try and understand his new family better. Andoni, at least, is a lot more forthcoming than Estefania. Hari doesn’t need to try and put words on a figurative, non-magical loom to get conversations out of his…his brother-in-law.

That’s really bloody odd to realize. Brother-in-law. Sister-in-law. Niece. If there is a God, how does Hari thank him for giving Hari this life without reverting to stupid feasts and boring priests?

“The name of my House has a rather obvious origin,” Andoni answers, recalling Hari’s attention to where it belongs. Andoni draws the dagger at his belt and reveals not a silver blade, but a bronze one. “Our family roots go back to the time when men used only bronze for their blades, not iron, and certainly not the steel that is gaining prominence. We’ve never been willing to give up that sign of our family. Of course, in non-magical hands, bronze will shatter against both iron and human-crafted steel. However, all of my family’s blades are goblin-made, and not even steel will destroy them. It takes goblin-crafted blades of silvered steel to destroy a bronze blade of my House.”

Hari takes the dagger when Andoni holds it out, granting permission. The blade is simple and two-sided, which is rare in Briton still. The hilt is bone, not wood, and looks like it was polished really well before wrapping it in just enough leather to give it a nice grip. “It’s pretty.” He tests its sharpness the way Godric showed him, hearing and feeling the rasp of a proper edge. “And deadly.”

Andoni grins. “A proper combination for a blade.” He slides the dagger back into its sheath when Hari gives it back. “The House of the Bronze Sword defended Araba from invaders, and from the more persistent Franks of the Empire, just as the Ancient House of Serpents did for Ipuzko. When fighting failed, we swore fealty we didn’t mean to regent rulers left behind by men who didn’t care about our people at all, and thus it was a meaningless gesture. They wished for land only, for in their eyes, land grants them status. A wise ruler knows it isn’t the land that grants status, but the people within it.”

“You sound like Navarra doesn’t have an idiot for a king,” Hari says, and Andoni laughs.

“He is simply a man trying to do his best with what he has been given, and to others, that will never be enough.” Andoni’s smile falters. “Ramiro was a decent king until his last years on the throne. Bermudo is an usurper who forgets that the throne he sits on was granted to him when the nobility of León agreed to support him.”

“And the gout?” Hari asks bluntly.
Andoni’s eyes widen. “I didn’t realize Bermudo was so afflicted. That is a revelation that you should not speak of to others, Hari. A king who is too ill to lead his army when the threat of invasion is ever present is a king no one will have faith in—and we must have that faith. León’s strength against the Caliphate is its unity, as is Navarra’s, and Viguera’s.”

Hari rolls his eyes. “Why can people never be satisfied with what they have?”

He was being rhetorical, but Andoni answers him anyway. “When the Caliphate had pushed itself northward until we stood firm and allowed it to push no further, then more often than not, there was peace between our kingdoms and theirs. It is only under Almanzor that the push begins anew, and I do not think it will falter until his death. He hungers for the whole of Iberia to be his.”

“Which is why the magical nobility in each kingdom is so important. They’re holding him back,” Hari says.

Andoni frowns, resting his hand on his knife. Hari doesn’t even think he’s aware that he’s done so. “We have, and we are…but that will soon end. Not because we do not wish to defend our homes, but because to do so will risk our deaths from allies who have grown fearful of magic. Others will rise to take our place. I do not know if they will succeed in filling the gap that magical defenders leave behind—I fear they won’t at all unless they are ruthless.”

“Great,” Hari replies, thinking that “ruthless” sounds like a polite way of saying, “roving band of merciless pricks.”

The only real problem Hari has with his new family is that people keep handing him the baby. “I have absolutely zero experience with infants!” he’ll shout after Estefania, Andoni, or a servant’s retreating back. He hasn’t forgotten how to hold an infant in the time it took for Twelvetide to be other with, but this is a baby. He doesn’t know what anything María burbles or does even means unless it’s a fragrant nappy—which he also does not know how to cope with.

“How?” he finally begs Sal. “I have no experience with babies.”

Salazar finally stops teasing to eye him speculatively. “When you say no experience...you are also saying that there were no infants in your household.”


“Because what you are describing is so rare as to be unfathomable to most,” Salazar replies. “That does explain the panic.”

“I wasn’t panicking,” Hari mutters.

Sal doesn’t believe him. “Time to learn to keep an infant clean, then.”

“Sal. No.”

“You will need to learn someday. Why not now?”

“Because…” Hari trails off. He can’t think of a reason that isn’t truly stupid. “Because I really don’t want to?”

“Do you dislike babies?” Salazar counters.

Hari blinks a few times. “Well—no. María’s fine. I just don’t know what to do with her.”
“You feed her, clean her, keep her warm, and keep her healthy. Otherwise she will simply eat and sleep until she gains enough strength to explore. *Then* it becomes a challenge.”

“If I ever have to adopt kids, they are not going to be infants,” Hari says flatly. He repeats that mantra his entire way through learning how to change cloth nappies. He repeats it more when he tries to convince an infant that goat’s milk is amazing and she should totally eat it. “No infants. Nope. Not doing it,” Hari mutters. At least Salazar doesn’t try to make Hari change his mind.

* * * *

It’s pretty easy to stick with Hari in his head, unless it’s early morning and he’s still trying to figure out which way is up. It took him way too long to realize why he no longer shoots bolt-upright with the first stirring of sound in a room—the Dursleys. He had to do it at the Dursleys, nonstop, every day, for his entire life.

Now that he doesn’t have to worry about it any longer, he loathes mornings with the sort of fiery, burning hatred he should probably just be reserving for Voldemort. At least he is now in a houseful of people who loathe mornings similarly except for Orellana, but she doesn’t tease Hari for growling while he peels a naranj and wishes for tea with all his heart. He has definitely learned the limits of Conjuring, and that limit is that one must know where the thing is that one is calling for. He doesn’t fucking know where tea is except that it isn’t in front of him.

Everyone in the family, and every servant, calls him Nizar. Wherever they go in Burgos (and sometimes Ipuzko), Sal introduces him as Nizar, as his younger brother by pending adoption. Absolutely no one finds this odd; it’s how Hari learns that even in non-magical communities, adoption is a thing one does to get an Heir when they don’t have one, but need one…like if they’re gay. That also seems to be accepted on both sides of the magical fence. Even the stupid Church performs wedding ceremonies for same-sex couples, which is baffling.

“Why?” Estefania gives Hari a confused look. “Such is even in their holy book, Nizar.”

“It fucking well *is*?”

Hearing Nizar on everyone’s lips, hearing that name, is a lot nicer than he thought it would be. It’s *easier*. The sound of those two syllables is odd, but maybe that’s enough to help him recognize that those two new sounds belong to him. Hearing people call him Nizar makes Hari feel more comfortable in his own skin.

Everyone expected Harry James Potter to do things: kill Voldemort, be a hero, be perfect, be a shining example of a Gryffindor, get excellent grades, fix everything, be everyone’s fucking entertainment whenever the *Daily Prophet* changed its opinion on his existence.

No one expects Nizar Hariwalt Deslizarse to do anything except be Salazar and Estefania’s brother, Andoni and Orellana’s brother-in-law, and Fortunata and baby María Andonica’s uncle. Nizar is only expected to educate himself, to learn about the family he’s being formally claimed by, to understand its holdings and the responsibilities that are attached to them. Anything aside from that is…it’s his decision. Only his.

Like the book on shaping magic. “Can we take this with us?” Hari asks Salazar.

Salazar shrugs, retrieves his wand, and teaches Hari a duplication spell. The second book, an exact
copy of the first, is then placed into Hari’s hands. “Do not use that spell again until we have the chance to speak more of it when we return to Moray,” Sal tells him. “One cannot simply duplicate items without end. There are specific limits based upon available matter.”

“That’s sensible,” Harry says. “You can’t make something out of nothing.”

Salazar pauses in the midst of selecting another book to duplicate for potentially adding it to Hogewáþ’s library. “Perhaps excellence in Transfiguration Magic is not beyond your skill, after all.”

Hari sticks his tongue out at his brother and goes to find someone less fucking cranky to speak to. Beyond his skill, his arse.

Hari spends a great deal of his sleepless nights with the Burgos Nest of basilisks. He’s able to drive out his fear of basilisks by the end of the week, even if some of it is sheer fucking obstinacy. He’s always liked talking to snakes from the moment he discovered that he could. Just because it scared the life out of idiots in his time doesn’t mean Hari stopped talking to any snake who cared to listen.

It does help that most of the basilisks in the nest are a lot smaller than Çinara. It’s like being among an overenthusiastic group of oversized pythons. The smallest basilisks are from the last nesting of one of Çinara’s daughters, and only average about four feet in length.

Hari makes a point of mastering the soul shard’s yammering when he’s around the nest. It wants to use them the same way it used Jalaf—oh, god, Hari knows that poor mad basilisk’s name—but Hari isn’t going to let that happen. This is his body, his mind, his thoughts, and his feelings. That stupid bit of Tom Riddle’s soul can shut it.

Basilisks also make really good company. They live a very long time when they’re healthy. Çinara is three hundred years old and the eldest basilisk, matriarch of the Burgos Nest, but she’s still young. Her mother and father live in Ipuzko, and are nearing eight and nine hundred years old, respectively. The eldest basilisk any of them know of is fourteen hundred years old, though Çinara admits that ancient Maximus in Rome is very close to death.

Being bound to Salazar’s line means Çinara knows a lot of excellent stories about the family. Many of them tend to revolve around, “And then they scared off the invaders by being themselves,” but Hari thinks that’s hilarious. It’s so very Sal, even though he’s yet to see Salazar in a fight.

It’s not about the fight, anyway, but the way Sal defused a brawl by simply laying out his wand and waiting. Salazar challenged the brute in that tavern without challenging the other man at all. That takes a lot more intelligence and cunning than simply pointing a wand and hexing someone.

“Why are you laughing, Nizar?” Çinara asks when Hari starts giggling, unable to help it.

“I’m just realizing I probably shouldn’t have argued with the Sorting Hat,” he says. “I’m really such a complete Slytherin.”

“I do not understand what you mean by Sorting Hat and Slytherin.”

That’s an interesting conversation to navigate. Çinara tells Hari he was ridiculous to ignore the call of family. Hari doesn’t know how to explain why he did, but he agrees that he isn’t going to ever ignore that call again.

That day is the first time he not only writes letters to Hermione and Ron, but for some reason, he decides he really wants to write to Snape. He doubts Snape would appreciate being bothered by
someone he bloody well hates, but Harry is a tenacious shit, and he’s in the mood to challenge someone. That’s the only way he knows how to phrase it, but whatever—it works.

No one minds if he goes wandering around Burgos at all hours so long as Hari tells someone that he’s leaving the home, and gives at least a fairly good guess as to when he’ll be back. Hari discovers that Burgos has a magical population in an entire section of the city, one that isn’t hidden from non-magical eyes at all.

He does read the signs posted on the side of the building at the first corner with amusement, though:

Proceed with good faith, an open heart, a thoughtful mind, and you will be welcome.

Draw a sword and you will probably not lose body parts.

Harm another and no one will ever find your remains.

Blessed are our polite guests.

Below that are a few other crude signs, some definitely added by young hands:

’Ware the centaur shit!

Do not cheat a goblin.

Doxies are not toys.

No, really, do not cheat a goblin.

Pixies are very pretty but you have to let them go after holy days.

Do not trust magical horses. They are gigantic pintels.

Mermish folk do not give good courting advice.

Every time you cheat a goblin, you die. You’re not the one cleaning up the mess. Stop it!

Just because it is cute doesn’t mean it won’t bite you.

All of Smithy Tangi’s jewelry is cursed.

It sarding well is not!

Hari roams around Magical Burgos, completely entranced. There are magical beings of all types everywhere, not just humans. At first, what makes him a bit fearful is seeing that every magical being capable of rational thought—which is most of them—are carrying wands.

Centaurs with wands. Goblins with wands. Sphinxes with wands.
That…that’s supposed to be normal.

Hari nearly whites out in sudden rage. Okay. Maybe he understands Hermione trying to campaign for house-elves a bit better now. He trusts Hagrid’s opinion on house-elves wanting to help, but maybe there is something to their servitude that isn’t supposed to be.

No one he’s asked, in the entire kingdom of León, knows what a house-elf is. If a house-elf is a normal thing, then they would be here, and they would have wands—

That’s when he sees the elf. He didn’t recognize the house-elf at first because she is clean and bright-eyed, standing proud and tall…and she’s covered in fabric and jewelry. Hari uses the reflection of a tailor’s polished silver mirror so he can stare without boggling at the house-elf outright.

The elf’s long ears are pierced a dozen times in each ear, threaded with gold and silver hoops and chains. Rings are on her fingers; necklaces of beads and metal are around her throat and hang down the front of what is not anything like a tea towel. The elf’s garb is a lot more like a really nice Roman or Greek dress, not the cheap costumes Hari saw during Hallowe’ens when he was still stuck at Privet Drive. She also has a wand tucked into her sash—unvarnished holly.

Hari turns away from the mirror and then nearly collides with the elf he’s just been staring at. She is glaring up at him, her hands on her hips. “Have you not seen an elf before, little magician?”

“Actually, I was just thinking I’ve never seen anyone wearing that much jewelry, and all of it complex, without winding up tangled in a golden knot,” Hari replies honestly. He’s never seen anyone in that much jewelry, and Helga has a fierce love of gold.

The elf beams. “We make it all ourselves, magician. We elves are crafters of the tiny and the delicate. Our goblin cousins are the makers of the large and heavy.”

“Really?” Hari grins. “That’s amazing. There aren’t elves like you where I’m from. Oh—I’m Nizar.” He hesitates before holding out his hand. “I don’t know if I’m being rude.”

The elf takes his hand and grips it the way a human lady would, so that her fingers rest over his. “This is not offensive at all, Magician Nizar. I am Bellian.” Then she peers up at him. “Your name isn’t Nizar yet. But it’s going to be.”

Hari nods, trying not to bite his lip. “Yes. I’m trying to get used to it. I don’t want it to feel like it doesn’t fit me when magic makes it permanent.”

Bellian nods and lets go of his hand. “That is a wise decision to make. You are older in experience than in years.”

“Unfortunately,” Hari replies in a wry voice. “Can I—is it rude to ask if I can meet the rest of your…family?”

“Clan,” Bellian corrects him. “No! It isn’t rude at all. Not many magicians take such interest. You’re not writing a book, are you?”

“No. I don’t think it’s ever occurred to me to write a book. Why, should I?” Hari asks as Bellian grabs his hand again and leads him through the crowd.

He introduced himself as Nizar. He did it without even thinking about it.

Wow.
“I’m glad you are not writing about elves. We are not secretive, but we are not doxies and pixies. We are people,” she says sternly. “But Nizar the Magician could write books about other things if he wanted.”

“Maybe I’ll think about it when that’s my name in truth,” Hari replies, and the elf beams again.

Hari thanks any deity listening for Rowena and Estefania. He thinks he’s scoring points right and left. This would probably be a spectacular mess without their advice.

Bellian’s clan lives in one of the houses on the other side of Burgos, about halfway up the mountain. Bellian cheats and Apparates them both to the right level instead of climbing the stairs. When Hari mentions that they could have used Desplazarse to arrive there directly instead of walking through the city, Bellian shrugs and explains that she can’t find new ideas if she doesn’t look for them.

Then Hari is swarmed by excited elves. It’s like visiting the kitchens at Hogwarts, but instead of elves trying to bury him in food, he’s simply granted hospitality like any other family in the area would offer. Their energy level is the same, though. Since Hari is still an insomniac, he can keep up with their introductions, explanations, tours of the home, and examples of their crafting. Another magician his age would have dropped in an exhausted heap after the first hour.

All the elves wear the same Greek or Roman-styled tunics, or dresses like Bellian. The shine of gold and silver is everywhere, but silver dominates. Even the young elves wear quite a bit of jewelry unless they’re small enough that they keep trying to eat it.

“Wait, wait. I need to send a Patronus to my brother so he knows I’m not dead or dying,” Hari says, laughing, when they insist that he has to stay for supper.

The stag isn’t what he’s used to. It’s still a corporeal Patronus, and it’s still a deer, but the antlers are gone. Harry tilts his head, baffled. That’s weird, but as long as it can still pass messages, he doesn’t mind having a Patronus without antlers. “For Salazar Deslizarse: I’ve been temporarily kidnapped by a great clan of elves. I’ll be home…” He thinks about it. “Probably by midnight. See you soon.”

When he lowers his wand, Hari realizes that the elves have all gone quiet. “You are going to be the brother of the son of the Ancient House of Serpents?” Andellio asks in a whisper.

Hari puts his wand back in his sleeve. “Uh—yes. Is that a…that’s not a problem, is it?”

A lot of elves shake their heads, making it sound like dozens of dainty wind chimes were all set into motion by the wind at the same time. “No, it is not a problem,” Bellian says, giving her kin a stern look when the others remain hushed. “The Ancient House of Serpents has been a good family of magicians for a very long time.”

“So has the House of Wise Women,” Friedda squeaks. “They are both good magical families who remember their magical kin, like elves and goblins.”

Andellio gets his voice back. “No one in those Houses have ever tried to cheat the Green Folk. We just did not realize we had such an honored guest.”

“I’m just a person,” Hari says, smiling. “You don’t have to treat me differently just because of Salazar.”

Bellian points at him with one finger, revealing the glittering coat of paint on her long nail. “Those words are why we treat differently with those of your House, Nizar Deslizarse.”
The Clan of Mountain Wind elves might be hyperactive and excitable, but they’re also prompt. When midnight approaches, Bellian takes Hari’s hand and bids him to tell the others farewell so that she can take him home. She’s timed it well enough so that when the swarm of hugging is over, along with the more somber handshaking from the senior elves, she Apparates him back to the open veranda of the house at the stroke of midnight exactly. Hari might not have Sal’s calibrated hourglass in front of him, but he’s always had a good feel for time, and midnight in particular.

“I hope I get to see you again when we come back,” Hari says.

Bellian smiles. “You will be welcome. Good night, Nizar-who-will-be.”

“Good night,” Hari says, and then she’s gone. Her Disapparition is utterly silent. Now that is something he’d love to learn. He still leaves behind a terrible cracking sound in the air when he Apparates.

Hari ducks through the doorway, back into the warmth of the house, and finds Salazar waiting to greet him. “Uh, hi. I own a lot of jewelry now.”

Salazar grins. “So I see,” he replies, taking in the delicate silver chains that lie across Hari’s chest in tiered loops. Glittering bits of green and blue gemstones, wrapped in silver wire or set in silver bezels, hang from the lowest, middle, and highest of the chains. The elves were appalled that he had no piercings in his ears, so they immediately crafted a silver hook that rests over the top of his ear and wraps around it like a cuff from top to bottom. It isn’t even uncomfortable to wear.

“I didn’t ask. They just sort of…well, they happened,” Nizar says.

“The elves gift such things to those they favor.” Salazar frowns as he looks at Hari. “You seem disturbed.”

“Is there something in this house that we can drink?”

“Now I know something is bothering you. You never ask to drink.” Salazar slings his arm around Hari’s shoulders and guides him down to the family’s private dining hall, calling for a servant to have mead brought out that was made in the hills beyond the city.

“I know why you don’t know what house-elves are, now. I just don’t know what changed,” Hari says after he drinks most of a goblet of clover-sweet mead. He tells Salazar about the house-elves in his time, and says that the mountain clan elves were the exact same people, but…different.

Salazar glances down into his cup, as if he’s looking for a scryed image. “The elves. Is this worldwide, this servitude you describe?”

“Sal, I’d never left Britain until we came here for Christmastide. I have no idea.”

Hari goes to his room, a bit tipsy on good mead, and writes a letter to Dobby, describing everything he can remember about the Mountain Wind clan of elves. He thinks Dobby, proud free elf, will appreciate knowing that he isn’t a freak. He isn’t wrong. He’s right; he is a damned good elf, and he deserves to wear whatever he bloody well likes.

He rereads the letter when it’s done. It very much resembles the sort of letter Hari would have liked for someone to have written to him when he was miserable, when he was surrounded by horrible people who only called him Boy and Freak. If Hari can do for Dobby what no one did for him…

He doesn’t even know how anyone will ever see these letters. He’s starting to become convinced
that there is no going back.

He chews on the end of his quill, spitting out a bit of feather when it comes loose. Preservation Charms, maybe? There are plenty of places in Hogwarts to hide letters.

Maybe he can ask the elves here in Burgos to do it. Elves live a long time, too.

* * * *

They go back to the great stone fortress-estate in Ipuzko before returning to Moray. Hari sits out on the same corner jut of stone and tastes salt in the air, smells the ocean on the wind, and wonders that he feels so attached to a place he’s now only visited twice.

Not by Estefania’s line, Hari thinks idly, holding out the set of reed pipes so that the wind catches on the holes and plays its own tune. Estefania is prickly, odd company—he likes her anyway—but she doesn’t feel the same attachment to this land that Salazar does. Whoever Hari is descended from, it has to be someone who lived here, who loved this place, who felt this attachment in their blood every time they set foot on the vibrant grass with its many hues of green, blue, and hints of violet.

Not by his mother’s line, either. For Salazar’s family magic to have survived, that’s an unbroken chain of magic. His mother was an amazing witch, but she was a Muggle-born. Hari has to be related to Sal by his father.

This time when Hari raises the reed pipe to his lips, he gets it right.

“Do you know only songs of mourning from your time?”

Hari doesn’t jump in place. He knew Orellana and Salazar were approaching; he just didn’t want to stop playing until he’d finished it. “I suppose so.”

Orellana clambers up onto the wall to sit down next to Hari. Salazar does the same to sit on Hari’s opposite side. “What is it called?” Orellana asks.

“I don’t know.” Hari lowers the pipe and stares out at the green hills that mask the nearby cliffs over the ocean. “It’s a tune I’ve had stuck in my head for as long as I can remember. I just didn’t hum it out loud, and I don’t know if it has words to sing.”

“Why not out loud?” Salazar asks.

“Oh. My aunt would hit me if I did. She didn’t like it,” Hari replies. Neither of them say anything, though Salazar’s mouth gains a hard edge. “But I don’t have to worry about it now. I can teach it to you, and that means you can play it properly, Sal.”

Salazar gives him a curious look. “Why me?”

“You have a lute,” Hari says. “I’m pretty sure this song is supposed to be played on a guitar, but a lute sounds the same. It doesn’t really work on a pipe.”

“I’m getting it, then.” Sal Apparates without even standing up, which leaves Harry staring blankly at the spot where he was just sitting.
Great. He’s just as pants at Apparating as he was at using the Floo. At least no one here knows what Floo Travel is, and they don’t seem to want to know, either.

“How now?” Hari asks Orellana.

She smiles. “Because you made him curious, Nizar.”

Salazar Apparates into place on the stone, but at least he’s standing instead of bloody well showing off by reappearing sitting again. He sits down like a normal person, the lute he plays most often resting in his lap. “Well?” Sal prompts when Harry doesn’t do anything. “Play it. I need to hear it if I’m to mimic the sounds.”

“Oh.” Harry lifts the dual reed pipes to his lips, feeling his cheeks burn. His chest feels too tight, but he plays it through once at speed. Then he does so a second time, slower, as Salazar listens to each note and tries out strings and chords.

Salazar has a very good ear for picking up music. He’s been able to craft melodies to accompany Helga’s favored songs, even though she herself doesn’t know what the original melodies sounded like.

“I think I’ve got it,” Salazar murmurs. He plays through the tune, stopping on occasion as Hari remembers there are points where the sound should be stronger and places where it should be softer, slower.

The third time Salazar plays it through, Harry has to bite his lip. “That’s—that’s it. You’ve got it.”

“Nizar is correct. It sounds better on a lute than on the pipes,” Orellana says thoughtfully.

Salazar looks at Harry. “Nizar?”

“Is it—is it odd to feel like something is really comforting, but really sad at the same time?” Hari asks.

