The Dark Lord Inside

by Melodramaticx

Summary

If he had been anyone but Harry Potter, he might have thought he was dreaming. But apparently, having the past conscience of the most evil wizard alive stuck in your mind was an everyday occurrence for the Boy Who Lived.
The Destroyed Diary

It was in the library that Harry came across Tom Riddle’s diary again.

After the chaos that was his second year, Harry had had no desire to look upon the destroyed diary again, and so had given it back to Lucius Malfoy in a ploy to provide Dobby with his freedom.

The plot had worked and what had happened to the ink-stained diary after those events were unknown to Harry, nor did he even care. As far as he was concerned, the diary was gone forever.

However, these things – especially with Harry’s luck – had a way of coming back.

And so it was that Harry once again stumbled across the slim black book whilst perusing the shelves of the Hogwarts library, one November weekend.

Hermione had insisted that they start revising for their exams – “Summer exams? Hermione are you out of your bloody mind? Do you know how far away summer is?” Ron had said incredulously – and Ron and Harry had reluctantly agreed when Hermione had quite rightly pointed out that even with the summer exams in the far future, January would still bring about a host of mock exams anyway.

“Besides, you know how Snape is,” Hermione told them. “He’s gonna be looking for any reason to dock points.”

“You would have thought getting the desired Defense Against the Dark Arts position would have satisfied him,” Ron had muttered.

Harry sighed, reaching a hand to rub at his eyes underneath his glasses tiredly. They had only been in the library for an hour but already his mind had started drifting to other things. Particularly Quidditch.

The weather had been too atrocious to be out flying much and Harry missed it, the air whipping past his face and the feel of freedom all around him. In the air was the only place Harry ever felt truly free, where he felt like Harry Potter, rather than the Boy Who Lived.

He’d excused himself from their shared revision table under the pretence of looking for a book to help with his History of Magic revision but really, he just needed a break. Hidden amongst the many shelves, Harry let out a yawn and wondered how much long Hermione would insist they stay in here.

Figuring that he might as well return with a book before they sent out a rescue party for him, Harry grabbed a random book from the history section of the library. However, as he did so, another book that had been wedged in the pages of the history came loose, crashing down on top of his head.

Harry swore under his breath, rubbing the spot on his head where the corner of the book had hit.

“Now I’m getting attacked by the blooming library;” he muttered, leaning down to pick up the tattered book that now lay on the floor. As he did so, a burning pain flashed through him, starting in his fingertips and lingering in his scar.

Harry immediately dropped the book again, taking a step back and bumping into the opposite shelf and upsetting a couple of other books that had been precariously put back.
“Blimey mate, were you planning on bringing all those books back?” a voice said, and Harry glanced up to see Ron staring at the books surrounding Harry.

“N-No, they err… they just fell,” he grumbled in reply, hastily shoving the books back where they came from but keeping the tattered book and the history book to bring back to the table.

“Honestly, how long are you planning on staying here?” Ron asked, letting out a yawn as he leaned against one of the shelves. “Because I feel like my brain is melting out my ears. I must’ve read the same passage over and over again and I still have no idea what subject I’m even revising.”

“I don’t know, you know what Hermione’s like.”

“We’ve been here for an hour, Harry! This is more revision than I usually do in a week,” the redhead groaned.

“I thought you didn’t even know what subject you were revising?” Harry smirked, returning to the revision table with Ron dragging his feet.

“My point still stands.”

Hermione barely gave them a look when they returned, her nose buried in a thick book with sheets of parchment surrounding her on all sides.

Whilst Ron became content with staring wistfully out the window at the grounds, Harry glanced dully at what book he had ended up with. It had something to do with the history of magic schools in Europe, which had nothing to do with what he was studying this year.

Sighing, he pushed the book to the side and instead focused on the book that had been hidden in-between its pages. Then he froze.

Trailing his fingers down the front cover, he gaped at he stared at the extremely familiar book. Memories resurfaced in his brain – going down into the Chamber, meeting Tom Riddle, battling the Basilisk…

Slowly, he traced his fingers over the torn cover and the gaping hole in the middle of the book from where he had plunged the giant snake’s tooth in.

Tom Riddle’s diary. Here, at Hogwarts again. Four years since he had last seen it, the black book was once again in front of it, an air of evil seemingly surrounding it.

“What’ve got there?” Ron asked curiously, and Harry instantly slammed the history book over the diary. He didn’t know why, but he felt the reappearance of Tom Riddle’s diary was best left secret from his best friend for now. Especially since it had already caused so much horror for his family.

“Just a book on magic schools,” Harry muttered.

“Are we even studying that?”

“Merlin knows. I just picked it out.”

“Well it’s got to be more interesting than anything we are studying.” Ron muttered. “Honestly, Binns can make even the goriest goblin battle sound like Percy’s work day.”

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It was only later that night, with the curtains drawn tight around his four-poster bed that Harry had
the chance to take another look at Riddle’s diary.

It looked innocent enough – albeit with the front cover destroyed – but it had that same aura about it, a darkness that Harry was only too well familiar with.

But the part of Riddle’s soul that was in the diary was gone, Harry thought to himself. Destroyed down in the Chamber of Secrets by his twelve-year-old self. The diary was nothing more than a tattered old book now.

But why had it been in the library, shoved between the pages of a history textbook? Harry was highly doubtful that Lucius Malfoy had made the same mistake of leaving Voldemort’s personal belongings around Hogwarts, especially since Harry didn’t think Voldemort to be much the forgiving type.

Ignoring the rational part of his mind that told him to take the diary to Dumbledore immediately, Harry opened the diary with curiosity. Most of the book – both the cover and the pages – had been destroyed by the basilisk fang and Harry couldn’t even pry open the pages, since most of them were stuck together with long dried ink.

Only a few pages in the back of the book had not been punctured, though these pages were blank and looked relative innocent enough. Narrowing his eyes in suspicion, Harry leaned across to his bedside desk and grabbed a quill.

Just to make sure it’s truly destroyed, he decided. Either way I’ll give it to Dumbledore, but I want to make sure Riddle’s definitely destroyed.

Pressing the quill to the blank parchment, he wrote a simple hello and waited.

The ink did not disappear as it had done before. Nor did any new writing appear. In fact, after a few minutes of staring down at the page and waiting for something to happen, Harry felt a bit ridiculous.

This was just a diary now, he’d destroyed whatever part of Voldemort had been in there. He had heard the screams of his younger self, watched the illusion shatter into a thousand pieces mere moments before Ginny Weasley woke up.

Satisfied that the diary was simply that, an old book, Harry hid it under his pillow and nox-ed his wand, drifting off into an uneasy sleep.

His dreams that night were of moving silhouettes, of Hogwarts and what appeared to be the streets of London. The dreams culminated in screams and flashes of green before Harry woke up gasping in the middle of the night, drenched in a cold sweat.

However, he was too tired to mull over his nightmare and soon fell back to sleep, and by the time morning came, the dreams were quite forgotten.
“You look awful mate,” Ron commented on his appearance the next day at breakfast.

“Feel exhausted,” Harry mumbled, eying up the food before settling for a simple pumpkin juice. He picked at a piece of toast for a while but didn’t feel up for food. Whenever he thought about it waves of nausea came crashing down and he decided to play it safe.

“It’s not You-Know-Who again, is it?” Hermione asked worriedly, dropping her voice down to a whisper so only they could hear.

Harry shook his head. “No, at least I don’t think so. No dreams or anything I don’t think – just woke up on the wrong side of the bed I guess.”

“Happens to us all,” Ron said cheerily, glad that their conversation wouldn’t turn so serious too soon. He grabbed another tongful of bacon and dropped it on his plate, immediately digging in.

In contrast, Hermione delicately picked up one piece of bacon at a time and by the time she started eating, Ron was on his third lot of bacon.

Harry watched them, nose wrinkling as another wave of nausea hit him. If he was still feeling like this at dinner, he’d go to Madam Pomfrey but for now he just satisfied himself with his juice.

*Luckily, by the time lunch rolled round Harry was suddenly ravenous. Even Ron was surprised as Harry piled on sandwiches and sausage rolls and slices of pot pie onto two separate plates and ate from both, seemingly unpicky about what to eat first as it all went on the same fork.*

Ron was staring at him with a mixture of disgust and amazement. “Slow down there Harry, I’m pretty sure the elves aren’t going to suddenly stop cooking.”

Hermione scoffed next to them, as she always did when house elves were mentioned, but mercifully said nothing.

“‘M hungry,” Harry protested around a mouthful of food. “I didn’t eat anything this morning, felt sick.”

“I suppose everyone’s feeling a bit like that,” Hermione commented, not looking up from whichever textbook she was currently revising out of. “It’s always in November that everyone falls ill, have you noticed that?”

“Not particularly,” Ron said, still watching Harry while eating his own lunch. “Seriously, are you going to eat all that?”

“You eat just as much,” Hermione tutted. She muttered something under her breath that sounded suspiciously like “boys and their metabolisms” before returning to her book and Ron finally put his focus back on his own lunch.

Harry meanwhile suddenly stopped eating, fullness having thrown itself upon him quite suddenly. He swallowed his last mouthful, staring down at his plates with a feeling of regret, before Ron pulled him into a conversation about the Chudley Cannons most recent match.
“Today we will be brewing an Elixir to Induce Euphoria,” Professor Slughorn announced briskly, rubbing his hands together as he eyed the sixth-year potion class in front of him. “Tricky little concoction this, but luckily not disastrous if gotten wrong. However, since you are now all NEWT students, I want nothing short of perfection! Turn to page 142 and get started, please.”

Hermione immediately leapt into action, springing from her chair to the cupboard where the ingredients were and by the time the rest of the class had stumbled back with their ingredients – Dean was still gazing between two different types of bean, attempting to figure out which was the correct one – she had already added the shrivelfig and was watching her simmering potion intently.

Predictably she snorted in distaste when she saw the Half Blood Prince’s notes in Harry’s textbook, a heavy contrast to Ron who immediately darted his eyes to the book to try and find some tips.

Harry worked mechanically, following the instructions of the book to the letter until he came to the Prince’s scribblings between steps three and four. Here the Prince advised adding peppermint in order to counteract the side-effects.

Whilst normally Harry would have followed the Prince’s advice without hesitation, he paused, his eyes glazing over as he stared unseeing at the page in front of him.

There was something in the back of his mind, something that made him pause before he got up in search of peppermint. Shaking his head of the feeling, he got up and wandered over to the cupboard, searching amongst the herbs for the desired one.

He grabbed a bunch of the leaves but before he left his hand reached out instinctively, grabbing some rosemary as well before making his way back to the bench.

It felt like muscle memory – like he had made this potion hundreds of times before and that rosemary was the main ingredient.

Harry sat back down at his desk, ignoring the mutterings of Ron next to him and Hermione’s hand frantically grabbing various ingredients as she put together a potion that was a perfect replica of the example in the book.

Harry eyed the two different types of herbs in front of him, his hand hovering momentarily over the peppermint.

Again, that tiny, barely perceivable part of his mind stopped him from adding it, and instead nudged him towards the rosemary. Harry – who had never been one for ignoring his gut instinct, given that it had saved him many a time – grabbed the rosemary, shredding it into tiny pieces before carefully sprinkling it into his potion.

The ripped-up pieces of herbs immediately dissolved and the potion bubbled before settling back into its simmer. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, so Harry continued, adding the sopophorous beans and returning to the book’s original instructions.

The Potions class passed relatively uneventful – evidently Dean had chosen the wrong bean and was now looking between his cauldron and book in confusion, trying to figure out why instead of a nice sunshine yellow, his potion had settled for a sludge green. Slughorn exhaled heavily as he peered into Dean’s cauldron but said nothing before moving onto Seamus, who was far behind everyone else but to his credit had the potion at the exact colour it should be.

When Slughorn stopped at Hermione’s cauldron and peered in, his lips turned up into a smile and
he praised Hermione for her “perfect performance, as always” and awarded Gryffindor five points before moving onto Harry.

Harry stood back from his cauldron nervously, watching as Slughorn peered at the contents, nodding approvingly before he suddenly stopped and his eyes widened.

“My dear boy,” he murmured to himself, inhaling deeply. “Simply marvellous… stroke of genius…”

“Sorry, sir?” Harry spoke up anxiously. He really had no idea what the rosemary would do. For all he knew it could have made the cauldron explode on contact. Thinking about this, Harry wondered whether following his gut instinct in Potions with potentially toxic ingredients was the best idea.

“What did you add, my boy?” Slughorn asked in wonder, staring at Harry as if seeing him in a new light.

“Err… r-rosemary?” Harry admitted meekly as Ron frowned and squinted down at the textbook’s list of ingredients.

“Enlightening, really” the potions professor breathed, before glancing up at the rest of the class, some of who had looked up from their own concoctions in curiosity. “Everyone! Can I have your attention please?”

Harry averted his eyes, staring down at a folded corner in his books as he was suddenly aware of everyone’s eyes on him. When he looked up, he could see Malfoy scowling at him from across the room, his normally immaculate hair sticking to his forehead.

“Haven’t seen anything like this for quite a while! Not for many years in fact!” Professor Slughorn was saying excitedly, clapping his hands as he glanced once more to Harry’s cauldron. “What Mr Potter has done – a stroke of genius I dare say – was add rosemary to his elixir. Why, an elixir of this potency is effect enough on its own but by adding rosemary to it, why, I dare say Mr Potter’s potion has got to be at least ten times more powerful than the rest of the class’s potions! At least!”

Harry could feel Hermione’s glare on the back on his neck but he ignored it in favour of tidying his station as Slughorn finally stopped going on about Harry’s stroke of genius and dismissed the class at last.

“Blimey mate, reckon he was about two seconds away from forcing you to teach the class,” Ron muttered as they finally gathered their books and left the dungeons.

“Wonder how he’d feel if his star pupil was actually cheating,” Hermione said haughtily as Harry opened his mouth to reply.

“Cheating?” Ron said indignantly. “That’s not cheating-”

“Yes it is! As well you know, as well as-”

“Hermione if copying what the book tells you to do is cheating then I guess every single one of us is cheating. Especially you.”

Harry, who was only too used to the arguments between his two best friends, decided to keep his mouth shut on this one. He didn’t want to say anything that might anger Hermione further, and he particularly didn’t want to mention the fact that he had put the rosemary in there on a whim, rather than that the Prince had told him to. He’d reckon she’d have a heart attack.
“Just admit it,” Ron was saying as they headed to Charms. “You’re just jealous.”

“This isn’t about jealousy!” Hermione snapped. “What Harry did was dangerous!”

“Dangerous?” Ron scoffed as Harry looked up at the bushy haired witch in alarm. “It’s a fucking happiness potion. And Harry strengthened it. And if anyone needs extra strong happiness, then god knows its Harry-”

“Yes, because too much of something good can never be a bad thing,” Hermione said sarcastically. “That’s why amormentia is on the list of some of the most dangerous legal potions in the world – because it’s so harmless.”

“What do you mean dangerous?” Harry asked before Ron could retort.

“Elixir of Induced Euphoria basically takes some of your inhibitions away,” she said matter-of-factly. “It’s kind of like alcohol in a way. Except its more focused on happiness rather than confidence. Take away all of someone’s embarrassments and replace all their emotions with happiness… imagine what that would do to a person!”

“Give them a good life?” Ron offered and Hermione looked at him sourly.

“No,” she stressed. “A life full of happiness is no real life at all. If you’re always happy then you have no hang-ups about anything! No worries! You become so reliant that even the slightest bit of unhappiness is magnified to enormous levels. That’s why so many wizards and witches keep strengthening them. Soon many people basically overdose on them, because they’re so scared of being unhappy and they have no worries about what could happen to them. They think nothing will go wrong.”

“They overdose?” Ron said in disbelief.

Hermione nodded fervently. “Yes. It’s extremely important to have an emotional balance in life. That’s why there so much suspicion on potions that change one’s emotions. Theoretically, we shouldn’t have this much power over our own emotions. It’s potentially extremely harmful.”

At this Ron laughed. “Hermione, we’re in a magic school. Tell you what, you go straight up to Dumbledore and demand he take magic off the curriculum, on the basis that changing things is harmful.”

“Look, it’s fine,” Harry said wearily, feeling a wave of exhausted hit him as they reached the charms classroom. “I didn’t take any, and no one is going too. No one is going to overdose on that elixir.”

Hermione huffed but dropped it as they took their seats in the half-filled classroom. However, by the suspicious darts she gave to Harry’s potions book, it was clear the incident was not forgotten.
Dinner left Harry without an appetite and he picked at his food moodily, pushing mashed potato around his plate.

If either Hermione or Ron noticed his changed eating patterns, they didn’t comment. Ron was still defending the Prince, adamantly in his position that too much happiness couldn’t be a bad thing, not really – “Hermione, if I overdosed on an elixir of induced euphoria, well I mean there are much worse ways to go. You can’t seriously say you don’t prefer that over like some disease” – whilst Hermione had given up trying to reason, muttering under her breath about the Half-Blood Prince and the upcoming winter tests she was trying to cram for.

Harry didn’t feel much like conversing and he only engaged in polite small-talk with Neville before abruptly excusing himself from the table and making his way wearily back to the Gryffindor common room.

He sat himself down in front of the fire, the common room almost empty apart from a few seventh years as almost everyone was still at dinner.

None of the Prince’s alterations had been dangerous before. Sure, there were a few spells in there that Hermione had objected to but for the most part the extra ingredients and instructions had helped Harry.

And whilst the adding of rosemary had only cemented him further in Professor Slughorn’s good graces, the fact of the matter was that Harry hadn’t taken that advice from the Prince, nor could he get Hermione’s warnings out of his head.

He’d never wanted to make anything potentially dangerous. Even getting top marks in Potions wasn’t worth that.

Sighing, Harry tried to push the matter from his mind, swearing that despite the rosemary not coming from the recommendations of the Prince, he’d try to stick to the original recipe for the meantime. Even if his Potions credibility faltered in Professor Slughorn’s eyes, it was probably for the best.

Harry grabbed his bags and took out his homework for the evening, settling himself further into the plush armchair before getting started on their Charms essay.

Half an hour later the rest of the Gryffindors slowly trickled back into the common room, settling themselves down around the fire with homework or raucous games of Exploding Snap. Mercifully Hermione and Ron had dropped the argument and whilst Hermione sat down to work on her Transfiguration homework, Ron joined Seamus and Dean in with a round of cards.

The noise was beginning to get to Harry however, and even though it was only half eight, and he was used to this level of noise in the common room, he left for the dormitories, changing into his pyjamas and sliding under the cool sheets of his bed.

He tossed and turned for a while but couldn’t get comfortable – something was sticking into the side of his head. Sitting up, he dug his hand under his pillow and felt the rough edges of the tattered diary.

Harry set it on his lap, staring once again at the hole the fang had made. He slid his fingertips down the cover, feeling the bumps in the black material and fingering the little silk string
He felt like he hand it into Dumbledore. Even destroyed, there was no telling what this diary could
do or what could happen should it fall into the wrong hands. But reluctance to let go of the diary
tugged at Harry’s heart and he instead shoved it inside the top drawer of his bedside table, as if
trying to also shove it out of his life.

Harry settled down once more, taking off his glasses and puffing up his pillow and was soon in a
deep and entirely dreamless sleep.

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It was on the way their first class of the day – Herbology – that Ron brought up the subject of
where Harry had been last night.

“Honestly you should have been there,” he was saying about one of the Exploding Snap rounds.
“The look on Seamus’s face honestly, it was to die for. You would’ve thought he’d be used to it but
Fred told me about this spell you can do on the cards, one that makes the explosion like twice and
big and twice as loud but it’s faulty, cards go flying so far you can’t find them, George swears he
went blind for a week after one card hit him–”

“Harry was doing homework, which you should’ve also been doing,” Hermione interrupted in
disapproval.

“I did!” Ron argued. “I just prefer leisure before work. I can’t bear being at classes all day then
doing more work. But Harry, you were like gone, mate, when I came up to find you. Seriously, the
week’s only just begun, what time did you go to bed?”

Harry shrugged. “Dunno, about nine, maybe?”

“Jeez, if you didn’t want to do work you could’ve joined us in a game or something–”

“I was just tired,” Harry said, and if to prove a point he stifled another yawn. That must’ve been his
tenth this morning, despite having the deepest, most peaceful night he’d had in a while.

His persistent exhaustion lasting all morning and when lunchtime came he was ravenous again,
eating everything in sight before abruptly feeling full and slightly sick. He was more alert for
afternoon lessons, but that didn’t stop Snape from deducting twenty points from him for “not
paying attention, Mr Potter.”

He figured it was just one of those things teenagers go through, after all, Ron ate as much as he
was doing these days on a regular basis and Seamus slept through a class at least once a month. He
reckoned it was just now catching up to him.

Fighting dark lords didn’t leave much room for a good sleep pattern after all, and maybe he just
needed to recover those lost hours, Harry reasoned to himself.

However, the feeling didn’t go away. He’d go to bed early and wake up only when Ron dragged
him out of bed. Breakfast was picked at or avoided altogether as Harry tried to nap at the breakfast
table. More points were deducted by Snape for that behaviour.

For a couple of days he was still ravenous at lunchtime but eventually he regained his usual
appetite. But he was still tired. He ate dinner quickly in the hopes he could get his homework out
the way and go to bed. Maybe if he went to sleep early enough, if he got a head start then he
wouldn’t have to be dragged out of bed in the mornings.
No one mentioned Harry’s sudden exhaustion over the next two weeks, if anything they probably just thought he wanted time alone when he went to bed. After all, as the Boy Who Lived he had made a habit of trying to avoid people when he could.