Salazar plays through the song again, but he keeps the sound muted and low, more vibration than music. “I don’t think so. Is this sad for you?”

Hari thinks about it. “Yes, but no. It’s just…it’s there, in the back of my head, like it’s something I’m meant to hold onto. I don’t even know why I know this song, Salazar.”

Orellana takes his hand in a gentle grip. “Did your parents sing or play music, Nizar?”

He stares at the hills again. The green light in his memory is brighter, blinding, and ends forever the voice of a strong woman who refused to step aside. He can feel something raw and bottomless just below the surface of his thoughts.

“I don’t remember.”
The Horcrux, sensing their intent, pulls a new trick.

Despite his real interest in basilisks, the clan of elves, and Castile, Harry is glad to be back in Scotland—no, Moray, dammit. He hasn’t slipped that badly in a while. He suspects he’ll finally get used to calling this land Moray just in time for it to be claimed by Alba and become Scotland. He knows it happens, just not when.

Salazar writes the letter that tells everyone of Harry’s new name. Hedwig is happy to take it and fly north several days before they leave. By the time they return home, everyone is calling him Nizar.

In Burgos, it felt normal. In Hogwarts, it sounds bizarre.

“Due to the more familiar surroundings, I expect,” Salazar says when Harry mentions it. “This is a place you strongly associate with all that came before.”

Harry nods. “That’s true enough.” He goes to his room and sits in the window, focusing on the Mind Magic he’s learned until he’s at least got his thoughts back to thinking Hari instead of Harry. That helps, a little, but it’s still odd to hear Nizar. Now he’s glad he asked for everyone to start calling him that well before the adoption; he really does need time to get used to it.

He isn’t the only one who finds something disturbing. Salazar spends a lot of time frowning, as if in thought, and it isn’t just their renewed work on the soul jar troubling him. “I feel like I’ve forgotten something important,” Salazar finally admits to Hari. “I despise that feeling.”

Hari tries not to wince. “You are,” he says, doing his best to keep his voice calm and even. “You learned something of my future that Çinara agreed to help you…not forget, exactly, but you had to put it aside. You even assisted her with your own Mind Magic.” He hopes Salazar isn’t going to be upset or angry—he claimed he wouldn’t before it was done.

Salazar considers the matter with his head cocked to one side. “That important, is it?”

“Yes.”

Salazar nods and gives Hari a brief hug. “Then I will refuse to allow it to concern me. I will know when I need to.”
Hari smiles and tells Sal that is exactly what is meant to happen, trying not to feel guilty. Salazar will know, yes, but probably after he’s long dead.

The matter of Jalaf, the mad basilisk, was discussed with the entire Burgos Nest while Çinara kept all of the younger basilisks calm. Snakes, even sentient ones, don’t concern themselves much with the order in which things happen. They feel more attachment to the events themselves. The Nest agreed that there was too much at risk not to allow the events surrounding poor Jalaf, whoever he will be, to happen as Hari remembers. Salazar, suspecting that Jalaf may be one of Çinara’s own children, hated the idea, but Çinara was adamant that some things should not be changed.

Hari thought about asking Çinara to help him forget, too, but ultimately decided not to. He wants to know. If he meets this basilisk before he returns home or dies here, then Hari wants to touch his scales and peer into his multi-faceted eyes and whisper apologies and adoration while he still has the chance. Hari hid the memories of Jalaf himself, far from the influence of the shard, well away from what the others will see when they work at removing that stupid bit of Voldemort’s soul.

Burgos might have been warmer, but he’s still used to Hogewáþ’s winter weather. The cold wind and threatening snow won’t dampen his spirits, literally or figuratively. It’s the stupid soul jar that’s doing it.

The resumed fight means that Hari’s head aches all the fucking time. He wakes up almost every morning with dried blood crusted over the lightning-shaped scar on his forehead, leftovers from the soul jar’s attempts to either exert influence while he sleeps, or just some really stupid attempts at trying to scare him. Not a chance; Hari has never been led around that easily, thank you. He washes his face in magic-warmed water every morning to rid himself of the mess, or he takes a bath, submerging in water that steams into the cool air so he’ll feel less mentally and physically bruised.

His dreams are all terrible. He dreams of Dementors, of feeling like his very essence is being sucked into a terrible void; he sends his antlerless Patronus after the Dementors once he realizes he’s dreaming, rolling his eyes when the illusions flee. He dreams of werewolves, which is ludicrous. He isn’t scared of werewolves, or even of being one. His dream, his control; he changes the phase of the moon and the werewolf is gone. He dreams of Sirius, his mind truly lost and genuinely a danger; Harry simply thinks his godfather into his Animagus form and spends the rest of the dream cuddling a happy, tail-wagging Newfoundland. He dreams of the basilisk in the Chamber, but this time he knows that he’s one of the Slytherin Heirs, too; he wrests control of Jalaf away from Tom Riddle. It’s probably more than a bit satisfying to watch the basilisk bite the diary, destroying the very thing that harmed it.

That dream always hurts a bit when he wakes up from it. Hari couldn’t convince the basilisk to do that when he was twelve, but he reminds himself: he didn’t know. Not knowing was not his fault.

It’s the dream about the nursery, of his father’s voice, of seeing his mother face off against Voldemort, the green light of her death, and then a second bright green light to his eyes—that dream bothers Hari because he doesn’t know what to do about it. He can’t change her death.

They’ve scarcely been back a week when Helga asks Hari what he’d like for his sixteenth birthday. Hari looks up from dinner, confused. “My birthday? July—Iulius—is months from now.” He hadn’t mentioned it last July—it was normal not to talk about his birthday. He was also busy trying to learn how to bloody well communicate, and didn’t even realize the thirty-first had passed until everyone started talking about Augustus.

Salazar glances over at the student table and lowers his voice. “That might have been your birthday once, but you were moved through time on midnight of your birthday to midday of first Martius. To wait for Iulius now is to wait too long, Nizar.”
“Oh. Shit,” Hari says, bewildered. Sal and Helga are right, but his birthday changing hadn’t even occurred to him. He was more fascinated by the idea that he’s been here almost a full year, and nothing terrible has happened. “Then I guess I’m going to be sixteen on the first day of Martius. Does that mean anything special?”

Godric salutes him with his wine goblet. “It means you’re still alive.”

_I really hope so_, Hari thinks, but decides it’s probably not the best thing to repeat aloud. “Funny. I meant about being considered an adult, I suppose. It’s seventeen where I’m from.”

“It varies among kingdoms and your birthplace in each kingdom’s society,” Helga says. “There are a few set observations among the non-nobility, but among them and nobility, being considered an adult most often comes with your proven ability to behave as one.”

“Let me think about it.” Hari turns his attention back to his food, but his appetite fled, replaced with a burgeoning sense of panic. He’s never asked for birthday gifts before. When Hagrid got him Hedwig for his birthday, Hari hadn’t asked; Hagrid just gave. That’s what his other friends do, and Hari does the same for Hermione, Ron, Ginny, the twins, and their parents. He even got McGonagall something during Christmas in his fourth year: Hari sent her a tiny little tabby cat figurine no larger than his thumb, one that looked just like her Animagus form, magicked to move and act just like a real cat. He included a note saying it could be terrifying on her behalf when she wasn’t available. It isn’t considered proper to give teachers gifts, so she didn’t acknowledged it by note or with words, but McGonagall smiled at Hari the next day for no reason at all.

Birthdays are still a custom in this time, but it’s often an entire family group collaborating on the gift. It doesn’t necessarily need to be a physical item, but freedom from chores or duties, or—

Oh.

It takes a few false starts, and several deep breaths, before he can say it. “Do you think we could finish removing the soul jar on first Martius?”

Everyone at both tables fall silent. Hari rolls his eyes. “The easy answer is ‘No’ if it’s not possible.”

The others look to Rowena, who is the uncontested master among other masters of Mind Magic. “We can attempt such,” she finally answers, frowning. “That gives us a month and not even a fortnight of time to prepare. The final removal could thus be more violent.”

“Most of us go home for planting season the day before Imbolc,” Leoric speaks up. “That means you would have a month of quiet.”

“There is that, yes.” Godric nods at Leoric. “Thank you for reminding me.”

“Isn’t it still too cold for planting?” Hari asks.

“No in the south, Nizar,” Elesande says. “But everyone goes home anyway. It’s a month off from school!”

“Even I have to go home,” Matty says in a grumble, scowling. “It’s a quarter-day, and I have to help.”

“And some of us have to go home to prove our magical gifts to paranoid, controlling siblings in order to proceed with an apprenticeship instead of a marriage,” Helena mutters under her breath. “That should be your role, Mother, not Houdin’s!”
“I know, but he is feeling the pressure from a king who seeks more marriageable noble sons and
daughters for the creation of political alliances.” Rowena pats Helena’s hand. “Patience; you will
have your freedom soon enough.”

“So…yes, then,” Hari says, just to make certain there is a clear answer. “Yes, we’re going to try.”

“Yes,” Rowena answers, inclining her head.

“You lot will stay home an extra day instead of returning on the first, as is usual,” Godric tells the
other children, who grin at the idea of an extra day of freedom. They might be enthusiastic magical
students, but even magical students like to have time off.

That decision means that Hari’s next session with the stupid soul shard is a lot more intense. One
of them—Godric, maybe?—makes a discovery and finally peels away the last of the filmy
something that had kept Hari’s view of the shard’s corruption from his sight. It’s disturbing as hell,
and doesn’t look anything like he expected. He’s not really certain what it resembles, but it’s
definitely nothing like a person.

“That,” Rowena says, drinking down a goblet of spring water with a grimace, “is because it is not
the Horcrux of a magician who has split his soul only once. There is not enough humanity
remaining to give it a recognizable shape in your thoughts.”

“Not the first.” Hari tries cleaning his head with another balled-up bit of linen, but it isn’t working
very well. He’ll probably be climbing into the bath in a few minutes just to feel less tainted. “His
second, perhaps?”

“No.” Salazar is staring down at the stone floor, an unrecognizable expression on his face. “Not
his first, Nizar, nor his second. That is his sixth.”

Godric lifts his head from the mead he’d chosen to gulp down instead of water. “I didn’t think that
was sarding possible!”

Salazar releases a heavy sigh. “It seems as though it is.”

“You scryed upon it,” Helga realizes, looking at Salazar in concern. “What did you see?”

Salazar shakes his head. “Things I truly do not wish to ever discuss, Helga. Nevertheless, that is
Voldemort’s sixth Horcrux.”

“And yet this shard is still so powerful.” Rowena merely looks contemplative instead of frightened,
which is a relief. “I expect Vol de Mort did not plan to put so much of himself into this Horcrux’s
creation, as he did not know how to correctly make a living Horcrux.”

“He didn’t use the Imperius Curse, you mean.” Hari doesn’t remember, but since Voldemort’s
Killing Curse rebounded, it’s what Rowena believes. “Yes, okay, bloody Tempero!” Hari corrects
himself when four magicians glare at him in disapproval over his shoddy Latin.

All of the children leave Hogewâþ on the last day of Ianuarius, even Fortunata, who is grumbling
about having to spend a month with Estefania and Andoni. “It will be a disaster,” she pronounces,
scowling.

Hari raises an eyebrow. “Fortunata. You get to spend a month with the baby.”

Fortunata’s expression brightens for a few seconds before she frowns again. “Yes, but Aunt
Estefania wishes for me to learn to use words as weapons! I don’t want to use words. I want to
fight, like Father!”

Hari crosses his arms and gives her a flat look. Her eyes widen; he never looks at Fortunata that way. “If you really think that your father doesn’t choose words as the first of his weapons, you have not been paying the proper sort of attention.”

When Fortunata goes off to pack with a more thoughtful expression, Hari turns around to find Salazar grinning at him. “And you still won’t admit your future apprentice?” he whispers.

“Shut up,” Hari mutters, his ears burning.

* * * *

When the children are gone, the final work on untangling Hari from the soul shard begins.

The new sessions with the shard sees them gathering strength, fencing off the shard from what parts of Hari it might still have access to. Hari watches that progress in his mind and knows that the final removal is still going to be hell.

“This isn’t normal, is it?” Hari asks Rowena. None of the four lie to him, but Rowena is the best at doling out harsh truths.

“No.” Rowena looks displeased. “It is not. Sleep well on the last night of Februarius, Nizar. If we do succeed on the first, it will be a harsh trial.”

Hari scowls. “This entire process has been harsh. How much worse can it be?”

Rowena lifts both eyebrows, giving him a steely-eyed look. “Such questions,” she says, “are dangerous to ask.”

The Horcrux, sensing their intent, pulls a new trick.

Hari discovers this when he wakes up on the table in the Receiving Hall, feeling like he’s been punched in the chest, or that he’s been running for hours. He hasn’t passed out during one of these sessions since the first months. “Wha’ th’fuck,” he rasps out.

“We missed something,” Rowena says. Then she stalks away from the table, fury all but radiating from her.

“The Horcrux cut off your ability to breathe,” Godric explains, helping Hari to sit up.

“It—it did what?” he asks, swallowing against the dryness in his throat. “Where is everyone else?”

Godric hands Hari a goblet of water. “I would imagine Helga and Salazar are seeking out something that deserves death so that they may both ease their minds.”

Hearing something like that about Helga isn’t a surprise, but it is when it comes to Salazar. “Why did Sal leave?”

Godric sits down on the tabletop next to Hari. “Your brother is not a violent man by nature, but he has limits, Hari, and this Horcrux has broken past one of them. Much like you, he dislikes feeling helpless, but he cannot use the anger he feels against this Horcrux. Not until we can be certain it is
“Okay.” Hari drinks water and focuses on breathing for a few minutes. Rowena is pacing the hall, uttering oaths under her breath in rapid Bavarian—no, Latin. No, Greek—never mind, Hari has no idea. She’s going through languages too fast for him to keep up.

“I thought a Horcrux would protect itself through any means necessary.” He once asked Rowena why two Horcruxes would fight each other, his stupid soul jar scar against Voldemort’s Horcrux diary. Horcruxes think, feel, and want to live. The soul jar in Hari’s head didn’t give a damn that it was killing a different part of itself so long as it survived.

Godric nods. “It will, Nizar, but you must bear in mind that this Horcrux only needs ensure its vessel still lives. It would suffocate your brain until you are no longer capable of thinking or doing things for yourself, and when the damage was permanent, force you to breathe again.”

“Oh.” Hari grimaces. “I know we don’t want anything to go wrong, but if it succeeds in doing something like that? Please sarding kill me.”

Godric doesn’t stiffen, flinch, or allow his breathing to change, but they’re sitting shoulder-to-shoulder; Hari can feel the difference in the air between them. “You are aware of what you’re asking.”

“Yes, and I realize it’s not fair to ask—”

Godric places his hand on Hari’s knee, so Hari shuts up. “I only request that you inform Salazar, and ensure that he knows we’re to try and fix such damage before giving up. I don’t want him after my head for doing as you request.”

Hari nods. That isn’t going to be a fun conversation. “I will.” He hesitates, but he’s pretty sure the next part is not only necessary, but right. “Thank you.”

“Thank me by not dying.” Godric gives him a faint, genuine smile. “You’ve a mastery to earn under my name, you little shit.”

Hari goes upstairs, though it’s a slower climb than usual. Helga assured Godric and Rowena that his health was not affected, that they kept the Horcrux from doing him real damage, but he’s probably going to be easily winded for a while. Stupid Horcrux.

Orellana meets him at the door and then latches it after he enters. “Godric sent his Patronus to tell me you were on your way. You are well?”

Hari thinks about it and decides that for once, he isn’t going to joke about not being dead. Orellana is dreadfully pale for someone whose skin already spends its time impersonating a snowbank. “I’ll be okay. Are you? You look…well, dreadful.”

Orellana bites her lip. “Salazar is still gone from the castle?”

“As far as I know, yes.” Hari frowns, thinks about it, and then takes her hands. “What’s wrong? You’re scared, and it isn’t just about me.”

“No.” Orellana glances at the door, as if expecting it to swing inward at any moment. “I’m pregnant.”

“But that’s excellent!” Hari’s enthusiasm dies a swift death when Orellana doesn’t smile. “Orellana, it will all be well.”
“It was very close, last time,” Orellana whispers.

Hari squeezes her hands. “Maybe it was, but that was then, and this is now. Five great magicians, your own magic, my stubbornness—and you’re not twelve. You’ll have a fantastic new baby in a castle full of magic.”

Orellana finally smiles a little. “Are you always so certain as to good fortune?”

“No really,” Hari admits. “But you either keep hoping, or you give up. I’ve never wanted to give up. How far along are you?” Hari rephrases the question when Orellana’s forehead creases in bafflement. “How long until the baby is born?”

“Oh, it’s very early yet. September, I think,” Orellana replies. “I’ve not yet told Sal, and neither will you. I will do so when the soul jar is dealt with, but not before.”

“That’s probably a good idea.” Even before today’s Horcrux stupidity, Salazar has been muttering under his breath in Parseltongue in a near non-stop litany of information, ideas, oaths, curses, formulas—so much that Hari stopped trying to keep up because he couldn’t comprehend it. He might only be five years younger than Salazar, but Sal knows a hell of a lot more than Hari does about pretty much everything. In their individual ways, every single one of the Founders is a fucking genius.

“Orellana?” Hari waits until she looks up at him. “Congratulations. You’re going to have a baby.”

Orellana presses her lips together before she lets out a happy little squeak and leaps into Hari’s arms. He spins her around once before she laughingly protests and says it’s time he becomes educated in the particular nuances of pregnancy’s many sicknesses.

Fuck, that’s awful. It’s not enough that pregnancy has to be dangerous from start to finish, but it also has to make you want to vomit up your socks half the time. Hari has never been more glad to be a guy, even though he’s never really given his own gender much consideration beyond ‘definitely not female’ and ‘wanking is an easy, time-honored tradition.’ He doesn’t ever have to worry about pregnancy.

If Hari really does like men, he doesn’t have to worry about putting someone else through that risk, either. He’d like to find out, hopefully before the stupid Horcrux tries to kill him again.

Hari gathers up his courage (sort of) at the end of second week of Februarius. He drinks more than he normally does with supper, but the evening meal is so boisterous that almost no one notices. Orellana is the one who does, and gives him an inquiring look that makes Hari feel like his skin just burst into flame. She nods, smirks in understanding, and immediately pretends that she didn’t notice his blushing at all.

His heart is stuck in his throat when he wanders up to Anselmet and asks if they can talk. Anselmet gives the drawing he’s been sketching out on the floor one more bit of detail with his charcoal and nods. “Just for a moment, I suppose.”

“Well, that’s confidence-inspiring,” Hari drawls, which makes Anselmet lift his head and pay more attention. “Can I ask you a potentially rude question?”

“I’m not certain such a thing exists as long as the asker’s intentions are not foul,” Anselmet replies, rolling up the drawing. If Hari caught the details right, it’s another tower. He wonders which one. “Ask, Nizar.”

“Do you like men? For…well, not romance, I guess. Bedding?” Hari plasters his hands over his
face. “Wow, that was well-spoken.”

Anselmet is chuckling. “I don’t actually have a preference, Nizar.”

Hari lowers his hands cautiously. “Which means what?”

“It means I do not have a preference. I don’t care about the genitalia of the one I’m bedding so long as they’re willing,” Anselmet replies. “I will say I can’t wait to get away from this island and its despairing insistence upon the recognition of only men and women, when more types of people exist.”


“Physically, there is not much variation, no, though it does happen,” Anselmet says thoughtfully. “I meant that there are more variations in how one thinks of oneself up here.” He points at his temple. “The heart, mind, and soul have far more dominance over such affairs than most give them credit for. Even Godric understands that, though one with his preferences holding that understanding is quite the rarity. While the west of Europe tries to grind in the notion that there are only two sexes, there are cultures to the Far East who recognize five.”

Hari grins back. “Five? That’s really cool.”

“It is fascinating, yes. Why such questions?” Anselmet asks.

“Oh. Well.” Hari rubs at the back of his neck, trying not to feel like an idiot. “The Horcrux tried to kill me the other day.”

Anselmet nods. “Oriel and I are aware. We do not discuss it with the others working within the castle, not wishing them to fear what they cannot quite understand.”

“It’s just…” Hari clenches his hands into fists. “I don’t think I like women. I think maybe it’s men, but I haven’t—I’ve never—” That’s as far as he can get before words just stop. It isn’t even embarrassment any longer. It’s the asking.

Anselmet tilts his head. “You know that I’ll be leaving when the new year begins, so I doubt it is courtship you’re after. You wish to discover your preferences, but have no experience to guide your hand.”

“That was a terrible play on words!” Hari bursts out, and then blushes again. Shit!

Anselmet grins. “But at least it caused you to speak again. I’m flattered to be asked. If you’re still certain when the music fades for the night, come to my quarters on the fifth floor. If you’re worried about appearances, then do recall that we’re all used to your nightly wanderings.”

“I wasn’t—” Hari starts to protest, but then Anselmet gets up and scrubs Hari’s hair before he goes to show Rowena the design he was working on. Hari glares after him, finds his eyes wandering lower, and then yanks his gaze away before he decides to start turning colors again.

Anselmet’s lips taste like honey-sweetened blaeberries. Weird. Good weird, though.

He really does like men, too. A lot. He wonders if Anselmet would be open to meeting like this again.

“You are starved for the touch of others,” Anselmet murmurs against Hari’s temple, his hand tracing Hari’s bare back. Hari is boneless in the man’s arms, and not just because he was just
gently stroked to the best orgasm he’s ever had.

“Probably,” Hari admits. “My relatives didn’t touch me unless it was to hit me or drag me somewhere, and people in my time aren’t really into touching each other. Not often, anyway.” Every hug he’d received had been absolutely treasured, moments he relived in his head whenever things were particularly dire at the Dursleys. It was a reminder that someone really did care.

“Then I will be happy to continue to show you touch that doesn’t involve violence,” Anselmet promises.

When Hari gets back to the third floor, all of the blood in his body tries to rush to his face when he discovers that Sal is in the sitting room. “Why are you awake at this hour?” he asks, because Salazar usually isn’t.

Salazar glances up from a scroll. “Your bloody owl.”

Hari grins. He’s glad that Hedwig finally has something semi-regular to do, though he imagines constant flights across the Channel weren’t quite what she expected. “Hedwig is back? How is Fortunata?”

“I quote from my dear one’s letter, ‘I hate everything about all of this except Baby María.’”

Salazar rolls up the scroll. “I fear that expanding her rooms to what an adult might expect has created a tiny, lurking monster.”

“No, she already was that,” Hari says. “Is Hedwig in my room, or did she go downstairs to make Hardwin jealous?”

“I didn’t look to find out.” Salazar picks up a separate scroll and leans back in his chair. “Now I get to discover Estefania’s opinion of their first fortnight together.”

“Have fun with that,” Hari says, and turns to go into his room. He’s tired; he might actually sleep until the breakfast hour instead of waking up an hour before.

“Did you enjoy yourself this evening?”

Hari does his best not to immediately break the latch from grabbing it too hard. “You know me. I don’t sleep all that much.” Please don’t say anything. Please don’t say anything. Please don’t—

“You do realize Anselmet is leaving with the next new year, yes? He’s warned us all that if we plan to change anything else about the castle, we should do it while we still have an architect available. There certainly isn’t another one on this isle.”

He chooses not to thump his head against the door. “I know, Sal.”

“Though I suppose if you asked, Anselmet might delay until Martius if you were going to insist upon observing your time’s age of majority,” Salazar continues.

Harry glances over his shoulder to stare at Salazar, who is frowning down at the second scroll. “What?” he asks, amazed when the word doesn’t emerge as a croak.

“All young man and women leave the nest, eventually,” Salazar replies, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “That is life.”

“Yes. I suppose it is.” Harry swallows. “Good night, Sal.” He’s through his own bedroom door so fast, latching it behind him, that he has no idea if Salazar answered him.
His legs buckle; he slides down the wood of the door until he’s sitting on the floor. Fuck. He wasn’t—Sal has a valid point, but he hadn’t thought he would have to—

“I actually didn’t think it would be that way,” Harry says aloud, feeling stupid. Of course it would be. Of course he would have to—to leave. This is a school and he is a student and…and…Salazar wants him to leave.

Well, what else did you expect? he wonders angrily. You get little moments here and there, but otherwise, family is a thing that other people have.

He has no idea how long he sits in front of the door, but when numbness and cold crawl through his limbs, he doesn’t do anything about it.
Scorched Earth

Chapter Summary

“Children have to grow up and leave the nest at some point. You said as much yourself.”

Chapter Notes

If you're far enough to the east, it's already Friday! Happy Friday/Thursday.

Salazar awakens far too early the next morning, given the late hour in which he finally slept. Perhaps it’s the weather, which has rolled in with a fog composed of heavy mist and crystalized droplets of ice. He often doesn’t sleep well when Moravia decides to be so…so northerly.

It’s one of the rare occasions when he’s down to breakfast with the majority of the castle’s adults, not straggling in to capture the last of breakfast before Meraud starts chivvying the others into preparing dinner.

He has no plans on teasing Hari that morning, not when doing so last night had seen his brother fleeing the room like he was being chased. Godric, however, will never pass on the opportunity to discuss another’s exploits. “It comes to my ears that you had a pleasant evening last night, Nizar.”

Salazar lifts his eyes without moving his head, watching in a way that is not too obvious. His brother glances over at Godric, gives him the barest hint of a smile, and then returns his attention to breakfast. Rest must have cooled most of his embarrassment over such things. A few conversations with Nizar have taught Salazar that 1995 is full of people overburdened by modesty.

Salazar has made it up the kitchen stairs to the ground floor, and is trying to remember if he needs to visit any of their hothouses in the castle, when Orellana grasps him by the arm and pulls him into an empty room. “Orellana, we have a perfectly serviceable bed,” he teases.

Orellana doesn’t smile back. “Something’s wrong,” she says, staring up at him with lips that are thinned by concern.

“What?” Salazar scrubs at his face and wishes desperately for the mythical element of caffeine. “What is wrong?”

“Nizar,” Orellana hisses, giving his arm a shake. “Nizar is what’s wrong.”

Salazar feels like he’s missed several steps in a conversation that Orellana is having with someone else. “Is this about Anselmet?”

“Ansel—no. I truly doubt Anselmet would inspire such a thing. He is a good man. But that is the telling thing, Sal. When Godric made light of the situation, Nizar did not comment.”

“He usually doesn’t if he feels it’s a private concern,” Salazar tries, but still does not understand the
true problem.

“Often, yes, that is true—but Salazar: Nizar did not blush.”

Salazar feels his heart try to fall to the ground. “He does tend to have a chronic case of such, doesn’t he?” Orellana nods, relief filtering into her eyes now that he understands her meaning. “Tell the others. Quietly. Sedemai, Oriel, and Anselmet, too. Mind Magic might not be the strength of you or them, but we may need the assistance.”

Orellana nods and presses a swift kiss to his lips. “Calm yourself before you search for him,” she orders, and leaves the room.

His wife is correct to issue the warning. Salazar stands in place, eyes closed, and breathes until he thinks he can function without shattering furniture or screaming. He must be utterly calm. If the shard has truly managed to do what he suspects, it will goad him, and he refuses to allow that to happen.

Salazar finds Nizar on the seventh floor, staring at an outer corridor wall that has nothing beyond it but empty air. “Nizar?”

“Did you know that there is supposed to be something here?”

“As you haven’t mentioned it? No, I did not,” Salazar replies, curiosity roused in spite of the potential danger. “What is it?”

“A door. A door that I think must have led to other places in the castle,” Nizar says in a thoughtful voice. “Or perhaps it just had so much magic invested in its creation that the magic was in the doorway itself. Like crossing into a pocket dimension.”

“Magical space,” Salazar says.

“Mm. Yes. It’s the variations of it, and wondering how it would be done—that always fascinated me.” Nizar turns around. If Orellana had not all but kicked him into paying attention, Salazar wouldn’t have noticed anything wrong at all. His brother, as he observed before the holiday, is an excellent liar. “What did you want, Salazar?”

Nizar is not the only one who is an excellent liar. Salazar learned from some truly terrifying individuals during his childhood, though not for the same reasons that led his brother to mastering the skill. “I’m concerned about Fortunata. This is the longest time she’ll have spent away from home without us.”

Nizar seems to ponder his words. “Children have to grow up and leave the nest at some point. You said as much yourself.”

“I did, but perhaps I was being hasty…especially when it comes to you. I made an assumption. Of course you would not wish to leave. I doubt Fortunata would be pleased, either.”

The flash in Nizar’s eyes is so swift he almost misses it, but Salazar was watching, waiting like a spider desperate to pounce a fly.

Cold. Overwhelming ice to the heart.

Salazar has his wand out, the tip of the beechwood pressing hard into Nizar’s chest, before he allows himself to think on the action.
“Salazar, what are you—”

“You are very, very good,” Salazar whispers in anger. “You are very, very good at pretending to be human, shard of Tom Riddle.” Salazar bares his teeth. “But you do not understand it. Something makes me suspect that Tom Riddle himself never understood how to be human, either.”

The ice and hatred flares back into Nizar’s eyes as the shard reveals itself. “I’ll kill him,” it threatens.

“No, you won’t. You can’t kill the body you dwell in without killing yourself,” Salazar replies grimly. “You won’t even damage it permanently, will you? You need a mobile host for whatever foolishness you think you can achieve in my time.”

The shard sneers at him. “I used to respect you.”

Salazar shakes his head. “You respected an idea of me, a falsehood created by others.” He casts Nescius Somno without speaking the spell aloud. The shard fights it for a few seconds, but fails. Salazar catches Nizar when he slumps in place.

“You found him,” Godric gasps out when they encounter each other on the fourth floor landing. “I’d just finished checking the grounds in case it occurred to him to leave.”

“No. He was too curious about something on the seventh storey.” Salazar shifts Nizar in his arms and looks at Godric. “I think this must be the day of removal, Godric. It fooled us in a way it shouldn’t have been capable of, not after all the work we’ve done.”

“That’s going to be dangerous,” Godric says.

“Godric.” Salazar has to swallow before he can speak again. “I just had a conversation with a fully cognizant, highly intelligent shard of a man’s soul. Not a whole man, but a piece, one still capable of mimicking Nizar in manner and speech. If Orellana hadn’t noticed something amiss, I don’t know how long it would have taken for us to realize that something had gone wrong.”

Godric doesn’t hesitate before nodding. “I’ll send for the others. The Hall?”

“Yes. Familiar battleground.”

Godric pauses after taking only a single step. “If we fail, you know what he asked me to do.”

“I do.” Salazar manages a grimace of a smile. “Is it wrong of me to say that I’m glad he asked you, and not myself?”

Godric shakes his head. “No, Salazar. Not at all.”

The others have arrived in the Receiving Hall by the time Salazar joins them with his unconscious burden. The table is already cleared, though a pitcher of water and seven goblets sit on a conjured second table.

Salazar waits until he’s put Nizar down on the tabletop before he gives Anselmet an odd look. The man’s face is marked by graceful curls of a foreign writing, done in what is either white paint or crafted by magic. “What is that?”

“When one is going into a battle, or is merely to assist, it is wise to call upon the blessing of the gods,” Anselmet replies.
“Oh, that’s an excellent thought. Do mine, too,” Helga says. Anselmet bows his head before lifting his wand of southern acacia wood, painting Helga’s face in magical black lines that glitter with a coating of gold. “Reworded to call upon the favor of your patron, the Lady Freya,” Anselmet tells her.

Helga smiles. “Thank you, Anselmet. You honor me.”

“Fuck. I’d like it for myself, as well.” Godric steps forward, looking grim. “If that writing of yours can be altered and make allowances for us fools with only one Maker.”

“Faith can attract fools, but having faith is not foolish at all.” The lines appear on Godric’s face in gold-coated scarlet. When Anselmet looks at Rowena, they don’t even speak to each other before he simply raises his wand. Rowena’s face is decorated in sapphire dusted by bronze, a devotion written to Rowena’s patron Baduhenna.

Salazar doesn’t question it when he can feel a growing sense of watchfulness. They would have attracted the eyes of the Other, regardless, given the task they now face today. “Anselmet: Murumendiko Dama and Suarra, please. The air that supports the living serpent of the earth.”

“Please spell those names for me. I’d hate to offer insult by getting it wrong.”

Salazar bites back a smile and spells the Euskaran names out in their Latin translations. The magic touching his skin feels like a downy feather being traced along his face.

“Don’t rub at it with your hands. It is temporary and will easily remove itself,” Anselmet warns them all. He completes the same Euskaran incantation for Orellana in lines of copper that match her eyes; Sedemai’s version matches Godric’s but for its misty blue nature. Oriel accepts writing that resembles Helga’s, but is dedicated to Woden in lines of dark forest green.

“What of Nizar? In this, I do not think he would mind overly much if you chose for him,” Anselmet says.

Salazar thinks of his brother’s bafflement when it comes to faith and gods, and decides not to inflict the Euskaran pair’s influence on him, not yet. “A request to Persephone to stay her husband’s hand.”

“Why?” Anselmet looks startled by Salazar’s words.

“Because if one is asking favors of Death, one does not ask Hades. One asks his wife,” Rowena answers quietly.

Salazar nods. “Exactly so.”

“This battle will be swift, fierce, and so very harsh that there is a chance that any of us five could die,” Rowena announces once emerald lines with golden sparks mark Nizar’s slack face. “As has been before, it is we four who will perform the magic to enter Nizar’s mind. Orellana, Anselmet, Oriel, and Sedemai will be standing behind each of us, lending support and strength to our endeavor in hopes that none die. This will not be easy. We have no way of knowing where that shard will have hidden Nizar’s conscious awareness.”

“I suspect that I know,” Salazar murmurs. “Let that be my task, Rowena. I believe the shard will find itself far more interested in what I am doing, and the three of you will be able to do what is needed.”

Godric frowns. “If you go where I suspect, you will not be able to hear us, nor we you.”
“I am aware.” Salazar reaches out and places his finger on the end of the scar, just above Nizar’s brow. “Now.”

Salazar feels Orellana’s hand grasping his own, but it’s as if he does not enter a mind so much as he is dragged into it, tumbling end over end in a dizzying rush. He ends that pitiful trap and rightens himself while scoffing at the shard’s ridiculous attempts at keeping out intruders.

The next trap is a vise, one that feels like it is going to crush his ribs and his head. Salazar laughs it off. His father was a vile teacher when it came to Mind Magic, and there Salazar learned to defend himself. From Myrddin, Salazar learned how to treat the mind as a playground, as mutable and alterable as a dream.

Salazar and Nizar are connected by blood, no matter that a thousand years separates them. He is also connected by blood to the man who split his soul to create this shard. Salazar calls upon his own blood, which allows him to breeze past all of the traps and mazes the shard prepared to keep the curious at bay.

It takes him directly to a sleeping chamber, one that is not composed of stone, but what looks to be plastered walls washed with white paint. The rug upon the floor stretches to fill every part of the room. There is an odd wooden contraption with a child in it, a baby just old enough to sit up, crawl, and possibly toddle around. The child has stark black hair and his brother’s emerald-shining eyes.

The woman in front of the baby has Orellana’s pale skin, Nizar’s jewel-tone eyes, and a curtain of hair like Godric’s, darker red embers instead of Sedemai’s bright flame. She is young, but stands like a seasoned warrior. Defiance pours forth from her like the unstoppable ocean tide.

She faces a man robed in black, one whose black hair is thin and lank, speaking of a lack of vitality. His skin is like polished marble, and the wand in his hand has a grip carved to resemble a white talon. Salazar cannot see the man’s face, but that is Tom Marvolo Riddle, from a time when he still had his original flesh.

“I didn’t know.”

Salazar looks over to find that he followed the blood true, and he stands next to Nizar. His brother is watching the scene before them, a moment frozen in time. “I didn’t know,” he says again.

“What did you not know?” Salazar asks, hoping that Nizar is aware enough to hear him, and to answer.

“Destroying the soul shard. It—this isn’t like using a Pensieve, Sal. This is supposed to be my memory.”

Salazar takes another look and sees the placement of those who stand in the room. “But you do not see it from your perspective.”

Nizar shakes his head, tears appearing in his eyes before they make swift tracks down his face. “It isn’t my memory. It was never my memory, or I’d be able to see that bastard’s face! It’s Voldemort’s memory. The shard’s memory. When the shard is destroyed, I lose her.”

“Is that why you are standing here, holding this moment still?”

Nizar nods. “I thought—before you got here, I thought, ‘Maybe if I look long enough, I can create my own memory of this.’ It won’t work that way, though. I’ll remember that I used to have this memory. I’ll know that Mum was in it, but I won’t know her face anymore. What’s left will be just what I can remember from the pictures I had.”
Nizar suddenly bends over, coughing into his cupped hands. Salazar is alarmed to see dark blood mottle his brother’s fingers. “Something went wrong, I guess?”

“The shard took control of you,” Salazar replies.

Nizar gives him a look of complete horror. “It did what?”

Salazar smiles. “Well, at least now I can be relieved to find that you didn’t do such a thing on purpose.”

“I FUCKING WELL HOPE NOT!” Nizar shouts, and starts coughing again. “Shit, what’s wrong?”

“That is a sign that we must leave.” Salazar presses his forehead against Nizar’s. “I’m so sorry, brother. You can sacrifice this memory, or you can sacrifice the whole of your life. You have to let this go.”

Nizar grips Salazar’s hand. “Then I let it go. I kind of like my life.”

That finally gets the shard’s attention. Voldemort turns away from the frozen image of mother and son. His blue eyes are the greatest killing freezes of the north, and they burn like one fevered. He might have been handsome once, but one cannot split their soul five times (while standing ready to create a sixth fragment) and expect to retain health and beauty.

“You will not leave,” the shard declares.

“Oh, shut the fuck up,” Nizar retorts. “You don’t have a say in this.”

“You are within the shard. You are within me. My heart. My soul,” Voldemort counters with a quiet, gleeful smile. “You walked into this room, and here is where you will stay.”

“I don’t think so,” Salazar says, unimpressed.

“Oh, but Tom? What happens if you don’t defeat that infant over there?” Nizar gestures at the baby, who is standing up and grasping the wooden bars of his odd bed. “Don’t you have something you came here to do?”

Voldemort hesitates, clearly torn. “It has been done.”

“I don’t see a scar on that child’s head,” Nizar says. “Do you, Sal?”

Salazar is both amused and horrified that his brother would use his own fate against the shard. “It doesn’t seem to have been done at all, no.”

“I guess you botched it, Tom,” Nizar adds in the hiss of Parseltongue. “The most powerful magician in Britain, and you can’t even kill a mother and her infant son.”

Salazar gives the shard a disdainful look, one perfected by Estefania before they were even old enough for Court. “You are all bluster and words, after all. And here it was that I’d just spoken to another of your skill and intelligence. I shall have to tell them I was wrong.”

The memory Nizar has been holding still resumes in a shocking rush of angry words and defiance as Lily Potter and Voldemort face off once more. Nizar looks at Salazar and grasps his hand, wide-eyed. “Fuck, please get us out of here. I don’t want to watch this happen again!”

Salazar nods. “Done.” He tightens his hold on Nizar and then mentally reaches back for the gossamer touch of Orellana’s thoughts.
He thinks he’s succeeded, but then he loses his grip on Nizar’s hand.

* * * *

“Don’t you dare,” Hari whispers aloud, even as he’s staring down Voldemort in Little Hangleton again, their wands joined by *priori incantatem* while shades of the deceased emerge. Dumbledore told Hari they weren’t ghosts, just reflections, but Hari thinks Dumbledore is wrong. There was too much intelligence, too much *thoughtfulness*, in what those spirits did to secure his safety that night.

He hears Rowena’s voice as clearly as if she were speaking next to him: *The tree, Nizar. Focus on it. See it as if it is truly there before your very eyes!*

Hari grits his teeth and focuses on that image with every fiber of his being. Bright, emerald green leaves veined in blue and violet shine against a sky of multi-hued, brilliant blue. The first pale buds of apple blossoms reflect prisms of color, the whole spectrum of the rainbow in shades that no one but he and Salazar can see.

Salazar. Salazar had been—Sal! Hari yells.

*Keep your focus on that tree, little brother,* Salazar replies. Hari catches a glimpse of the shard itself, the knots surrounding it untangled by sword and wand, by the tearing of desperate, grasping fingers. There are still many knots remaining.

The moment his focus wavers, Hari loses his tree and is instead facing Tom Riddle’s shade. The walking Horcrux kicks the diary out of Hari’s reach before using Gryffindor’s sword to slaughter a phoenix—

“NO!” Hari shouts, though whether it’s in his head or aloud, he doesn’t know. It doesn’t matter. That tree is his. He might not be fond of apple trees after this, but he knows that tree, every inch of it. Every single aspect. Nothing of the shard is within that tree.

This time it’s Helga he hears, not in his head, but a whisper at his ear. “Nizar. You must let it go. You are still holding onto a part of the shard yourself.”

No. Absolutely not. He can’t be. What is holding?

He agreed to let her go. He meant it. He let go, he let Voldemort turn to raise his wand in that memory one final time…

*Lily! Take Harry and run!*

Oh. Hari knows instantly what he hasn’t yet let go of. It’s sound only, easy to mistake as his own memory…

*You are the reason they’re both dead, Harry.*

He almost loses the tree. The shard keeps trying to show him Cedric’s too-still body, his shock-wide eyes, another death he could not prevent.

No. He is not responsible for his parents’ deaths. He was an infant. He isn’t responsible for anything Voldemort has done.
Cedric, Hari thinks for the very first time, was not my fault.

Think of what you will lose without my strength, Voldemort whispers.

Everything.

No.

He won’t lose anything. He has something to gain.

Hari feels something twist in his thoughts when he screams the words. “I DON’T WANT IT ANYMORE!”

“Why?” He can feel Helga’s familiar grip on his hand.

Hari gasps, the memory of so many accusing eyes flickering across his vision. “I DON’T WANT TO BE REMINDED OF FAILING!”

He hears something scream, broken glass agony that assaults his senses. Then Hari can see again, and the shard is gone. He simply stares, feeling like he can’t breathe. The place where the shard dwelled is empty, a blank space in his own thoughts.

“You don’t have to carry that reminder anymore, dearest,” Helga tells him, and it sounds like she is…is she crying? Oh, no—no, the scary Viking is not supposed to be crying. “Nizar. You are free.”

* * *

Hari wakes sometime later, blinking his eyes as the familiar ceiling of the Receiving Hall slowly comes into focus. There is the heavy weight of heat along his body, possibly a blanket covering him, and a pillow beneath his head. His chest aches, his head hurts, and it feels as if he had to regrow every single bone in his body with Skele-Gro.

He feels like he was run over by the fucking Knight Bus.

Hari cranes his head and finds the source of the heat at his side. “Oh, it’s you,” he rasps. Diego lifts his head and whines, his tail thumping repeatedly against Hari’s leg. “Good dog.”

“I didn’t expect to see you awake so soon.” Sedemai leans over him as she presses her hand to his forehead. “How do you feel?”


“Your heart stopped beating,” Sedemai tells him in a gentle voice, “when Salazar lost his mental grip on you. It took a short span of time for Helga to convince your stubborn heart to again perform its task of keeping you alive. That is why you have a blanket, a living heat source named Diego at your side, and why you will not be moving for a while.”

“That’s okay. Not sure I could even if I wanted to,” Hari says. “Where are…where is everyone?”

“Unconscious on the floor,” Sedemai says dryly. “They all but dropped the moment Rowena confirmed the Horcrux destroyed. Fortunately, we were standing with them, waiting to catch those
who fell. I wasn’t certain it would be wise to move them, so we brought blankets for all and built up the fire.”

Rowena warned Hari that the final removal of the shard was going to be harsh on all of them, not just Hari. He’s not really surprised.

Hari looks at the misty blue lines on Sedemai’s face, like her skin was painted. Writing, maybe? “What’s on your face? It’s beautiful.”

“Anselmet introduced us to the notion of writing one’s battle intent upon our faces. It’s mindful of the old Britons and Picts with their blue woad, but I think this more elegant.” Sedemai stands up. “Anselmet, come here. Yours is the better one to view.”

Anselmet leans over Hari, revealing crisp white, unrecognizable writing on his black skin. “Hello, Nizar.”

“Hi.” Anselmet holds still while Hari reaches up with a shaking hand to touch one of the white lines. It comes away on his fingertip like powder. “It’s pretty. Think I just smudged it, though.”

“It has already served its purpose.” Anselmet gives Hari a cautious look. “Did I…I did not mean to cause you harm.”

Hari blinks a few times, confused. “You didn’t? Pretty sure snogging isn’t harmful.”

“Snogging. Oh. A slang word again.” Anselmet presses the back of his hand to Hari’s cheek. “I had concerns. This was a very sudden and unexpected event.”

“Trust me—not you,” Hari reassures him. “Also, go wash up and sleep. Your eyes are glassy, so you’re either exhausted or stoned.”

“Stoned,” Anselmet repeats, his lips quirking into a relieved smile. “You will need to explain that word when we’re both conscious again.”

Orellana replaces Anselmet, taking a firm grip on Hari’s hand. She helps him to drink water, which eases the rawness in his throat, and then gives him a stern look. “You scared us all. You will not repeat that.”

“Well, the soul shard is dead, so I won’t repeat it.” Hari grins when she smiles and shakes her head. “I’m okay, Orellana. I mean, I could see a big empty spot in my head, but I’m fine.”

Orellana’s smile fades. “That is a scar, Nizar, one that will never heal.”

“That’s inconvenient.” Even Hari knows that was a nonsense statement. Orellana rolls her eyes and puts her hand to his forehead. It’s either exhaustion or magic, but Hari still slides into unconsciousness at her touch.
Salazar dreams of those last moments again and again: Rowena granting him the fatal strike to the shard after Godric severed the final knot, which caused the shard to emit horrific shrieking.

_Yours, Salazar_, Rowena whispering. _He is your family._

_Both of them_, he thinks, but without mourning for Voldemort. The last blow he gives to the shard is probably too powerful, strong enough to leave his brother with a terrible headache, but the shrill noise ends at last.

He remembers Helga standing in that empty space, a scar that will remain for the rest of Nizar’s life. _I know what the shard took from him._ She sounds mournful, but resolute. _He will awaken as himself, Salazar. He is already used to being without it._

Salazar can smell apple blossoms in his sleep, see streaks of color from Hari’s early summer apple tree in bloom against the vibrant blue sky. He finally awakens to smell fruit in truth, apples baking in a heavy iron pan over the fire in the Receiving Hall. Oriel is tending it and a rising bit of bread with a frown of concentration on her face, but she doesn’t seem worried. That’s a good sign.

He rolls over onto his hands and knees and immediately feels like he’s going to be sick upon the floor. No, he will not be doing that. He waits until his belly stops protesting, and then uses the nearest wall to gain his footing.

Nizar is still resting on the table, blanketed in two different quilts and Diego. Hedwig is perched on Diego’s head, sleeping. Diego doesn’t seem overly concerned about being turned into an owl perch, but Hedwig often demands friendship from the unlikely.

“Drink the water on that table,” Oriel orders him without turning around. “If you can keep it down without retching, you can eat.”

Salazar isn’t going to argue, not when he feels desert-parched. After he drinks down a full goblet and thankfully does not retch, he takes another look around the Hall. “The others have already
“You are the last to awaken, yes,” Oriel confirms, swinging the iron bar away from the fire to remove the pan from the heat. “Rowena says that you poured more of your magic into the task than any of them.”

“Last to wake?”

Oriel snorts. “Nizar woke before any of you. Such a stubborn lad, even when he’s exhausted. Orellana calmed his restlessness so that he would sleep again.” She lifts her chin. “He was so very fortunate yesterday. I’m glad we didn’t lose him.”