He had heard Lavender and Parvati gossiping about whether he had a girlfriend that he was sneaking out to visit and Hermione snorted so loud at this from her usual armchair that Harry almost felt hurt at the notion that she didn’t believe he could have a girlfriend.

He was the bloody Saviour after all. He could have a girlfriend. If he wanted.

Alongside his tiredness he also had the headaches to deal with. Deep, aching headaches residing deep into his mind that he couldn’t get rid of, no matter how many potions he got from Madam Pomfrey or painkillers that Hermione gave him.

They hurt the most at the start, often leaving him sitting on the bed holding his head between his legs as he wondered what could have possibly brought this on. It wasn’t his scar that was hurting – Ron had sighed in relief at that and Harry didn’t blame him – but his whole head. It was just a headache so nobody was that fussed about it except Harry.

“It will go away in its own time,” Madam Pomfrey had told him when he returned for the third time for another potion. “There’s no magical cure for everything, you know.”

Ultimately, she was right, for after the first week the headaches got considerably better, and were now just dull thuds in his head that, whilst uncomfortable, weren’t painful.

With his eating habits restored, his sleeping pattern very slowly but surely going back to normal and the headaches lessening to merely an inconvenience, Harry almost felt convinced that he was back to normal. Almost.

Sometimes he swore he felt a weight on him. Not a heavy one, nor one he could accurately describe. When he had told Hermione in vague details about some weight on his shoulders that made him lethargic she had sympathised with him and told him that perhaps it was stress from the pressure of the upcoming tests the teachers had planned.

She had suggested that he revise with her in the library in the evenings whilst Ron suggested more Exploding Snap games.

“Oh even muggle snap if it’ll make your headache worse,” he said enthusiastically.

Harry had declined both offers, preferring instead to sit on the windowsill, staring out at the cold, misty grounds of Hogwarts and the stars that glittered out from the night sky.

Whilst he usually preferred to stay by the warmth of the fire during the winter months, Harry found that staying by the cool window somewhat helped the headache loosen a bit more until he could almost forget about it.

It was the middle of the third week that Harry had first felt that exhaustion that he felt marginally better. His sleeping pattern was back to normal now and when he woke up on a Thursday morning, the first day of December, he realized that the remnants of the headache had entirely gone.

Feeling better than he had in days, he engaged in conversation with Hermione and Ron throughout the day, something, he noted, that he had greatly missed. It was incredibly lonely to feel so ill you didn’t want to join in. Self-isolation, he thought to himself. And he wasn’t a stranger to that.

By the evening he joined Ron and Seamus in a few rounds of Exploding Snap, and then Colin
Creevey had joined in, surprisingly putting up a good fight.

Harry left the others in the common room as he headed up to bed, wanting some peace by the window for a bit. He settled down as usual and continued the essay Snape had set them a couple of days previously.

Halfway through a sentence he ran out of ink however and scowled at the empty pot. Opening up the top drawer of his bedside desk he reached in, and his fingers felt that familiar cool leather binding.

Tom Riddle’s diary. He had forgotten entirely about that. Feeling guilty that he still hadn’t informed anyone of its reappearance, he placed it on his lap, pushing Snape’s essay out the way for the time being.

He opened the diary to the last page, where his tiny ‘hello’ from three weeks ago was. It hadn’t disappeared or even faded slightly.

Frowning, Harry dipped his quill into a brand-new ink pot and pressed down once more on the parchment.

‘Are you there?’ he wrote in slightly messy scrawl.

He sat staring at the parchment for several minutes, waiting for something – for anything – to happen.

He slumped back against the windowsill rolling his eyes and chuckling to himself. It was just a book. Nothing more. Just a stupid book.

_I’ve never considered books to be stupid. They can actually be remarkably dangerous_ a voice said. It echoed around Harry and seemed to be everywhere at once.

“What?” Harry said, frowning as he glanced up. There was only him in the dark room and if he listened carefully, he could still here some sort of game being played downstairs. It seemed they have moved on from Exploding Snap.

Harry rubbed irritably at his temples. “Going fucking crazy,” he told himself, pushing the diary back into the drawer and closing it.

_Yes it would certainly appear that way, wouldn’t it?_

Harry froze, hand still on the handle of the drawer. No, that voice sounded far too real to be simply his imagination. He whipped round, staring into the shadows as if someone was hiding or playing a prank on him but the light from the crescent moon allowed him enough vision to see that there was no-one there.

“W-Who spoke?” Harry called out cautiously, his hand edging towards his wand.

_And what exactly are you going to do with your wand?_ The voice sounded amused this time. It was a slightly deep, velveting voice that sent the hairs on the back of Harry’s neck standing up. There was a familiarity about the voice too, something that made him want to run, run as far as he could.

“Who is that?” he asked steadily, wand gripped tightly.

_It’s me_, the voice drawled out.
“Where are you?”

Where do you think I am?

Harry frowned, spinning on the spot as he tried to figure out where that voice was coming from. It just seemed all around him, there was no particular direction. Nervously, he glanced up to the ceiling but saw nothing there.

“There’s no-one there,” Harry murmured to himself, voice verging on hysteria. “Figment of my mind, that’s all.”

Well, you’re close, I’ll give you that.

Harry groaned, dropping down on the bed and gripping his head. He rather thought he’d prefer the headaches over imagining a voice.

But that’s the thing see, the voice continued. I’m not imaginary. I’m real.

Harry looked up slowly, dropping his hands as his mouth opened and closed, no sound coming out. He swallowed nervously.

“Y-You’re in my mind… aren’t you?” he whispered, barely audible but it didn’t seem to matter to the voice.

I am.

“Why?”

You offered me a place to stay. I could hardly refuse could I? The voice had taking on that amused tone again and Harry thought there was something mocking about it.

He shook his head. “I didn’t offer anything.”

Oh but you did. You took me in, cold and helpless and ready to give up.

“Oh really?” Harry snapped out, his eyes darting to the door to make sure no-one would suddenly burst in and see Harry Potter talking to himself. “And when did I do this? Because I certainly don’t remember saying to a disembodied voice ‘oh please, come into my mind, that’ll be no trouble at all’.”

Harry felt something press at the front of his mind and he had a fleeting feeling of uncomfortableness that was reminiscent of his headache days prior.

Not all invitations are spoken.

“When did I invite you in?”

I’m not entirely sure, the voice said slowly. A few weeks perhaps, I’ve been too busy resting to really pay attention to the days you see.

“Resting, really,” Harry muttered. “Since when do disembodied voices need rest?”

Everything needs rest. I was dying you see but you gave me wonderful nourishment.

“Hang on,” Harry frowned. “I’ve been feeling ill the past few weeks… was that you?”
Sorry. Harry thought the voice didn’t sound very sorry at all.

“You’ve been making me exhausted all this time? Sleeping through classes? Merlin, were you the cause for my headache as well? And the eating?” he asked in an accusing tone.

*I needed to fully recover.*

“And now that you have you’ll leave me alone?” Harry asked hesitantly.

There was a pause, before –

*I can’t.*

“Why not?” Harry tried not to let the panic he was feeling seep into his tone but felt like he didn’t do a convincing job. Not that it mattered, if the being really was inside his head then it knew exactly how he was feeling anyway.

*My vessel was broken.*

“Young vessel?” Harry blurted out.

*Yes,* the voice snapped impatiently. *The vessel in which I was contained. It was broken and I was dying but then you came along and offered me refuge. I can’t leave, I have no vessel anymore.*

“C-Can’t you… I don’t know, get a new one?” he said. Harry was suddenly filled with mental image of one of the armchairs in the Gryffindor with a velvety voice.

The voice laughed.

*Please,* it scoffed. *I’m not some ghost you can dump into any old inanimate object. Have some common sense.*

“Sorry,” Harry muttered, filled with the bizarre sense that he had offended the voice by suggesting such a thing. “W-What do you need? For a vessel? What will it take for you to leave me alone?”

*Time. I may have recovered sufficiently enough to talk to you but I am still far from my original strength. So, for now I have decided to stay put right here.*

“Oh no you don’t,” Harry said angrily. “This is my mind we’re talking about. Mine, not some safe haven’t for some goddamn spirit o-or voice or whatever. Go haunt someone else-”

A sudden blinding flash of pain echoed around his head and Harry yelped, hands gripping fistfuls of his hair as if it would help with the onslaught of agony. Then, almost as soon as it had appeared, the pain disappeared again, nothing more than a dull ache in the furthest reaches of his mind.

Harry exhaled heavily, eyes squeezed shut and wished this was all some terrible, terrible dream.

*I don’t think I’ll be leaving quite yet,* the voice said silkily. *As I have told you, I’m perfectly comfortable here and nowhere near my full strength yet. So, until I have fully recovered and have found a suitable vessel, I’m afraid you’re going to have to deal with me.*

“Just stop with the headaches, will you?!” Harry snapped, and then whipped his head up as he heard approaching footsteps.

*We’ll see.*
The door to the dormitories opened and Neville nervously poked his head around the side.

“You alright there?” he asked.

“I’m fine,” Harry said angrily, turning to his bed and punching the pillow into a more desirable shape.

“Oh. I-I just thought I heard something. You sounded like you were in pain.”

“Yeah, don’t worry about it,” Harry muttered, rubbing tiredly at his temples. “The pain is gone now.”

Seemingly satisfied with that answer, Neville made his way across the room to his own bed, grabbing his pyjamas off the covers.

Harry changed as well and then slid under the covers, setting his glasses to the side and wondered why on earth these things all had to happen to him. As if he didn’t have enough problems to deal with.

_Look on the bright side, this could be a positive experience for you, Harry Potter._

Too exhausted to even speculate about how the voice knew his name, Harry shut his eyes and was soon deep in sleep.
The Nightmare Continues

When he woke up, Harry was convinced that it had just been a dream. He was about halfway down to breakfast with Ron and Hermione that he even remembered the voice from last night but nothing spoke to him.

He tried to speak inside his mind to the voice, but got nothing in return and a wave of relief swept through him.

Just a horrible dream, he thought in satisfaction, tucking into toast and scrambled eggs.

The morning past by without any incidents and Harry was feeling significantly more cheerful than he had felt in weeks.

Defense Against the Dark Arts with Snape was the final lesson he had and Harry inwardly groaned as he threw himself down in his chair, the rest of his classmates filing in at the same time.

“Still, look at it this way,” Ron said, getting out his books. “Just this and then it’s the weekend, thank god. I really want to go into Hogsmeade, I heard Zonko’s just had a new shipment—”

The red-headed wizard cut off immediately as the door opened and a thick silence fell over the class. Snape ignored them all, sweeping to the front of the room before turning and scowling at each and every one of them.

“I just had a class with the second year Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs,” he said icily. “I really did not think I could possibly meet any students more idiotic than you but congratulations, you have the potential to not be the worst class I have today.”

Harry and Ron chanced a glance to each other, wondering where the pissed off professor was going with this.

“However, I don’t think I can possibly bear another practical lesson today so we are going to play it safe,” Snape hissed. “Turn to page 293 and read the chapter on defences against common dark spells. And if one of you even makes the slightest sound, mark my words, you will regret it.”

There was the sound of several books opening at once and Harry flicked through the pages, rolling his eyes. It was the end of a Friday, and the last thing he felt like doing was reading a chapter with an angry Snape breathing down his neck.

Dully, he began to read, stifling a yawn.

_I don’t think some of these spells can be even considered dark arts, they’re so mundane_, the voice said in distaste and Harry jumped, hitting his knee on the desk.

“What?” he said abruptly, and felt the entire class’s eyes on him.

“Mr Potter,” Snape growled. “Did you not remember me explicitly saying that the chapter was to be read in silence? If you can’t even remember something from mere minutes ago I daresay you have no hope for the NEWTs. Twenty points from Gryffindor.”

Harry scowled, looking back down at his book as he caught sight of Malfoy looking at Snape in glee.
A fingernail growing spell? the voice continued, oblivious to Harry’s slowly growing hysteria. Like that’s a dark spell. Why, Janice Holden had already mastered that one by fourth year for purely cosmetic purposes.

Harry froze, his eyes glued to the page he was currently supposed to be reading and dread slowly filled him. It hadn’t been a dream? This was real? There was really some disembodied voice currently residing in his mind?

I believe we went over this yesterday, Potter.

It’s Harry, his mind snapped back before he could stop himself.

Excuse me if we’re not friends yet, the voice said in that mocking tone.

‘How do you even know my name?’ Harry thought desperately.

I know a lot of things about you, Harry Potter. Quite the mind you have here, much more entertaining than those atrocious classes you take. I didn’t think History of Magic could get any worse but I was clearly mistaken.

‘What are you looking at in my mind? Get out of there!’ Harry thought angrily, furious at the idea of this unknown voice invading his privacy.

Just your memories. In particular that atrocious witch you had teaching you last year.

Umbridge?

Was that her name? the voice asked in a bored tone. What on earth did you do to piss her off so much?

According to her, lying, Harry thought, gritting in teeth.

About what?

Forget about it.

Carefully, trying not to alert the being inside his mind to what he was doing, Harry mentally put up walls in front of his most secretive memories. He didn’t want this spirit to know anything other than Hogwarts lessons and professors really, and Harry tried hard to keep his mind blank of what he was doing.

The voice didn’t speak again for the rest of the lesson, for which Harry was immensely grateful. It was hard enough to concentrate as it was with Snape in a particularly foul mood without having his thought wave interrupted every few seconds with a snide remark.

For a moment, he debated telling Ron and Hermione about the voice in his head but then decided against it when they launched into another argument before they had even made it back to the common room. They already had enough to deal with without thinking Harry had suddenly gone crazy.

Harry’s lips twitched in amusement as he remembered back in second year, when Hermione had told him that hearing voices wasn’t a good thing, even for wizards. She had been right of course, and he didn’t feel like dealing with the isolation and suspicion that had met him when he told them about hearing the basilisk.
He decided to keep the information to himself for now. No need to worry them, he told himself. Hopefully he could just find a suitable vessel – whatever that was – for the spirit and then it would be on its merry way, no harm done.

*I think the library would be a good place to start*, the voice said, having apparently heard his train of thought.

Harry froze from where he had gone up to his room to retrieve Snape’s essay to finish it down in the common room.

“What?” he said dumbly.

*For my vessel. Research is usually the primary approach to these things*, the voice said snidely, in a way that oddly reminded him of Hermione. Funnily enough, the library is probably the first place she would have suggested as well.

Harry groaned aloud at the idea of having to spend another weekend in the library.

“No, I’m going to Hogsmeade,” he told the voice firmly. “I’m not hanging around in the library all day-”

Another flash of pain went through him.

“Will you stop that?!” he snapped. “This is my body, remember? You’re only a guest – and an unwanted one at that. You can’t just make me do whatever you want to do.”

*Thought you wanted to get rid of me?*

“I do,” Harry said bitterly. “But I’m not spending the bloody weekend in the library looking up vessels or whatever. Besides, Ron will think I’ve gone nuts.”

*And haven’t you?* it asked in amusement. *You are hearing voices after all.*

“Look,” Harry said in exasperation, straightening up once he’d found his essay, ditched on the floor from the night previously. “Just let me spend the day in Hogsmeade, OK? Then I’ll go to the library.”

The voice, seemingly satisfied with this plan, didn’t reply.

The next day as he had promise, Ron dragged Harry and Hermione straight to Zonko’s as soon as they stepped foot in Hogsmeade.

There they spent an hour surrounded by an array of magical fidgets and other excited Hogwarts students, where Ron debated between buying a quill that automatically wrote in whatever code you set it to and a cauldron that would make its contents disappear whenever you added boomslang skin to it.

Harry was over by some of Zonko’s older – but most popular – line of stock, vaguely listening in to the conversation the group of third years near him. As far as he could tell, this was one of their first trips into Hogsmeade and thus the novelty was still very much there.

At long last Ron finally let them leave and they browsed through the other shops – Harry picking up a couple new quills and Hermione being instantly drawn to the books – before Harry finally
excused himself from his best friends at the Hogwarts entrance hall.

“Need to go to the library,” he told them. Ron gave him a sympathetic look before heading towards the Gryffindor corridor and Hermione followed him. Luckily, she kept her revision primarily for weekdays and thus now was planning on reading the book she had bought in Hogsmeade in the comfort of the common room armchairs. It would stop Harry having to come up with an excuse of what he was researching.

“What am I looking for anyway?” Harry mumbled under his breath, wandering between the shelves of the library. It was unsurprisingly empty, only a couple of tables filled with seventh years studying for their NEWTs in the summer.

*Magical artefacts,* the voice told him. *My vessel must be something powerful.*

Harry rolled his eyes. Of course, it did.

“What even was your last vessel?” he asked absentmindedly, wandering into the same section that he had been three weeks prior.

*You should know, you have it.*

Harry frowned “What? No, I don’t.”

*Yes, you do. Hidden in your desk.*

Harry’s mouth suddenly went dry and he froze, eyes drifting to the history book on magical schools in Europe.

It didn’t mean… no, surely not? T-That was destroyed, there was nothing left-

*Yes, obviously, why else would I have to leave?* it asked in amusement.

“The diary,” Harry said in a whisper, hardly daring to believe it. “T-That diary… that was your vessel?!”

A student further down the aisle glanced up and stared at him in confusion, before grabbing their desired book and leaving.

Of course, Harry thought to himself. How did he not figure that out? Powerful magical object… destroyed… a few weeks ago…

So, some spirit must have come across it and decided to take refuge. After all, there couldn’t be an object much more powerful than something that used to contain Voldemort’s soul…

Cold horror suddenly washed over Harry and every hair stood on end. No. No, no, no, no. Oh god please no. That wasn’t possible, that couldn’t be possible, he was dead, long gone, shattered into a thousand pieces –

“W-What…?” Harry croaked out, desperately hoping he’d be lucky for once, just once in his life. “W-What’s your name?”

*My name?*

“Y-You have one, right? W-What is it?”

*Why do you want to know?*
“Y-You know mine! It’s only fair a-and… look, just tell me your name!” Harry hissed, hardly daring to breathe, fingertips going white from how hard he was gripping one of the bookshelves.

My name… the voice said slowly. Is Tom. Tom Riddle.

If Harry had been able to move, he might have thrown up. Or collapsed to the ground. He wasn’t sure which. Distantly he was aware that he probably shouldn’t be thinking of what… of what this spirit within him would grow up to be but he couldn’t help it.

Couldn’t help it as the memories of being down in that chamber, of the handsome and charismatic sixteen-year-old Voldemort and the pale, clammy hands of a slowly dying Ginny assaulted him in the middle of the Hogwarts library.

The voice however – Tom Riddle, Harry reminded himself in despair – didn’t seem to care what Harry was currently thinking. It was keeping to itself – himself – at the back of Harry’s mind, with no idea of the horror he would cause.

Slowly, Harry lowered himself to the ground, tucking his knees under his chin and praying for a miracle. He had Voldemort stuck in his head. OK, so maybe this was Voldemort’s younger self, before he became an immortality obsessed maniac but he was still evil. He was still a murderer.

And he was currently residing in Harry’s mind with no intention of leaving until Harry procured some suitable vessel.

“How are you alive?” Harry asked in wonder, more to himself than anything but Tom Riddle still replied.

What do you mean?

“I-I mean the diary, it’s… well, it’s destroyed. H-How did you even survive that? Why did you survive that? How…?” Harry stumbled over his words, not sure where to begin or how much Riddle even knew about him. Would he remember the twelve-year-old Harry from the Chamber? Did he know how long he’d been in that diary for?

I told you… I barely survived. Clinging to the last fragments of whatever was left of that damn book. How long I had left I wasn’t sure. But it wasn’t long.

Vaguely, Harry was reminded that although most of the diary had been destroyed by the basilisk venom, there had still been a couple of pages at the back, left untouched.

“A-And now you need a magical, powerful… thing, to become your new vessel?”

Yes, we’ve been through this. Great, Riddle sounded impatient now.

“And then what?” Harry wondered. “A-After… after you find a new vessel… what next?”

I become strong enough to come back.

Harry was glad that he had decided to sit down, because his legs definitely would have buckled underneath him at that.

“Come back?” he whispered.

Yes. And you will be rid of me. So, shall we continue?

“I have no idea where to even start,” Harry said hoarsely, wondering not for the first time why only
he seemed to have such terrible luck.

Of all the things to happen to him, of all the people to have stuck in your head, of course Harry just had to have the murderer of his parents.

_That book, over there_, Tom told him. _The purple one with silver lettering._

Harry reached up and grabbed the mentioned book. It was a book about hidden magic throughout Europe. With Tom’s instructions, he also picked out several other books, including a book about Hogwarts myths and legends.

After settling himself down at a table in an isolated corner of the library so no-one would disturb him, Harry started on the first book on top of pile he had gathered and began to read.

He felt more conscious of the presence in his mind now. The weight that had settled on his shoulders through the past few weeks have become normal now, but Harry realized that it was simply the presence of another soul within his.

“What about this one?” Harry asked half an hour later, pointing to one of the objects in the magical artifacts of Europe book.

_You mean that Hungarian vase that was destroyed one hundred years ago?_ Riddle asked.

“Yeah that- oh. OK, well what about this?”

_No-one knows the whereabouts of that crown._

“Well maybe we could…” Harry trailed off. Really, he had no idea where to find this… Norwegian crown or whatever it was. And he certainly didn’t want to go traipsing around the countryside looking for it.

“This is pointless,” he grumbled, slamming the book shut after two hours of fruitless searching. “There’s plenty of magical artifacts in Hogwarts, wouldn’t it be better to start searching here instead of, oh, I don’t know, the entire goddamn continent?”

_Europe has more powerful artifacts than Hogwarts_, Riddle said in distaste.

“You don’t need the most powerful object in the world.” Harry snapped. “Your last vessel was a fucking diary, go find another diary.”

_Do you think I enjoy this?_ Riddle asked, his voice taking on a harsher tone. _Because I’d much rather be in my own body than here, in the mind of some sixteen-year-old who cares nothing for anything outside Hogwarts’ walls._

“And you do?” Harry asked coolly.

_I happen to be a lot more ambitious than most people I know_, the future Dark Lord said haughtily. _You take so many things for granted. I came from a place where magic is completely unknown, and I hope to learn about as much of it as possible now that I have been granted access._

“For your information, I also came from the muggle world,” Harry muttered, pulling another book towards him. “I’m just trying to enjoy my school years.”

Riddle didn’t reply, but Harry suddenly felt the oddest sensation, as if someone was poking at his brain.
He felt a sudden tug deep inside his mind and he instantly thought of the park near the Dursleys’ that he used to escape to whenever he could.

“Stop that,” he said angrily, pushing the memory back to the shadows of his mind. “You have no right to those memories.”

_You said you have grown up with muggles_, Riddle commented. _I just wanted to see if it was true._

“Why would I lie?”

_It annoys you_, Riddle said in wonder.

“Well you did just invade my privacy after making yourself an unwanted guest—”

_No, not that. It annoys you that you grew up in the muggle world. Don’t worry, I understand perfectly well._

“No, it’s not that… exactly,” Harry sighed. “Not all muggles are bad, just the ones I grew up with—”

Again there was that same probing sensation and Harry gritted his teeth and forced Riddle out of his memories.

“Stay out of my memories,” he snapped. “I mean it, or I’m not helping you.”

_But then you’d be stuck with me forever_, Riddle said in amusement.

“I’d find some way to get rid of you,” Harry grumbled, wondering whether a basilisk fang to the forehead would kill this leftover diary-Riddle.

_Alright, alright, I’ll stay out. You aren’t as interesting as you probably think you are, Harry Potter. But you’d be surprised how dull it can get stuck inside your mind._

“Welcome to my life.”
By the time Monday rolled around, Harry was no further with researching vessels. Riddle was extraordinarily fussy with what he would put it soul into it appeared, for despite Harry finding what he considered to be pretty powerful magic, Riddle refused time and time again, insisting it wasn’t good enough.

When Harry, exhausted on a Sunday night right before curfew had finally asked Riddle in a rage what exactly would satisfy him, Riddle had told him that he deserved the best and brought up the idea of the Hogwarts’ founders’ artifacts, an idea that Harry firmly shut down.

“I’m not desecrating history for you,” he’d snapped, never mind the fact every other item he’d look at had been historically significant as well.

Somehow the idea of Riddle and the founders’ items made him sick. He didn’t want Voldemort’s soul anywhere near Gryffindor’s sword, that was for certain.

He thought about going to Dumbledore, or maybe even just Hermione about the soul currently residing alongside his own but quickly decided against it. Logically, he knew that allowing Riddle to pick out a vessel in order to absorb its magic to become stronger would enable him to return to life and then – horror of horrors – there would two Dark Lords to deal with, rather than just the one. And Harry had had enough of Dark Lords for a lifetime.

However, there was no other way that Riddle was going to leave Harry’s mind, which could only mean one of two things: either he’d have to live this way forever, with an extremely impatient murderer in his head or they’d have to stab him with a basilisk fang to finish the job – which would probably kill Harry too.

Maybe Fawkes could get to him just in time, like before, Harry wondered and mulled over the idea until early Monday morning but eventually decided to put that idea on the back-burner for now as Plan B. Whilst he had been incredibly lucky so far, Harry didn’t want to see how much he could toy with death before he was actually killed.

As usual Riddle stayed relatively quiet throughout the day, apparently bored with what Harry was learning. He particularly didn’t like History of Magic and told Harry so, stating that he could teach it much better than Binns even with all his years of experience.

Harry found that he was getting to know Riddle a lot more than he had in the Chamber, which was inevitable he supposed. The Riddle from his second year had been charismatic, tall and handsome. His silver-tongue could probably get Harry to do almost anything he wanted – which was probably why he had agreed to give up his evenings to further help Riddle’s plans to become a second Voldemort – and his velvety voice almost slid around like melted butter in Harry’s mind.

However, Harry had also learnt that Riddle liked to be doing stuff, and that being trapped inside the
mind of a future Hogwarts student was a nightmare for him. Though he had mercifully decided to leave Harry’s memories alone, he was now attempting to entertain himself testing how much influence he had over Harry’s mind.

Twice Harry had had to double over in pain, clutching his forehead and yelping aloud as Riddle pressed a bit too hard and that flash of pain came back in full force. He had nearly been carted off to Madam Pomfrey by Hermione but thankfully he managed to just pass it off as a few remaining symptoms of his illness the week before.

Riddle had described himself as being a ‘hippogriff trapped in a dog’s cage’ which Harry had taken offense to.

“Why are you the hippogriff and I’m the dog?” he asked.

Riddle had not replied but Harry had felt a stab of impatience flow through his mind. Whether that was his own or Riddle’s emotions, he didn’t want to know.

All in all, Harry decided that he’d much rather than the charismatic Riddle from the Second Year stuck in his brain than this agitated one but he made sure he didn’t think about that too much – it appeared Riddle didn’t remember him and he didn’t want to go into details about who exactly Riddle was to him.

Maybe if he knew, Tom Riddle would just decide he’d bombard Harry to death with agonizing headaches for his future self’s ease.

Professor Slughorn had them preparing a Wiggenweld Potion in his class that afternoon and whilst Harry could recognise the Prince’s notes on the page the potion’s instructions were on, he stuck by his promise and decided not to pay attention to the extra markings this time.

He added the salamander blood to create the healing potion and stirred it until the potion turned a deep red. Glancing over at the book, he added a bit more and kept stirring. The potion slowly took on a more orange form.

Satisfied with the colouring of his potion, he added a few more drops until the potion took on a sunny yellow colour. He stirred it and almost immediately it turned the light green the book asked for.

He reached over to grab some more salamander blood for the next step – Slughorn had purposely set them one of the most finicky potions in the book – but something made him immediately freeze, hand hovering over the jar of blood.

No, stop, Riddle hissed out, suddenly more alert than he had been all day.

“Huh?” Harry said, hurriedly looking back down at his potion when Ron glanced up.

“What?” he asked.

“N-Nothing, sorry, just my potion… acting weird,” he mumbled out. Ron leaned over to glance in his cauldron.

“Looks fine to me, mate,” he shrugged, before turning back to his own work.

Stir it more.

“It’s fine,” Harry mumbled under his breath so neither Ron nor Hermione could hear him. “The
book says it’s meant to be this colour.”

*The book says its meant to be green.*

“It is green,” he replied indignantly, before anxiously double checking his potion. Yep, it was a lightish green but it was definitely green. Same colour as his eyes.

*It needs to be a darker green.*

“The book doesn’t say that though-”

*Just stir it some more,* Riddle insisted. *It turned green too quickly, you need for stir it for at least five seconds each round.*

Harry hesitated. Was this going to make his potion blow up? Was Riddle trying to find some amusement in Harry’s humiliation? He wouldn’t put it past the Slytherin.

He heard a throaty laugh echo around his head in response to the idea, and Harry scowled before picking his ladle back up and stirring the potion some more.

After a few seconds, the liquid did start to become slightly darker, and Harry kept at it until Riddle told him to stop and he set the ladle to the side. Instead of the green of his eyes, the potion now resembled the Slytherin colours, a more forest-like green.

*Now you can add more blood,* Riddle said in that same amused tone Harry had become quite familiar with.

“Butter wouldn’t melt in your mouth, would it?” Harry muttered, adding the next lot of salamander blood to the concoction.

Ignoring Riddle’s confusion, Harry continued through the instructions, adding and stirring in the way the instructions stated until it was time to add the lionfish spines.

That passed smoothly enough and he then moved onto the flobberworm mucus. However, the potion took only a few seconds to turn red after the first mixture was poured in and Harry hesitated, glancing towards his next lot of mucus to add.

Remembering Riddle’s advice about the five seconds, he slowly stirred for a bit longer and watched as the potion turned into a deeper red.

*That’s fine,* Riddle told him, and Harry sighed in relief. Maybe he didn’t need the Prince’s corrections after all.

He seemed to be proved correct when Slughorn practically jumped in delight when he saw Harry’s finished product. Although the professor had also declared Hermione’s to be a perfect specimen, and had awarded her ten points to Gryffindor for it, it was clear to see that Harry’s potion just seemed to have a little bit more colour to it than hers.

Professor Slughorn had told him with colouring like this, the patient’s chances of side-effects were drastically decreased – though not impossible – and had clapped him on the back with a pudgy hand before awarding him twenty points.

*He hasn’t changed, has he?* Riddle noted with some bemusement as the professor dismissed them having set a ten-inch essay on that very potion. *Still ignores the entire class whenever someone happens to shine through. Probably thinks he’s responsible for the student’s ‘brilliance’. 
'He is the teacher', Harry thought back as he collected his things and left with Ron and Hermione.

_Teacher? I taught you more than he did, that’s for sure._

‘We can’t all be potion geniuses like you, Riddle’.

Harry swore he heard the other laugh.

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Riddle seemed to have cheered up immensely since the potion lesson and in the Gryffindor common room at the end of the day he even made a few of Harry’s plays for him in the chess game against Ron.

Ron had still won, but Harry partly blamed that on Riddle getting distracted by what he called the ‘tacky’ colours of Gryffindor tower.

_You’re not planning on watching them play all night, are you?_ Riddle asked in distaste as Harry settled himself down on one of the armchairs as Ron played against Dean.

Harry rolled his eyes, watching as Dean triumphantly took one of Ron’s pawns.

_We could be in the library, _Riddle continued, oblivious to Harry’s disinterest. _Or doing that potions essay. They don’t give you this time off to just sit around watching chess. You aren’t even playing it._

“You sound so much like Hermione that it’s actually quite scary,” Harry muttered, pretending to be stifling a yawn.

_You are in a medieval castle with tons of knowledge at your fingertips. Doesn’t that make you even slightly curious?_

Harry frowned. Why would it? He learnt so much during the day that he could barely remember it all for exams, he wasn’t quite sure he could stuff more information in his brain. Especially not with its brand-new guest.

_But that’s curriculum stuff, _Riddle dismissed. _Find what you’re interested in, research it further. Learn something that hasn’t be recited back to you by a teacher._

‘I’m not interested in anything though’, Harry thought, and in a way, it was true. He loved learning about magic, everything about magic interested him, even chess games that had barely any difference to their muggle counterparts aside from the back that the pieces literally beat each other up. That’s why, even sitting in the chair watching his fellow Gryffindors play a game entertained Harry.

_Really? Nothing? Hundreds of years of magical history and you have no interest in any of it?_

Not the way Binns explained it, that was for sure.

_Then let me be your teacher_, Riddle said enthusiastically and Harry blinked in surprise.

Be taught History of Magic… by Tom Riddle? The idea was almost laughable. It suddenly occurred to Harry that the future Lord Voldemort was simply bored. He was stuck inside Harry’s mind all day with absolutely nothing to do except repeat lessons that he had probably already done ten times over.
Harry sighed. Look, he told Riddle internally. I’ll go to the library tomorrow, OK? You can research magical artifacts to your heart’s content. But despite what you think, I don’t need extra tutoring.

Riddle scoffed, but fell silent on the matter and remained that way for the rest of the evening. Harry wondered what Riddle did when he went quiet.

He tried to imagine a physical embodiment of the sixteen-year-old, sat inside Harry’s skull, bored and fed up with being trapped inside. It rather reminded Harry of his own childhood with the Dursleys, locked in the cupboard under the stairs with only the spiders for company. A tinge of sympathy went through him before Harry firmly brushed it aside. This was still Tom Riddle he was thinking about. Still the same person who had brutally murdered his parents and set a basilisk on Hogwarts in hopes of ridding those he deemed unworthy. He didn’t deserve Harry’s sympathy.

He can stay bored, Harry thought savagely. I’m sure his future self is having a blast anyway.

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“And in 1763 what the centaurs did was…” Here Professor Binns took in a deep breath, despite being dead and not needing to breathe. One might think he was doing it to prepare for a dramatic reveal, but nobody who had actually been in one of Binns’ lessons would ever believe this.

Riddle was bored again, Harry could feel it. It was an incessant tapping at the front of his mind, as if he was continuously hitting his head against a wall. Harry had to stifle a laugh at the mental image. Riddle was not impressed.

Next to him, Ron had the side of his face squashed against the desk, light snores coming from his mouth. Further along Seamus was attempting to balance a quill on one finger. Harry could see one of the Ravenclaws who had taken the optional class scrunching up a piece of paper and attempting to knock the quill to the ground.

Miserable lot, Riddle commented. History of magic is such a vibrant area of knowledge but how can you possibly be expected to learn in these conditions?

Harry snorted. These conditions? It was only Binns.

Exactly. While he might be historic himself, he’s hardly the right kind of teacher.

‘And who is, you?’

History of magic has never been my strongpoint but I hardly think that’s necessary to create a better learning environment.

‘I like it’, Harry thought. ‘How else would I catch up on all the sleep this research is costing me?’

The incessant tapping started up again.

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“Harry? What are you doing in here?”

Harry glanced up from his table in the corner of the library into the brown eyes of Ginny Weasley.

“What do you mean?” he asked uncomfortably, attempting to hide the cover of the book he was currently reading.
“I mean why are you in a corner of the library, all alone reading a book on Dark Vases of Egypt?” she asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“I-I… I thought it might be useful… for history of magic,” he attempted to reason. Riddle was completely still in his head, listening intently.

“Hermione hasn’t mentioned anything about Egyptian vases,” Ginny said before sitting herself down in the chair opposite Harry. “Anyway, what I really meant was why aren’t you outside? Isn’t that usually where the great Harry Potter is to be found on an evening like this?”

Her lips twitched up in amusement and Harry glanced over towards a window. The weather had cleared up considerably and whilst it was still freezing, the visibility was excellent.

“It’s cold,” Harry said lamely. “And I just didn’t really feel like it today. Feel kind of nauseous.”

Ginny looked at him in sympathy. “Maybe Madam Pomfrey has something?”

“Yeah… maybe. I think maybe I just ate too fast at dinner or something… it’ll go away soon I bet.”

Ginny glanced around the room quickly before leaning over the table and dropping her voice to a whisper.

“T-This hasn’t got anything to do with… You-Know-Who has it?” she asked, nodding towards the book still propped up in Harry’s lap.

Harry’s eyebrows raised in surprise.

“Look I-I know I’m not Hermione or Ron,” she said quickly, before he had chance to respond. “But you can talk to me if you want. I-I mean… I-I did meet him and… I just… I’m just saying I know what it’s like, to experience that kind of horror.”

“Ginny it’s…” Harry sighed, trailing off a biting his lip in thought. He wondered how Ron’s little sister would react if he told her the truth, that Voldemort – the same Voldemort who had taken her down to the Chamber of Secrets and almost killed her – was in his mind, listening to this very conversation.

“I-It’s not that, nothing to do with… that,” he said instead, pushing the guilt aside.

“That’s good then, I mean I guess,” Ginny said. “Gives you a chance to have a normal reason for being in the library, huh? Anyway, I hope you feel better soon.”

She pushed back her chair and stood up, smiling briefly at Harry before leaving.

Pretty little thing, isn’t she?

“Stay away from her,” Harry growled, anger suddenly rushing through him as he slammed the book on Egyptian vases on the table.

Don’t worry, she isn’t my type. I can tell you have a fondness for her.

“She’s Ron’s little sister,” Harry said, in hopes that the answer would make Riddle drop the subject. However, the Slytherin had something else on his mind.

Who was she talking about? Who is You-Know-Who? he asked curiously.
“Just… just don’t worry about it, OK?”

_I can force it out of your mind, you know_, Riddle warned him.

Harry felt the very edges of his mind begin to stir and inevitably he thought of his first year, heading down towards the trapdoor in order to stop Voldemort returning.

“Stop it,” he snapped. “It’s none of your business. I agreed to find you a vessel to put your soul in but that was it. I’m not telling you about everything that’s going on in the world.”

_Whoever it is, they must have caused you a lot of grief._

Harry gave a short, humourless laugh. “Yeah, you can say that.”

Riddle said no more on the subject of You-Know-Who, but Harry could tell he hadn’t forgotten about it. Whilst Harry poured over book after book of magical objects, Riddle stayed silent, a mere presence in the back of Harry’s mind that mulled over the mysterious entity that had caused such horror as to not even have a name.
“Today we will be practising non-verbal spells,” Snape spoke out against the hushed silence that always fell over any class he taught. “Absolutely vital in duelling, as the element of surprise gives the user such an advantage over their opponent that it could secure victory.”

His black eyes surveyed the Slytherins and Gryffindors seated in front of him, lips turned down in distaste.

“However,” Snape said in a bored tone. “Unlike some other defensive spells you have been taught, non-verbal versions of these are particularly difficult and as such I will be astonished if any of you can even manage to conjure up more than a nosebleed this lesson.”

From his seat at the very back of the classroom, Harry chewed his nail nervously.

“Well?” Snape spat when nothing happened. “Why are you staring at me blankly? Find a duelling partner and get on with it.”

There was a scraping of chairs and rustling of paper as everyone quickly arranged themselves in partners, not wanting to be the reason for a deduction of house points.

Snape swept through the classroom, eying up the duelling partners and rearranging when necessary. He paired Neville up with Goyle instead of Lavender, remarking that at least Goyle could defend himself against whatever mistake Neville was bound to make.

The professor continued until he got to Harry and Ron, who were facing each other with their wands out. The hairs on the back of Harry’s neck stood up as Snape looked at them.

“I think not,” Snape said icily. “I won’t have you do idly chattering in the back whilst everyone else does some work in this lesson. Mr Weasley, you can partner up with Mr Crabbe. Mr Potter, I believe this means Mr Malfoy is free.”

Stifling a groan, Harry dragged his feet over to the Slytherin side of the classroom whilst Ron shot a scowl at the teacher. Malfoy was leaning against the wall, twirling his wand between his fingers with a smirk on his face.

“Don’t worry,” he said in a mocking tone. “I’ll go easy on you, Potter.”

Harry forced himself to stand opposite Malfoy, wand held loosely in his right hand.

“Right then,” he said. “Do you want to start, or shall I?”

“Funnily enough, one of the most fundamental parts of the element of surprise is what, Mr Potter?” Snape hissed out from behind Harry.

“Umm... surprise?” Harry answered meekly.

“And do you think you gain surprise by announcing when you will be casting a non-verbal spell?”

“Umm... no?”

“Then maybe you shouldn’t do it, Potter,” Snape chastised, before leaving to terrorise some other Gryffindors. Harry swore he saw Neville pale slightly.
Malfy, who had been thoroughly enjoying Harry’s humiliation, suddenly flicked his wand up, a few sparks darting out the end of his wand and falling harmlessly to the floor. Harry smirked as Malfy looked slightly put-out.

His humour was short-lived however, when Malfy threw a verbal stinging hex at him and Harry’s desperate at defending himself using a non-verbal spell failed miserably.

This went on for some time. By the time half an hour had gone by, Malfy and Harry had achieved nothing but throwing out minor hexes and defending them with different coloured sparks that landed nowhere near their target. The rest of the class was achieving the same results and Ron was red in the face from how hard he was concentrating.

Blue sparks? That’s a new one, Riddle commented as Malfy attempted to defect Harry’s Impediment Jinx unsuccessfully.

Harry gritted his teeth, preparing himself as Malfy took on the offensive.

You’d think after all these years of casting these defensive spells the you’d be able to do a non-verbal version, Riddle scoffed.

It’s a lot harder than that, Harry internally snapped back.

Are you imagining casting the spell in your head, the colours, the jet of light coming out the end of your wand, or are you just saying the incantation in your head and expecting it to work? The Slytherin’s voice was laced with that same tone of amusement.

Harry tried to imagine the spell physically working in front of him, but it didn’t nothing to deflect against Malfy’s Jelly-leg Jinx, which sent him sprawling to the classroom floor.

He swore aloud as his head collided with the stone floor, wincing as he pulled himself up into a sitting position.

‘Are you going to help me, or just watch me be repeatedly thrown across the room?’ he snarled internally to Riddle.

That depends. Do you want my help?

Well I’d rather not have to face whatever hex Malfy has planned for me a dozen more times, Harry thought bitterly, getting up to his feet to once again face the blonde boy.

So that is a yes to my help?

Riddle was toying with him now, Harry realized. Just because he had no physical form and was trapped inside Harry’s mind, doomed to only see and hear what Harry did, didn’t mean that Riddle couldn’t easily play with Harry like a cat did with a mouse.

Yes, Harry thought sullenly. I, Harry Potter, want Tom Riddle’s help with non-verbal spells. Satisfied?