“So am I.” When he’s certain his legs will carry him the short distance from one table to another, Salazar goes to Nizar. His brother doesn’t stir at Salazar’s touch, truly deep in sleep instead of the restless slumber that is more common.

Nizar’s skin is paler than usual, but someone must have wiped his face clean of the green lines Anselmet gave him. A hint of grey-violet remains beneath Nizar’s closed eyes, a sign of the battle’s physical toll.

The scar bled again while they worked. Salazar wipes away the remaining flecks of dried blood and then hesitates in surprise. The lightning-shaped scar on Nizar’s forehead is all but gone. There is a faint white line of what had just yesterday been a stark, red-edged scar. He suspects it will eventually disappear completely.

“I hope you won’t miss that scar,” Salazar whispers. “Gods know that I will not.”

He eats a bit of fruit-laden bread that Oriel brings him, which gives him enough energy to make his slow, aching way to the privy on the ground floor. Now he wishes they’d placed a bath inside as well; it would do him good to soak in hot water.

Such won’t be necessary in the future. One of Anselmet’s newest designs is a tower devoted to healing, which will have a bath on each floor to accompany the privies. An entire tower of healing is a bit large for a school, even if they gain a hundred students, but Anselmet wisely pointed out that if there is ever a siege, those living in Castleview might need to shelter within Hogewáþ’s walls, and then that sort of space will serve dual purpose.

Salazar goes back to Nizar, sits down, and rests his chin on his propped-up hand. He absently pets Diego with his other hand when the dog whines for a bit of attention, then scratches Hedwig’s breast, drawing a soft hoot of contentment from the sleeping owl.

He should see to Orellana. He doesn’t want to leave Nizar in this room without family nearby.

“Did you—did you really want me to leave?”

Salazar sucks in a startled breath, lifting his head to realize that he dozed off while sitting at the table. He looks down at Nizar to find that his eyes are open, revealing the familiar green that shines the same color as their family magic. Nizar’s voice is steady, even if it sounds rough.

“What? What are you speaking of?”

Nizar licks his lips and grimaces. “Ugh, my teeth are foul. I meant—the last thing I remember before getting stuck in that memory, before you found me…you were talking of how young men and women leave the nest. You spoke like I was supposed to do so.”
Salazar feels his brows drawing together in bafflement. “You don’t have to, if you do not wish to go,” he says, trying to figure out his misstep. “I was largely thinking on my daughter when we last spoke. But we’ve noticed your eye lingering on Anselmet for months now, Nizar. Perhaps we assumed more interest than was true?”

Nizar sighs. “I’ve had a crush on Anselmet for months. Not the same thing as wanting to court someone.”

“Crush.” Salazar rubs his forehead with one finger. “An attraction that is vaguely romantic, but not to the point of wishing for a formal relationship?”

“Close enough, yes,” Nizar says. “I don’t know if there is a term for liking someone and not wanting to marry them.”

“English has many descriptive nouns I’m still unaware of. There is probably such a word in their language.” Salazar grips Nizar’s hand. “No, little brother. I do not wish you to go, though I will always be aware that you may one day choose to do so.” He hesitates, thinking on his words. “Is this my fault? Did I—did I cause you to fear that you were losing the family you just gained?”

“No, and yes,” Nizar glares at Salazar. “Your words caused fears based on my horseshit, Sal. That isn’t your fault. I’m the one who slipped. I just didn’t know that the shard could…could…” He frowns. “Actually, I still don’t know what happened. The shard took control how?”

“It literally possessed you, little brother,” Salazar murmurs, since he does not wish to shout these words throughout the castle. “Orellana noticed at once that you did not react as you should have to Godric’s teasing.”

Nizar looks appalled. “That’s—ugh. Now I really, really understand how Ginny feels. I don’t think I have words to express how utterly unwanted that is.”

“The shard is very, very dead, so it can’t happen again,” Salazar reminds him, and then brushes Nizar’s hair away from his forehead. “Your scar is fading.”

Nizar’s expression morphs into one of tight anger. “Good.”

“You did not like it?” Salazar asks, surprised by Nizar’s response.

“It was a reminder. Worse, it was an identifying mark that the entire fucking wizarding world knew about. I was reading up on Metamorphe Magia just to learn how to get rid of it. Fuck that scar. I’m glad it will be gone.”

Salazar wakes up later to someone’s gentle hand on his shoulder. He jerks upright and then eases when he realizes that it’s Rowena. “Good—” Salazar glances at the window. “Good evening? Night? Morning?”

“Good evening,” Rowena corrects in an amused voice. She holds out two glass phials with their clear glass stoppers. “These are correct, yes? We knew you were preparing for the shard’s removal, but I am not good at identifying your brews. Labeling them would be a kindness for the rest of us, Salazar.”

Salazar selects one of the phials and tilts it in the light until he recognizes the deep green and yellow-violet hints of his brewed Restorative Potion. “Yes, this is correct. There should have been five…or possibly more.” He can’t recall at that moment if he’d finished a second batch or not.

“There were five,” Rowena confirms. “I assume the other three would be for us?”
“They are,” Salazar says, accepting the second phial for Nizar.

“Good. I still feel so sarding awful that my head hurts too much for true rest,” Rowena says in blunt, pained honesty. “If I hear Godric whine once more about his aches, I will take after him with one of Meraud’s baking pans. Make certain you drink those,” she adds, almost as an afterthought, before leaving the Hall again.

Nizar lets out a dry chuckle, revealing his wakefulness. “Cranky Gaul.”

“Yes.” Salazar uncaps the first phial and drinks it before he allows himself to register the taste. It normally does not bother him, but he still feels lingering nausea and wishes to take no chances. Then Salazar helps Nizar to sit up so he can drink the contents of the other phial, though at least his brother no longer cringes at the sight of this potion.

“Maybe I’ll be able to walk tomorrow,” Nizar muses after lying down again. “I’m utterly done with needing to be carried to a privy and back again.”

“I haven’t even made it beyond the privy yet,” Salazar mutters, putting his head back down on the rucked up corner of a blanket. “I want to sleep in my own bed.”

“Me, too. Even if it’s a lumpy disaster that is either too squishy or too lumpy. Thousands of geese sacrifice their feathers, and they still can’t make up their minds,” Nizar complains.

“Bind it better,” Salazar says into the blanket.

“Sal?”

“Hmm?”

“Fucking how?” Nizar asks.

Salazar lifts his head. “You…adjust the cords that bind it into its shape,” he says, and then groans when Nizar gives him a flat stare. “Bedding is not crafted that way in your time, is it?”

“Nope.”

Salazar reaches out to scrub at his brother’s hair, which Nizar tolerates with tired, fond patience. “I will show you. It never occurred to me that a bed could change so much.”

“That’d be nice,” Nizar slurs, and then drops into slumber again a moment later.

*          *          *          *

It’s the eighteenth day of Februarius when Hari feels like he can make the slow trek up the stairs to the third floor. He lost four days to the stupid shard, but at least it’s dead.

Salazar is at his side for the climb, since he didn’t make it off the ground floor, either. Not until today. That means Hari can tease his brother. “Orellana has something she wishes to tell you.”

“So you keep hinting,” Salazar grumbles back, lifting the latch and letting the door swing inward. He walks inside; Hari nearly collides with him when Salazar halts in surprise.
Hari peers over Salazar’s shoulder and sees Orellana standing in their sitting room. She’s holding up a white outfit, long-sleeved with a long skirt, similar to what baby María was wearing in Burgos. It’s a bit smaller though, meant for a baby when it’s newborn and tiny.

“Really?” Salazar whispers.

Orellana grins and nods. “September,” she replies.

Salazar rushes forward to embrace her, lifting her from the floor. “September,” he repeats. “You’re certain you wish to—to go through this? It is early enough to end the pregnancy without discomfort.”

Orellana shakes her head, smiling. “No need, Sal. I’m certain. We’re to have a second child.”

Hari realizes there is a wide smile on his face. He hadn’t thought on it, before, but—he’s going to be an uncle. An uncle to not just Fortunata and María, but also to this new baby.

He feels like he’s floating on a cloud as he washes his face and then flops onto his own bed. An uncle. He is. Will be. Close enough. He goes to sleep while still arguing with himself about the adoption’s timing.

Hari wakes the next day, but he has no idea what time it is other than the undeniable fact that it’s daylight. He stumbles into the garderobe and manages to not drown himself in a hot bath, reveling in the fact that he no longer smells like dried blood and sweat. He smells like—well, he’s not actually certain what the soap is made from, but it’s awesome. He cleans horror off of his teeth and thinks shaving would be a terrible idea no matter how itchy his face feels. He makes it out to one of the sitting room’s padded benches before his legs tell him he’s walked far enough. He drops into place and tries not to pant for breath while his arms and legs tremble.

“I didn’t do that much,” he whimpers to Orellana, who is using his gifted bolt of white cotton-blended wool to make another baby outfit. He wonders how many clothes babies need.

“You nearly died,” Orellana reminds Hari, glancing up from her work to smile at him. “Have patience with yourself.”

“I’m terrible at that.” Hari thinks about it before using his wand to Summon Formar La Magia. He can feel the strain in his head just from that bit of magic and decides that’s definitely all the magic he’s doing today. He can at least read something interesting, though.

His Transfiguration textbooks were dull rubbish. Or maybe just dull. This one explains the theory in a way that bloody well makes sense.

“I wonder if it’s because they haven’t separated out the science yet,” Hari mutters when he comes across another mention of atoms and how they can be rearranged to alter the composition of matter, even though the book isn’t calling them atoms, but atomus. It’s close enough that it might actually be the same word.

“What was that?”

Hari looks up at Orellana. “Oh, sorry. I was just thinking out loud. What does atomus mean?”

Orellana purses her lips. “Indivisible particle, I believe.”

“Thanks.” Definitely the same word, then. He’d really liked science in primary school, often hiding in the library to read books on the subject instead of daring recess and Dudley’s fists.
Dudley would tell his aunt every time after school that Harry hadn’t been at recess to be certain he got in trouble, didn’t get to eat dinner that night, but he thought maybe—maybe—it would be worth it, if he could ever get away...

Hari startles awake when Salazar’s hand touches his shoulder. He fell asleep in the middle of reading. “Hi, Sal.” He yawns and tucks the scrap of parchment back into the book to mark where he’d left off. “Another one?” he asks when he spies the phial.

Salazar raises an eyebrow. “You aren’t the only one who needs such. I nearly planted my face into my own cauldron while brewing it. I missed no steps,” he adds after a moment.

“If you thought you had, you’d have started over again,” Hari says, taking the green phial and swallowing the Restorative Potion. “What time is it?” he asks, noticing that Orellana isn’t in the sitting room any longer.

“Thirty minutes before the supper hour. I asked Oriel to bring the meal here; I don’t think I could manage stairs or Desplazarse again tonight,” Salazar replies. “Were you dreaming, Nizar? You seemed as if you were.”

Hari thinks on it. “Yes,” he says, blinking a few times as the magical kick of Sal’s excellent potion makes him feel more alert all at once. Definitely less likely to fall on his face if he tries to stand up. “It was an odd dream.”

“Tell me?” Salazar requests.

Hari smiles. “You’re still trying to prove I have Divination talent.”

Salazar tilts his head. “Perhaps. Would it be so terrible?”

“It would be strange, especially if this is truly a real glimpse of the future,” Hari says, and describes seeing Snape in his aunt and uncle’s house—specifically, standing in the doorway to his old bedroom. Petunia had her back to the open door, her eyes wide with fear as she gazed down at the black wand at her throat. Snape’s expression had been utterly cold, black eyes filled with more fury than Hari ever witnessed during his entire time at Hogwarts. He can’t remember the exact words spoken in the dream, but he feels a remembered chill at the idea of a Withering Curse.

“Everything she touches will wither unless she has pure intentions.” Salazar has a grim smile on his face. “What an excellent notion. I shall have to remember that one.”

“Yes, but…it’s ridiculous,” Hari says. “Snape doesn’t care about—well, that. Me. It can’t be anything like a Seer’s dream.”

“Not necessarily. If you are dreaming of a time after you were missing, then perhaps the man who would be most effective at the task is searching for you,” Salazar suggests. “I am not trained in spycraft, but knew several of them in Ramiro’s Court, and met still others when I schooled in Córdoba for a time. They are excellent at uncovering information that others do not know how to seek.”

“Yes, but why curse my aunt?” Hari presses. “That sounds a lot more like wishful dreaming.”

Salazar doesn’t dismiss the idea. “Perhaps,” he allows. “But then you would have to consider that, were this a wishful dream, is it this Professor Snape who would be in the role you dreamed of?”

“Probably not, even if he knows how to terrify the life out of people,” Hari admits. “If it was my
brain making it up, it would be Sirius or Remus. Maybe Professor McGonagall.” Arthur and Molly are nice, but he doesn’t see either of them threatening to curse his aunt that way. “Or you.”

“I am not in that time, Nizar,” Salazar reminds him, grinning.

“Shut up. This is the ‘making it up’ assumption. I’ll write it down later, but I doubt it will be useful,” Hari says. “I’m starting to think…I know we haven’t spoken to Myrddin yet, but I’m starting to get the feeling that maybe I don’t go back. Ever.”

Salazar frowns. “What makes you believe such?”

“Just a feeling.” Hari shrugs. “I could be wrong.”

“I’ve had that feeling also, but it seems…incomplete. No, I don’t know what that means. Divination, unlike the brewing of a potion, is not exact.” Salazar looks thoughtful as he sits down next to Hari on the bench. “It could mean you never go back, or it could mean that it is such a distant event that the shape of it is unrecognizable.”

Hari bites his lip when he feels a pang of guilt. He misses his friends, but he’s realizing he’d prefer either of those two options. Never going back, or having it be a long time from now: both seem a hell of a lot more appealing than still being too young to deal with Wizarding Britain’s horseshit.

“I realize you remain exhausted, but I had a thought in my head when I awoke this morning.”

“What sort of thought?” Hari asks.

“You feel overwhelmed by crowds, by excessive celebration—I would imagine that ridiculous Tournament contributed to this feeling,” Salazar says.

“In part, yes.” Hari glances at him. “But mostly it was the bit about being everyone’s stupid famous symbol.”

“That, as well.” Salazar laces his fingers together. “There is no actual reason that the adoption has to take place on the Summer Solstice. Any of the four points of the solar year would suffice. I’d merely planned for it to be in the summer to give you time to recover from the shard’s removal…but perhaps I am choosing the wrong day.”

“You mean like delaying it until the Harvest Equinox, or the Winter Solstice?”

Salazar shakes his head. “No. I mean that if you are certain of your own mind and desires…there is no reason it cannot take place sooner. The Lencten Equinox is on fifteenth Martius.”

“So…twenty-four days from now,” Hari says, and Salazar nods. “And no one really does anything on the Equinoxes here.”

“They are good days for scrying, and other kingdoms might pay more attention, but this isle only uses the equinoxes to mark the planting or harvesting of certain crops,” Salazar replies. “It would be a quiet affair. Those of us in the castle, of course. Estefania, Andoni, and our niece would visit for the occasion. Bermudo would need to send a witness on behalf of the Court. Our cousins in Ipuzko wish to attend, but understand that you might find it to be too many people, and would be pleased by a visit from you afterwards—perhaps on twenty-fifth Martius, when others are tending to the Feast of the Annunciation.”

“They’re being thoughtful, and they’re correct. That much all happening at once might be overwhelming, even though I like our cousins,” Hari says. “Estefania would be fine with being
here next month instead of waiting for June—Iunius?”

“Estefania has decided she adores you.” Salazar scowls. “She’d consider it all but her own personal victory if the adoption happened sooner.”

“Is that something I should apologizing for? Estefania deciding she likes me best?” Hari asks, trying not to grin.

Salazar laughs outright. “Oh, not at all. It means she is turning all of her manipulative attention upon you, and I no longer have to bear the brunt of it alone.”

“Oh, great. You haven’t even adopted me yet, and you’re already throwing me under the bus,” Hari teases.

“What the fuck is a bus, Nizar?”

“It’s—you know what? Never mind about the bus,” Hari says. “I’ll tell you later. The Lencten Equinox, Sal. Let’s do that. It means I have less time to be nervous about it.”

Salazar gives him a cautious glance. “You’re certain?”

“Sal, I hadn’t even been here a year yet when this place began to feel like I was home. Yes, I’m certain,” he says, and he’s suddenly enveloped by Salazar’s rib-bruising hug.

*          *          *          *

The first time he’s able to go down to the kitchen again for a meal, everyone stands up and applauds him as he enters. Hari stares at them in bafflement. “What?”

“You survived an ordeal that would have felled a lesser man,” Godric declares, holding up his goblet. It’s the silver set, not the ones carved from horn or stone.

Sedemai nods. “Tonight, we honor you.”

Hari resists the urge to hide behind Salazar, who is smirking. He knew, the bastard. “I—uh—thank you?”

Rowena looks somber, but Hari can see a smile lurking in her eyes. “Nizar Hariwalt, of the House of Ancient Serpents, by right of blood and soon by rite of adoption: fifteen-year-old magician and master of Mind Magic.”

“Nizar Hariwalt, master of Mind Magic,” the other magicians in the room repeat, goblets raised.

“I— ” Hari swallows. “I literally don’t know what to say.”

Salazar nudges him. “Thank them again, idiota. They are recognizing you.”

Hari glares at Salazar before he looks at those gathered: Rowena, Helga, Godric, Orellana, Sedemai, Anselmet, Oriel—in their role as magicians, not as hired servants. Eight magicians once he includes Salazar, plus Meraud, Eadburga, Mauris, and Milon. “Thank you for helping to ensure I didn’t die horribly, and that I managed to learn something truly useful in the process.”
Helga laughs. “True words, Nizar.”

That seems to be enough ceremony for everyone. They toast his health before Hari is shuffled into a seat between Salazar and Helga, who immediately hugs him with one arm and doesn’t let go until Hari has a trencher of food to deal with.

“You really think I have a mastery in Mind Magic?” Hari finally asks Rowena when he gets the chance. He hasn’t really had much to eat aside from bone broth in days, so supper definitely took precedence over asking potentially stupid questions.

Rowena merely raises an eyebrow. “If you did not have such, you wouldn’t have been so quick to discern the last links that tied you to the soul shard. We did not find those, Nizar. You did.”

Hari feels both thrilled in his success and horribly chilled. If he hadn’t been able to do that, he’d be dead. “Oh.”

Rowena sips at her goblet before lowering it to smile at him. “That is one lesson beneath me completed. Is our schooling together done?”

“Non nondum. Im ‘vere malum in Latine.” Hari makes a face. “Was that correct?”

“It was, but I deplore your Latin in other matters.” Rowena gives him a speculative look. “There is no magical mastery when it comes to the art of spoken language unless you are literally using your words to weave, as a magical bard will do. The same applies to the written word; there is no mastery for learning how to write in other languages unless you weave with your words in a manner that creates.”

“I’m not worried about either of those. I don’t think I’m bard material,” Hari says, grinning. “But knowing how to understand people? How to read books in other languages? Not all translation spells work perfectly, not with differences in grammar and prose, turns of phrase, or even the dreaded slang. I’d really like to know how to read the books we have. Besides, if I want to write in magic, I can pester Gedeloc. I like his version.”

“You need to finish a mastery with me before you drag Gedeloc back into this,” Godric says.

“What, I can’t do both at the same time?” Hari asks.

“Well, yes,” Godric says after a moment. “It would be bad to mix up the lessons, though.”

“Look, even if I mess up with the writing, you’ll only be a tree for about a day, Godric,” Hari says, straight-faced.

Godric gives him a suspicious look. “You’re in jest.”

Hari shrugs. “I’ll just have to be certain I don’t mix up the lessons then, won’t I?”

“You know, most magicians are often satisfied with a single mastery,” Meraud says as she stops by to retrieve his empty trencher. “You could leave off with one.”

“Why would I want to do that?” Hari asks, and smiles when the others laugh. “I could do that, but it sounds dull.”

Godric points at Salazar with his knife. “Still insane, still your responsibility.”

Salazar waits until Godric is distracted by Anselmet before he leans over. “Is there really such a
spell in Pictish that can turn another into a tree?"

“Probably. I mean, it’s just Transfiguring one living thing into another living thing,” Hari replies. “Besides, he won’t let me throw snakes at him. I have to make sure he’s still leery about something, don’t I?”

Salazar slings his arm around Hari’s shoulder and kisses his hair. “I’m glad you’re here, little brother. If you do discern the means of turning Godric into a tree, please let me watch.”

Hari grins. “No promises.”

*          *          *          *

Salazar returns to his family’s quarters early on the evening of the twenty-second instead of lingering downstairs with the others. Nizar didn’t come to join them for the evening meal. His brother’s absence is a minor concern, but it has not been long since the removal of the soul shard, so it is a concern nonetheless.

Salazar knocks on the door to Nizar’s chamber with a gentle hand. When he hears no response, he sends his Patronus to check the room, just to be certain. That gains him nothing, so he lifts the latch and gently pushes the door open.

Nizar is lying on the floor, sound asleep, with his head pillowed on one of his cloaks. He’s surrounded by scrolls and individual sheets of paper that he’s either charmed flat or weighed down until the paper remembers the new shape. If it weren’t for the woolen rug that Milon was finally able to place in the room, winning a war of nearly eight months, Salazar suspects Nizar would be lying on the castle’s stone floor in an uncomfortable twist of limbs.

Then Salazar notices the images on the flat sheets of paper. He was wrong; his brother could possibly sleep upon a rubble pile at the moment and not notice.

Salazar kneels down on the rug and picks up the nearest paper with gentle hands. On it is captured the colorful image of a red-haired girl with green eyes on a broom, one with ample freckles and a bright smile. She reminds Salazar a bit of Sedemai, and flies about on her broom as if she doesn’t need one at all to touch the heavens. Nizar’s printing is on a tiny corner, away from the colors that bleed across the page: Ginevra Weasley (Ginny).

He bites his lip and picks up the next one. This is of a blond-haired boy with a sharp chin, pale features, and eyes that wish to be both blue and grey. There is warmth lurking in his gaze that the boy is desperately attempting to hide when he speaks to another whose image was not captured on the paper. The boy is wearing the odd uniform Salazar saw on Tom Riddle during his scrying, one he also sometimes glimpsed in Nizar’s thoughts while they worked to remove the soul jar.

Nizar calls this one Prat (Draco Malfoy). It does not escape Salazar’s notice that the ribbon at the boy’s neck is striped emerald and silver.

“And what does prat mean, I wonder?” Salazar murmurs.

“Berk. Arsehole. Fucking twit.”

Salazar glances up to see that Nizar awoke sometime in the last few minutes and didn’t bother to

Nizar shakes his head. “No. If I wanted them to be secret, I certainly wouldn’t have left the entire pile out for anyone in the family to look at.”

“Why did you draw someone whom you think so highly of?” Salazar asks, smiling.

“Draw? Oh, you mean Rowena’s Recordari Charm. The Pensieve that isn’t a Pensieve at all.”

“Pensife,” Salazar corrects, though it might be a lost cause, as Nizar claims *sife* and *sieve* are the same words exactly but for their spelling. “My question remains.”

Nizar sits up and swipes his hand through his hair. “If something had gone wrong with the shard, I didn’t want to forget any of them. Even if I didn’t like some of them. I’ve been working on these since we returned from Ipuzko. I just started working on others today.”

Salazar nods and puts down the Prat to pick up a third flat drawing. This is of another red-haired, green-eyed woman, but she is an adult, not a student. The image is fainter, the details not as crisp, and unlike Ginevra’s picture, barely moves at all. “Your mother.”

Nizar nods. “What I can recall of her from other pictures. I keep trying, but so far, that’s the best I can do.”

“This is still an excellent likeness,” Salazar tells Nizar, but chooses not to push further. Instead, he picks up the moving image of a young woman with brown skin and brown hair even wilder than Nizar’s. “And who is this?”