Absolutely.

“Flipendo,” Harry said, flicking his wand and sending a Knockback Jinx Malfy’s way. Malfoy screwed up in face in concentration but was still sent flying over the desk and crashed to the floor.

Imagine yourself casting a protego spell, Riddle told him as Malfy tried to collect his bearings.
Don’t say ‘protego’ in your head, just imagine it. Imagine the burst of blue light out the end of your wand and imagine it forming a shield around you. Imagine every tiny shimmer and fragment in that shield in great detail. Concentrate only on that.

Harry tried to do as Riddle instructed, but he got distracted when he saw the offensive end of Malfoy’s wand pointed at him and instantly lost his train of thought. Internally shouting out protego, he flicked his wand but it did nothing to protect him and Harry found himself once again on the stone floor.

Riddle tutted in his head. What did I say about saying ‘protego’? Non-verbal spells aren’t cast, they’re imagined.

“Not cast, imagined, got it,” Harry muttered as he pulled himself up to his feet. He sent a stinging hex at Malfoy and watched in satisfaction as Snape’s favourite student also failed to do a non-verbal spell.

Professor Snape, from where he stood at the front of the classroom, scowled at their efforts, though was not surprised. He had warned them after all.

Try this, close your eyes.

“Err…” Harry said as he saw Malfoy brush off the last effects of the hex. “I’d rather not-”

“Talking to yourself, Potter?” Malfoy snapped, hair dishevelled and looking thoroughly put out that he hadn’t yet managed to succeed in the task they had been given. “Should’ve known, it was only a matter of time before you went loopy.”

Ignore him, he’s merely a distraction, Riddle said coolly. Close your eyes. Trust me.

Harry thought that if there was one thing that he couldn’t possible do, it would be to trust the future Lord Voldemort but he had nothing to lose, so reluctantly he closed his eyes.

Imagine the shield around you. Imagine it rippling in the air, fragile like a spider’s web but as strong as a thousand dragons.

Harry let the persuasive, silky voice of Riddle wash over him, picturing the protego spell working. It seemed Riddle was also taking charge of Harry’s imagination, for suddenly Harry could suddenly see every millimetre of the shield fluttering in the breeze but holding its shape firm.

Around him, Harry heard the rest of the class duelling, stinging hexes and jelly-leg jinxes whipping through the air with no defensive spells to slow them down. Opposite him, Harry heard Malfoy stumbling to his feet, and heard his cloak brush against the desk as he prepared himself for another attack.

Ignore everyone else, they’re not worthy of our attention, Riddle whispered. Imagine that shield. We’re completely protected right now. There’s not a single thing that could penetrate it, nothing in the world that could possibly cause harm…

Harry heard Malfoy mutter ‘furnunculus’ under his breath and swore he could feel the Pimple Jinx flying through the air towards him. But it didn’t matter, Riddle had told him the jinx couldn’t possibly hit him. And Harry didn’t need much more persuasion than the soft, velvety voice of the Slytherin in his ear assuring him.

Across the classroom, Snape raised one eyebrow in surprise as Malfoy’s latest jinx bounced harmlessly off Potter’s non-verbal protego spell, falling harmlessly to the ground as a couple of red
sparks.

Harry opened his eyes in curiosity as several seconds past and he didn’t feel his skin bubble up into pimples. Malfoy was staring at him, annoyance clear in his scowl but no-one else in the classroom had noticed, too busy failing their own defensive spells.

“Well now,” Snape’s voice cut across the noise like a recently sharpened knife. “And here I thought this lesson would simply be another example of how easily you all can disappoint.”

The class felt silent, several pairs of eyes following Snape as he swept across the floor, straight towards Malfoy and Harry.

“But then again,” Snape commented. “If the only one who managed to perform a non-verbal spell is Mr Potter here, then perhaps you have still unsurprisingly disappointed me. I expected better from the Slytherins at least.”

Malfoy glowered, eyes firmly on the floor.

They resumed their duelling for the last ten minutes of the lesson, and whilst Harry successfully managed to deflect every single one of Malfoy’s spells, no-one in the class managed to achieve the same results. The closest was probably Dean who, tired from being constantly hexed by Blaise Zabini, had instead thrown himself under the nearest desk to avoid being hit.

“If that had been Malfoy or any of the other Slytherins, Snape would’ve showered them in house points,” Ron grumbled as they made their way to the Great Hall for food.

“It was incredibly impressive,” Hermione said. “I didn’t expect it to be easy but it was much harder than I could have possibly imagined. What you did Harry, that was remarkable. You could see even Snape thought it.”

“How did you even do it?” Ron asked as they sat themselves down at the Gryffindor table. “Personally, I thought Dean had the right idea. No point trying to defend yourself if you can just run.”

“You have to imagine it, not cast it,” Harry said absentmindedly as a plate of roast beef appeared in front of him. He helped himself to some roasted vegetables.

“What?”

“The spell,” he tried to explain, spearing a piece of broccoli with his fork. “Don’t say the incantation in your head, you have to physically imagine the spell working. That’s how you do it.”

“Blimey,” Ron said, reaching for the gravy. “Why can’t Snape just tell us that rather than how much of a disappointment we are? Clearly this is his fault.”

Harry grunted in agreement whilst Hermione just nodded thoughtfully.

I want the gravy too, Riddle suddenly said in Harry’s head.

“What”? Harry thought, shoving more vegetables in his mouth.

The gravy, put some on the beef.

You can’t taste this, Harry thought, picking at the gravy-less beef on his plate.

Yes I can, Riddle said. I’m getting stronger. I can just about taste it. I want the gravy.
Rolling his eyes and not even questioning why he was allowing himself to be ordered around by Riddle, Harry reached for the gravy and poured a generous amount over his beef, despite not usually putting so much on his plate.

Satisfied that his request had been fulfilled, Riddle went quiet again, allowing Harry to eat and talking with Ron and Hermione uninterrupted, focusing all his strength instead on the taste of roast beef and gravy that lingered just out of reach.

Over the next week, Riddle proved to be an immense help with Harry’s classes. Not only did he keep Harry centred during their Defence Against the Dark Arts non-verbal spell lessons, but he also made small suggestions in Potions that made the Prince’s annotated textbook completely pointless for Harry.

In fact, for some potions Riddle had them completely memorized and demanded that Harry not even open the door, wanting to see if he could get Harry to create it perfectly.

This worked well until Riddle forgot that it was essential that Harry stir his potion anticlockwise and Harry was drenched in the bright-orange contents of his potion. He apologised hastily to Slughorn, who had blinked in surprise whilst Riddle burst out laughing in his head.

Harry was still half convinced Riddle had done that on purpose but the other boy made no other attempt to recite the instructions off by heart.

As a result of the human textbook residing in his mind Harry got through his essays twice as quickly and suddenly found he had a lot more free time than usual, though Riddle demanded that he spend these in the library researching more potential vessels for him.

With the Christmas holidays approaching though, Harry was at a loss for what to do. Ron had told him that the offer to spend Christmas at the Weasleys was always available to him, but Riddle was adamant that he spent Christmas at Hogwarts.

*This is the perfect chance to research freely, without suspicion,* he had informed Harry matter-of-factly. *The longer you delay this, the more time I spend in your brain. Don’t you want to have your mind to yourself?*

Well, Harry thought, he had a point there. He rather missed the privacy of his thoughts. Though Riddle had told him that he was not strong enough yet to read all his thoughts, he *could* read the thoughts Harry directed at him.

This filled Harry with relief, as he had found his mind drifting during lessons to whether he’d be able to spend time with Ginny during the Christmas holidays, and wondering what Voldemort was up to.

He wasn’t sure which thoughts he’d prefer Riddle to not know about, his love life or his life as the Boy Who Lived but he was glad that Riddle was shut out of it all.

However, Harry was reluctant to miss a chance to spend Christmas at the Weasleys. Molly and Arthur Weasley tried hard to treat Harry as if he was their own son, for which he was thankful for and didn’t realize how much he needed. And as great as Hogwarts’ feasts were, Molly could still cook up a mean roast when she wanted to.

Riddle seemed irritated with Harry’s plan to spend time with the Weasleys and it occurred to Harry several days after he had snapped at Riddle’s constant efforts to get him to spend the holiday in the
castle that perhaps there was more to his desire to remain at Hogwarts than Harry originally thought.

Hogwarts was a home to Tom Riddle in the same way that it was a home to Harry. It was the place that had rescued them both from their miserable childhoods and opened up the wonderful world of magic to them. Harry briefly remembered how the moment Riddle had realized that the basilisk that he had released would cause Hogwarts to be shut over the summer, he had instantly sent it back to the Chamber and had not reopened it.

As much as Harry sympathised with this – despite his best attempts – he wanted to spend his Christmas surrounded by the Weasleys, rather than whoever decided to remain at the castle. However, a guilty feeling washed over when he realized that he would basically be bringing Voldemort to the Burrow for Christmas.

The idea would be laughable if it wasn’t so horrible.

Eventually he decided to spend the first half of the holiday at Hogwarts to pacify Riddle, and then make it to the Burrow in time for Christmas for the second half.

However, before he could push all thoughts of work aside and throw himself into the excitement of Christmas with everyone else, Harry had one more hurdle to jump over – Slughorn’s Christmas party.

“Do we have to?” he grumbled as Hermione redid his tie.

“I’m not very happy about it either,” she muttered, her bushy hair having been tamed for tonight and pinned back in a sleek up-do. “But maybe we can just turn up for an hour and then leave.”

Not bloody likely, Riddle grumbled in his head and Harry inwardly smirked. It seemed he and Riddle saw eye-to-eye on the matter.

Harry and Hermione trailed down the Hogwarts corridors towards the dungeons where the party was being held. They had both decided to go together as each other’s dates, knowing they couldn’t possibly drag anyone else into going. Ron had practically run out the room at the suggestion.

“Mr Potter! Miss Granger!” Slughorn said happily when they entered, flinging his hands up in greeting, a bottle of firewhisky held precariously in one hand. “Welcome, welcome, I-I must introduce you, here, take a drink, there you go.”

He pushed two glasses of what looked like butterbeer into their hands and Harry took a hesitant sip. Almost immediately he coughed – it tasted vaguely like butterbeer but had a slight kick to it.

Hermione quickly set her drink on a nearby table before they were both dragged around the room by Slughorn.

“…met Sanguini here whilst writing a book on vampires actually,” Worple was saying, oblivious

Slughorn left them to the company of Eldred Worple and Sanguini before bustling off across the room to talk to another former student of his. Harry smiled nervously at Worple before taking another tip of his drink. Next to him, Hermione was glancing around the room, trying not to make eye contact with Cormac McLaggen who was staring at her intently from a few feet away.

“…met Sanguini here whilst writing a book on vampires actually,” Worple was saying, oblivious
to the fact that neither Harry nor Hermione were even listening. “Fascinating bunch really, did you
know that every blood moon they like to gather in this ancient spot in the woods and carve these
runes into... why, what was it into? Wood, was it? Or stone. No, it was definitely some kind of
wood, perhaps from the oak tree...”

Vampire, eh? Riddle said curiously. Ask him if the wood from the trees of the Bialowieza forest is
really enchanted.

Harry ignored Riddle, taking another sip of his drink as he nodded along to whatever Worple was
saying.

“Excuse me, I am awfully famished, I’ll be right back,” Hermione interrupted politely, before
making her way over to the buffet table. Harry say McLaggen frown in disappointment.

Ask him, Riddle insisted.

No, Harry’s mind said back. I don’t want to engage in conversation. I just want to appease
Slughorn and then leave.

You can still leave, it’s just one question. Ask him if the wood is actually enchanted or whether it’s
just a myth.

Harry sighed, realizing that Riddle wasn’t going to drop it until Harry did what he asked.

“Mr Sanguini,” he said, and the vampire quirked one eyebrow up, as if surprised that Harry would
address him. Worple looked equally as shocked. “I-I was just wondering whether...”

Whether the wood from the trees of the Bialowieza forest is actually enchanted, Riddle finished.

Harry dutifully repeated what Riddle had asked him and Sanguini’s lips twitched.

“It’s said to be a myth,” he replied smoothly, brushing a piece of invisible lint off his jacket sleeve.

But you don’t believe that, do you?

“But you don’t believe that, do you?” Harry repeated, watching in curiosity as Sanguini opened his
mouth and then closed it again, seemingly thinking over what to say.

“No...” he said carefully. “No, I don’t. A wood that ancient... I believe there must be... some sort
of magic going on... absorbed into the trees...”

Ask him how much magic.

“H-How much? How much magic would be in that wood?”

“Why? Why do you wish to know?” Sanguini’s eyes bore into him suspiciously.

Harry stuttered over his words, not sure what to say. But Riddle already had an answer.

Just something Professor Binns mentioned in class, he said smoothly, and waited until Harry had
repeated him before continuing. He said something about the virality of the trees and how they
provided wood for the earliest magical wands.

“... provided wood for the earliest magical wands,” Harry told Sanguini, trying not to let his
surprise show on his face.
Sanguini nodded thoughtfully.

“Yes,” he said. “I suppose that wood offered a wonderful material for the early wands. That, however, was many eons ago.”

He excused himself from the group before Harry could say anything else and, not wanting to be stuck with Worple, Harry also excused himself, heading over to the buffet table Hermione had disappeared from.

“What was that?” he hissed to Riddle under his breath. “Do you actually listen to Binns?”

*Sometimes. I didn’t get that from Binns though.*

“So where did you learn it from?”

*Books.* Riddle didn’t elaborate further and Harry huffed.

“In what books are you reading about different kinds of wood?” he asked, finding it hard to imagine Tom Riddle interested in such things.

*It’s not the wood itself that is interesting, it’s the myth,* Riddle said haughtily. *That’s what I find interest in and that’s what book I read it in.*

“Why are you interested in myths though? They’re not real,” Harry said absentmindedly, taking another sip of his drink and moving further down the buffet line before people could hear him supposedly talking to himself.

*Myths come from truth. And sometimes the truth is far more interesting. Hogwarts, for example, houses many myths that I enjoyed searching up on-*

“How the Chamber of Secrets?” Harry asked without thinking, and then instantly cursed himself.

*You’ve heard of that then? Yes, that was one of the myths I was particularly engaged with.*

He didn’t elaborate any further and Harry didn’t ask. Unknown to the person in question, he knew full well the story behind the Chamber and Riddle.
December the 18th found Harry making his way back to Hogwarts from Hogsmeade station, having seen off Hermione and Ron, promising that he'd be at the Burrow for Christmas.

“You’d better,” Ron had told him. “Mum’ll go nuts if you stay here. She says it’s not healthy to be cooped up in that castle.”

“I’ll be there,” Harry had said with a grin, before waving goodbye as the train slowly moved out of the station.

Harry tightened his cloak around him as the castle loomed ahead in the distance.

“Right, so which section of the library are we demolishing this time?” he asked Riddle, kicking a bit of snow from the night before.

You’ll see.

Harry rolled his eyes at Riddle’s typical response and shivered in the breeze that had picked up.

Due to most of the Gryffindors having gone home, Harry took several books of Riddle’s choosing out of the library and took it back to the tower instead, settling himself down in front of the roaring fire and spreading the thick volumes out in front of him.

“Alright, which one first?” he pondered.

Hogwarts: A History.

“What? Why?” Harry frowned, picking up the mentioned book. He hadn’t questioned Riddle on why he wanted this book in the library, assuming Riddle wouldn’t tell him anyway.

I want to read it.

“Great. Thanks. Very informative.”

Harry heard a hiss deep in his head.

I want to show you some of the myths of Hogwarts, Riddle snapped.

Harry stopped, staring down at the book in confusion at Riddle’s words.

“You want to show me… wait, wait, wait, you want to show me the myths of Hogwarts?”
Just because it’s the holidays, doesn’t mean you can’t learn something.

Sighing, Harry opened the book and settled back against the edge on the sofa on the floor, letting his eyes drift over the words.

“What other myths were you interested in?” he asked out of curiosity.

The Room of Requirement. That was one I learnt about in my third year.

“What did the room give you?”

Space, was Riddle’s curt reply. Harry nodded absentmindedly.

“I get that,” he mumbled. “I love Hogwarts and all but… god can it be overbearing at times. Sometimes I just want peace and quiet, that’s when I do a lap around the Quidditch pitch on my broom.”

Flying was never an interest of mine.

“What was?”

Myths.

Harry’s lips twitched in humour and he could feel a similar echo of amusement in his head.

“What was your favourite subject?” he asked.

Potions.

Harry’s brow furrowed in confusion. “Really? I mean, I know you’re good and all but I thought it’d be Defence Against the Dark Arts.” Especially since he’d applied for the position, Harry thought to himself. But that hadn’t happened yet for Riddle.

Defence Against the Dark Arts is one of my stronger subjects, that is true, Riddle said slowly. But I prefer the simplicity and precision of potions. There’s no faffing about, simply knowledge and a correct way on how to do things.

Yep, that sounds like you,” Harry murmured.

History of Magic, as well, was one of my favourites. Though it hardly takes a genius to see why you might not have such an appreciation for it.

“Your teacher was more interesting, I assume?”

Riddle gave a short laugh. Take a wild guess who I was taught by.

“No,” Harry grinned. “Don’t tell me you had Binns as well.”

Well, he was a little more alive in my time but still taught in that same dreary monotone. Still, he taught some fascinating topics.

“Riddle,” he said suddenly, a question he had vaguely thought about before coming back to the front of his mind. “Do you know what year it is?”

In your time?
“Yeah.”

_Not really, no. I am aware that it is years past my time, but how long I do not know. It’s remarkable just how little has changed through._

“It’s 1996,” Harry said, not even sure why he was telling Riddle this.

The Slytherin was quiet for the longest time, but Harry was aware of his presence in his mind, mulling over the new information.

_That is… quite a few decades away._

“What year is it – was it, sorry – for you?”

1943.

“Over fifty years ago,” Harry said to himself, but he heard Riddle’s murmur of agreement. “Do you miss it?”

_Miss what?_


_Take a wild guess_, Riddle said sourly.

“I still don’t understand what exactly you are though,” Harry frowned. “Because you’re not him are you? Not the actual Tom Riddle? Otherwise… otherwise Tom Riddle would have gone missing in 1943. You’re like a conscience rather than the actual person… aren’t you?”

_I am Tom Riddle_, he seethed. _I am the Tom Riddle of 1943, I am the Tom Riddle stuck inside the mind of a future Hogwarts student and I am whatever future Tom Riddle may or may not exist at this current time. I have all the memories, the emotions of everything up to 1943. I am not merely some disembodied voice._

The phrase ‘disembodied voice’ Riddle spat out, as if disgusted that he could be considered anything less than he really was. Harry could feel a deep rage within him, as if Riddle was fuming.

_It may surprise you, Potter, but I have likes and dislikes and emotions too. I can be bored, angry, miserable, amused… I am not a ghost. I am very much alive. I’m just… trapped._

“Because of me?” Harry whispered. “Because I took you from the diary?”

_No, before that as well._

A sudden rush of emotions consumed Harry, and he suddenly felt like he couldn’t breathe. Suddenly felt like the walls were slowly moving in towards him, but he had the strangest feeling they wouldn’t ever touch him, wouldn’t ever crush him and cause him death. The thought, far from comforting, only added to the feeling of a never-ending claustrophobic nightmare.

_An endless vortex of waiting, waiting for something – he didn’t know what, he didn’t know if it would even happen, but still he would wait. What else could he do?_”

_“Stop it,” Harry whispered, hands cold and clammy, shaking slightly from where they held the book. “Please… stop it.”_”

The claustrophobic feeling abruptly stopped and Harry finally felt he could breathe around, looking
around him to make sure he was still safe in Gryffindor tower.

_Fifty years,_ Riddle said bitterly. _It felt like longer._

“Why? Why would you do that to yourself?” Harry asked, even though he already knew the answer.

Because Voldemort wanted to preserve himself. Because Voldemort – the same Riddle Harry was talking to right now – wanted to continue his quest to rid Hogwarts of all those ‘unsuited’ to study magic. Harry began to wonder whether it was later that Riddle became like this, or whether he had always been sick in the head.

At what point did his prejudices start?  

_It was… necessary._

“Tell me something else about you,” Harry said, trying to steer the conversation away from more depressing topics.

_Like what?_ He sounded suspicious. Harry rolled his eyes.

“Like… what’s your favourite colour?”

_Green._

“Oh wow, big surprise, typical Slytherin,” Harry muttered.

_How did you know I was a Slytherin?_  

Harry swallowed nervously. “Umm… it’s obvious. Come on, you’re hardly a Hufflepuff now.”

Riddle snorted. _Loyalty has never been my forte._

"And what about Ravenclaw? Or Gryffindor?"

_Simpletons, _Riddle scoffed, ignoring Harry’s sound of protest. _Admit it, you do things for other people. Loyalty… knowledge… bravery… what use is all of that when you use it only for other people? All the knowledge I have collected is primarily for my own gain, like it should be._

"Why? Why should it just be for you?"

_Because you can’t rely on others. You have no guarantee of things except that for which you do yourself._

"Seems like a sad way to live your life,” Harry murmured, before a flash of pain went through his head, but it wasn’t to the same level of intensity that Riddle’s other headaches had been.
Riddle told him then and Harry sighed, knowing that the conversation about Voldemort’s early life was clearly over.

Well, Harry thought to himself as he began to read again. Looks like Riddle is stuck relying solely on Harry now. It must kill him inside.

Yet the idea of it, rather than pleasing him, just made Harry pity him instead.

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Over the next few days, Harry grew to sympathise with Riddle a lot more. As much as he tried to hide it, Harry could tell that he relatively bored and lonely, but he didn’t dare mention this to him. He was pretty sure the Heir of Slytherin would rip his head off.

So instead he tried to entertain Riddle. He stopped protesting as much when Riddle wanted to go to the library and drew the conversation to parts of magical history that he found out he was interested in. Riddle enjoyed teaching, it was plain to see, and Harry let him talk, his smooth voice washing over him. It was much more engaging that Binn’s lectures, that was for sure.

In fact, Harry was pretty sure he learnt more about the Goblin Rebellions than he had in one day than he had in an entire year in Binn’s class. Though Riddle had the tendency to take on a biased approach to history and made his opinions extremely clear. He didn’t think much of anyone that wasn’t a witch or wizard, that was for sure, and thought the whole conflict with the goblins was rather pointless.

Whilst their afternoons were dedicated to the library, in the evenings Harry would sometimes wander around the practically empty castle, fingers trailing over the familiar cold stone walls. This seemed to be when Riddle was most complacent, and Harry found that it helped relax him too.

*That’s where Ernest Saunders was hit by Mallory’s Pimple charm,* Riddle told him as they approached the Charms classroom. *And over there is where someone enchanted the stones to shake whenever a Slytherin walked past them.*

Harry enjoyed it when Riddle told him stories about his time at Hogwarts. It didn’t seem that massively different to the Hogwarts he was familiar with. Slowly he began to think of Riddle less as a younger Voldemort and more as just a Hogwarts student.
"My first Christmas here was one of the best ones of my life," Harry murmured as he sat on a windowsill, staring out at the snow-covered grounds. "Ron and I had a snow-fight with his brothers. I remembered thinking… thinking that this was what everyone was on about. Christmas was rather a dismal affair for me before then, my cousin got mountains of presents and all I could think about was how materialistic it all was, you know? But it was more than that at Hogwarts. It was… family."

_Tell me about your family,_ Riddle said suddenly.

Harry’s heart sank at the mention. “I-I don’t think there’s much to tell,” he mumbled. “I grew up with my aunt, uncle and cousin. They weren’t… well, they weren’t the Weasleys, that’s for sure.”

_Your parents?_

"Dead."

There was silence, and then –

_I’m an orphan too._

Harry nodded slowly. “People ask me if I miss them all the time but… I don’t even remember them. How can I miss something I don’t remember? But then I feel guilty… they were my parents. And I can’t even remember them."

_I don’t miss my parents. I don’t care for mourning over the dead._

Harry shrugged. “I had a lonely childhood, naturally I was going to wonder about what my life would have been if they had been alive."

_Don’t bother,_ Riddle said savagely. _I spent my childhood doing the exact same thing, only to realize that maybe it had been better not knowing the truth._

"The truth?" Harry asked in confusion.
That they didn’t want me, Riddle said quietly. His voice shook slightly, and it was the first sign of vulnerability Harry had heard from him. He suddenly felt extremely uncomfortable, like he shouldn’t be hearing this.

I want to read more about Egyptian artefacts tomorrow, Riddle said decidedly, as if he hadn’t just confessed something incredibly private to his future mortal enemy.

"Really? Haven’t we exhausted that area already?"

Of course not. We’ve barely started.

Resisting the urge to groan, Harry turned away from the Charms classroom and instead heading towards the library before it shut.
Stepping into the Burrow was like encasing oneself into a warm blanket. The minute he had stepped over the threshold, Harry was immediately hugged by Molly Weasley, who told him for the hundredth time how peaky he looked and how he needed to be fed up instantly.

Ron managed to drag Harry away from his mother’s embrace, chattering excitedly about the new rules Fred and George had come up with for Quidditch, which included having to fly over to the shed and back in less than five seconds every time someone scored a goal. If you didn’t make it, you had to use the oldest, most problematic broom the Weasleys had, until someone else didn’t make the race. The broom had a habit of flying the user backwards at any given time.

The first chance he got Harry tried to find some privacy. He told Ron he’d meet him downstairs a few seconds before going up to Ron’s room that he was going to be sharing with his best friend. Riddle was highly uncomfortable, Harry could tell and as much as he told himself he was seeking privacy for his own sake, part of him knew he wanted to give Riddle time to get used to it.

“You aren’t used to this, are you?” Harry asked him, pushing his suitcase into a spare corner of the room. “They’re a good family, it just takes time to get used to the… chaos, I guess.”

“It’s like this all the time?” Riddle asked incredulously and Harry grinned.

“Absolutely. It’s fantastic, a far cry from my own childhood.”

“You still won’t tell me about your childhood.”

“You won’t tell me about yours.”

Mine’s private.

“So is mine.”

I have access to your entire life in here, Riddle warned him.

“I mean, you can look if you want but you know the consequences for looking through my memories,” Harry shrugged. “So, unless you want to stay in my head forever then I suggest you stay out.”

There was a light knock at the door and Harry looked up quickly. The door slowly opened and Ginny peered around.

“Oh, hey Ginny,” Harry said breaking into a smile. “I thought you’d be playing Quidditch with the
others.”

Ginny shrugged, coming further into the room and sitting down on Ron’s bed. “Maybe later.”

“Err… d-did you need something?” Harry stuttered, and felt Riddle’s amusement in his mind.

“Not really, no,” Ginny said carefully, looking around the room.

“Oh. OK then. I mean, I was just trying to put my stuff away… you know… might play Quidditch later too.”

*This is just embarrassing.*

Shut up, Harry’s mind hissed back.

“Sure, maybe we could be on the same team,” the red-head girl shrugged. “Heard Fred and George have made up a few new rules.”

“Yeah… yeah I heard about that.”

Ginny took in a deep breath and slowly got up, crossing the room to sit on Harry’s bed, watching him kick one of his shoes under the bed, out of the way.

“Why did you stay at Hogwarts?” she asked curiously.

“Research,” Harry said. “Hermione’s on my case about revision so I thought… thought I might as well try and do something useful.”

“And did it help?”

Ginny was close, really close. So close that Harry could see little specks of hazel in her deep brown eyes.

“I-I… I learnt stuff,” he said lamely. “About… about the Goblin Rebellion.”

Ginny frowned. “I thought you learnt that ages ago?”

Harry shrugged awkwardly. “Yeah but… I wasn’t really listening.”

At this she grinned. “Does anyone?”

Harry was just about to speak but before he could do so, there was a shout from downstairs.

“Oi, are you two coming or what? We’ve got a game to play!!” one of the twins was yelling.

Ginny stood up quickly, looking both relieved and slightly disappointed.

“Well,” she said brightly. “I-I guess I’ll see you down there.”

She past Harry and left the room in a cloud of floral perfume and for a moment Harry just stood there, breathing in the scent that reminded him of warmth and comfort.

_THAT was probably one of the most atrocious things I’ve ever seen_, Riddle commented lightly.

“Shut up,” Harry muttered. “It’s not my fault.”

*I fail to see how it's not your fault. She practically had a sign over her head asking you to kiss her*_
and you just… I mean, what exactly were you doing? The Goblin Rebellion may be a good conversation starter in this time but back in my time we consider it about the opposite of flirting.

Oh please, Voldemort wasn’t about to give Harry dating advice, was he?

“She’s Ron’s sister,” he argued weakly. “It’s complicated, alright?”

And, firmly ending the conversation at that – despite Riddle’s ever-present amusement – Harry left the room and went outside to re-join the others.

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Christmas day brought about excitement throughout the Burrow and a fresh layer of snow on the frozen ground.

Harry and Ron immediately raced outside to play an early game of Quidditch before Molly could scold them for now properly wrapping up in various coats and scarves. Ginny soon joined them along with Charlie and by the end of their first game – with each of them having to taken on several roles – the four were exhausted, sweaty but pleased with themselves.

As soon as Molly could gather everyone into the sitting room to open presents, Christmas truly started and Harry once again marvelled at the idea of presents.

He got the usual assortments of sweets, books and a fancy quill from Hermione and the last package he opened – a squishy one – revealed another Weasley jumper. Harry immediately put it on.

Riddle made comments here and now but largely kept quiet – Harry figured that a proper Christmas was probably a new experience for him, and thus allowed him to deal with it on his own.

They played Quidditch for a large portion of the day, before finally succumbing to the warmth of the Burrow, where they instead set up a game of Exploding Snap. Bill and Charlie sat in the background, playing chess together and were unsurprisingly equally matched.

“That’s all they could really do,” Fred told Harry, nodding to the chess game. “They couldn’t play Exploding Snap with just the two of them now, could they?”

“But what about Percy?” Harry asked curiously.

Fred and George shared a look before bursting into laughter. Harry tried to keep it together for a little bit longer but then soon enough he was laughing too.

Harry noticed that throughout the day Riddle grew more and more restless. He didn’t speak to Harry but Harry could feel him moving around in his mind, almost like he was pacing.

‘What’s up’? he asked, directing the thought to Riddle.

Riddle didn’t answer for a while, and just as Harry was about to give up he spoke.

What are they doing?

Harry frowned. ‘What do you mean?’ he thought.

In front of him, the cards exploded and Ron let out a loud cheer.
Are they just going to stay inside all day? Riddle’s voice wasn’t judgemental, just full of curiosity.

‘What else would they do?’ Harry asked.

Well...

Riddle’s voice trailed off, as if he was debating what to say. Harry suddenly felt flashes of memories that weren’t his playing out in his mind. They were like tiny shots taken from a much larger movie, flickering images of crosses and long, wooden benches.

You grew up Catholic, Harry thought in wonder. Riddle snorted.

No, I didn’t.

‘You had a Catholic upbringing then’, Harry retorted instead.

It was Protestant, actually.

More flashes of flickering memories. Burnt down candles shining against dark stone brick. It was like Hogwarts, only much plainer.

‘The Weasleys aren’t religious I don’t think’. Harry tried to remember if Ron had ever mentioned a religion. ‘Christmas is just about family for them’.

Riddle’s mind was drifting, still fixated on the Protestant church in his past. Harry’s mind was flooded with religious imagery – always exceedingly plain – and lingered momentarily on a small, dark room. Before Harry could properly think about this last image though, he was abruptly torn out of Riddle’s memories and thrust back into the Weasleys’ living room.

Harry tried to imagine a younger Tom Riddle singing hymns in some sort of choir. He’d bet 100 galleons that he was a talented singer. He seemed like the type who would just be talented at anything.

Harry offered the mental image to Riddle, who scoffed and Harry was suddenly filled with the image of himself, falling off his broom in the Weasleys’ garden and landed face first in the snow. He scowled as Riddle cackled.

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“I’m so not in the mood to go back,” Ron groaned on the evening before they were due to return to Hogwarts. “I haven’t studied for those bloody tests.”

“Yeah,” Harry mumbled in agreement, making sure he had all his socks packed away.

“What are you talking about?” Ron laughed from where he was lounging on his bed. “Didn’t you spend the first half of the holidays revising?”

“Oh… yeah but I mean… I don’t remember all of it,” Harry lied.

“Snape is for sure going to use every excuse he can to deduct points,” the other wizard sighed. “Looks like he’s going to blow a gasket, what with you not giving him a chance to deduct points from you. Poor Neville’s getting the brunt.”

Maybe you should hex Snape? Riddle suggested. He can’t deduct points if it’s a non-verbal hex.

Harry snorted with laughter and Ron glanced up at him in confusion.
“N-Nothing just… never mind,” Harry told him.

The train back to Hogwarts the next day was an eventful journey. With all the Weasleys currently attending Hogwarts in one compartment, alongside Harry, Hermione and Neville who joined later, playing a grand tournament of Exploding Snap turned out to be a lot louder and a lot messier than any of them had anticipated.

Eventually though, George was declared the winner – with Ron sullenly claiming that he had bewitched the cards and cheated to get his victory – and Hogwarts was finally visible on the horizon.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief as he stepped off the train into the cool night air. With the others by his side and his suitcase dragging along behind him, Harry made his way back to the first place he had called home, and felt Riddle’s familiar sigh of happiness.

“I just want to sleep for a thousand years,” Seamus groaned as the sixth year Gryffindors entered the common room. “Reckon McGonagall’s gonna have a bloody heart attack if I tell her I lost my transfigured teacup over the holidays. Somewhere in Britain is a small china bird smacking its face into a tree.”

“Wait you actually did some revision?” Dean asked.

“What did you do with your teacup she handed out then?”

“Put my bloomin’ tea in it, didn’t I?”

“Wait she gave us a teacup?” Ron asked in panic.

Harry left them to it and went up to his room, ready to just throw himself into bed and sleep. However, when he got to the dormitories he spied a letter settled on the middle of it.

Frowning, he reached over and picked it up, noting his name written on the front in looping writing.

He opened it up, taking out the parchment before sitting down on the bed and reading, dread growing in his stomach.

_Dear Mr Potter,_

_I believe that it is time we discussed the future, in particular your future concerning Lord Voldemort. Please meet me in my office Friday at 8pm. The password is ‘Cockroach Clusters’._

_Yours sincerely,_

_Professor Dumbledore._

Chapter End Notes

This chapter may be a little shorter than the others and I’m sorry if it seemed like I was racing through it, I’m trying to work on that.

Just a small question, do you guys prefer an asterisk (*) to separate the different parts
of the chapter, or a line (---)?
Ron let out a grunt as he threw himself down on the bench next to Harry in the Great Hall.

“What’s wrong?” Hermione asked, nibbling at a pastry.

“Apparently Snape’s gonna test us on non-verbal spells today,” he said darkly. “Ernie told me that’s what he had the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws do.”

“Oh,” Hermione said, sounding for the first time extremely anxious about the announcement of an upcoming mock exam. “But barely anyone’s even been able to cast a non-verbal spell-”

“Yeah, and Harry’s is the only ‘proper’ one,” Ron said, attempting to mimic Snape’s monotone. “Git just has it in for us, don’t he?”

“Well at least Harry doesn’t have to worry,” the brunette witch said lightly, before tapping Harry’s shoulder. “Harry? Are you alright?”

“Huh?” Harry asked, being yanked out of his train of thought.


“O-Oh… no, yeah, I heard,” Harry stuttered, glancing back down to his plate.

“What’s wrong? I think if anyone doesn’t have much to worry about it’s you,” Hermione pointed out.

“N-No it’s not that, it’s just…”

Harry let out a deep sigh, before deciding he might as well tell them what had been bothering him for the past few days.

“Dumbledore sent me a letter,” he explained, dropping his voice to a murmur. “He wants to talk to me… about my future.”

“Oh!” Hermione let out a squeak of understanding. “You mean about…?”

Harry nodded, stabbing at his steak and kidney pie half-heartedly.

“Well that’s good… right?” Ron asked nervously. “I mean, being prepared and all.”

“Yeah, I know, it’s just… it all seems so real now,” Harry mumbled. “I just don’t really know what to expect, that’s all.”

The truth was that Harry was scared. He always knew this was coming, even before he had heard the prophecy about his role as the Boy Who Lived the previous year. He had to defeat Voldemort, just him and nobody else.
To say that he was unprepared was an understatement. Harry could barely keep up with his school applied spells, let alone learning all the advanced spell work he’d need to defeat one of the evilest wizards alive.

*Do you mind?* Riddle commented. *Your anxiety is unsettling me.*

Unsettling Riddle? Harry scoffed under his breath. He wasn’t even aware that Riddle could be unsettled.

*It’s all around me,* Riddle snapped. *Your nervousness, it’s like a fog and it’s making me nervous so for the love of Merlin get over it.*

‘Get over it’? Harry snapped back. ‘This isn’t something I can just get over’.

*It’s a bloody potions test that you’ve already practically aced, I think you can,* he replied in a snide tone.

Harry groaned, running his fingers through his hair. This isn’t about that, he thought, gritting his teeth. It’s about something else.

*This ponce who calls himself a ‘Lord’ in that letter?* Riddle scoffed. *Oh please.*

‘You don’t know anything about it, Harry spat back.

“Harry, don’t worry, at least it’s better than Dumbledore ignoring your like last year,” Ron said lightly, clapping a hand on Harry’s back.

*Anyone who calls themselves a ‘Lord’ when they’re not are delusional,* Riddle snapped. *Like I would ever dream of being submissive to someone like that. I bow to no-one.*

“We should probably head off now anyway,” Hermione said, glancing over at the other Gryffindors who were making their way to Defence Against the Dark Arts.

The trio slowly began to join the rest of their classmates towards the dungeons, Hermione muttering ‘imagine, don’t cast’ under her breath the whole time.

Entering the dungeons released a chill over all of them and Harry shivered as he made his way towards their seats at the back. Snape hadn’t arrived yet and so everyone was quietly whispering together, casting nervous glances at the door. The rumour about the test had clearly spread, Harry noted.

Tomorrow he would have to go see Dumbledore about his future concerning Voldemort. He supposed he was thankful that he was finally going to prepare Harry to fight for his life but still Harry dreaded it. He was sixteen for Merlin’s sake, the only thing he should be worrying about is exams and Snape’s test.

Dimly Harry was aware that he hadn’t included the promise of a second Voldemort in his list of dangers but quickly forgot about it as the dungeon door slammed open and Snape swept in, black cloak behind him.

As soon as he reached the front he turned and eyed them, a grimace on his face.

“I suppose it’s finally time to see what you’ve learn,” he said softly. “So today, as I am sure you have probably heard is when I am going to be testing you. Now I am sure that the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs have told you that I am going to give you a practical test with non-verbal spells.”
The class looked as though they were going to groan but Snape’s glare rendered them silent.

“However,” he continued. “Performing spells is only half of Defence Against the Dark Arts. In order to perform them correctly, you need to know the theory behind it. So, you shall also have a written test, which the other class will get next week.”

Hermione meekly put her hand up.

“Miss Granger?” Snape asked in a bored tone.

“Sir, a-are we just doing last terms work or…” she trailed off at the look on the professor’s face.

“You shall be doing whatever I decide to ask you,” he said acidly. “I hope that shouldn’t be a problem for you, since I’d assumed you’d already be studying for your NEWTs.”

He looked at the class again with another grim look. “But then again… perhaps not.”

Snape seemed to take pleasure in the panic-stricken expressions on the students’ faces as he handed out the tests.

“I expect nothing less than full marks,” he said. “Because if you don’t even know these basic questions then I see no point in continuing to teach you. You have half an hour, begin.”

Harry turned over his parchment anxiously, and felt his heart drop as he stared at the questions. He swore they hadn’t covered these in class. Next to him, Ron looked just as horrified him but Hermione was already writing, frowning as she did so.

“Focus on your own work, Mr Potter,” Snape snapped and Harry jumped. “I won’t tolerate cheating in this class. Though the way Professor Slughorn goes on about you, I’d be surprised if you didn’t ace this.”

He said it with an icy smile on his face, and Harry quickly looked down.

OK, he thought desperately. Common cure for poison… common cure for poison…

He wracked his brains, trying to think if Snape had even mentioned any cure for poison. All his could think of was the Wiggenweld Potion from Potions, that cured those from the Draught of Living Death. It was hardly a common potion, nor did Harry think it cured anything but the Draught, but he hastily wrote it down anyway.

Wrong, Riddle said lightly.

Well what is it then? Harry thought furiously. Riddle was silent and Harry nodded in satisfaction. Even Tom Riddle didn’t know everything.

Right, Harry thought, moving onto the second question. Properties of a strong Defence spell-

It's a Bezoar, Riddle said in boredom. Common cure for most poisons.

Harry hesitated, quill hovering over his parchment, before sighing and crossing out his original answer to the first question and putting Riddle’s instead.

Now do you want the answer to the second question or are you going to pretend you know? Riddle asked lightly. Either way you’re going to end up writing my answers but at least this way you won’t have ink marks all over the parchment.
That depends, Harry thought. Am I going to have to wrestle the answer out of you?

*It would be nice to have some gratitude...* Riddle said slowly.

Harry rolled his eyes. Of course.

“Twenty minutes,” Snape said calmly, and a couple of students looked up in alarm.

Panic rushed through Harry. He’d only answered one of the thirty questions on the paper.

Alright, he internally snapped to Riddle. What do you want?

A favour, Riddle said smoothly.

Well that’s suspicious, Harry frowned, mind jumping to images of Riddle forcing him to torture and maim muggle-borns.

Riddle laughed in his head and it sent a chill down Harry’s spine.

*I don’t know what the favour is yet,* Riddle stated. *But you’ll be in my debt and owe me that favour when I come to collect. And I always come to collect.*

I can’t agree if I don’t know what the favour is, Harry argued. But it was a weak argument – he didn’t have enough time left and Snape was looking smug as he eyed up their panicked expressions, almost anticipating how many points he could take away.

Harry gritted his teeth. ‘Fine’, he forced through his mind.

*Mind, matter and energy,* Riddle answered.

What?

*The answer to the second question,* he sighed impatiently. *Mind, matter and energy.*

‘But... why?’ Harry asked dumbly but Riddle was in no mood for explaining.

*The question doesn’t ask that. Write it down. Third question, the answer is-*

‘Hold on’, Harry snapped back, quickly scrawling down the answers Riddle told him. Riddle huffed.

In the end Harry finished the test with seconds to spare. He threw his quill down when the half an hour was gone and Snape started to take in the tests, eyes raking over the answers.