“That’s Hermione.” Nizar smiles. “She and Ron are two of the first friends I ever had. She’s brilliant, too. You like intelligence; you’d like her. She might never let you sleep for all the questions she’d ask, though.”

Salazar smiles down at the image. The girl with the Greek name has a keen eye and a kind smile. Hari captured her image in the midst of writing on a scroll with a curving quill, though she looks up on occasion, as if seeking out another.

Ron Weasley is a red-haired lad, older brother to the girl on the broom. He’s sitting before a board that looks quite a bit like it’s meant for Shatranj, though the pieces are not quite the same. “It’s not really Shatranj anymore. It’s chess,” Nizar answers his unspoken question. “He’s quite good.”

“And which do you prefer? Chess, or Shatranj?” Salazar asks.

“Neither,” Nizar admits. “It’s been good to learn the game, but it isn’t my favorite. I preferred Quidditch. I was my team’s Seeker.”

“Seeker.” Salazar can easily see his brother preferring such, given the way he flies. “Yet you’ve never joined us for a game.”

Nizar glances away and picks up a scroll. “I wasn’t ready. When I built that broom and realized I could play Quidditch again, it was my old team I wanted to play the game with—and I can’t. Maybe I won’t have that opportunity ever again, but still I had to…to…”

“Grieve,” Salazar offers quietly.

Nizar sighs and nods. “Yes.” He unrolls the scroll, gesturing for Salazar to hold the other end. Pictured on a stretch of a green Quidditch pitch, with a stadium far more complex than their
wooden creation in the field, are six flyers roaming around in the air. “Just wait. They’ll come closer.”

The fliers do, one at a time. Angelina Johnson, with long braids and Anselmet’s dark skin. Alicia Spinnet, who looks as if she is directly of the hindavī. Oliver Wood, with dark eyes, tight-curled dark blond hair, and the grim smile of a temperamental warrior. Two more red-haired lads, older siblings to Ron and Ginevra, who perform with bats and Bludger as if they’re mirror images of each other. Brown-haired and brown-eyed Katie Bell, who is off with a Quaffle before the twins can catch her.

“Scarlet and gold.” Salazar watches Nizar re-roll the scroll. “Godric’s colors.”

Nizar ducks his head. “There is a magical system that Sorts us to the four different Houses you and the others created here. I argued with it. It wanted Slytherin, but I met the Prat, first, while he was acting very much like my aunt, uncle, and cousin. I already had to live with those sorts of people. I didn’t want to spend ten months of the year sharing a sleeping chamber with another one.”

“Godric would be quite the braggart to know you’d been a student solely of his House,” Salazar says in a mild voice. “Too bad for him that you’re still going to become a member of my House, instead.”

It’s the right thing to say. When Salazar glances at Nizar from the corner of his eye, Nizar is smiling again. “We’ll have to tell him after the adoption. The response should be entertaining.”

“It will be, yes.” Salazar finds a captured image that looks a great deal like Nizar had in Martius of last year. He is an adult of an age with Lily Potter, and shares Nizar’s wild hair, but his skin is light brown where Lily’s and Nizar’s is pale. This would be James Potter. If the resemblance was even stronger in Nizar’s youth, it’s no wonder he is sick unto death of being compared to his father.

“Does it matter all that much, though?” Nizar asks. “I mean, does me becoming your brother mean that I’m aligned to your House in the school sense as well as family?”

Salazar shakes his head. “You’ve been learning under all six of us, Nizar. No, you are not aligned to any corner of the school beyond the familial binding you will have to me. I doubt even your apprenticeships will be noted as such.”

“It’s formally an apprenticeship, then? Whatever comes next?”

Salazar glances up to discover his little brother worrying at the bottom of his lip. “It did not take you very long to gain the necessary knowledge to be on equal terms with your peers, Nizar. You’ve endeavored to learn everything you can in great, leaping strides that please us all. No matter what you choose next as your focus of study, it will indeed be an apprenticeship in truth rather than the informality you have with Rowena and Godric.”

“Oh.” Nizar looks down at his crafted images again. “What sort of mastery do you think I’ll get out of it?”

“You already have your first mastery, Nizar,” Salazar reminds him, smiling. “Mind Magic. Imagine what you will be able to do with such strength.”

* * * * *
Salazar wakes up the next morning to the confusing sight of a deer Patronus that doesn’t seem to comprehend its own appearance anymore. “You said I wouldn’t tell you. So I’m telling you, just to prove a point,” Nizar’s voice says in a belligerent grumble, and then the Patronus disappears.

He sits up, rubs his face, and tries to figure out what his brother is speaking of. He’s realized it by the time he visits the garderobe and drenches his face with cold water—he often forgets the warming charm in the morning for the pitcher, but at least he wakes in a hurry.

“Oh.” Salazar gets dressed and leaves Orellana still sleeping, crossing the sitting room to rap on Nizar’s door. He’s already been invited by Patronus, so he lets that be his warning before he lifts the latch.

Nizar was out of bed long enough to pull on one of the shirts he insisted be made from cotton and then promptly huddled beneath every single quilt he owns again. “So there,” Nizar mutters at him.

“Ill?” Salazar asks, resting his hand against Nizar’s forehead. He immediately pulls his fingers back, hissing. “Never mind. That was a foolish question. Great bleeding fuck, Nizar!”

“If anyone ever quotes you, they’re going to be so confused by your use of modern terms.” Nizar gives him a glassy-eyed look that is full of irritated amusement. “What are you so pissed off about? I’m the one who feels like shit.”

“Pissed and pissed off mean two drastically different things, don’t they?” Salazar asks, casting one of Helga’s spells to discern if this is simply a strong illness, or a harsher sickness that will require a Vǫlva’s skill.

“Pissed means sodden in your cups. Pissed off means really sarding angry.” Nizar sighs. “Is it another cold?”

“Please stop using that term. It’s confusing and has to be slang, as it makes no sense at all.” Salazar dismisses the spell. “It is not a ‘cold’ as you say. This is your body’s way of announcing its displeasure with the battle to remove the shard, which it is quite used to possessing. You’ll have a dangerously high fever, but that is an aspect we can control.”

“Feel like shit, but won’t soak through eight napkins as my head drains of snot all at once. Got it.” Nizar snags a wet cloth he’d left sitting on the colder window ledge and drapes it back over his face. “Wake me up when you have potions that mean I won’t hallucinate.”

“Are you seeing things that do not exist?” Salazar asks, concerned.

“Not yet, but there is a first time for everything, isn’t there?” Nizar retorts in a muffled voice.

Salazar goes back into his sleeping chamber long enough to wake Orellana and tell her of Nizar’s condition. Then he is off to face a morning over a cauldron. He’d prepared numerous basic potions for the winter chills and sicknesses, but a fever that wishes to burn like a wildfire is best treated by brewing to specifics: the body that will receive the potion, the condition that led to the fever, and the health of that body before the fever came. He did his best to prevent this, shoving Restoratives at his brother in as many doses as it is safe to give in a single day, every day. It is no one’s fault that it was not enough. If anything, it’s a testament to his brother’s stubbornness in all matters that it took over a week for Nizar to fall ill after the shard’s removal.

“Sickness?” Helga asks, not surprised to find him bottling his work from early brewing. “Orellana informed me by Patronus. She mentioned a very high fever.”

“I think it is only the burn of a body that is feeling slighted for being so disturbed.” Salazar touches
all but two of the stoppered potions phials with his wand, laying Preservation Charms, before he puts them into the belt pouch with expanded magical space. “I would not refuse the offer if the best healer in the north wished to confirmed this.”

Helga just smiles at Nizar’s irritable mutterings. “He’s as joyful a patient as you are, Salazar,” she says, but confirms that Nizar’s fever is exactly as Salazar suspected. “Three days, I think. Control the fever but do not dismiss it. I think there might also be a sickness lurking behind it, and a controlled fever will burn it out so that it never becomes a threat.”

After Nizar downs the first two potions and feels less like a blacksmith’s forge when touched, the idea of three days abed, trapped with books and good company, is no longer a matter worthy of complaint. “I still told you,” Nizar says. He’s had a gentle breakfast accompanied by brewed mint leaves with honey, which, to Salazar’s confusion, was also referred to as tea—herbal tea, unrelated to caffeinated tea.

“It’s called an infusión, Nizar. Not tea,” Salazar mutters, annoyed by Nizar’s future English. “You didn’t ask for assistance, either.” He scratches out the word on his scroll and replaces it with another. This is a rough drafting only, and he doesn’t yet need perfection.

“Do you want me to word my way around my difficulties or not?” Nizar points out. “What are you doing?”

“Trying to find the shape of the contract for the adoption.” Salazar shakes his head and scratches out another line. He’s so very fond of these small, portable desks made of flat sheets of wood that Godric and Rowena crafted for the students; it means he does not have to conjure a heavy slanted desk from elsewhere in the castle in order to continue working.

“Wait, it’s literally a contract?”

Salazar glances over at Nizar, who is holding his copy of Formar La Magia book but not looking at it. “If I didn’t explain it in a way that was fully understood, then I apologize. Yes, a literal contract is involved. When we both sign it, and it is then signed by the witnesses, the magic bound to the document will then bind you to me as family.”

“Oh. I understand now.” Nizar bites at his lip and then seems to change his mind about indulging in the habit. “Who are the witnesses? Do we choose them?”

“Whoever Bermudo sends must sign it on behalf of León. A member of my family must sign it in recognition of their approval of your addition to our line, so that will be Estefania,” Salazar says. “One of your magical teachers must sign it, both to signal both their approval and to affirm that you are not being coerced into accepting the terms of the adoption contract. You may choose Rowena, Helga, Godric, or Sedemai. I have no preference.”

“It’s too bad they can’t all sign it. It seems like I’m playing favorites, otherwise,” Nizar murmurs. “But Godric is the closest I have at the moment to a real apprenticeship, since I’m actually attempting to earn a mastery there. Him, I think.”

“He’ll be pleased, and the others will not feel slighted.”

“No, I suppose not.” Nizar turns back to his book, but there is a frown on his face, and not one of concentration.

“Nizar?” Salazar prompts. “Something is troubling you.”

“You mean aside from being sick?” Nizar sighs and lowers the book again. “I’ve been trying to
explain how to tell you that I’m depressed, but depressed doesn’t mean the same thing here.”

Salazar gives him a blank look. “Depressed? As in a depression in the earth?”

“No, and that’s the problem.” Nizar’s brow furrows. “It’s…the closest words I have are that it’s an excessive, unwanted sadness.”

Salazar rests his quill in its inkpot. “And you’re angry about this?”

“Yes, because I’m not fucking sad!” Nizar exclaims in frustration. “It’s just—it’s just there, and I really hate feeling that way. I don’t have a reason to feel that way!”

Salazar waits for Nizar to take up a goblet and drink the water in it before he speaks. “Yes, you do. Consider this one of the lessons of your Defence mastery, as it pertains to the care of others if you are to ever remove a soul jar from another living being.”

“That’s part of Defence?” Nizar asks, perking up.

“It is,” Salazar confirms. “A master of Defence knows all manners of defending another, little brother, and a Horcrux is among those dangers. You will not only learn how to prevent others from being turned into Horcruxes, but you will learn how to remove a soul shard should you encounter one suffering from that fate. The removal is not the last step.”

“I’m listening.”

Salazar observes the shine to Nizar’s eyes and retrieves another potion, removing the Preservation Charm. “Drink this first.”

Once that is done, Salazar takes back the empty phial. “A soul shard has a very strong sense of self-preservation, whether it is a living being or inanimate form. The shard, to be certain that you would not harm yourself, has likely been suppressing the full strength of your emotions from the day it was driven into your mind.”

Nizar looks disturbed. “Then—I didn’t feel as angry about the Dursleys as I should have, because it wouldn’t let me.”

“Not only your foul relatives, Nizar,” Salazar replies. “Any situation the shard judged would endanger you both if your emotional response would be excessive. Fear, anger, joy, aggression, even love—it would restrain your senses.”

“Oh.” Nizar glances down at the open book’s pages, fiddling with the edge of the binding. “That’s what Helga meant that first day, wasn’t it? She asked me if I had trouble understanding my feelings, or if I didn’t understand the feelings of others—if I found them overwhelming.”

Salazar nods. “Yes. You may experience a period of finding everything overwhelming, Nizar. Or it may limit itself to what I strongly suspect is long-delayed grief.”

Nizar looks up again. “Grief?”

“Nizar, you do not have the shard’s memory of the event, but deep down, somewhere, I suspect you have your own.” Salazar gentles his voice. “You might have been young, but you were conscious and aware when you witnessed your mother’s death. Those scars do not fade easily, especially when you are kept from feeling their existence.”

Nizar shakes his head. “I’m not so sure about that one, Sal. I don’t remember anything about my
parents now except what I’ve been told. I only know their faces from the pictures I’ve seen.”

Salazar considers it. “Then it may be the delayed grief of knowing you lost them, a fact you were aware of from youth onwards. Either way, the result is the same.”

“That scar where the shard used to be,” Nizar ventures after a few minutes. “That’s a very large, empty spot in my thoughts. Is something supposed to be there?”

“Your memories of your parents might once have been there, which would explain why you don’t have them, but I can’t tell you that for certain. None of us can. If a memory buries itself deeply enough, it might cause you true harm for someone to attempt to retrieve it.” Salazar rubs the bridge of his nose and wonders if he should speak of the other part.

“You’re stalling,” Nizar says. “Come on, then. If this is a lesson, you can’t leave anything out.”

“That’s cheating,” Salazar grumbles. “Very well. When a living being is turned into a soul jar, the shard of the other’s soul is inserted in a manner that is spiritually and physically destructive. You have to make room for what is put in place, Nizar. Something is always lost when this is done. Sometimes the loss is inconsequential. Sometimes the loss is dire, and it may be very difficult or impossible to recover from this after the soul jar’s removal. Sometimes the destruction is so great that the living vessel dies the moment the soul jar is removed.”

“Shit.” Nizar’s expression is curious, but sympathy dominates. “Have you ever…has that ever happened when you’ve helped someone? Them dying?”

“The immediate death? No. I’m twenty-one, Nizar, and my first years as a magician were focused in other areas. Godric, though—he has seen such. I suggest you not ask him about it unless you are in the midst of a lesson on that very topic, as it isn’t a fond memory for him. Rowena has witnessed those who’ve died who could not recover from the removal for other reasons. She will discuss this more readily; she knows she did all that was possible to prevent it.”

“You don’t believe I’m going to have to deal with the second one, then,” Nizar says.

“But you still think it’s dangerous for me to know,” Nizar guesses. He bites his lip again. “Tell me anyway, Sal.”

“You have no sense of self-preservation whatsoever,” Salazar says flatly. “None.”

“Huh.” Nizar doesn’t look surprised. “That actually makes a lot of sense. Does that mean every time I fought back, it was the shard’s influence?”

“No. As I said, you already built a way around it, and it is a construct that we are all going to continue to build upon,” Salazar insists, glaring at Nizar. “I mean this both as your teacher and your brother—this lesson will never be neglected, and it is one that might never end.”

“Okay.” Nizar spreads his hands. “What is it?”

“You value others,” Salazar says slowly, wanting to be certain his words are truly understood. “You value other people over yourself, always. When you understand that to leave a danger unaddressed will be to leave others in peril, you act to stop it. Your crafted self-preservation comes
from the idea that you cannot let yourself die if others are still in harm’s way.”

“Oh.” Nizar looks at Salazar and shakes his head. “You idiot. What are you worried about?”

Salazar’s eyes widen; that isn’t quite the response he expected. “What do you mean?”

“You’re saying I need a reason to keep living. I already have that, Sal.” Nizar smiles. “Everyone in this castle: teachers, students, friends. You, Orellana, Fortunata. Estefania, Andoni, María. I have all of you. That’s why I’ll keep surviving.”
“I’m beginning to join Helga’s fantasies of murdering the Head teacher over the school in Nizar’s time.”

"Don’t. I’ll be tempted to involve myself, as well."

Chapter Notes

*decides to just conveniently drop this off here as an end-of-weekend sendoff*

See Notes at the end for a warning, even though I already have the violence thing tagged.

“Do you think he means it, then?” Rowena asks. They’ve gathered together in a warded room the next morning after breakfast, all of those who teach in the castle. Anselmet volunteered to remain with Nizar, as company and as precaution, though the fever has nearly burnt itself out.

Salazar leans back in his chair with his booted feet resting on the edge of the table. “I think Nizar believes he means exactly that…but I also think Nizar would sacrifice himself without a moment of hesitation if he thought it the best solution to protect another.”

“But not out of any genuine desire to die,” Orellana says, brow furrowed in concern.

“No, love. Not that,” Salazar replies.

“It’s not a desire for death. Nizar simply can’t see it. He cannot see that his life has value, that he has just as much right to exist as another.” Helga scowls. “His terrible family made the situation far more complicated, but this Dumbledore’s willingness to send untrained child magicians into battle on his behalf solidified a destroyed aspect of Nizar’s mind from nebulous form into belief.”

Rowena nods. “Helga is correct. As Salazar has already spoken of, we truly will have to build upon those existing protective instincts. Even the magic embedded in his blade’s sheath reformed the runes to name him a guardian.”

“Nizar did speak of wanting to learn everything about magic,” Godric says, resting his chin on his hand. “We simply do as he has already asked. Even if he suspects ulterior motives, he won’t be concerned.”

“No,” Helga agrees. “He values the freedom to learn and to do far too much; he would not complain about being granted knowledge.”

“Particularly the element of freedom.” Orellana glances at Salazar. “I think if there are other magics that might assist with this task, they should be presented in such a way that Nizar requests..."
to learn them himself—they cannot be forced upon him, or I believe he’ll rebel at the thought.”

Rowena smiles. “I did recently say that I hoped a new task would present itself after the Horcrux’s removal. The idea of creating a magician with such skill in the arts of magic, of word, and of combat—all which will allow Nizar to indulge in this self-taught habit of protecting others while lessening his chances of dying? To tie all such together so it is learned by choice? I think this may well be one of the greatest challenges I will ever face.”

“We’ll not be bored, then,” Godric says in amusement.

“And…” Salazar waits until the others look at him. “Nizar likes teaching. He has yet to admit it aloud, but we’ve all witnessed it. We know that we will gain more students, especially if these new burnings performed by dangerous fanatics send others north, seeking refuge.”

Sedemai grimaces. “We six cannot teach all.”

“No. There will have to be others, possibly much sooner than we once thought. But: we already have a seventh,” Salazar says.

Rowena frowns. “We don’t yet need a seventh. We only gain one new student with the return of the others on second Martius.”

“No, but Nizar’s assistance—I’ve found it invaluable,” Sedemai counters. “It is informal for now, and may need to remain so until he finds his way to a second mastery, but Salazar is correct.”

“If Nizar were to take on the task of teaching defence, it would ease my heart,” Godric admits in a low voice. “I may be a War Master, but I’m not fond of it. I’d prefer to teach these young ones of history, or show them the first of tactics that are merely children’s games. I am not above demonstrating the dueling arts, either, but to dwell on my warring skills all the time…I’ve seen too many battles already, my friends. I do not like reliving them in the night simply due to what I’ve spoken of during the day.”

“I hadn’t realized it bothered you so much, Godric,” Salazar says.

Godric waves his hand, as if dismissing the concern. “I hadn’t wished to speak of it. What I teach is necessary and needed. Besides that, you’d already warned me that your bit of drink called Dreamless Sleep can become as addictive as any wine. It’s helped more that your insane kin has joined me when I’ve needed to outrun old ghosts.”

“Could he actually teach defence, Godric? Is Nizar capable?” Rowena asks, and Salazar has to remind himself not to bristle. It’s a fair question.

Godric looks at Rowena in surprise. “He could teach the basics of it now, Rowena. It’s the harsher lessons, the specializations of war and defence…that’s what remains for us to work upon.”

“Wait a moment.” Orellana stares at Godric. “You’ve just started—”

“Yes, and no,” Godric interrupts, but he’s smiling. “He came to us with a surprisingly good understanding of defence already, though I suspect it’s much that Nizar taught to himself. I did not start out with the basic lessons, but the…intermedius? That is correct, yes?”

“That which comes between,” Rowena confirms absently, thinking more on Godric’s other words than his Latin.

“Then what is left?” Salazar asks. He was certainly not this ambitious or determined in his studies.
Salazar was far more prone to digging in his heels in stubbornness—but he was never denied access to books or lessons, either.

“If any other man were to say to me that they wished to finish a mastery beneath me while also learning of another magic? I would say a year and a half, perhaps two years. But Nizar?” Godric grins. “Perhaps a year for a mastery of defensive magics at my hands. You’d have to ask old Gedeloc his opinion on the other.”

“And that’s without including his interest in Metamorphe Magia,” Salazar says.

Sedemai mirrors her husband’s wide grin. “Would that be why he’s suddenly much improved at Transfiguration? Helga and I were beginning to despair!”

“He spoke of the sciences being removed from the theory of the subject.” Orellana sighs when Sedemai gives her a look of complete disbelief. “I know. It seems utter folly to me, as well, but Nizar says the theory of Transfiguration in his time does not even discuss the basic elements of creation, or how to alter objects without altering their base composition beyond repair.”

“He says Animalemorphe Magia and Metamorphe Magia are not taught, either,” Salazar adds. “I’m beginning to join in Helga’s fantasies of murdering the Head teacher over the school in Nizar’s time.”

Rowena rolls her eyes. “Don’t. I’ll be tempted to involve myself, as well. Have we spoken of everything necessary this morning?”

“Actually…” Salazar lifts his feet from the table and puts them down on the floor. “I think we should discuss the addition of yet two more towers, among certain other improvements to Hogewáþ.”

* * * * *

Hari bolts upright on waking, heart hammering in his chest. All right; that was weird. He’s never had a bad dream about Lupin’s accident with the full moon and lack of Wolfsbane before. Well—he has dreamed of it, but not in any negative way, and not in a way that he couldn’t circumvent when it was the shard trying to fuck with his head.

He knows he’s not sleeping any more today, so he puts on a shirt before pushing open the lead-paned window to his sleeping chamber. Salazar’s quarters are on the western side of the castle, so it’s easy to see the full moon just slipping behind the trees to set.

Full moon. Hari frowns. That doesn’t actually reassure him at all.

He finds clean truis and throws on a woolen-silk robe before sliding his feet into socks and boots without bothering to bind either. He grabs his wand, slides it up his sleeve, and shoves his knife into his boot.

When he unlatches the door, Salazar is already shoving his leg into his other boot, one hand on the door that exits their quarters. “Sal?”

Salazar looks over his shoulder and frowns. “If I told you to go back to bed, would you listen?”
“Not when I woke up thinking something is wrong, and you’re acting like it,” Hari replies. “Get a robe or a cloak, idiota—it’s still cold out.”

Salazar glares at him before disappearing into his chamber long enough to do just that. “How did you know something was wrong?” he asks after closing the door so that the latch barely clicks behind them.

“Bad dream.” Nizar huffs out an annoyed breath when Salazar lifts an eyebrow. “A bad dream that is not of the usual sort I have to cope with. How did you know something is wrong?”

“It’s the castle’s magic,” Salazar informs him in a hushed voice. “If one is a student of our school, we know if they’re endangered, even if they’re not here.”

“Oh—wait. Why didn’t you know something had gone wrong with the soul jar, then?” Hari asks as they take the stairs down at a swift pace.

Salazar glances at him. “Because the sarding thing circumvented that aspect of Hogewáb’s magic. That is a lapse in our warding which has since been corrected.”

“Good,” Hari says fervently. He’d really hate for anyone else to ever have to go through that.

Their boots strike the ground floor just as Godric joins them. He looks like he dressed in a hurry, though at least he didn’t need to be reminded that it’s still bloody Februarius.

Godric frowns at Hari. “You should not be accompanying us. We don’t know what we’ll face.”