“Appalling but unsurprising,” he sneered to Lavender.

“Equally as horrific but at least you attempted an education guess,” he told Parvati. “And Mr Finnegan, I can’t imagine what made you come up with these answers but I assure you they were not from my class.”

And so it went on. Snape docked points left and right and even though he was still disgusted by the Slytherins’ results, he kept quiet, only giving the occasionally sneer or grimace.

When he got to Hermione’s test he eyed it over, lips twitching in dissatisfaction before throwing it onto the rest of the tests.
“Your explanation for question twenty-three is all over the place, Miss Granger,” Snape said before moving on. Hermione beamed, for Snape that was the closest she would get to praise.

“Let’s see what the famous Mr Potter has provided for us, shall we?” he said icily, picking up Harry’s test and looking over it.

The sneer was quickly wiped off as he eyed the parchment. For a moment he just stood, staring at the test before looking up at Harry with a scowl.

“What would happen if I were to mix African sea salt with seeds of the poppy?” he snapped and Harry blinked in surprise. This was first year all over again and he let the memory flood his mind, not caring if Riddle saw or not.

Riddle, who had been eying up Harry’s memory of that potions lesson sent a wave of exasperation through Harry.

*A healing potion more directed towards sea-related illnesses.*

Harry looked up and met Snape’s cold glance. “A healing potion directed at sea-related illnesses,” he said coolly and watched as Snape’s scowl deepened.

“And if I were to add mandrake root to that concoction?” he asked.

*A pretty useless healing potion.*

Harry snorted and Snape narrowed his eyes in anger.

“Is there something funny, Potter?” he seethed. By now the whole class had turned to see the growing tension between Harry and Snape and waited with baited breath.

*If you find a one-way visit to St. Mungo’s particularly humorous then yes,* Riddle said smugly.

“No, sir,” Harry told the professor. “Unless you count a one-way trip to St. Mungo’s particularly humorous.”

“And if I were to deflect a simple Stinging Hex with the most advanced protego spell?”

*You would force the hex onto the person who cast it,* Riddle said smoothly and Harry repeated his words. *Which would result in a hex so powerful it has the ability to paralyze the victim for up to four days.*

“And is so powerful that…” Harry trailed off, hesitating.

“And?” Snape inquired, eyes gleaming. “Don’t leave us hanging now, Mr Potter.”

“…can paralyse the victim for up to four days,” Harry whispered quietly.

The whole class stared, some in horror. Even Hermione was looking at him with some kind of fear in her eyes.

The silence was suffocating as Snape eyed up Harry.

“What did you do?” he eventually hissed, breaking the silence.

“W-What do you mean?” Harry asked, bewildered. “Y-You just asked me and-”
“Mr Potter you are dealing with very serious magic here, so I suggest you do not lie to me,” Snape spat out. “Which book did you read this in?”

“I-I didn’t, I just… I just…”

Harry trailed off, not knowing what to answer. Riddle came to his aid once more.

A book in the Restricted Section, he lied smoothly. *I was looking up something I had heard about in Transfiguration, where it’s used in dark arts.*

“I read it in a book in the Restricted Section,” Harry said, shifting uncomfortably under Snape’s burning gaze. “T-There was something about transfiguration… when it’s used in the dark arts.”

Snape’s eyes narrowed as he stared at Harry, but he said no more on the subject and instead snatched Ron’s test away from him, adding it to the pile without glancing at it and moving back to the front of the classroom.

“Since Mr Potter here seems to have actually read a book for once, perhaps he shall also do us the honour of being the first in our practical,” Snape said and Harry shrank back in his seat. “Come up to the front.”

Harry let out a deep breath and got up, smiling briefly at Ron mouthing ‘good luck’ to him. The rest of the class was still in a state of shock that Harry had known the answers to questions they had never even heard of before and Hermione was shaking her head in confusion, eying up her textbook as if it had personally offended her.

Harry walked slowly to the front of the classroom, trying to drag it out as much as he could but all to soon he was facing Snape, wand held in his hand at the ready.

‘Riddle, help’ he thought desperately, not even caring that he was begging his mortal enemy for help. At the moment Snape was his enemy and Harry did not like the look of the expression on the professor’s face.

*It’s the same non-verbal spell you’ve been doing for the last few lessons.*

Snape flicked back his wand, muttering in incantation before a jet of light zoomed towards him.

Harry desperately tried to conjure up the protego spell but Snape’s spell was too fast and before he could even think about it, Harry had waved his wand and shouted ‘*protego*’, watching it successfully deflect Snape’s spell.

For a moment he sighed in relief, but then he saw annoyance in Snape’s eyes.

“Ah yes, the perfect specimen of a non-verbal spell,” he said snidely and a few of the Slytherins snorted with laughter.

“I’m s-sorry sir, I wasn’t ready,” Harry stuttered out.

“In a duel, you will never be ready,” Snape hissed.

Concentrate, Riddle said, and his smooth voice washed over Harry. He let his muscles relax and focused on breathing in and out, before picturing his protection spell again.

Snape cast another spell but Harry kept his focus, watching the jet of light approach him but feeling oddly calm. He watched as it sizzled and fizz out the moment he hit the spell’s protective
barrier and Harry felt a moment of smugness as he looked up to Snape.

“Am I done now, sir?” Harry asked coolly, the disbelief in Snape’s eyes making him speak before he could bite his tongue.

He could feel Riddle’s equal satisfaction in his answer and the furious gaze of Snape at being shown up in front of the class.

“Not yet,” Snape replied coldly.

He didn’t know what made the professor do it, whether it was Harry’s smug remark, or the looks on the Gryffindors’ faces or perhaps a mixture of both, but the next thing Harry knew Snape had cast out an incantation that he didn’t recognise and a jet of purple light shot menacingly towards him.

Harry panicked, completely unprepared for his protego spell and watched the spell shoot towards him.

He noticed the shock on the Gryffindors’ faces, the grins on the Slytherins and then his vision was filled with purple, until he felt something deep in his head force its way out.

Instantly the purple light was forced backwards, taking Snape by surprise and throwing him across the room. The desk that had been near them was also blown back, crashing into the wall and with a giant crack, split almost in two. For a moment, there was unsure silence. Everyone was staring at Harry with awe and fear in their eyes and Snape’s murderous look burned into him.

The professor pushed himself to his feet, brushing his cloak, all the while staring down at Harry. He stalked over to Harry, ignoring the Gryffindor’s flinch before leaning down to hiss in his ear –

“What you did was incredibly foolish and dangerous, even for someone so arrogant as yourself. I suggest you keep the dark arts to yourself before the Ministry becomes involved.”

Snape straightened up, ignoring Harry’s look of horror and he turned to face the rest of the class.

“Get out, all of you,” he spat. “This class is over for today. Get out!”

The class was instantly on their feet, grabbing their books and almost breaking into a run for the door. Harry had gone pale and was completely frozen to the spot, until Hermione grabbed his arm and dragged him out the classroom.

“What was he talking about?” Ron was asking as they hurried down the corridor with everyone else. “What was he saying about a dark spell? That’s dark arts? I don’t get it-”

“Just keep moving,” Hermione ordered, pushing them down towards the Great Hall.

Harry was still too in shock to even protest to Hermione’s grip that was still on his arm. It had all happened so fast, there was a jet of light coming towards him and suddenly Snape was on the ground and everyone was looking at him.

He had no idea what spell Snape had cast at him, nor what spell had rebounded it.

All he knew was that he had not been the one to cast it.
Hey guys so just a quick note, I was just wondering if any of you would be interest in being a sort of temporary beta for this story?
I tend to binge-write and then stop for a while, so sometimes there's a few plot holes, or I drag a subplot out for too long or I get repetitive, and I want this story to be as enjoyable (and realistic) for you as possible :)
So if any of you would like to read through what I've written and offer constructive criticisms on the above points, (again, this will probably only be temporary, rather than a full time thing) then just comment below and I will be in touch :)
Many thanks x

There was whispering all around Harry in the Great Hall as he tried to eat dinner that evening. The story that Harry had thrown Snape back with an unknown protection spell had warped itself into a completely new narrative, and now apparently Harry had waltz into the room before blasting the professor across the room. In any narrative circling the school though, the take-back was the same – Harry threw a powerful spell at one of most feared professors in the school.

Whilst a couple of people thanked him with grins on their faces, the majority eyed him with suspicion. Harry sighed as he felt burning gazes on the back of his neck. He had no desire for more ‘Harry Potter is a dark wizard’ rumours.

“More carrots, Harry?” Neville asked and Harry jumped in shock, swearing as he accidently hit his knee on the table.

“Oh, shove off, Malfoy,” Ron said through a mouthful of food. “If anyone’s a dark wizard here it’s you.”

Malfoy pretended to think about it. “I don’t know… I’ve never thrown a professor across the room. Just imagine the next Defence class… I bet he takes a hundred Gryffindor house points. Maybe a thousand. Maybe you’ll be expelled,” he sneered.

“Just ignore him,” Hermione muttered as Crabbe and Goyle cackled with their ringleader before heading over to the Slytherin table.

Harry stabbed moodily at his vegetables, mind stuck on the afternoon’s events.

‘Was he right?’ he asked Riddle hesitantly. ‘Was that dark arts’.

Do you count protection as a ‘dark art’? Riddle questioned.

Harry growled and Neville looked at him in alarm.
“You alright?” he asked timidly.

“I’m fine,” Harry said through gritted teeth.

‘Well Riddle?’ his mind snapped to the Slytherin. ‘Was it a dark spell?’

It was necessary, Riddle said, and left it at that, ignoring Harry’s other attempts to get an answer out.

--------------------------------------------------

“Harry?”

Harry glanced up from his place by the fire and into Hermione’s nervous brown gaze.

“Can I talk to you?” she asked.

“Oh yeah sure, I’ve got to leave for my meeting for Dumbledore in half an hour though—”

“This won’t take long,” she interrupted, sitting down next to him.

He frowned as she didn’t speak, seemingly thinking hard about what she was going to say.

“I-I need to ask you…” Hermione said hesitantly. “Obviously I’m not accusing you of being…. I-I mean I know you’re good but…”

“Hermione, what’s up?”

“That spell you used yesterday, that was dark magic,” Hermione blurted out.

Harry froze but Hermione just carried on.

“I mean, it’s borderline dark arts, but it’s still considered to be pretty dark. I-I looked it up and… well… as much as I can tell it sort of rebounds the caster’s spell back into them… like a really strong protego but it’s less of a side-effect than…”

“An objective,” Harry finished and she nodded.

“Harry,” she paused, thinking. “I-I don’t know where you read that spell but… it’s really suspicious, I’m not going to lie.”

“I’m not a dark wizard,” Harry snapped, starting to get irritated. He could deal with others thinking he was some second Voldemort, but he couldn’t bear the idea that his friends thought the same.

“I know you’re not,” Hermione immediately assured him. “In fact, I was just thinking that it’s a really useful spell for going against You-Know-Who, so perhaps it’s a good thing you know it but… be careful, Harry, that’s all I’m saying.”

She smiled briefly at him before getting up and leaving him to his thoughts. Although there were others still in the common room, Harry still felt awfully lonely, especially since they seemed to go quiet when he entered the room.

Pity Riddle is ignoring me, he thought.

Who says I’m ignoring you?
‘You’re avoiding my questions’.

*You haven’t provided any worth answering.*

‘Can you get anymore insufferable?’

*Probably, is that what you’d like to see?* Riddle asked in amusement.

‘You made me cast a dark spell’ Harry’s mind accused.

*I made you defend yourself.*

Harry blinked in surprise. Whatever he had been expecting, it had not been that. Riddle protected him?

*Don’t worry, it’s temporary and purely out of self-preservation,* Riddle said haughtily. *Once I get a vessel you can get hit with spells all you want.*

‘But you can’t get hurt in my mind’, Harry accused.

*No… but I prefer my living space to be intact.*

The image of Riddle’s almost destroyed diary floated to the front of Harry’s mind and his lips twitched in amusement as another flash of pain went through his, laced with Riddle’s irritation.

*I can hardly make a book cast a spell, can I?* he snapped.

Harry sighed, catching sight of the clock and realizing that he should probably start making his way to Dumbledore’s office.

Tucking his wand into his back pocket, Harry made his way out of the common room and towards the headmaster’s office. He saw barely anyone on the way there, and those who did glanced curiously at him before moving on.

“Cockroach clusters,” he told the gargoyle that guarded the office and it dipped its head in acknowledgement before moving aside and the staircase began winding up in front of Harry.

He went up the spiral steps, arriving at the giant wooden door and hesitating slightly, before knocking.

“Enter,” a voice said and Harry pushed the door open to reveal Dumbledore’s lavish office. The headmaster in question was leaning over his pensieve, frowning slightly but when he looked up and saw Harry, he beamed.

“Harry, my boy,” he said. “Right on time, I see. I was just looking over some of my memories… it’s funny how some you don’t even recognise.”

He shook his head in bemusement before turning away from the basin and approaching Harry, his bright red robes sweeping behind him.

“Harry, my boy,” he said. “Right on time, I see. I was just looking over some of my memories… it’s funny how some you don’t even recognise.”

He shook his head in bemusement before turning away from the basin and approaching Harry, his bright red robes sweeping behind him.

“Sit down, we have much to talk about,” Dumbledore said, gesturing to the chair in front of his desk.

Hesitantly, Harry sat down, eying up the room and wondering what was going to happen.

Dumbledore was still smiling at his, peering over his half-moon glasses.
“Lemon drop?” he suggested, indicating the bowl to Harry’s right.

“I’m sorry sir but… what am I doing here?” Harry asked curiously. “A-Are you… are you going to teach me spells? More powerful spells for fighting Voldemort?”

“I thought you would be quite capable of powerful spells on your own,” Dumbledore said, lips twitching slightly in amusement as he popped a lemon drop in his mouth. “Professor Snape told me about your practical. It appears you may have humiliated the poor man in front of his class.”

Harry shifted uncomfortably. “Professor Dumbledore, sir, I—”

“Lemon drop?” Dumbledore asked again, pushing the bowl towards Harry. Harry took one, slowly unpeeling it as the headmaster watched him.

“Am I in trouble?” Harry suddenly blurted out, fingers frozen on the sweet. “F-For… the defensive spell?”

Dumbledore dipped his head slightly, examining Harry with his piercing blue eyes. “Do you want to be?”

“But sir, I don’t understand, the spell I cast, it was…” he trailed off, not knowing how to explain it.

Thankfully Dumbledore was already moving the conversation on.

“Might I suggest that you continue your occlumency lessons with Snape?” he said lightly. “Both Snape and I agree that it may be crucial now that Voldemort is indeed getting stronger.”

Harry could feel Riddle’s curiosity deep in his mind but ignored it.

“But Professor…” Harry cut himself off as the penny dropped.

They thought he had been controlled by Voldemort. In a way it was true, since it had been Riddle who had cast the spell but Dumbledore and Snape had thought that Voldemort – the very alive, dark wizard currently on a mission to rid Britain of those he deemed ‘unworthy’ – had entered Harry’s mind and controlled his magic. Harry shuddered at the idea.

“You understand how dangerous it would be to continue without some sort of protection,” Dumbledore said gravely, voice dropping its usual cheerfulness.

Harry nodded stiffly.

“Then I shall ask Professor Snape to continue the lessons,” Dumbledore stated. “And I must ask this of you Harry, if you ever feel his presence in your mind, you are to come to me at once. We cannot risk him entering the castle in any way.”

Harry felt a rush of guilt go through him and leaned down further in his chair, wondering what on earth he was doing. Here Dumbledore was, trying to make sure Hogwarts was safe, whilst Harry was allowing Riddle free rent in his mind and even helping him come back.

He spent the next half an hour in a state of shock as Dumbledore explained what was expected on him in the lessons and what he was to expect in the near future. When Harry finally left his office, he slowly trudged back to the Gryffindor common room, head swimming in thoughts.

Who’s Voldemort?

Harry sighed, not wanting to have to explain. But he figured he’d have to, or else Riddle would go
diving through his memories, consequences be damn.

“Voldemort is…” Harry hesitated, not knowing where to start.

He stopped beside an empty classroom and with a whispered ‘alohomora’ he entered and shut the door carefully behind him.

He drew out the teacher’s chair behind the desk and sat down, leaning his head on his arms on the desk.

“He killed my parents,” Harry mumbled, though he knew Riddle had heard.

Why? Riddle asked curiously. Who were they?

“No-one especially important,” Harry said dully. “They just… they just got in the way, I guess. Anyway, long story short he’s after me now and… and I have to kill him.”

Riddle was silent in his head.

“He… he killed a lot of people,” Harry muttered, anger bubbling inside of him. “Tore a lot of families up… all in search of immortality or some bullshit like that. And the more I think about it, the more it feels like I can’t defeat him.”

*Dumbledore seems to think you can*, Riddle said carefully, but it didn’t sound like assurance. Just a fact.

“That’s the problem. Everyone thinks I can but no-one *knows*. I-I’m sixteen, Riddle. I know barely any magic. For Merlin’s sake I only just found out about all of this when I was eleven.”

For reasons he didn’t quite understand, Harry shared several memories with Riddle. He dug up the memory of his first year, eleven years old in clothes too big for him facing the darkest wizard of all time, a mutilated face on the back of one of his professors. He shared the memory of Cedric’s dead body, eyes wide open and then the memory of his fifth year, watching as his friends were grabbed by Death Eaters. He showed Sirius’s death and then the pain tearing through him as Voldemort possessed his body in the Department of Mysteries.

Riddle watched them all, a quiet weight in the back of his mind and when Harry was done he stayed silent, pondering.

“He’s going to kill me,” Harry admitted. “I-I’m underwhelmingly unprepared. Let’s face it, I can have all the private lessons I want but I’ll never be up to Voldemort’s level for years and years and I don’t have that much time.”

*Dumbledore said you were capable.*

“Dumbledore said that because you cast a powerful protection spell. Not me, you.”

*But what if you could cast it?*

Harry frowned. “I don’t know how.”

*I could teach you.*

“B-But… but why would you do that?” Harry asked suspiciously. Sure, Riddle wasn’t aware that he would grow up to be Voldemort, but he still had no reason to protect Harry –
Self-preservation.

Oh. That explained it, Harry thought to himself.

“But if you can just cast spells from inside me anyway,” Harry began to argue.

*It takes an enormous amount of energy. It’s much better if you can cast it.*

Harry was silent for a moment, weighing his options. He knew he was no match for Voldemort, but now Voldemort’s younger self was offering him tuition. It seemed absolutely insane and yet Harry could think of nothing better. Dumbledore preferred to take a defensive side to things, but he had yet to teach Harry any spells and Harry knew that Riddle would know some offensive spells as well.

“Will you teach me attack as well as defence?” he asked hesitantly.

*Of course.*

Harry nodded. “OK then,” he said. “Let’s do it.”

*This weekend,* Riddle decided. *We’ll go to the Room of Requirement.*

Harry silently agreed and stood up, leaving the classroom and quickly murmuring a locking incantation behind him. He made his way back to the common room, a lot more optimistic about his future for once and secretly thought to himself that maybe it was a good thing that Tom Riddle was stuck in his head.

When he entered the room, a lot of people were still up since it was a Friday evening, but Harry headed straight for the corner of the room, where Hermione was seated in one of the armchairs finishing an essay. There was something he had to tell her.

“Hey, can I talk to you?” Harry asked awkwardly, stopping next to her.

She looked up in surprise. “Of course. Is this about Dumbledore’s meeting?”

“Oh err… not really, no. He just wants me to continue occlumency lessons with Snape,” he sighed, sitting down opposite the brunette witch.

She looked at him sympathetically. “I know it’s horrible but it really is for the best, especially if You-Know-Who’s in your mind. Actually, it makes sense now, that spell in Defence Against the Dark Arts, I knew you couldn’t possible know such a dangerous spell, it must’ve been-”

“It wasn’t Voldemort,” Harry interrupted and Hermione’s eyes widened.

“So you…?”

“It wasn’t me either,” he replied, wondering how she would react to his confession. “It was… well, I…”

He trailed off, guilt filling him as he avoided her concerned gaze. She would never forgive him for this.

“There’s someone in my head,” he finally admitted, and Hermione’s concerned look immediately turned concerned.

“Someone in your head?” she questioned and Harry nodded.
“I-It’s… he’s… well, he’s like a spirit… I guess?” he tried. “He can see and hear everything I see and hear and… I-I can hear him…”


“You remember before Christmas, when I was always sleeping and had that headache?” Harry asked and she nodded. “It was just before then. The illness was actually because of him, really—”

“But I still don’t get just how this happened,” Hermione said, frowning. “And what sort of spirit? There are hundreds in the magical world—”

“I don’t know,” Harry said, uncomfortable with lying to one of his best friends. “But he was the one who cast the spell and… he said he’d help me with Voldemort. With defensive spells.”

“But…” Hermione looked at a loss. “That wasn’t a *protego* spell Harry, you do understand that, right? That was dark magic—”

“If I have to use dark magic to defeat Voldemort then that’s what I’m going to do,” Harry said impatiently. “He’s too powerful, I can’t use basic sixth year Defence Against the Dark Arts spells for this. I need more, and Dumbledore doesn’t seem willing to teach me. This spirit will.”

“But Harry,” Hermione protested, before stopping suddenly. “Hang on,” she frowned. “Can… can he hear this? The ermm… spirit?”

Greetings, Riddle said in amusement.

“Yes, he can hear this,” Harry spoke over Riddle’s voice in his mind.

“And are you sure he doesn’t…?” She took deep breath. “Are you sure this isn’t a trick? Are you sure he’s not just trying to lead you into a trap or something? Some spirits are evil Harry, they’re notorious for—”

“He can’t hurt me, self-preservation,” he explained to Hermione’s questioning look. “Besides, he needs me to help find a vessel for him—”

“A vessel?”

“Yeah, his old one got destroyed – hence why he’s taken refuge in my mind – and he needs my help to find a new one. He wants some magical artifact.”

Hermione leaned back in her seat, shock written across her face.

“Merlin,” she said under her breath and inhaled deeply. “Alright, I trust you Harry. What do you need me to do? Are you going to tell Ron?”

“Yeah,” Harry said awkwardly. “But I’m going to wait to tell him. He might… freak out.”

She nodded knowingly.

“And I do need your help,” he continued. “I need you to keep searching up suitable vessels for him. He’s said no to everything I’ve offered. I have no clue what he actually wants—”

*Powerful magic. That’s what the vessel needs. I need a lot of power.*

Harry rolled his eyes. “He says he needs a powerful object. Lots of magic. But can you search into
that? Then he can teach me defence spells.”

*And offensive*, Riddle added but Harry didn’t repeat that.

Hermione nodded. “Y-Yeah, yeah I can do that. There’s a couple of countries that have particular brands of ancient magic – Egypt and India are a couple of them – and I’ll start looking at books about their history.”

“Thank you,” Harry said in relief, getting up out of his chair.

“Oh, and Harry?” Hermione said lightly and Harry turned to look at her.

“Be careful,” she warned, and he nodded before heading upstairs to bed.

Chapter End Notes

Once again thank you for all of your wonderful comments so far :) x
Saturday morning found Harry staring blearily at the space the Room of Requirement had decided to give him. It was similar to when he had taught Dumbledore’s Army back in his fifth year, only this duelling room was a lot more intimate with half the walls being taken up with books.

Riddle had suggested they go to the Room at around seven in the morning, which Harry firmly declined, stating that if he didn’t at least retain a normal routine then it would seem suspicious. When Riddle had pointed out that they already did find him suspicious, Harry had ignored him and made his way down to breakfast at his normal time.

Riddle had chastised him throughout the meal, arguing that he clearly didn’t understand that Riddle was the teacher and therefore Harry was obligated to listen to him. It became harder and harder to listen to the Slytherin’s scolding, especially when he resorting to sending pain throughout Harry’s head and it was at that moment that Harry reluctantly excused himself from the table and made his way to the Room of Requirement, Riddle’s smugness radiating throughout his being.

Which led to now, with Harry staring with wonder at the mat set up in the centre of the room. An enchanted mannequin waited expectantly for him in the centre of the room and Harry swore that the rattling closet in the far end of the room held a boggart inside.

*This’ll do,* Riddle said in a rather bored tone. *Go to the bookcases against the wall to your left.*

“But what about teaching me spells?” Harry asked.

*You need to know the theory behind it first,* Riddle stated as if it was obvious.

“You sound just like Snape,” Harry grumbled, heading over to the bookcases.

*Get that thick blue book in the centre, third shelf,* Harry’s ‘teacher’ ordered, ignoring Harry completely. *The one about common defense spells.*

Harry took the book out and settled down in one of the armchairs provided, opening the book.

*You should read the introduction,* Riddle told him. *It’ll go through the basic principles of a defence spell. After that we’ll apply it to common defence spells that hopefully you’ll actually know, and then we’ll skip to advanced spells.*

“All today?” Harry groaned. “That’s like a year’s worth of work.”

*No wonder you know next to nothing,* Riddle said in wonder. *We’ll be doing this quickly.*

True to his word, Riddle kept Harry going at a fast pace. He made Harry memorize the principles of a basic defence spell and regularly asked him to make sure he knew. Every time Harry failed to answer one of his many tests, or hesitated, he would be met with a flash of pain through his head that got more and more painful the more questions he failed.
When he had snapped at Riddle that the pain wasn’t helping, Riddle punished him with another burst of pain and soon Harry learnt to keep his mouth shut.

In some ways, Riddle was a much worse teacher than Snape had ever been. At least Snape had just docked points and handed out detentions; Riddle threw Harry to the ground over and over again with migraines and once had even threatened to make Harry shut himself inside the closet with the boggart.

Harry had no idea whether he could even do that but decided he didn’t want to find out.

However, Harry found himself growing more and more confident with advanced spells under Riddle’s leadership, which he had never received with Snape’s classes. He had perfected non-verbal defensive spells within a week and Riddle immediately had him casting offensive spells without uttering a word as well. Though it had been a lot harder to master, Harry soon got a good grip on it.

Harry found himself almost looking forward to the classes – he finally felt more confident in his own abilities and it kept his mind distracted from Snape’s upcoming occlumency lessons. Snape had begrudgingly agreed to tutor Harry again, and his first lesson was a month after the meeting with Dumbledore, two weeks from when Harry was currently standing in front of the boggart closet, wand clutched tightly and his heart thudding loudly.

*Remember to concentrate, ignore whatever comes out of that closet,* Riddle’s voice washed over him. *Non-verbal offensive spell, whichever you want.*

Harry took a shaking breath in, watching the closet in nervous anticipation. He slowly exhaled, before lifting his wand and casting a quick ‘alohomora’.

The doors swung open with an ominous creak and for a while nothing happened. But then Harry heard a high pitched ‘Harry Potter’ and a cloaked figure made its way out the closet towards him.

Harry swallowed, trying to fight back the lump in his throat as he backed up, eyes fixed on the pale snake-like face of Voldemort. Boggart-Voldemort smiled thinly at him, a cruel smile that send chills through Harry.

“Are you ready to die that quickly?” Voldemort asked in him amusement, his wand held loosely in his bone-white hand.

“I-I…” Harry stuttered out, his wand shaking slightly.

Offensive spell, non-verbal, Riddle told him but Harry couldn’t think at the moment.

All he could think about was the monster in front of him, the murderer who had killed his parents and countless others who was slowly gliding towards him, the spitting image of a Dementor with blood-red eyes and a distorted face that had once been handsome.

Voldemort’s bony hand reached out for him, long fingers flexing in the candle-light of the Room of Requirement but Harry didn’t move.

Anger and panic bubbled inside him at the sight of the dark wizard, all the offensive spells he had learnt over the past days completely gone from his mind.

Harry shut his eyes, thinking back to the lessons where Riddle had gone through the offensive spells he was to learn. There was one that would momentarily swell up the inside of the victim’s neck, suffocating them for a short amount of time. Enough time to cast some more damage, Riddle
had told him.

Forcing himself to breathe out evening, Harry opened his eyes to see that Voldemort was closer now, still with that same sick smile on his face, as if he was enjoying dragging out Harry’s misery.

Lifting his wand, Harry flicked it forward, gritting his teeth and imagining the jet of light shooting out the end of his wand and hitting his victim. He pictured Voldemort stopping in his tracks and himself managing to gain the upper hand in precious few seconds.

The spell was cast and shot towards Voldemort, who glanced at it without worry. He lifted his own wand and murmured something under his breath and the curse was instantly deflected, hitting one of the stone walls instead.

*Protego, Potter, protego,* Riddle told him urgently as the boggart disguised as Voldemort continued to glide towards Harry, glee in its eyes.

Harry quickly cast a shield around him as boggart-Voldemort lifted its wand. It approached Harry, cruel happiness in Voldemort’s gleaming red eyes before it stopped, confusion filling its face. Just as Harry had the thought that the look of surprise didn’t really suit Voldemort, the boggart changed, its shape morphing into several other shapes until finally, it was a door.

Harry stared in shock at the door. Why on earth had the boggart chosen this to scare him? It had been doing a pretty good job with Voldemort. It wasn’t even a door Harry remotely recognised, just a normal, dark-brown door with a few scrapes and cracks in it.

Silence filled the room, and Harry just stared at the boggart-door for what seemed like an eternity, long after his *protego* had worn off.

“Riddle, what do I-?”

*Offensive spell.*

“But what-”

*Perform an offensive spell, I’ve taught you enough,* was Riddle’s curt reply and Harry lifted his wand in confusion, performing a ‘reducto’ charm and watching the door explode into a hundred fragments.

The fragments turned black and then took on a more liquid form, shooting back towards the closet and the door slammed shut, securing the boggart once more.

Silent settled over the room like a thickening fog.

“I don’t understand,” Harry said after a few minutes, his voice sounding oddly loud in the large room.

*You failed to defeat Voldemort, that’s what happened,* Riddle told him. *Now, let’s go back over those offensive spells and make sure you don’t forget them next time.*

And, pushing the strange behaviour of the boggart to the back of his mind, Harry went back to the mat with the mannequin in the centre of the room to retry the offensive spells.

“Have you found anything yet?” Harry asked Hermione as he dragged his exhausted body back
into the practically empty common room. There were a couple of second years over in the corner playing chess and a seventh year doing homework away from the fire.

Hermione glanced up from the stack of books surrounding her on the floor. “What? Oh yeah, sorry. Well I’ve found a few that I thought had potential, maybe if you looked at them then…?”

She hesitated but Harry nodded in understanding. He went over to her place on the floor and sat down amongst the books. Hermione grabbed one of the volumes next to her and opened it up at a page she had marked.

“I found this, it’s this Egyptian bracelet,” she said, turning the book around so Harry could see the sketching of the gold and blue bracelet. “It’s supposed to be a replica of the goddess Isis’s bracelet but in itself it’s pretty powerful, it says here that the last wizard who—”

No, Riddle said abruptly and Harry frowned.

‘It’s powerful magic, what more do you want?’ he asked Riddle.

Not that one. Something else. More powerful.

Harry sighed. “Sorry, Hermione,” he said apologetically. “He doesn’t want it.”

Hermione looked at him in surprise and then down at the book. “Err… OK, well umm… I have others…”

She quickly turned back to her stack of books, moving hardbacks aside until she came to the one she wanted and flipped through it.

“Here,” she said, showing Harry the page. “This is from those French catacombs – you know the ones below Paris? – anyway, it’s a brooch they found in one of the tombs, and according to this one source—”

No, Riddle dismissed again.

“No?” Hermione asked, noticing Harry’s frown.

He shook his head. “Sorry, he doesn’t want that one either.”

I need more magic, Riddle told Harry.

“He needs something more powerful,” Harry repeated.

“I mean, the other ones I have are around what I can tell the same sort of magic or less,” she said, before digging through her research again for another book. “Hang on… I have one here… I mean, if he doesn’t like this one then I don’t know what he’ll want… just a second… ah, here it is.”

She pushed the open book into Harry’s lap and he looked down at it, studying the drawing of what looked like a snake wrapped around itself.

“It’s a tiara one of the ancient ladies of India used to wear,” Hermione explained. “According to the book it was given to her by an extremely knowledgeable traveller, who said that the magic was from the ‘heart of the world’ itself, whatever that means. I have no idea how we’ll get it—”

No.

Harry groaned in exasperation and buried his head in his hands.
"What do you want?" his mind screamed at Riddle.

"He doesn’t like that one either?" Hermione asked in confusion, taking the book off him. "I mean, that’s the most powerful one I’ve found… I have no idea what to look for after this."

"She’s trying to help", Harry internally told Riddle. "So will you please give some sort of hint as to what you need?"

_Something powerful, I told you. None of these are enough._

"He just says he needs something more powerful than those," Harry sighed. "I’m sorry Hermione, I-I don’t even know what’s powerful enough."

"It’s fine," she interrupted, giving him a small smile. "I haven’t been to the Restricted Section yet, maybe there’s something there. I’ll find something, don’t worry. You just concentrate on practising those defensive spells. How’s it going by the way?"

Harry slowly began to smile. "It’s going well… I think. I’m at a much better place than I was before but I’ve still got a long way to go."

"That’s great, Harry," she beamed. "Now you just need to protect your mind from You-Know-Who and you’ll be at an advantage."

"Oh god, don’t remind," he said with a grimace. "Snape’s definitely going to take it out on me now that there’s no witnesses. I think I’m going to go to bed now though, I feel like I could collapse anytime. Thanks again by the way."

"I’ll find something," Hermione promised as he stood up.

He nodded at her gratefully before leaving the common room and heading upstairs towards the dormitories.

He stripped out of his clothes and into his pyjamas before slipping into bed, pulling the curtains around him and staring up at the red canopy.

‘What do you think?’ he wondered.

_What do I think of what?_

‘The lessons, my progress’, Harry’s mind replied back.

_I think you pretty much said it all. You’re far better than before but still, a long way to go, Riddle told him._

Harry grinned. As abusive as Riddle’s teaching method was, it got things done. He probably would have preferred McGonagall or Dumbledore but at least Riddle actually took the time to teach him something practical for Voldemort.

_Why aren’t the professors teaching you anything?_ Riddle asked curiously.

Harry shrugged. He guessed that they didn’t like the idea of their Saviour practising anything that could be considered even remotely dark.

_How do they think you’re going to defeat a dark wizard?_ Riddle scoffed.

"Dumbledore said love was my power,” Harry said softly, remembering his first year. “The thing
is… I don’t think Voldemort can love.”

*Love is your power?* Riddle said in amusement. *I hate to tell you this but I don’t think that’s going to cut it.*

“Do dark wizards love?” Harry questioned out loud to no-one in particular, but Riddle still answered.

*They wouldn’t be in that position if they had,* Riddle said. *Fear is the main way to gain power. Fear, awe and seduction. Love has no place.*

What about Dumbledore? Harry thought to himself. He’s the pinnacle of light and is one of the most powerful wizards.

Riddle scoffed. *It gives him a weakness, something others can always use against him. I never understood why he allowed such an obvious Achilles’ heel.*

“I think you’re wrong,” Harry whispered into the quiet air. “I think love can make people into some of the most powerful beings in the world. But power doesn’t directly equal controlling everyone.”

*Then what is it?*

Harry’s mind lingered on Riddle’s question for several minutes, until he realized he had no answer for it. In a way, Dumbledore was controlling everyone, but in a more fatherly fashion.

Harry would’ve told Riddle this, but he highly doubted the Slytherin would listen.
“Come in,” Snape’s voice called out when Harry knocked on the professor’s door.

Reluctantly, Harry opened the door and stepped into the dark and dismal room. Across the office, Snape was watching him and Harry noticed he looked just as unhappy with the idea of tutoring Harry as Harry was himself.

“The headmaster appears to believe that it is vital that we continue your lessons,” Snape said through gritted teeth and Harry lingered by the door. “Therefore, every Thursday night at 8pm I want you at my office ready for your lessons. Understood?”

Numbly, Harry nodded.

“Beyond that,” the professor continued. “It is imperative that you listen to me. You must understand that you are not only risking your only safety, but the safety of everyone at Hogwarts if you fail to keep the Dark Lord out.”

“I’m sorry sir, but I don’t understand. How does Voldemort pose a threat to everyone else? Surely it’s only me he can possess-”

“You foolish boy!” Snape snapped. “If the Dark Lord has enough control over you to force you to cast a spell that you have never even heard of, then it won’t be long before he realizes the potential of having someone he can control in Hogwarts-”

Yeah, after all that’s your job, Harry thought to himself, but didn’t dare voice it. After all, he didn’t want an angry Snape riffling through his memories.

“Let us begin. I shall not tell you when I will be intruding on your mind, because the Dark Lord will offer you no such mercy either. At least attempt to block me, Potter.”

Harry eyed the professor nervously, trying to focus on putting a wall up in his head. Riddle was equally as mistrustful of Snape and had retreated into the furthest reaches of Harry’s mind.

In a mere second, Harry saw the flash of Snape’s wand before his mind was suddenly yanked apart and Snape was in his head.

He saw himself up in the air, eyes on the lookout for the Snitch and then the memory changed and he was at one of the many Hogwarts’ feasts he been to. Then suddenly he was reliving the memory of Cho Chang in the Room of Requirement and their frequently shared glances with nervous smiles, her brown eyes looking at him in awe-

“S-Stop it,” Harry forced out, trying to recover his walls but they crumbled away easily.

“Control your mind,” Snape hissed, releasing Harry and he collapsed to the ground.
“Give me second!” Harry said furiously, scrambling to his feet.

“The Dark Lord gives no warnings.”

Hogsmeade with Ron and Hermione by his sides, laughing and chatting as they headed towards the Three Broomsticks… Sirius’s death, watching the light fade out from his eyes as he fell through that archway…

“Potter, concentrate!”

Harry felt his palms hit the stone floor for a second time as Snape released him from the spell. He gasped for oxygen, feeling as if he’d just run a marathon. A shadow fell over him as Snape stared down at him, scowling.

“I’m trying, OK?!” Harry glared at him. “It’s hard-”

“Oh, you’re trying,” Snape sneered. “Tell me, Potter, will the fact that you tried to block your mind from the Dark Lord help you sleep at night after he has slaughtered everyone in this school?”

Harry glowered, before forcing himself to his feet once more.

Snape didn’t hesitate and once again Harry was forced to try and keep his wall up, but it fell apart easily.

Now he was back at that park near the Dursleys, mindlessly pushing himself back and forth on the creaking swing in the park. Then he was in detention with Umbridge, watching himself carve bloody letters into the back of his own hand. Then finally, a window with crack wooden framing, a grim, raining day on the other side…

A huge force pushed its way through Harry’s mind until he was suddenly back in Snape’s office, panting but still on his feet.

Snape was looking at him, a slight frown on his face.

“Better,” he said shortly. “Let’s try again.”

Ignoring Harry’s sound of protest, he forced his way back into Harry’s mind, pushing his way through the flickering memories until he got to November of that year, Harry staring down at a little black book with a gaping hole in the centre… then the window again, but this time Harry could see the peeling green wallpaper on either side-

The force erupted out of Harry again, though this time it was laced with Riddle’s fury. It flew between them and into Snape, until Harry could see glimpses of the professor’s past, a cold snake-like face staring down at him with a cruel smile as he hissed that the family had been found…

Harry slammed into the ground, head hitting the stone and pain shooting through him. He winced, curling up on his side as the agony throbbed through him and waited for it to disappear.

Slowly, he opened his eyes and sat up, taking note of Snape opposite him, body heaving with exertion. But instead of the glare he had expected, Snape was staring at him with shock and fear.

“What did you do?” he whispered.

“I-I… I don’t know, what-”

Snape’s hand reached out and grabbed Harry by the collar, yanking him up and slamming him into
“What did you do?!” he snarled.

“I just tried to block my mind like you said-”

“He has been in your mind, hasn’t he?” Snape hissed. “Beyond the time in my classroom, hasn’t he?!”

“I don’t know what you’re-”

Snape let go of him and Harry dropped to the floor, looking up at Snape in confusion as the professor paced the room, muttering to himself.

“Professor Snape, sir,” Harry said desperately. “What happened-”

“The Dark Lord is aware of this connection, and it’s potential,” Snape said abruptly. “You are in more danger than you have ever been, Potter.”

“But what-”

“He threw me out,” Snape hissed, glaring at Harry. “Do you understand that? The Dark Lord felt my presence in your mind and threw me out, which means he is quite aware of how much control he has over you. You have the potential to be his greatest weapon, Potter. You cannot possibly know what this means.”

“But then…” Harry trailed off. “W-What do I do?”

“Leave me for now,” Snape said. “I must consult the headmaster. Leave!”

Harry didn’t need to be told twice and practically ran for the exit, glad to be away from the gloomy office.

It was just as the door shut that he saw Snape pull up the sleeve of his cloak, taking in the dark ink against pale skin, the ink almost moving in the candlelight.

“Weapon for Voldemort,” Harry scoffed as he made his way back to the Gryffindor tower, keen to forget the night’s events. “He could never get me to do anything.”

There is… potential.

Harry paused, before walking on again. “What are you talking about? That was you, wasn’t it? You pushed him out?”

I did, but there was another presence.

“What are you talking about?”

I felt someone else there, Riddle snapped back. Someone who did not belong.

“Y-You don’t… you don’t believe him, do you?” Harry asked unsurely, stopping again. “That Voldemort could control me?”

I think it’s possible.

“But then what do I do?” Harry panicked, suddenly completely forgetting that he had been heading
to the common room. “I-I can’t let him control me, I can’t put anyone in danger, Merlin I’m gonna have to leave-”

No, you won’t, Riddle interrupted. You will learn occlumency until you can master it and keep him out of your mind. Until then, I shall continue to teach you a select group of spells you can use against him.

Harry leaned against the wall, resting the back of his head against the stone. He had no idea why Riddle was helping him, but assumed it had something to do with the whole ‘self-preservation’ thing.

“Will you help me with occlumency?” he whispered.

You have a teacher.

“He’s been trying to teach me for a year, it hasn’t work,” Harry groaned. “C-Can’t you just help during lessons? Like with the non-verbal spells?”

Riddle was silent for a moment, before he spoke up again.

I suppose I could… for another favour…

“I’m already owing you a favour-”

And now you’ll owe me another one. Do we have an agreement?

Harry cursed his luck, that in preventing Voldemort from controlling his body he was going to have to submerge himself further into debt with his younger self, Tom Riddle. He wondered what Dumbledore would have to say about this.

“Alright, we have an agreement.”