Hari is not impressed by that argument. “When is the last time either of you faced a werewolf who hadn’t taken this Taming of the Beast potion? Or dealt with that same werewolf after the fact?”


“You believe so?” Salazar asks Hari.

Hari nods. “I was dreaming of the night my godfather missed his potion, and I was scared—but the more I think on it, the more I believe I wasn’t the one scared in that dream at all. Then I woke up and noticed the full moon dipping beneath the tree line.”

“If we do encounter an untamed lycanthrope, you’re not allowed to disagree with me any longer about your own Divination talents, hermanito,” Salazar replies as Godric returns. He’s holding a sword with a goblin-silver blade and the wooden, rounded Saxon style of grip. It’s a nice sword, but nothing like the Sword of Gryffindor from Hari’s time. If it weren’t for the fact that the future Entrance Hall portrait of Godric has the sword, Hari would wonder if the Sword of Gryffindor ever belonged to Godric at all.

“Not fatal,” Godric says at once, holding up the blade. “It would need to be dipped in aconite for that. If there is an untamed wolf, it might not be a thing they were aware of before tonight. I’d rather they bear an unpleasant scar than be dead if blood is spilled, especially if it was not of their choosing. Do you have an idea of where we’re going?”

“We’ll find out soon enough.” Salazar holds out his arm. Hari grips it after Godric does, trying not to feel nervous—trying not to feel awed that no one is telling him to stay behind for his own good, that he will only get in the way, a hindrance rather than a help. Even mid-Apparition, he’s reflecting on the fact that no matter what he did to prove himself before, it was never enough.

It’s a bit warmer where they arrive, but not by much. Dawn is painting the ground in pale blues,
grays, and violets. They’re in a wide clearing surrounded by trees, with large swaths of it plowed and probably seeded already. Halfway up the clearing’s hillside is a farmhouse that’s been built halfway into the earth. Hari can only see a window on this side; the entrance must be on the front side of the hill. Smoke is rising in pathetic wisps from the edge of the house where the smoke hood must be—though Hari’s first sight of one was baffling, since they look like modern exhaust hoods for a kitchen range.

“God Almighty,” Godric mutters under his breath. “We’re in Laegrecastrescir.”

“Galiena,” Hari whispers. He suddenly feels cold, like a Dementor is nearby. Salazar has assured him that nothing like a Dementor is known to any magician Sal has ever met, but that just makes Hari leery about being the first to stumble across one of the scary fuckers.

“The moon isn’t visible. Nizar?” Salazar turns to him. “Believe it or not, I am not that experienced in lycanthrope encounters.”

“Neither of us are,” Godric adds, his eyes flickering back and forth as he keeps watch on their surroundings.

“Uh—if the moon isn’t visible to a werewolf’s eyes, it doesn’t matter if it’s set or not. Once they can’t see it anymore, a werewolf is going to be docile. With the sun coming up, we’ll find them transforming back into a human, or human already and taking a nap in the dirt.”

Godric nods in response. “I’m down here most often, visiting with the family to be certain the local priest isn’t treating them ill. Behind me, both of you. If all is well, then Bardolf and Eloisa will know my face.”

They agree, but Hari has his wand out anyway. He’d rather hex someone on accident and apologize instead of being trampled by a confused werewolf.

“Shit.” Godric halts when they round the hill. “There is body in the yard. A man.”

“Bardolf?” Salazar asks.

Godric glances over his shoulder at them and slowly shakes his head. “No. I suspect I’ve found our lycanthrope. He is nude, and looks to have slit his own throat. Nizar—”

“Not my first dead body,” Hari says crossly.

“No, but I believe I know what we’re going to find inside, and it will not be pleasant,” Godric replies gently. “If you see this first body and can go no further, I’ll never think less of you for it.”

Hari nods, mollified. “Okay.”

When they get to the bare earth that surrounds the doorway, all of them stop walking. “He must have awoken to what was done and chose death over a life of guilt,” Salazar says in a soft voice.

Hari stares at the man, who has blond hair and the lean build of a healthy farmer, or maybe just someone with a job that required work but not unending labor. The knife, maybe a carver’s knife from a kitchen, is still loosely clasped in his hand. The ground around the dead man is dark and wet. His skin is tanned, but beneath that color, Hari can already see it turning a mottled grey from…from…

Suddenly the only thing Hari can think about isn’t the danger—that’s gone—but Galiena. He bolts for the open doorway of the house, calling her name; Godric swears and is right on his heels.
Hari nearly slips in liquid that makes the rushes on the floor slick. He defiantly chooses not to think about what made them that way, glancing over at the next still body on the floor. Long shirt but otherwise not dressed. Bardolf, probably, unless the family had a guest.

He takes a breath and that’s almost a mistake. The air is thick with the scent of copper and the stench of human waste.

Godric warned him that death didn’t need rot to smell foul. Hari forgot those words and came close to vomiting, which he desperately doesn’t want to do. He concentrates on ignoring the scents, assisted by Mind Magic and utter fucking stubbornness.

“There is Eloisa,” Godric murmurs, his voice tight with anger and upset.

Hari doesn’t need to look more than once to know that the woman is very, very dead. His stomach tries to heave again, but he doesn’t let it. If he’s going to throw up, it’ll be afterwards. “Galiena?”

They both glance up, but the house has no loft for sleeping chambers above. Godric searches the room again with his eyes, so Hari does the same. It’s so simple, so plain: a one-room farmhouse that is sitting room, kitchen, workspace, and sleeping chamber all at the same time. “I do not see the girl. She might have fled.”

Hari looks beyond Eloisa’s torn body, tracing the wall behind her. There are patterns in the wood that don’t fit. How many mothers have died for their children? How many fathers have done the same?

“I know where she is. Can you move Galiena’s mother?” Hari manages to voice the request without stuttering. He doesn’t want to move the body, even if his hovering charms aren’t that bad anymore.

Godric nods and uses his wand to place Eloisa near her husband. The moment the dead woman is out of the way, Hari kneels on the ground before the wall, heedless of the damp earth or the reason why. He slides back a heavy iron bolt that was thrown over a small door—storage, probably, secure storage to keep their food safe from wild animals that might figure out how to best the home’s door.

Galiena tumbles out of the cramped space, landing directly in Hari’s lap. She starts scratching at his face, shrieking, before Hari can get his hands on her arms. “Galiena!” he shouts. No good; she’s still trying to claw his eyes out, wide-eyed and terrified.

Rowena says that Galiena is one of her best Latin students.

“Audi me!” Hari barks, feeling his cheeks burn where her fingernails gouged his skin. “Ego sum Nizar! Tu es Galiena! Hoc est Godric!”

Galiena slowly stops trying to blind him. Her hair is a mess, her face marred by dirt, snot, and tears. “Nizar? Where is Mother? Where is Father?” she ends the question on a shriek.

Hari makes a decision and pulls Galiena directly into his arms, clasping her head to his chest. He isn’t going to lie to her, but some things don’t need to be witnessed. “They didn’t survive.”

Galiena screams and starts fighting him in earnest. “LET ME SEE! YOU LET ME SEE THEM! NIZAR, LET ME SEE THEM NOW!”

Hari presses his lips together and tries not to hate the poor bastard lying dead on the cold ground outside. He hardens his voice. “Galiena Bardolfsdottir of Laegrecastrescir. Listen. To. Me.”
She quiets again. “Listening,” she mumbles in a rebellious voice.

“I promise you that you will see them again—but not until they’re in their burial shrouds, ready to be given to the earth, and not a moment before. Do you hear me?” Nizar’s voice cracks. “You don’t want to see them right now. You already know what happened. *You don’t need to see it.*”

Galiena sniffs and asks in a thick, raw voice, “Is it really bad?”

Hari nods and tightens his grip. “Yes, dearheart. It’s really bad. Your mum—your mother died to make sure you lived. She wouldn’t want you to see what it cost, okay? She’d want you to remember everything that came before, but *not this.*”

Galiena starts crying in deep, heaving sobs. Hari glances up at Godric, whose expression could easily be mistaken for somber if Hari didn’t see the bleeding, reopened wounds behind it. “I’m taking her back to the castle. If she has anything here—clothing or—or things in this house that should be hers. Will you bring them?”

Godric nods and places his hand on Hari’s shoulder. “I will. Take her directly to Helga. There is a gouge in that cupboard door, Nizar, and the young one’s arm is bleeding.”

*Shit.* Hari hadn’t even noticed. “See you soon,” he says, and for the very first time, manages to Apparate without needing to stand and twist in place.

* * * *

Godric comes out of the house with a bundle in his arms, but it isn’t a body, thank the gods. “Eloisa and Bardolf are both dead, but Galiena lives. Salazar?”

Salazar leans back from the corpse, wiping the sweat from his brow with his sleeve as he dumps water from the silver bowl. He has seen quite enough. “This man had lycanthropy for at least a decade, and knew what to expect of a full moon.”

Godric’s voice hardens. “A werewolf’s deliberate attack?”

“Yes, but not by this man’s choice.” Salazar reaches up to grasp the arm Godric offers, gaining his feet. He still nearly falls right back down again, lightheaded. Scrying for the present, the future: those, Salazar finds as easy as breathing. It’s scrying for events of the past that exhaust him. “Tempero, Godric. A foul bastard cast Tempero on this innocent in order to take revenge against the family.”

“Revenge?” Godric looks aghast. “Revenge for—Bardolf and Eloisa are some of the mildest of folk I’ve ever met!”

“Revenge for a long-rejected courtship, from what I could see.” Salazar reaches into his belt pouch on instinct, not expecting to discover he had the foresight to retrieve potions in his hurry to leave the castle, and finds one anyway. He left a Restorative inside after Nizar’s illness instead of placing it back with his other potions.

Salazar won’t curse his own good fortune by ignoring it. He’s saving his curses for someone else today. He pulls the glass stopper and drinks the phial’s contents after removing the preservation magic. “Where is my brother, Godric?” he asks when Nizar does not appear.
“Nizar has taken Galiena back to see Helga. Galiena is distraught enough, and did not need to see these deaths.” Godric hesitates. “And she was injured, claws across the shoulder. She’ll be infected.”

“And so young.” Salazar shakes his head. “Nizar does not fear werewolves. Galiena is in safe company.”

Salazar can feel the potion’s effects within moments, granting him full awareness once more. Now he can deal with this mess properly. “If you’re familiar with the priest, tell them…” He presses his fingers to his forehead. Salazar knows what the Church’s attitude has become in regards to those who choose to die by their own hand.

“Tell them that this man was murdered, that the knife in his hand was his last attempt at his own defence. Bardolf and Eloisa welcomed him as a guest the night before when his travels took him too far from home.”

“The villagers will know the moment they see the bodies inside that this was not the work of a normal man, Salazar,” Godric reminds him.

“I know. Tell them it was the work of a crazed magician. I will bring them the fucking bastard’s body as proof before noon,” Salazar growls, and then chooses to Desplazarse from that spot. He knows exactly where to go to find whom he seeks.

* * * *

Salazar returns to the village of Laegrecastrescir at noon, as he promised. It looks as if everyone in the village has gathered, a crowd of at least seventy people. Godric is standing near the village well with the grey-haired priest, one dressed as a monk rather than in more expensive frocks that would denote status or rank.

“Emerald Flame of the West,” the monk whispers at Salazar’s appearance. “I thought it merely a name.”

Salazar drops the corpse he brought with him and then holds up his right hand. His magic is still streaming off of his skin like green fire. “My apologies,” he rasps out. “Sometimes it is difficult to put holy flame back where it belongs when the need is done.” He doesn’t like referring to his magic in such a fashion, but it often soothes ruffled religious feathers to remind the priesthood that they are supposed to believe that such gifts come from their own Maker.

“Is that the culprit?” a young woman asks, one who bears faint resemblance to Galiena and Eloisa. “Is that the foul one who—” Her voice breaks as tears form in her mist-grey eyes.

Salazar rubs at his face, wincing when he discovers his own dried blood, and nods. “It is. His name was Ludovicus. Does anyone know of him?”

The young woman spits on the ground and then makes a sign against evil, aiming it at the dead magician. “Yes!” she snarls. “He courted my dear sister Eloisa years ago, but Eloisa found him vile and rejected his suit in favor of Bardolf.”

“Is that what this was about?” Godric asks, the skin around his eyes taut with anger. “A revenge killing for a minor slight eight years past?”
“It was exactly that.” Salazar glances at the priest. “Forgive me for not knowing. What is your name?”

“I am Ogier, originally of the Duchy of Limburg,” the priest replies. “This is—this is a terrible day. Godric assures me that young Galiena is safe?”

“She is. My brother took her into his care, and he will allow no harm to come to her,” Salazar reassures them, which causes Eloisa’s sister to sigh in relief.

“That is—that is good.” Ogier glances at Godric. “We are grateful to you for providing swift justice.” The old man lowers his voice. “I have just been discussing something of import with your companion. This will sound quite cold, given what has occurred this morning, but after the funerals are held, Galiena should not return here. It is not safe.”

“Not safe,” Salazar repeats, not certain he’s heard the man correctly. Eloisa’s sister looks unhappy, but not with Ogier. “Why?”

“I have no ill will towards those who care for the land and people around them, no matter the strange nature of the gifts they wield,” Ogier continues to speak softly. “But others do, and already they speak of Eloisa and Bardolf’s fates as being divine punishment from God for bearing and raising a demon child.”

“You know better than that,” Salazar says in displeasure.

“Of course I do, and so do most of those who stand here with myself and Lord Godric.” Ogier dips his head. “But fear is a powerful thing, Lord Salazar. I do not wish to see a baptized child of God come to further harm due to the words of fools. If they choose to bring tales of Galiena’s strange magic to the bishop, I would not be able to stop my superiors from taking her—and I do not wish to be recalled as the priest who stood watch over the first burning of Laegrecastresciri.”

Salazar glances at Godric, who gives him a slight nod. The priest speaks truly, and the implications are unnerving. “Very well. The funerals?”

“Will be three days hence, as the sun dips towards evening, so the dead will know the peace of the coming night.” Ogier gives Salazar another head-dipping bow. “Thank you for what you’ve done, what you will do, and for forgiving those who know not what they do.”

“We must leave,” Salazar says instead of replying. He is not in the habit of forgiving those who’ve performed foul deeds. “Do with this dead fool as you will, but please honor the three who died by his hand.”

“It will be done. Is he…dangerous?” Ogier asks, giving the body a look of distaste.

Salazar shakes his head. “There is no danger to him now but for the reek that will soon emerge from his corpse.”

Godric grips Salazar’s arm the moment they’ve stepped beyond sight of those gathered in the village square. “You had to kill the bastard? You should have brought him before the Council.”

“For a half-trained fool of a magician, Ludovicus actually put up quite the fight. I didn’t judge him safe to attempt capture for presenting him to the Council. I’ll send word to them, never fear, Godric,” Salazar adds. “They can call us forth, and I’ll show them what occurred in a Pensife if they ask, whether it was scryed knowledge or witnessed by my own eyes. Then they can have the fool’s wand and take the pleasure of snapping it for themselves.”
“You make this island’s Council nervous as it is,” Godric rebukes him, but there is no sting in his words. “Shall I take us both home?”

“Gods, please do so,” Salazar requests, and feels the twist of Desplazarse before the familiar stone of Hogewáþ surrounds them once more. Salazar drops his head forward so that it rests on Godric’s shoulder. Godric spoke of being tired of dwelling on battles, but Salazar is not so fond of them, either.

Godric rests his massive hand on Salazar’s head. “Come,” he says. “We should see to Galiena.”

Salazar makes himself straighten, to pretend more vigor than he currently feels. He wasn’t yet recovered enough from the fight against that damned soul shard to face another magician in combat, but he did it anyway. Salazar gave Ludovicus cause for regret before he died.

Helga, Rowena, and Nizar are in the kitchen. Oriel is sitting on the floor next to Galiena, who has a pallet near the fire and is so deeply asleep that Salazar believes Helga to be responsible. “How is she?” Godric asks.

“Infected,” Helga says bluntly. “I’m not certain how she will take the news of her new wolf form, but other than her grief, she will be well.”

Salazar glimpses the scratches on Nizar’s face. “And you are—”

“Not infected. Don’t be ridiculous,” Nizar responds, rolling his eyes. “A werewolf can only pass on lycanthropy if they’re actually in wolf form…or they can pass on traits of lycanthropy if they allow the curse to consume them. That part I didn’t know, but I’ve never met anyone who decided that embracing a lycanthropy curse was a great idea.”

“My apologies,” Salazar says. “I was concerned—”

Nizar gives him an odd look before he walks over and guides Salazar to the nearest table. “Sit down before you fall down. In fact, take a fucking nap. You look miserable, Sal.”

“I’m not,” Salazar protests, but sometime later he finds himself rousing, his head pillowed on his crossed arms from napping directly at the table. Nizar and Galiena are having a hushed conversation near the fire.

“I don’t want to be evil,” Galiena whispers.


“But I’m going to be a werewolf,” Galiena says in a trembling voice. “Werewolves are evil!”

Nizar snorts. “Nonsense. Did you know, Galiena, that I have two godfathers?”

Galiena sounds baffled by the change of subject. “No, but—why didn’t you have a godfather and a godmother for your baptism?” she asks when curiosity wins over distress.

“I suspect that the only person who could have been a godmother to me was my aunt, and my Aunt Petunia? She is a terrible person, Galiena. I don’t know if I’d name her evil, but she did awful things and considered herself justified. Since my parents didn’t want one of my godparents to be vile, they chose someone they knew who wasn’t. Would you like to know who?”

Galiena sniffs. “Yes, Nizar. I’d like to know.”
“One is named Sirius, after the red star in the sky that Salazar teaches you of. Sirius was my father’s best friend, and he is an Animalemorphe Magus. He’s never figured out how to be anything other than a very large black dog, but he’s a good dog. The other…” Nizar hesitates, but not out of fear. Salazar finds himself smiling at how well certain lessons have taken hold.

“My other godfather is named Remus.”

Salazar lifts his head to see the puzzled expression on Galiena’s face. “Like Remus and Romulus of Rome?”

“You’ve heard that tale already?” Nizar nods. “Ironically enough, yes. Exactly like Remus of Rome. He was also my father’s good friend, and my mother trusted him with our lives. The thing you should remember, though, is that Remus was attacked by a werewolf when he was five years old, Galiena. He’s had the scars from a werewolf’s claws across his face ever since.”

“They let a werewolf be a godparent? But wouldn’t God smite the wolf away from the Holy Font?” Galiena asks in disbelief.

Nizar lets out a gentle laugh. “That’s silly. Remus is a good man. Why would God smite a good man who loved my parents, and who loves me?”

“I—I suppose,” Galiena says, still frowning. “But what about the curse? Lycanthropy is supposed to be an evil curse.”

“Well, it’s definitely not a very nice curse,” Nizar replies. “But evil? I think it’s only evil if you let that curse be who you are, instead of you being who you are.”

“Oh.” When Salazar dares to sit upright, feeling an ache in his neck when he does so, Galiena is chewing on her lip. “Nizar, why do you keep referring to your parents as if they’re gone?”

“noticed, did you?” Nizar puts his arm around Galiena and draws her in close to his side. “They died when I was a child. They died saving my life.”

Galiena’s eyes widen, her mouth shaping a perfect little O of surprise. “Like—like mine did this morning.”

“Rather like that, yes,” Nizar says quietly. He looks up and catches Salazar’s eye.

Salazar realizes exactly what Rowena means by his little brother’s mastery of Mind Magic when he catches the thought just behind Nizar’s eyes, projected with clear intent. He thinks about it for a moment before nodding his agreement.

“I have an idea,” Nizar says to Galiena, “and you’re allowed to say no, but I don’t think you should be alone tonight. None of the other students have returned. All of the rooms in your tower would be empty. Would you like to stay with me?”

Galiena sniffs and wipes at her eyes. “You’re not afraid of me?”

“Well, it’s not going to be a full moon for another twenty-eight days, and we do have this potion that makes you safe on the night of the full moon,” Nizar replies, just a touch of dryness in his voice. “I’m not afraid of my godfather, Galiena, and I’m not afraid of you. Besides, you’re tiny. What is a tiny werewolf going to do to me, gnaw on my ankles? Your teeth wouldn’t even get through my boots,” he teases.

Galiena starts to light up with childhood indignance before she realizes what she’s being indignant
about. She deflates a bit, but doesn’t quite falter back into misery. “I’d wait until you took them off,” she says.

Nizar smiles. “Good planning.”

Salazar gets up from the table after giving his brother another nod. Planning. He definitely has to plan for a change, and it’s one he should have performed months ago.

* * * *

Hari takes Galiena upstairs after Helga confirms that she’s healed the werewolf’s scarring on Galiena’s arm as best she can. Only time can heal the rest, not magic. The scars are white bands with central lines of thin, angry red, the deepest puncture from the werewolf’s claws. There are only four of them marring Galiena’s tiny shoulder. The damage could have been so much worse.

When Hari opens the door to his quarters, Galiena turns shy, ducking behind him. “Don’t be ridiculous. You see Salazar and Orellana all the time.”

“Yes, but this is their home,” Galiena whispers back, her eyes huge. Hari suspects she’s also still tired, despite a healing sleep, and decides he’ll sleep on the rug in his quarters. Galiena can have the bed and its questionable geese feathering. Binding it better is still a work in progress.

“Why do you look so bloody smug?” Hari asks Salazar, but Salazar just grins. Orellana is biting her lip against a smile as she works on embroidering a baby blanket. Hari rolls his eyes at them and lifts the latch on his own sleeping chamber door, intent on tucking a tired six-year-old into bed…

Except he’s not looking at a single sleeping chamber. He’s looking at a much smaller version of the sitting room, like Fortunata has in her quarters. “What the fuck?”

“I was supposed to do this months ago,” Salazar says, joining them and causing Galiena to let out a startled squeak. “You’re an adult, Nizar, or so close that it does not matter. If you choose to continue to live here, I will at least see to it that you dwell in rooms you deserve to have.”

Hari opens his mouth to argue, realizes that arguing about being given nice things is going to set a bad precedent with Galiena, and immediately gives up. “Okay,” he says. “Thank you.”

Salazar’s grin is all teeth. He knows exactly why Hari capitulated so quickly. “You are welcome, hermanito.”

Hari gives him a shove. “If you restructured physical space today after killing an evil magician and scrying backwards, then you need to go to sleep! Orellana, please come and collect my brother and hex him into going to bed.”

Orellana laughs and tugs Salazar away from Hari’s door. “Nizar is correct, dearest. Come with me. You can be cross about being so coddled in the morning.”

Hari grins and shuts the door so that he and Galiena are now in the tiny sitting room, alone together. Salazar even gave Hari a table and a desk to use, with two chairs for the table and another for the desk. “Okay, then. Let’s see what he changed,” Hari says, the perfect excuse to show Galiena everything within.
“Okay,” Galiena agrees, her expression twisted up in confusion. “Does Salazar do that a lot?”

“All the time.” Hari opens the first door off the sitting room to find a small sleeping chamber. The bed is situated beneath a window and is smaller than his; a student-sized slanted desk sits in the corner; there is a delicate wool rug on the floor, one definitely meant for a child who has already shown a marked preference for blue. An open door opposite the desk leads into a small garderobe with a child-sized bathtub. “I think this is meant to be yours, but maybe not tonight.”

“Mine?” Galiena asks, baffled, as she follows Hari to the door on the other side of the sitting room.

“Yes. I think Sal is plotting.” Hari says. “But that’s okay. I’m plotting, too. It’s a fun way to pass the time.” Hari’s sleeping chamber is recognizable by its grey-dyed wool rug, but the room has been expanded. A wooden-framed mirror stands in the corner, the window is much larger, and his bed is definitely bigger. That will sleep two people comfortably instead of one. His shelves have been widened, and now he has room on them again for new things. At least the garderobe still looks the same.

“Hi, Hedwig,” Hari says to his owl, who is already perched on the larger window ledge, looking pleased with herself. He doesn’t need to ask if she approves of the changes. He’s probably going to need to resign himself to waking up to two snowy owls in his window.

“I’m thinking that tonight, you’re going to sleep in my bed, and I’m going to sleep on the rug here in the room with you. All the doors will be latched, and my owl will sleep on the windowsill to keep us company. Most important of all…”

Hari kneels down on the rug in front of Galiena. “I absolutely swear to you that as long as I have the power to prevent it, I will never let anything harm you until you’re old enough to wave a wand well enough to defend yourself properly. Until your first apprenticeship? Yes, that sounds like a good way to phrase it. What do you think?”

“I—I—” Tears slip down Galiena’s small face. “Are you becoming my guardian?”

“At the moment, it’s more accurate to say that the school of Hogewáþ is going to be your guardian,” Hari says, choosing his words carefully. “Your aunt would take you in and care for you if she could, but Ogier, your village’s priest, told Sal and Godric that it isn’t safe in your village anymore. Once we attend your parents’ funerals… I’m sorry, Galiena. You won’t be able to live in Laegrecastrescir anymore.”

Galiena bursts into tears again. Hari picks her up so that they can both sit on the larger bed and holds the crying girl in his arms. She sounds so tired, and he isn’t surprised when Galiena falls asleep mid-sob.

“Guardian,” Hari repeats, frowning. He hadn’t really thought about that yet. He is definitely not old enough to be a parent, but she’s still young enough to need one.

Maybe it’s fate. He’s all but doing for Galiena what he’d longed for when he was her age. He doesn’t want anyone to suffer what he went through. It’s…it’s not…

Hari grits his teeth and makes himself think the words: his childhood was not right. It was wrong. No child should have to suffer that way.

He refuses to let Galiena suffer, not when he can easily prevent it. If that means he decides to choose the obvious insanity involved in becoming a parent, then fuck it—that definitely won’t be the craziest thing he’s ever done.
Galiena has a death-grip on his tunic in her sleep, one he’s not going to be escaping until she releases him. Oh, well; the bed is certainly large enough for two. He lays down on his side so that Galiena can cling to him all she likes.

Hari reaches up to ruffle Hedwig’s feathers, making her close her eyes in scratching-bliss. Then he uses his wand to latch both of the room’s doors, as he said he would.

It’s weird to realize he isn’t uncomfortable at all, even with a clinging leech of a child attached to his side. He falls asleep not long after placing his wand beneath his pillow.

Chapter End Notes

NON-SPECIFIC depictions of blood and death. (Nizar is busy pretending not to see it, too.)
That Which Is To Be Has Already Been

Chapter Summary

“How are you this entirely bad at being a Slytherin?”

Chapter Notes

People said nice things to me about the story so here is chapter. (Also I had a lonnaaa ng day and I wanna finish Part III, too. So, here. 2 days early!)

“Sal, I’m fifteen years old. I can’t be a parent.”

Salazar lifts an eyebrow at Nizar, who is leaning over in his seat with his face buried in his hands. “You are going to be sixteen in two days, Nizar. And do you forget that I became a parent at twelve?”

“Yes, but at least you had parents!” Nizar bursts out, lifting his head. “You know what parents are supposed to be like. I never had—I don’t know what to do!”

Salazar sighs and leans back on the padded bench of his sitting room, shifting his feet so they’re closer to the warmth from the fire burning in the hearth. “You certainly have experience in what a parent should not be,” he points out quietly.

“Fuck, don’t remind me,” Nizar mutters. “I—Galiena deserves better.”

“Better than what?” Salazar gives his brother a stern look. “Better than the man who rushed to her rescue yesterday morning, heedless of any possible dangers?”

“That poor bastard was already dead!”

“He was, yes,” Salazar agrees. “But you did not know if he was the only threat. You are formidable with a wand, little brother, but you are not yet its master.”

“So Godric keeps reminding me. Often. I don’t think he believes me when I say I knew there was no other danger,” Nizar says.

“Did you know that? Truly?” Salazar asks.

Nizar doesn’t answer right away. He gnaws at the edge of his thumbnail while staring at the fire. “Yes,” he finally says. “I don’t know why I was certain, but I was.”

“That, Nizar, is Divination talent that has been honed by Mind Magic,” Salazar says. Nizar glares at him. “I told you that if you were correct, you would not be allowed to deny it any longer.”

“No. I suppose I can’t.” Nizar half-smiles. “Trelawney would be so bloody angry, accusing me of trying to oust her from her rightful place.”
“One needs more than useful insights of the present and the future to teach Divination,” Salazar replies. “You don’t have to decide at this moment, you realize.”

“For Galiena?” Nizar nods. “Yes and no. I have to tell her something, Sal. Consider it more useful insight.”

Salazar has to admire his brother’s solution. Nizar brings Galiena out into the family sitting room to join Salazar and Orellana. Galiena has been a shy, retreating creature since her parents’ deaths; she hides behind Nizar until seated on a bench, where she is in plain view of the others. Salazar feels a pang of grief at how drawn Galiena’s features have become. Her eyes are still sharp, though, and that gives him hope.

“Your parents’ funerals are going to be held this evening,” Nizar tells Galiena. “Do you want to attend them?”

Galiena’s eyes flicker over to Salazar and Orellana before she nods. “I want to see them,” she whispers. “You said I could see them. I want to.”

Nizar squeezes Galiena’s hand. “Then there is just one more thing before we go back to your village. You see…I really have no idea what I’m doing, but I know what it feels like to be where you are now.” Galiena bites her lip and nods for Nizar to continue.

“This is what I’m going to offer.” Nizar holds out a wooden plaque that has a wire for hanging attached to it. The plaque is carved with Galiena’s name in English’s Latinized script. “You can live in your regular sleeping chamber in the tower with the other students when they come back. But whenever you want? You can come here with this sign, put it on the door to that sleeping chamber in my rooms, and that little sleeping chamber is yours for however long you keep the sign on the door. When you want to go back to the tower, take the sign with you. I do not care if it’s three of a morning and dawn has yet to come—if you need that room, or you need me, then you’re welcome.”

Galiena takes the wooden plaque with trembling hands, tracing the letters of her name with one fingertip. “You want…you want me to choose. Not take.”

“I can’t take.” For a brief moment, the scars of Nizar’s childhood flare in his eyes in a reflection of remembered misery. “No one should take. I think everyone should be able to choose. It should always be your choice. We’re all here for you, but if you ever decide you want…more than that…” Nizar closes Galiena’s fingers around the little wooden plaque. “Then you get to choose it.”

Galiena flings her arms around Nizar’s neck. Nizar looks startled for a moment before he hugs her.

Orellana reaches out and clasps Salazar’s hand. When he looks at his wife, she merely nods. Salazar smiles back; Orellana also believes that Nizar has already chosen his Heir.

They attend the service held in the village’s tiny churchyard. Galiena studies the shrouded bodies of her parents, and the victim used as a terrible weapon, with red-rimmed eyes, but she refuses to cry throughout the priest’s entire series of prayers. The tears only come when the strongest in the village lift up Bardolf’s body. Then Eloisa is given to the earth, lying next to her husband. Then the last, the man they know now to be Rolft from Stamford, is placed into his own deep hole in the ground. Rolft has only a grown daughter present to mourn him. Salazar feels an ache in his heart at the way she stands alone as earth is shoveled back into each grave until mounds rise above the ground to mark where three bodies lie.

They wait for the rest of the villagers to leave, and then Nizar, Salazar, and Orellana retrieve their
wands. “No simple stone without markings. Not for these three,” Salazar says. It does not take much work to engrave the three stones that will rest above the bodies, leaving each rock imprinted with Eloisa, Bardolf, and Rolft’s names, their homes, and the date of their deaths. Orellana is the one who etches the stones with the braided crosses Galiena’s parents preferred, while Rolft receives a braided, upside-down hammer.

“Thank you,” Rolft’s daughter says, and walks away with her head bowed.

“She didn’t even tell us her name,” Nizar says softly, watching her leave.

“We’re strangers. Worse, we’re strangers who didn’t save her father’s life,” Salazar murmurs in return. “Come.”

“Wait.” Nizar watches Galiena, who is roaming through the nearest field, finding the first flowers of spring with sharp eyes and deft, seeking hands. She returns and places a bundle over each grave: yellow celandines, primroses, snowdrops, and wood sorrel. Then she comes back to Nizar, who lifts her up into his arms without concern for her muddied hands and grass-stained gown.

“Did the priest give them a good funeral?” Galiena asks Nizar.

Nizar shakes his head. “I don’t know. This is my first funeral.”

Orellana looks at him. “But what of your parents, Nizar?”

“I don’t know if they had a funeral.” Nizar hefts Galiena in his arms to resettle her more comfortably. “I don’t even know where they’re buried. I only know where they lived.”

Salazar eyes his brother, who is studying the placed flowers with the look of someone who doesn’t know what else to do. “Where is that, then?”

“Godric’s Hollow,” Nizar says, a brief smile crossing his face. “In Somerset.”

“Godric would think that very funny,” Galiena says.

Nizar nods. “He probably would. Are you ready to go?”

“Wait.” Galiena purses her lips and then speaks, quoting something in a tremulous voice. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.”

“Where is that from?” Nizar asks.

“Somewhere in the Bible. I can’t remember all of it, but that was Mother’s favorite verse. She thought it very wise.”

Nizar smiles. “I think she was correct.”

“Godric’s Hollow?” Salazar asks after they’ve returned to Hogewáþ. “You never mentioned such before.”

Nizar puts Galiena down so that she can walk on ahead over the castle moat, humming under her breath. “I didn’t think much on it. It’s just a coincidence, anyway.”

“Hermanito, I will tell you a lesson I learned from Myrddin, one that will haunt me for all of my life.” Salazar halts and waits for Nizar to stop and look at him. “Every man makes choices all on
his own, but it is all those individual choices that cause our steps to meet.”

Nizar looks perplexed. “Which means what, exactly?”

“There are no coincidences, little brother. Absolutely none.”

* * * * *

They celebrate Nizar’s birthday on the first, which is little more than a quiet meal on his brother’s insistence. The only extravagance Nizar tolerates is Godric’s insistence that yes, they really do need to drink to it. Godric will put up with the mead if that’s the only way Nizar will be convinced.

Nizar laughs. “Fine! When your head aches tomorrow like someone crushed it with a rock, you’re not allowed to blame me at all.”

After supper, Salazar fetches his lute and plays through the tune Nizar introduced him to while Nizar rests against his side. Salazar often wonders what depth of meaning its lyrics are meant to hold, but Nizar still can’t recall any words for it beyond the vague notion that such existed. Salazar cannot tell if he finds the notes to be soothing or mournful…or perhaps it is meant to be both.

Salazar glances down to discover that Nizar has fallen asleep with his head pillowed on Salazar’s shoulder. The intent doesn’t seem to matter to Nizar, then, not if he finds the song so peaceful that it overcomes his perpetual inability to sleep.

Their students return on the second of Martius, as planned. Branwyne and Wander are now nine and twelve; the month away shows Salazar just how much Wander has grown, though Branwyne is struggling to keep up with her cousin. Fairman and Jeph are ten and twelve, with Jeph beginning to put true muscle onto his frame while Fairman remains a short, well-tanned twig. Tholy and Elspeth, nine and eleven, spent most of the month collecting more freckles on their pale skin. More and more, their eyes seem intent on being that peculiar ocean green that Salazar has only ever seen on those from the north of the Brittonic isles. Leif and Vigi are eleven and twelve, and are covered with a fresh batch of scratches and thin scars from their new practice duels performed with sharp wooden blades. Leoric and Elesande both had their Februarius birthdays and are now eleven and nine years of age; their brilliant ginger hair is beginning to darken to match their uncle’s ember red.

Helena returns in a grand sulk from her time with Houdin. “And how was your brother?” Salazar asks her.

“He’s a great big bloody pintel!” Helena retorts, mixing in Nizar’s slang with English. “I thought I was going to have to hex him into approving my continued education over a forced noble marriage, Salazar! I am thirteen years old, and I will have my apprenticeship whether he likes it or not!”

“Your mother would never allow you to be forced into marriage, and you know it,” Salazar reminds her. “Go up to the tower. Rowena is missing Alicia and despairing of Houdin’s sense, and your delightful face will cheer her.”

Salazar watches her go and thinks in irritation that Nizar was correct. If Leoric is running towards Godric for an apprenticeship, then Helena is going to be his burden. He hopes she’s grown past some of the moody tempers of this age range before that time comes.

Eneko returns with his perpetual scowl much lessened. “Did time among our cousins in Ipuzko set
you into lighter spirits about our family as a whole?” Salazar asks him.

“A bit,” Eneko admits. “I do enjoy your home in the hills near the cliffs more than I did my own. It was…pleasant.”

“Faint praise,” Salazar says dryly. “Welcome back, Martina,” he adds when he spies the girl’s stick-straight blonde hair.

“Hello, Salazar! Hello, Eneko! I am so glad to be back here, my parents are vile, I hope the food is delicious!” she says in a rush and bolts off towards the student rooms in the tower, possibly to roll around the entirety of her sleeping chamber to mark it as hers.

Their new student is twelve-year-old Fellona of Castletown on the Isle of Man, whom Helga discovered taking refuge in Findláech’s Court. Black-haired, blue-eyed Fellona is from a noble family that could take the vacant crown in the Kingdom of the Isles by marrying their daughter to someone suitable; Fellona responded to this attempt at an arranged marriage by using Desplazarse to escape her kingdom’s reach entirely, wanting nothing to do with a crown of any sort.

The one he’s been waiting for finally arrives. Estefania and Fortunata appear by Desplazarse; Fortunata spies Salazar and immediately dives right into his arms. Salazar picks her up, grinning, amazed at how his nine-year-old daughter has gained noticeable height and weight in a single month’s time.

Estefania smiles. “The southern air has always been good to our family. I think you should all come to Burgos during the harvest season, Salazar.”

“Perhaps we should,” Salazar agrees. “Fortunata, Matty has already returned. Please go remind her that she does not have to literally mark her territory to keep uninvited guests out of her own sleeping chamber.”

Fortunata giggles. “Okay, Father!”

Salazar waits until she’s out of hearing. “Estefania.”

Estefania’s eyebrows rise, recognizing the tone of his voice. “What has happened?”

“Orellana is pregnant.” He is utterly shocked when Estefania shrieks a curse aloud and then flings herself into his arms, just as Fortunata had done.

“It is a good thing,” Estefania insists when she releases him. “A good omen. Two new additions to our family this year, Salazar.”

“I still fear for Orellana,” Salazar admits.

Estefania narrows her eyes. “Have you looked upon it? Scryed upon the water, brother?”

He shakes his head. “Sister, I’m afraid to do so. I fear what I might not see.”

“Then make an offering to our gods, and believe in your heart that all will be well,” Estefania says. “I must return. I told Andoni that I would not leave him long with our child. She’s become such the demanding baby!”

“You, spoiling your own daughter? I’d never believe it,” Salazar replies, and smiles when Estefania rolls her eyes before disappearing.
Their students do not seem surprised by the successful removal of the Horcrux from Nizar. Most of their questions for him center on wondering if it hurt, or if it was difficult to remove. Nizar answers all of these questions honestly without once mentioning that the soul shard’s removal did not take place on first Martius as originally planned.

Salazar looks to the others and finds quiet agreement; there will be plenty in their lives to come that their students will find frightening. There is no need to begin that education in terror when most are still so young.

It’s Fortunata and Galiena who earn the truth, especially as Galiena was present to see that the most prominent evidence of the shard, Nizar’s scar, was already fading. “Were you frightened?” Fortunata asks, clinging to Nizar’s hand.

“A bit,” Nizar says. “But your father was there, and your mother, Godric, Rowena, Helga, Anselmet, Oriel, Sedemai. Sometimes you have to learn to trust that there is someone at your back.”

It does not take long for every student to become aware of the fate of Galiena’s parents, and to learn that Hogewâþ’s youngest student is now a werewolf who will see her first full moon on twenty-seventh Martius. There is nervous muttering from a few mouths, but Nizar is a storm cloud when it comes to Galiena’s defence, chasing away the fears of the young ones with kind or stern words—or if that fails, burning-eyed glares that would set evil men to fleeing.

If anything will convince Galiena to claim Nizar as hers, it might be this, Salazar thinks. Galiena’s morose expression morphs into childhood beauty every time Nizar speaks on her behalf, of when he coaxes peace where there might have been tension. He speaks freely of his own werewolf godfather; the grief in his voice sways many who might otherwise have remained afraid.

It’s third Martius when the Summons Salazar has been expecting finally arrives, borne on the leg of an albino raven. “Is that a bloody albino crow?” Nizar asks when he spies the bird perched on the sitting room window ledge, dozing.

“Raven,” Salazar corrects as he reads through the letter. “Albino—do you mean *albus*? It is Latin for white.”

It’s only fortunate timing that enables Salazar to observe how badly Nizar startles at the word *albus*. “Uh—probably,” Nizar says. “In my time, albino has become a term for living creatures, humans included, who lack skin pigment. Or in that bird’s case…well, whatever it is that colors a bird’s wings.”

“Interesting.” Salazar rerolls the scroll, running his thumb over the seal for the Council over the isle of Briton. “What is wrong with the Latin term, Nizar?”

“Nothing.”

Salazar lifts an eyebrow. “Nizar. You reacted to that term like those who have nightmares about battles from long ago. Please tell me why it bothers you.”

Nizar sighs and gives in. “Albus is the first name of the Headmaster over the school in my time.”

“Hmm.” Salazar taps the scroll against his fingertips. “We should probably not inform Helga.”

His brother gives him a brief smile of relief for not pursuing the matter further. “Who sent you an albino raven and a letter, Sal?”
“Oh, that would be the Council. They’re wanting to see the three of us tomorrow regarding Ludovicus’s death to ensure that it was a justified killing and not a murder.”

Nizar hesitates. “Like in a criminal trial?”

“No,” Salazar assures him. “I’ve already sent them a full verbal accounting of what occurred that morning. This is more a formal confirmation that they will be taking no action, though they will be asking a few questions of yourself and Godric to make certain my story holds true.”

“But not Galiena, though, right? They’re not going to put her through that, are they?”

Salazar smiles. “You know, when the runes on that sheath reformed to call you a guardian, I think it might have underestimated you.”

Nizar blushes. “Shut up,” he mutters. “What time tomorrow?”

“We’ll use Desplazarse to travel directly to them after lunch.” Salazar gets out a fresh bit of paper to compose a response, tucking it into the leather case on the bird’s leg without disturbing the raven’s sleep at all.

“Is this going to be anything like Court?” Nizar asks. “Or is it going to be worse?”

Salazar gives him an odd look. “I cannot think of much that is worse, but no, it will not be worse than Court. You might find it to be equivalent, but you charmed Bermudo well enough.”

Nizar just stares when the three of them arrive in the Council’s current chosen meeting place. “Isn’t this bloody Stonehenge?”

“I’m not certain what you mean by Stonehenge, but this is the Giant’s Dance,” Godric answers, walking next to Nizar as they follow Salazar through the tall grass and up to the stones themselves. “It’s very, very old. Not even the Britons know when it was constructed, though they still use it in recognition of what it is.”

“Okay, then what is it?” Nizar asks just as they step through one of the remaining upright stones with its third slab of rock acting as a roof. “What the fuck!”

Salazar turns around to see Nizar staring up at the rocks, his jaw hanging open. “That, Nizar, is what I mean by a doorway,” Godric answers, looking pleased. “Most do not notice their first crossing of a doorway, especially as this one is not awake. It could be, given enough power, but for now it sleeps.”

“That’s inactive?” Nizar stares at Godric in disbelief. “My arse that’s not awake!”

“Oh, he’s charming,” the member of the Council to Salazar’s left remarks, but does not lower their hood. “And very sensitive to the currents of magic.”

Nizar glances around at the ring of black-cloaked and hooded magicians, all of them with their faces hidden. “He is also finding it alarming that he couldn’t see any of you until you spoke.”

“We do try to be subtle. The Giant’s Dance cannot be hidden from non-magical eyes, so we hide ourselves until it is time to speak,” another member of the Council says. Despite the distance from one side of the circle to the other, that voice is as perfectly audible as the magician closest to them.

“That’s understandable. I have no idea what the protocol for this is, so I’m just saying ‘Hello,’” Nizar says.
“Greetings, Nizar of House Deslizarse,” another intones, but their robes are green and blue compared to the dominant black. Salazar recalls the month and remembers that this would be the Speaker for the Council at this time of year. “You have walked through the stones that ensure your words will all be true. Salazar of House Deslizarse, we would like to hear you speak of what occurred once more.”

“Have no fear, Nizar of House Deslizarse. Ludovicus is a name known to us,” says a different member. “It would not have been much longer before he called down the whole of our wrath.”

Salazar goes to the center of the ring of magicians and bows to them, the same sort of traditional, complex greeting he offered Nizar on their first meeting. The earth practically sings beneath his feet, as it always does when he stands over this particular confluence of magic. “Greetings to you,” he says, and begins the explanation of what occurred the morning of twenty-fourth Februarius, starting with his rise from bed and ending with confirmation of young Galiena’s lycanthropy from Helga. The fight itself is harder for him to describe, mostly because such events tend to blur together. The habits crafted by training often take over, allowing him the means to think even as he reacts to each new threat.

“Thank you,” the Council’s Speaker says gravely. “Eorl Godric over Griffon’s Door, if you would take the Lord Salazar’s place in the circle?”

Nizar shifts on his feet, one to the other, as the others ask Godric sensible questions both of what Salazar was present for, and what he was not, which will grant them a clear picture of the morning. “Will you stop that?” Salazar requests in Parseltongue.

“It’s tingly,” Nizar grumbles. “It’s like my legs have gone to sleep, only they haven’t!”

“A sensitivity to strong magic, but not elemental magic. Interesting.” Salazar gives him a gentle nudge. “Your turn. Don’t attempt to lie.”

Nizar glares at him. “I don’t need to.”

They have even fewer questions for Nizar. Most of them seem to be a scholar’s curiosity over Helga’s healing techniques, which Nizar quickly loses patience for. “I don’t know!” he snaps after the third question. “I’m not a Völva. Go ask one of them!”

Salazar glances upwards and considers the merits in hexing his brother, but the Speaker only laughs. “Aptly stated. You fear us not at all, do you?”

“I’m actually a lot more worried about the fact that it feels like I’m going to be struck by lightning from the ground instead of the sky,” Nizar says bluntly.

“An Earth-Speaker?” one of the Council asks Salazar.

Salazar shakes his head. “No. A greater sensitivity to the flow of magic than any of us had realized, but he isn’t an Earth-Speaker. It will serve him well under his apprenticeship to Gedeloc of the Venicones.”

“You’re apprenticed to Gedeloc?” the Speaker asks in surprise.

“It’s not formal yet, but I will be by next week,” Nizar replies.

“He hasn’t taken an apprentice in twenty years. Consider yourself honored,” the Speaker says, but continues before Nizar can answer. “Thank you all for your time. It is our ruling that the death of the magician Ludovicus at the hands of Salazar Fernan, Marqués of León and magician of
Hogewáp in Moray, was right and just. Go in peace.”

Godric slings his arm around Nizar’s shoulders as they leave the circle, passing through the stone doorway again. “Well? What did you think of your first time before Briton’s Council?”

“Surprisingly free of horseshit,” Nizar says, and Godric laughs. “It was odd that no one showed their faces or used their own voice, though.”

“If one on trial does not know who is passing judgement, one has absolutely no idea who to bribe,” Salazar informs him. “Anonymity works very well in such matters. Even Godric has served five years on the Council, though he could only tell us after it was done.”

“And I had to oversee a hearing of yours three out of those five years,” Godric responds, rolling his eyes.

Nizar grins. “And you think I get in trouble a lot?”

Salazar scowls at the two idiots who are having fun at his expense. “They simply did not have an appreciation for the efficiency of Castile.”

* * * * *

Salazar sent out a letter on twenty-sixth Februarius, asking Sierida to carry to the message to a homestead near Eidyn Burh. His answer arrives on fifth Martius, not by bird, but by a guest arriving at the castle.

“I didn’t think that your response would arrive by your own lips,” Salazar greets her, taking her hand in a brief grip. He has to make himself let go.

“Nonsense. You intrigued me too much,” his guest replies, smiling. Salazar keeps the barriers in his mind raised, gritting his teeth as the shine of her magic washes over him. “Where is this brother of yours?”

Salazar sends his Patronus throughout the castle, bringing Orellana, Helga, Godric, Sedemai, Nizar, and Rowena to the Receiving Hall. “Oh, Maker bless me,” Godric mutters upon seeing their guest. “Rowena, do slap me if I attempt anything foolish.”

Rowena eyes him. “It would not take much, I think.”

Nizar merely tilts his head at the woman. “Half-Veela?”

She smiles. “I am. You’ve met a half-blood before, then?”

“A few full Veelas at a distance, and a one-quarter Veela. Fleur is a really good magician,” Nizar says.

“Little brother, this is Eithnemael of the Stone Hill, a bit away from Eidyn Burh’s watchful gaze. She is a Pictish magician who specializes only in the magic of blood. Eithnemael, this is my brother, Nizar Hariwalt Deslizarse.”

“Not quite yet, though the name suits well,” Eithnemael murmurs, allowing Nizar to take her hand. “Oh!” Her black eyes widen in surprise. “There is power within you, young Nizar, and such
potential. Not only could you learn my craft, you could be a great master of my magic.”

“I…thanks?” Nizar seems doubtful. “Sorry, I’m not intending to be rude. I’m still trying to get used to the way some people think of certain types of magic.”

“No, you mean no offense at all,” Eithnemael agrees. “Salazar, I see at once why you asked me to chart his blood. He is so far from the place and time of his birth, and yet he is not out of place at all.”

“Sal!”

“You mentioned Godric’s Hollow of Somerset, a village that does not yet exist. We became curious,” Salazar tells Nizar, who looks mutinous. “We have suspicions, but my skill in blood magic is very basic. For what I’d see done, it requires a master such as Eithnemael.”

They gather around the Receiving Hall table, watching as Eithnemael unrolls not paper, but parchment crafted from carefully stretched hide. She leans her staff against the table and then begins tracing over the parchment with her fingernails, leaving faint lines of magic behind that sink into the parchment.

“What is it you’re wanting to know?” Nizar asks in a low voice while Eithnemael works.

“If you’re related to more than just myself. Like Godric, for example,” Salazar says, glancing at the man in question. “Sedemai, kick him.”

Godric winces when Sedemai gives him a sharp kick with her boot beneath the table. “Husband, control yourself!”

“I’m trying,” Godric mutters resentfully, but his eyes are clear again. “Mind Magic only prevents so much, and she is not even trying to affect anyone around her!”

“Be glad I’m not my mother,” Eithnemael smirks as she continues to trace magic into the parchment. “You would already be lunging over this table, Godric of Griffon’s Door, and I’m not too shy to put a knife between your ribs.”

“And I’d very much like to avoid that, Lady Eithnemael.”

This time when the parchment is laid out before Nizar, it receives first a drop of blood from Salazar, Orellana, Sedemai, Godric, Rowena, and Helga on one side of the parchment. Only then does Nizar put his blood at the bottom. Eithnemael smiles when that single red drop strikes the parchment.

“Oh. Well.” Sedemai leans forward as tiny red lines jump from her name and Godric’s names to trace their slow, maze-like way down the page. “I honestly thought if there was blood between Godric and Nizar at all, it would come from one of his by-blows.”

“I’ve only forgotten the charms to prevent conception a few times,” Godric mutters, but his eyes are tracing the lines, too. So is Rowena, one eyebrow raised.

“From Salazar, but not from you,” Eithnemael says to Orellana.

Orellana smiles. “We already knew that it was Salazar’s family, but not Salazar himself.”

Eithnemael tilts her head as she reads the lines, which are still forming, making their slow way down the parchment. “No, not directly of Salazar, but Nizar is very much a child of the Ancient
“House of Serpents.” She smiles again. “Nizar is of that House by his father’s line.”

“That part I figured out on my own,” Nizar says. “My mother was a magician from a non-magical family.”

“No, not so much. Perhaps the magic had not spoken in that bloodline for a long time, but not entirely non-magical,” Eithnemael counters, tapping the line from Rowena’s name. “The lines that begin to connect you are not from Rowena herself, but a grandniece. Your mother is of Ravenclaw’s blood, Young Serpent.”

Nizar stares at her in surprise. “Really?”

Eithnemael rolls her eyes. “Do not doubt my work. Rowena is a great-aunt to you, though many generations dwell between yourself and her.”

“And what is this, then?” Godric asks, pointing to the complicated, intermixed lines that now join him and Sedemai to Nizar.

“A direct line of descent,” Eithnemael pronounces, sounding a bit gleeful. “Nizar is a many-times great-grandson to you.”

Godric looks disturbed. “I’ve no wish to have more of a claim to Nizar than the one Salazar has rightfully made.”

Eithnemael laughs aloud. “You could not even if you wished to. It is not the magic of the Griffon’s Door line that sings in Nizar’s blood, but that of the Serpent. Even the whisper of Ravenclaw is drowned out by that ancient song.”

“Nizar?” Orellana asks, noticing the pensive expression on Nizar’s face.

“I’m finding myself disappointed that Helga has no lines on this parchment at all,” Nizar says. “I’ve thought you all to be family, but I didn’t know it was literal. It would be nice if it was true for all of you.”

Helga reaches across the table to grip Nizar’s hand. “Nizar. You are bróðir to me, though I cannot lay the same claim as Salazar. I do not need blood to feel that way.”

Eithnemael is studying Nizar. “You are distressed by this reading of the blood.”

“Not the reading. Not the magic,” Nizar replies. “Family is a difficult subject for me.”

“Mm.” Eithnemael has not taken her eyes from Nizar. “You will come to me on Samhain. You will learn magic beneath me, and you will be stronger for it.”

Nizar jerks his head up from the parchment. “What? But I can’t—”

“You will,” Eithnemael interrupts him in a calm voice. “I always know my students, and I always know when. By the time Samhain is upon us, you will understand why, and seek me out by your own choice.”

“You’ve just said I’m going to do it. That does not sound like choice to me,” Nizar says, glaring at Eithnemael. Salazar wants to caution him not to do so. Magicians like Eithnemael can be… dangerous.

“Just because I’ve seen the choice you make does not mean you do not choose it.” Eithnemael
sounds much like every Pictish magic worker Salazar has ever encountered—cryptic, all of them. Myrddin learned many bad habits from them over the centuries.

Nizar frowns. “Why do you not come here on Samhain, then?”

Eithnemael raises an eyebrow. “No one has taught you how an apprenticeship is sought, have they?”

“What am I missing?” Nizar asks them.

“For formal apprenticeships, the student must seek the master. You must go to her, and find her where she dwells. You must ask and accept what will be, in this case, a formal contract.” Rowena’s brow is slightly furrowed as she looks at Eithnemael. “Would you be willing to winter in Hogewáþ, Eithnemael? It would ease Nizar’s heart, for he has other responsibilities that he would have intense cause for regret if they were forsaken.”

Eithnemael looks at Nizar again, who stares back at her with no hint of Godric or Salazar’s difficulty. When it comes to dealing with Veela, Salazar truly envies those who are utterly uninterested in those of female gender. Male Veelas do not create the same problem for women at all.

“Master of Mind Magic, and such a price you paid to earn such,” Eithnemael says at last in a quiet, solemn voice. Nizar instinctively reaches up to touch the scar on his forehead, which has faded to the point where it’s scarcely visible at all. “Fighting for others—learning my magic will make you a stronger master of Defence, Young Serpent. Oh, and the Metamorphe Magia.”

“And…a ward. Maybe.” Nizar swallows. “A daughter of others, but I promised her I would be what she needed if she chose.”

“You are a strange one, aren’t you?” Eithnemael muses. “A fighter to any bitter end; holder of ambition without desire for power; a leader who would risk himself before others; a devourer of knowledge who thinks he has no wisdom to share.”

Nizar hunches his shoulders. “I’m just me.”

“Yes,” Eithnemael agrees, smiling. “But soon you will be so much more.” She stands abruptly, taking her staff into her hand. “Salazar, I am grateful for your invitation. I have learned much today. I will take no payment; finding my next apprentice is all the coin I need.”

Salazar stands up and takes her hand again to bow over it. “You are truly frightening, Eithnemael. I will see you in the winter, I suspect.”

Eithnemael gives him a surprisingly sympathetic look. “Yes,” she says. “You will.” Then she uses Desplazarse to leave the Hall.

“Nizar?” Rowena prompts when Salazar turns around.

Nizar is scowling. “I can’t decide if I like her, or if I wish to toss her from a cliff.”

“I thought the same of Myrddin. Often,” Salazar admits, smiling. “Contention between student and master is no bad thing as long as one still learns.”

Sedemai laughs at the expression on Nizar’s face. “There are worse things, Nizar. Besides, you did voice interest in learning more of Blood Magic.”
“Yes, but I didn’t expect to be studying that, Defence, Metamorphe Magia, Pictish Magia, and bloody languages all at once!” Nizar puts his face down on the table and covers his head with his arms.

“Gedeloc has already spoken for you?” Rowena asks in surprise. “You hadn’t said!”

“Hedwig brought the letter back the same day we were to see the Council, so I got distracted. At least now I know why he wants me to come fetch him from Aberdeen,” Nizar says into the tabletop. “I can do this. I don’t actually need to sleep for the next year.”

Salazar stares at Nizar. Even he hadn’t completely put together the full breadth of the responsibilities Nizar has taken upon himself. “Little brother, Godric is correct. You are completely insane.”

Nizar groans again. Then he lifts his arm and offers Salazar two raised fingers, which sets Godric off laughing.

* * * *

The night before the Equinox, Hari waits until he’s been able to gently convince Galiena to sleep before he goes to his shelves and retrieves four scrolls, each labeled on the outside corner with names.

He lies each one out on his rug; a single tap of his wand keeps the images still and flat instead of trying to curl back up again. James Potter, a ghostlike Recordari translation of a photograph of a young father chasing after a toddler on a toy broom. Lily Potter, smiling at someone out of sight in the photograph, standing in a room that he can’t remember enough of to give it detail. Remus Lupin has a gentle smirk on his face and his wand pointed at a shaking wardrobe in the DADA classroom, one with an angry boggart inside that wants to come out and be a Dementor. Sirius Black, who on the paper is sometimes the big black Newfoundland dog, and sometimes himself as he’d looked the last time Hari saw Sirius in the Hogwarts hospital wing.

“You said you’d see me soon,” Hari says to Sirius’s image. “I don’t think this is what either of us had in mind.” He takes a breath and addresses all four images. “You know it doesn’t change what you mean to me. I’d like to hope you’d understand why I’d give up my name. Maybe after we all had a long talk about how Salazar Slytherin isn’t what we were taught—and hey, he is family, too. Somehow. It isn’t as if I’m being adopted by someone I’m not related to at all.”

For the first time in long months, Hari thinks on that wizard who’d come to him on his fifteenth birthday. Hari remembers recognizing that the man was family, albeit distant, and wonders how much he’s never been told about his family. He wonders how many actual relatives he had out there that could have raised him, people who were not the Dursleys.

“I like to think you’d be happy for me,” Hari says, wiping his face. “Because I am. I’m happy, and safe, and I think my life is going to be incredible.” It certainly beats letting Voldemort kill him.

“I miss you,” Hari whispers. He releases the charm that held the scrolls flat, letting them roll up to hide the recorded images once more.
When Hari wakes up on the Lencten Equinox of fifteenth Martius, it’s a clear, bright day, almost warm enough to fool someone into think it’s summer. At least his brother’s coin in paying a weather magician to ensure it hadn’t been a waste of money.

Weather magic. Hari ponders the idea while submerging his head beneath the water in the bathtub. He might like to have a better awareness of the weather, but the idea of playing with it sounds like asking for fucking trouble, and he has that in spades already.

He gets through cleaning and shaving all right, but when confronted by the clothes he laid out for the day, Hari realizes exactly what is going to take place and has the worst case of nerves he’s ever dealt with.

Hari knows when he finally makes it out to the sitting room that he probably looks unwell, especially since he has both of his arms crossed over his stomach. Salazar’s reaction confirms it. “What’s wrong?” he asks in alarm.

“I am so fucking nervous that I’ve been sick three times so far this morning,” Hari admits, trying to smile.

Salazar guides Hari over to sit down on one of the padded benches. “Now I’m truly glad I did not hold to the original plan of the Summer Solstice.”

“It isn’t just about the event. I keep asking myself…” Hari swallows down another surge of nausea. “I keep asking myself if I should let you do this.”

Salazar’s jaw clenches for a moment, but his expression eases before Hari can apologize for hurting him. “Why?”

“Because…because I’m me,” Hari whispers.

Salazar shakes his head, sighs, and then wraps his arms around Hari. “That is exactly why I am doing this, little brother. Because you are you.”

“You’re an idiot,” Hari mutters into Salazar’s robe.

“Then I will be in good company,” Salazar replies, and gives him a gentle shove. “Come on. You are actually behind schedule, and they will be waiting for us.”

“You might actually have to drag me,” Hari says. “I think I’d rather deal with the dragon again.”

Salazar grasps him by both shoulders. “Nizar: does it make you happy, this adoption?”

Hari almost rears back. “Uh—yeah! Yes, I mean. Of course it does.”

“That people waiting outside will also be happy for you,” Salazar says.

It’s exactly the sort of reminder Hari needed. This isn’t Hogwarts. This is Hogewáþ, and unlike Bermudo’s Court, everyone present is someone he likes or someone he loves, and they feel the same way about him.

It won’t always be that way, Hari knows, thinking on how Hogewáþ will soon be a much larger school than the Founders realize. There will come a day when someone of foul temperament will
enter these halls to learn, and they will still be taught, even if they act like a complete prick. It
won’t be their attitude that matters, but their intentions.

If only he’d known that at age eleven. Then again, if he’d let that Sorting Hat have its way, Hari
might not be going out into the bright sunshine in the land of Moray in 991, ready to sign a scroll
that will mean he doesn’t just have a family in words and distant ties of blood, but by magic and
law.

Everyone is outside already, waiting in the wide, grassless expanse before the castle drawbridge.
Someone put up a tent of sorts on tall wooden posts, and a white canvas is tied to its top, shading
everyone even as it flutters in the mild breeze. Orellana has Fortunata and Galiena, holding each
girl’s hand; Helga is still being shadowed by rosy-cheeked Fellona from the Isle of Man, who Hari
finds distractingly familiar. Estefania and Andoni are at the front of the crowd, and Andoni is
cradling swaddled baby María in his arms. Estefania is wearing a silver gown, the color of the
House of Wise Women’s magic, but she also has on silver jewelry graced with emeralds to
acknowledge her father’s part of the family.

He didn’t know who Bermudo was going to send as a witness for León, but Hari recognizes Ines at
once. She served beneath Salazar when he was insane enough to accept the post of Magical
Alférez under King Ramiro III. Hari heard a lot about those three years in the evenings during
Christmastide at Bermudo’s Court, which often involved Salazar and Ines getting really pissed
together as they reminisced over battles or whinged about politics then and now. It had definitely
been educational.

The rest of the students are clustered around the Founders, Sedemai, Oriel, and Anselmet, the latter
of whom are once again acting today as magicians to witness the adoption. The castle’s other eight
servants are behind them, though it doesn’t escape Hari’s notice that Constantinius is lurking as far
to the back as possible without it being considered rude. All right, then; the feeling of dislike is
mutual.

Hari steps forward when Salazar gives him a pointed look of instruction, standing alone in front of
Helga. Originally it was going to be Rowena who presided over the signing of the contract, but
after Eithnemael’s blood reading, she’s no longer considered neutral.

Helga looks exceptionally pleased to be doing so in Rowena’s place. Her voice is still solemn when
she addresses the crowd, though. Hari almost wishes she’d choose to sound more like herself. “On
this fifteenth Martius, day of the Lencten Equinox, we meet to bear witness to the first magical
adoption conducted before the walls of Hogewâþ. Today, one of our magicians chooses to give up
the name of his birth and accept the name of his chosen brother.”

Helga turns to Hari, and the feel of magic in the air lands on Hari’s head like a gentle blanket.
“Harry James Potter, born in Somerset in England sixteen years ago, you have read the terms of the
adoptive contract. Do you agree to them with an easy heart, clear thoughts, and of your own will?”

Hari is surprised to find that he doesn’t feel nervous any longer. Magic is bloody grand. “Yes, I do
agree to the written terms with an easy heart, clear thoughts, and of my own will.”

“Once this document has been signed by yourself and by others, your name will now longer be
what was given to you at birth. You will henceforth be known as Nizar Hariwalt, Lord of León, of
the Ancient House of Serpents in the County of Castile and the land of Ipuzko, Magical Master of
Mind Magic and a student in the ways of Defence and Picti Magia. Do you still agree to these
terms?”

Hari glances down at his left palm, which is marked by raised runes that look like scars—the
contract he now has with Gedeloc, which will disappear when Gedeloc is satisfied that Hari’s apprenticeship is done. He wonders if Eithnemael’s will be stacked over this one, or if he’ll be looking at rune-sets on both of his hands. At least Godric didn’t bother with binding contract marks. “I do agree.”

Helga nods at Hari and turns to Salazar. “And you claim this one?”

Salazar takes a step forward so that he stands next to Hari, his eyes closed. When Salazar takes a breath and opens them, the emerald green fire and silver sparks of his magic are burning in his eyes. “I am Salazar Fernan of the Ancient House of Serpents, born twenty-eighth December in 969. I was named Salazar by my father to remind those of Castile and León that it was a son of Ipuzko that would bear the noble title from his wife’s line.”

Hari can’t help glancing at Salazar when he hears the vicious pride in Salazar’s voice. He wonders what politics were involved there.

“I was Magical Alférez to King Ramiro III of León, and am Magical Marqués of León over Castile.” Salazar hesitates only for a brief moment. “I am the Emerald Flame of the West, Potions Master of León and Moray, holder of magical masteries in Divination and Mind Magic, and I am Keeper of Hogewáþ’s Western Magic. I claim this one, named at birth as Harry James Potter, as my brother by right of my father’s familial blood and magic flowing in his veins, by the wisdom of choice, and by the guidance of my magic and heart.”

Helga smiles and looks to Estefania. “Does the family to the Marqués agree to the wisdom of this adoption?”

Estefania inclines her head in a graceful nod. “Both the House of Wise Women in Castile and the Ancient House of Serpents in Ipuzko do so agree.”

Helga directs her attention to Gedeloc, who had to become their other witness after the blood-reading for the same reason Rowena couldn’t officiate—neutrality. “Gedeloc of the Venicones, Master of the Picti Magia: do you find your student to be of sound mind, heart, and magic, and that he makes this choice of his own will?”

Gedeloc tightens his grip on his staff before bows low enough that his long grey hair swings forward. “I vow the answer is yes to both, Helga Hugðilepuf.”

“Ines Ildaria, Magical Marquésa over the land of Asturias and current Magical Alférez for the throne of León: does the kingdom of León agree to the terms of the adoption?” Helga asks.

Ines smiles. “I certainly do, and it is my word that matters most.”

“Then step forth, all of you,” Helga bids them.

Hari walks next to Salazar and uses the shift of fabric and Gedeloc’s heavy steps to mask his voice. “How difficult did you find it to say Harry instead of Hari?”

Salazar lets out a faint snort. “So very, very difficult, little brother.”

The white quill with its black markings was made from one of Hedwig’s own discarded primary feathers. Helga presents it to Hari first and waves him to the contract waiting on the table beneath the tent.

Hari takes one last look at the words, acknowledging what he’s giving up and what he’s gaining. He still thinks there is something not quite perfect about the contract that’s been written, but he and
Sal have been wracking their brains for days. Neither of them can figure out what might possibly be missing. Not even Rowena sees anything amiss.

He takes a breath and signs the document first with his old name—he had to bloody practice it again!—and then with the new name Salazar gave him, placing the date next to the last letter. Then he lets his shoulders slump in relief before handing the quill to Salazar.

Salazar takes it from his fingers, flashing Hari a bright grin, before he signs the document with his usual swiftness when it comes to employing the whole of his name and titles. Estefania is next, placing her full name and title onto the contract with a smug smile on her face. Gedeloc hobbles forward, muttering under his breath about the irritation involved in having a war-maimed and hobbled leg. He takes the quill from Estefania, gives Hari a quick, musing glance, and then signs the contract not in Latinized script, but in the Pictish script of circles and runes. At last, Ines signs the contract with the flourish of a trained scribe.

The blanket of magic Hari felt at the start sinks into his skin, making him gasp. His vision whites out; for a moment, the only thing he sees is emerald that shines with stars of silver.

*Salazar was right,* Nizar thinks, shaking his head until his vision clears. He knows without having to search for it that those hints of gold are gone. In fact…

“How can you still see any sign of that blood protection?” Nizar asks her. It’s probably not proper form, but he wants to know.

Helga regards him in the peculiar, still way that means she’s actively calling upon her magical Sight. “No,” she says at last. “I didn’t realize that would be affected by the adoption.”

“I would imagine that the magic recognized such would no longer be necessary.” Salazar grasps Nizar’s hand. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

“It’s okay, Sal. You’re correct. It wouldn’t be necessary anymore,” Nizar says.

“How do you feel, brother of Salazar?” Gedeloc asks, giving Nizar a sharp look with his multi-hued blue eyes.

“Normal,” Nizar replies honestly. If anything is weird, it’s how easy it is to get used to—

Nizar frowns. Normal. Entirely, completely *normal.* He’s thinking of himself by his new name like it’s never been anything different.

*My name is Nizar.*

Nizar scowls and tries again.

*My name is Nizar.*

Fuck!

“Sal?” Nizar glares at his brother. “How are you this entirely bad at being a Slytherin?”

“Oh, you’re aggravated enough to choose the mutilation of our name.” Salazar lifts both eyebrows. “What did I do?”

“I know what was wrong with the contract, Sal!” Nizar tries to turn his glare onto the contract, but it disappeared—the magic in its writing was dispersed between the two of them.
“Is this a wrong that will cause problems to the family?” Estefania asks, eyes narrowing.

“No, it’s just a complete pain in the arse!” Nizar scowls. “I can’t lie about my name, Salazar! I can’t even think it differently in my own head!”

Salazar lets out a relieved sigh. “Gods. For a moment, I was certain it was going to be something dire.”

“Something dire—!” Nizar switches over to Parseltongue, mindful of a lot of young ears trying to listen in, and then proceeds to tear Salazar a new one with every invective he’s ever heard in his entire life.

Estefania is speaking over his hissing. “How could you not think of an allowance for such? Have you forgotten everything you’ve ever been taught about politics and life at Court?”

“I’ve never had to tell someone my name is anything other than it is!” Salazar retorts, though he’s leaning away from Nizar’s Parseltongue tirade.

Helga is leaning against the nearest post, all but howling with laughter. “Oh, gods, Salazar! You deserve every word he’s spitting at you!”

“Well, now we can be assured that they are family. They fight as such,” Gedeloc says in a mild voice full of amusement.

“I’m truly sorry!” Salazar exclaims as Nizar breaks off. “You’re correct that it is a terrible lapse in thought. I hope it is a forgivable one.”

Nizar swallows; Gedeloc probably meant his words to be light and teasing, but all of his experience with family previous to Hogewáþ involved fighting. “Sal.” He shakes his head and then wraps his arms around his idiot brother. “I swear there is nothing to forgive.”

Salazar’s embrace is almost too tight. “You’re certain?”

“I really am. About everything.”

End Notes

I lurk on Tumblr @deadcatwithaflamethrower

Works inspired by this: MmAmōn - Rememberer by CharlotteDaBookworm

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!