-----------------------------------------

Harry knew Riddle hadn’t been lying about the other presence when he felt an agonizing pain rip through him. He had been asleep, his dreams dark and murky and in a place that was vaguely familiar to him.

He was moving down dark corridors, the walls almost swaying either side of him. The wallpaper was peeling off, floorboards cracked in the corners and it was with sudden fear that Harry realized he was in the Riddle Manor.

“At last,” a low hiss rang out, and Harry flinched back into the shadows, straining his eyes as he tried to assess the danger. The corridor, however, was empty.

“My Lord…” a nervous voice stuttered, and Harry realized that the conversation was coming from one of the many rooms leading off the hall. “D-Did it… is it working?”

Curiosity getting the better of him, Harry began to make his way down the corridor, listening out for where the voices were coming from. Along the corridors were several patches of lighter colouring in the walls, as if they had once housed pictures that had been since torn down.

“There is… a way,” that hiss spoke out again and Harry felt dread creep up his spine. He knew that voice only too well, it haunted the very corners of his nightmares.

“Can you control him?” a new voice spoke this time, laced with excitement. “I-If we control him,
we’ll have a way through, we could have-”

“Silence!” Voldemort’s harsh voice commanded. “It is not strong enough yet.”

“You can’t control him?” the voice asked without thinking and Harry felt his heart drop.

A scream shattered the silence of Riddle Manor, piercing Harry’s eardrums. He heard a thud and quickened his pace, finally reaching the room Voldemort was residing in.

It was a completely different sight to the corridor. Whilst the rest of the house had seemingly been left to rot, this drawing room had been given much more thought to cleanliness. A large fire was roaring in the back, set in an old, cracked marble fireplace. In front of the fireplace was a large, worn down red rug and two armchairs sat in front of the fire. Harry recognised the tall, cloaked figure of Voldemort, face turned towards the fire as one skeletal finger stoked Nagini’s scaly head.

In front of him, a man dressed in the Death Eater’s usual garb was huddled face down on the floor, shaking slightly from the effects of Voldemort’s curse. Another figure stood further off in the shadows, and it was with a rush of anger that Harry finally placed that nervous voice as the voice of Wormtail.

“Soon,” Voldemort hissed out into the uncomfortable quietness of the room. “The link is still too weak but soon…”

Voldemort turned his head to look at Nagini and Harry saw his blood-red eyes narrowed in twisted affection as he hissed under his breath to the snake. His eyes then closed and Voldemort leaned his head back at the same time Harry felt a curiously prod to the back of his head.

All of a sudden a flash pain ripped through him, pressing down on his head and squeezing his brain until he couldn’t think. He opened his mouth to scream but nothing but coming out. He could feel Voldemort within him, feel his cold presence dripping into every fibre of his being and trying to grip on.

His body fought back, a burning pain against the freezing cold presence of Voldemort. He felt hands grip his arms, holding too tightly, shaking him and shaking him and Harry kept trying to force Voldemort out his head but he was stronger now, and he didn’t think he could manage…

Harry could feel Voldemort’s grip slipping away as he too lost control and Harry saw Riddle Manor crumble into darkness in front of him and the next thing he knew he was twisted amongst white sheets.

Harry shot up in bed, panting, his voice sounding hoarse from screaming in the dark. Next to him, Ron was staring at him in worry, his hand still on Harry’s arm from when he had been shaking him.

“Harry, are you alright?” he asked in worry. “You were screaming, woke us all up.”

Harry looked around, still breathing heavily to see Neville’s concerned face. Dean and Seamus were also watching him from their own beds, hair mussed up from sleep.

“I-I’m sorry,” Harry said. “I-It was… it was…”

“Was it him?” Ron whispered.

Harry looked up into his best friend’s concerned gaze, and nodded, shuddering as he remembered the ice-cold grip of Voldemort in his veins.
“Do you need to go see Dumbledore?” Ron continued in that low voice. “I-I mean, if it’s You-Know-Who… wouldn’t he want you to?”

Harry nodded again numbly, pushing himself out of the bed and onto unsteady feet. Ron managed to catch him before his knees buckled and Harry smiled briefly in thanks before the memories of the dream came back and he was filled with a deep fear.

It was definitely apparent that Voldemort knew that the link connecting his mind to Harry’s was much stronger now. Strong enough that Voldemort could control him – or would, once the link opened up to him more. Voldemort was already testing the limits of where he could go in Harry’s mind and although Harry had managed to force him out this time, he had no idea how long he could keep doing that for.

Harry and Ron stumbled down the spiral staircase and into the common room, where the last embers of the fire were just starting to go out. The Fat Lady sleepily let them out, mumbling something about sugared plums. Their footsteps echoed down the long stone corridors, the soft light from Ron’s wand just barely showing their way.

‘Riddle’? Harry called inside his mind, wanting to know if the other was still there. He didn’t know why one of his first instincts was to check on Riddle, but figured that if the agonizing pain of Voldemort forcing his way in had gone through the entirety of his body, then Riddle must have felt it too.

But the Slytherin was silent.

“And what is this?” a nasally voice called out as Harry and Ron turned a corner. Harry twisted his head to glance behind him, and his heart sank as he spotted the victorious smirk of Argus Filch.

“Students out of bed, eh?” the caretaker grinned, Mrs Norris curling herself around his feet, beady eyes glued on them. “My, my, my, what will your Head of House say?”

“We need to see Dumbledore,” Ron argued. “Come on, it’s important.”

“Not so important it couldn’t wait until morning, eh? Students are all alike, thinking they can wander the corridors as they please, not a care in the world-”

“We need to see Dumbledore!”

“Excuses, I bet. Boy, are you in a heap load of trouble. Wait til I let-”

“I’ll take this from here, Filch,” a voice called out softly and Snape emerged from the shadows, looking down at Ron and Harry.

Filch gave them a nasty look of satisfaction before he shuffled away, Mrs Norris trailing along behind him.

“And what are you two doing in the corridors after curfew?” Snape asked in a monotone. “Dear me, you two just can’t seem to stay out of trouble can you-?”

“He was here,” Harry said hoarsely, desperately trying to get Snape to understand what he meant. “I-In my mind… I felt him-”

Snape’s eyes widened momentarily but his mask was back in place and he turned away, snapping at them to follow him before they headed off in the direction of Dumbledore’s office.
Snape told the gargoyle the password in an abrupt tone and it leapt aside, allowing them to climb the spiral staircase to the large door.

The professor sharply knocked and then opened the door, sweeping into the room.

“Stay here,” he hissed at Ron and Harry, before leaving through another room. Harry and Ron nervously sat down in the chairs in front of Dumbledore’s desk. Ron stifled a yawn.

“W-What happened?” he asked. “Did you see someone else get attacked? Oh god, it wasn’t Dad again was it-?”

“No, no-one was attacked,” Harry whispered, keeping his gaze firmly on his hands. He picked at one of his nails, trying to keep the panic from racing through him.

“Then what was it? Did you-”

“Headmaster, how could you-” Harry heard Snape’s voice saying, before both he and Dumbledore entered the main office.

Dumbledore smiled at the two students, but it didn’t reach his eyes. Those were filled with alarm.

“Mr Weasley, thank you for helping Harry here, you may return to your dormitory,” he said lightly.

Ron glanced between the headmaster and Harry hesitantly, before slowly getting up.

“I-I’ll see you later then… I guess,” he said awkwardly to Harry, eyes meeting with Harry’s in a silent plea to be told everything later. Harry nodded and Ron made his way to the door, leaving the office.

Dumbledore waited until the door had clicked shut, before making his way to his chair, sitting down and leaning back, blue eyes fixed on Harry.

“Perhaps you should tell me about this dream of yours,” he told Harry gently.

And so Harry did, telling both Dumbledore and Snape about walking down Riddle Manor and the tattered condition it was in. He told them about the lavish room that Voldemort had been seated in, Wormtail in the shadows and the unknown Death Eater on the floor. When he got to the part about Voldemort attempting to possess him again he paused, and swallowed. He shuddered at the memory.

“… and that’s when Ron woke me up,” he finished, watching Dumbledore for his reaction. But the aging wizard did not react, merely pressed his fingertips together and rested his chin on them, thinking to himself.

“You never told me this could happen!” Snape hissed at Dumbledore, glaring at him.

“I never realized…” Dumbledore murmured. “But why now? It doesn’t make sense…”

“He needs to be told,” the other professor snapped, folding his arms and jerking his head in the direction of Harry. “He has a right to.”

“W-What’s going on?” Harry asked nervously. “W-Why can Voldemort possess me? He couldn’t before-”

“No, he couldn’t,” Dumbledore said. He took a deep breath, and looked at Harry sadly. “I’m afraid
I have something to tell you Harry, and it is not good.”

Harry frowned, glancing over to Snape who was scowling at Dumbledore. “Tell me what?”

“The night Voldemort went to kill you, that fateful Halloween night… the night his curse rebounded back onto him… his soul was split.”

Harry stared at him in confusion. “His soul was split?”

“They’re called horcruxes, Harry,” the headmaster explained. “Sort of a safe place for part of someone’s soul. Voldemort, seeking immortality, made seven of these and placed the fragments of his soul into six different objects, the seventh remaining in his body. The night he went to kill you and the curse rebounded, a part of his soul - an eighth piece - latched itself onto the only living thing in that place.”

“Me,” Harry whispered, feeling numb with shock.

Dumbledore nodded gravely. “It’s why you can talk to snakes, Harry, and why you and Voldemort share this connection. It didn’t appear to be that strong, a link from your mind to his that could only tolerate the other being able to witness mere moments of the other’s life. There was never any question on whether Voldemort would be able to control you. The link simply wasn’t strong enough.”

Snape scoffed in the background, but Dumbledore ignored him.

“That day in the Department of Mystery, when Voldemort took over your body and forced you to relive your most painful memories... that was Voldemort at his peak, that was all his could do. Horrible, of course, and absolute torture for you but... he couldn’t control you physically.”

“Until now,” Snape snapped. “Now he has the boy casting spells and will soon use this advantage against us.”

“But why now?” Harry wondered, staring into Dumbledore’s blue eyes, that had seemed to lose some of their twinkle. “Why didn’t he control me before? Why didn’t he control me in the Ministry? Why-?”

Dumbledore held up a hand to stop his ramblings. Harry sank back in his chair.

“I do not know why he can control you now,” he said solemnly. “I had thought – no, I was sure - that projecting images in your mind was the most he was capable of. However, it appears the fragment inside of you has become stronger.”

“But how is that possible?”

Dumbledore was quiet, eyes watching Harry before he spoke out.

“I don’t know,” he said softly. “There is no conceivable way that the horcrux could have become stronger.”

“Hang on…” Harry frowned, thinking about this new wave of information he had been given. “So a horcrux… is that like his diary?”

Dumbledore dipped his head. “Yes, Tom Riddle’s diary was one of the things he made into a horcrux to house his soul. But it was destroyed in your second year.”
“What are we supposed to do?” Snape questioned. “Allow the Dark Lord to just waltz into Potter’s mind and into Hogwarts?”

“Our only hope is to block him out of Harry’s mind before that happens,” Dumbledore said, before turning to Harry. “You shall now have your occlumency lessons with Professor Snape twice a week, it is exceptionally important that we keep your mind closed from Voldemort’s influence.”

“Maybe we should think of sectioning Potter to another part of the school,” Snape said through gritted teeth, but Dumbledore shook his head.

“I don’t think that’ll be necessary, Severus. We must retain a sense of normality in any case, suspicion may reach back to Voldemort and give him a sense of urgency. Let him think that he has the upper hand for now.”

Snape said nothing, dipping his head slightly.

“You may return to Gryffindor tower now,” Dumbledore told Harry. “I’m afraid that for now there is nothing we can do except for the occlumency lessons.”

“Sir,” Harry hesitated, not moving out of his chair just yet. “W-What about spells? S-Shouldn’t I be learning some defensive spells or offensive spells?”

“I don’t think that’ll be necessary,” Dumbledore said, and something flashed through his eyes that Harry didn’t recognise.

He nodded stiffly and got up, heading over to the door. He paused with his hand on the doorknob though, and turned back to the two professors.

“When you said that his horcrux inside of me was stronger,” he said slowly as Dumbledore raised an eyebrow in question. “W-What did you mean by that? Like… it was twice as strong as a normal one? Like… like there were two horcruxes?”

Dumbledore pondered this for a moment, before nodding his head briefly. “Yes Harry, for some unknown reason, your horcrux is stronger than Voldemort’s others. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that unlike the other chosen objects, you are a living being.”

Harry nodded, and twisted the doorknob, leaving the office and letting the heavy wooden door click shut behind him.

He felt like Dumbledore knew more than he was letting on, but how much he knew Harry wasn’t sure. In any case, it had become apparent that the reason for Voldemort’s sudden ability to access Harry’s mind and the stronger link between them was due to the fact that the horcrux inside Harry was stronger now – how could it be? Diary Riddle, another of Voldemort’s horcruxes, was also residing in Harry. He was the keeper of two fragments of Voldemort’s soul.

Riddle had inevitably opened up the link between them for Voldemort to cross over into Harry’s mind and control him. Soon it would be as easy for Voldemort to cast spells through Harry as it was for Riddle.

‘Riddle?’ Harry’s mind called out, suddenly wondering if Riddle had been listening to the whole conversation. But Riddle still kept quiet, and when Harry reached into the far reaches of his mind, he could only feel a small presence.

Harry couldn’t help but feel a small stab of worry slice through him. What had happened? Was Riddle even still in his mind? Perhaps by attempting to control him, Voldemort had accidently
The idea made Harry slightly downcast – it had been nice to have someone to talk to, even if it was a Dark Lord. He had been able to speak to Riddle without feeling pitied. Riddle had no time for mollycoddling him and Harry appreciated it.

And besides, Riddle had been teaching Harry spells for duelling Voldemort. Dumbledore obviously didn’t see it worthwhile – though Harry had no clue why – and he suddenly felt exceptionally vulnerable.

Harry slowly made his way back to the dormitories, knowing he’d have to tell Hermione and Ron about Voldemort’s horcruxes. He dreaded the idea, he could only imagine their sympathetic gazes and promises that it would be OK. Harry could barely even stand the idea of being near them now – what if Voldemort controlled him suddenly and hurt them? Harry would never be able to forgive himself. He had already put them in enough danger.

Luckily, by the time he was back in the sixth-year dormitories in the Gryffindor tower, Ron was fast asleep, face pressed into the pillow and light snores coming from his open mouth. Harry settled into his own bed, grateful for some time alone to think over the events that had just taken place.

Telling Ron and Hermione could wait until morning.
A Familiar Place for some Truths

Chapter Notes

Here's another chapter for you guys, because I'm having a not-so-good day and you always cheer me up :)

Many thanks to bluetyrannosaurus for beta-ing x

It was several days before Riddle spoke again, and when he did his voice was full of anguish.

Ron and Hermione had taken the news as expected, sitting in stunned silence for what seemed like years before telling Harry how sorry they were and how they would be there for him.

He had tried to tell them to keep their distance, just in case Voldemort did control him but they weren’t having it.

“We’ve been through all this danger with you and him and you think we’re going to leave now?” Ron had asked incredulously. “Harry, mate, just how thick are you?”

Hermione had flung herself at Harry, hugging him tightly and mumbling apologies before pulling away, asking why this was all suddenly happening.

Harry had told them that apparently the mind link between him and Voldemort was stronger now, but that Dumbledore had no idea why. Ron had nodded but Hermione had just stared at him thoughtfully, and Harry knew she had come to the same conclusion he had; the ‘spirit’ in Harry’s head had opened the way for Voldemort.

Harry had another lesson with Snape, in which Snape plundered Harry’s mind and Harry’s attempts to block it out failed spectacularly. Embarrassingly, Snape had even seen his memory of kissing Cho and Harry had gone red, stuttering out excuses whilst Snape had just snapped that he had no time for delving into teenage love stories.

Harry frequently tried to contact Riddle in his mind, but the other was always silent, only a mere shadow in the back of Harry’s mind that would not budge. It was on a Tuesday, after Harry’s occlumency lesson, that Harry fell exhausted into bed, falling asleep immediately.

His dreams were plagued with nightmares.

In them, Harry stood at a window, the green wallpaper peeling around it. Figures huddled under umbrellas passed below and Harry stood there, standing out the rain staring as they passed. He could feel anger seeping through him, throbbing at his fingertips until something cold washed through him and suddenly he couldn’t breathe.

He opened his mouth to scream for help, but cold water filled his mouth and lungs, choking him and squeezing all around him. Harry struggled, fighting against the hands that held him under until suddenly he was ripping upwards, water stinging his eyes and lungs burning for oxygen.

He coughed up mouthfuls of water, watching it splatter on the stone floor as dark figures surrounded him, disappointment seeping off them in waves, each one feeling like to a punch to the
Harry woke with a gasp, shooting up in bed. He was drenched in a cold sweat, the sheets having been shoved to the end of the bed and Harry fumbled for his glasses on the bedside table, slipping them on as he shook from the memory of his nightmare.

He drew his knees under his chin and rested his head on them, trying to get his shaking breath until control, telling himself that it was just another nightmare, and that the Dursleys were far away.

But it felt different this time, and Harry still felt those waves of asphyxiation until all he wanted to do was scream and tear down the red hangings around his bed.

*Get up.*

Harry took in an unsteady breath, fingers gripping his hair.

“Riddle?” he whispered to the darkness in confusion.

*Get up, now.*

Harry quickly pushed himself out of bed, glad to be out of the tight grip of the sheets. His feet touched the cool floor and he sighed in relief slightly, feeling marginally better.

*Go out of Gryffindor Tower.*

Harry mindlessly obeyed Riddle’s sudden commands, too tired to argue or even think about where Riddle may be taking him. He followed each and every order, turning right or left when commanded, and going into corridors that he vaguely recognised in the darkness. It was so early in the morning that fortunately for Harry even the teachers had gone to bed, and there was no-one patrolling the corridors.

*Turn into here,* Riddle demanded, and Harry obediently pushed the door open, stopping and blinking when he realized where he was.

It was the girls’ toilets on the third floor, Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. Harry let his eyes trail over the bathroom tiles that glimmered slightly in the moonlight slipping through the window. Myrtle was nowhere to be seen, and the bathroom was eerily quiet without her, or the usual bustle of Hogwarts students in the corridors.

*Go to the third sink from the wall, the one with the snake on the tap.*

Slowly, Harry approach the all-too-familiar sink, fingers reaching out to brush the little serpent
“Open” he hissed in Parseltongue, feeling Riddle’s surprise radiate throughout him as the sinks began to lower down into the tiled floor, a grinding sound echoing throughout the room.

Go down. Riddle commanded as the ominous hole appeared before Harry. Harry crouched down on the bathroom floor and slowly lowered himself into the hole, feeling his stomach tie itself in knots as he suddenly fell, sliding through the piping into the very base of Hogwarts.

He hit the pile of small animal carcasses at the bottom and winced as bones dug into him. Pushing himself to his feet, he followed Riddle’s direction into the Chamber of Salazar Slytherin, though he didn’t need it. Despite having only been here once years ago, he could remember the Chamber as if it had been yesterday.

He commanded the door to open for him in Parseltongue again, and entered the Chamber itself. When the door slammed shut behind him, Harry stood on the spot, eyes fixed on the large stone fixture of Slytherin himself at the opposite end of the hall.

Harry could feel Riddle’s relief mixed in with his desperation to move closer and Harry silently agreed, forcing his feet to move slowly towards the centre.

The steady drip of water echoed around him, and Harry’s footsteps on the wet stone reverberated throughout the chamber – he had forgotten to put shoes on, Harry realized with a jolt. He’d been so keen on getting out of the tower that he hadn’t even thought to change out of his pyjamas.

As he slowly made his way through the chamber towards where Ginny had once laid unconscious, Harry froze as he caught sight of the giant skeleton of the basilisk. Riddle’s horror flooded through him and almost knocked him to his feet Harry firmly stayed put, eyes trailing over the long spine and jutting out ribs of the snake, before resting on the abnormally large skull, its grotesque mouth open in a snarl that it never finished.

His eyes lingered on the missing fang of the basilisk on the upper jaw, before noting the other sharp fangs.

What happened? Riddle’s hiss vibrated through him, shaking him to his very core with his sheer anger.

“It’s dead,” Harry said shortly.

Why? How? Who killed her? Riddle practically screamed in Harry’s head. Pain was flashing erratically throughout Harry’s skull but he didn’t care, noticing that amongst the many layers of anger and horror that Riddle’s voice held, it also held a note of grief.

Harry didn’t reply, moving closer to the giant carcass and reaching out a hand to touch its jaw. The bone was cold to the touch and slightly damp.

“It was a she?” he murmured, trailing his fingers across the jaw.

Yes, Riddle seethed. She was a thousand-year-old Basilisk and now she’s dead. I will murder whoever did this to her. I-I will... I’ll...

Riddle cut himself off with a scream of fury and despair. His anger radiated through Harry like molten lava, but it was still better than Voldemort’s cold presence.

“She was a friend of yours?” Harry asked curiously. He never considered that Riddle had thought...
more of the basilisk than as just a weapon.

No, Riddle snapped. _But no-one just kills an ancient Basilisk, she would’ve_...

He trailed off and went silent again, but Harry thought back to Nagini, Voldemort’s precious snake. He suddenly found himself not believing Riddle. No matter what he said, Harry was sure that some part of him cared for the basilisk.

Riddle was forcing himself at the back of Harry’s mind again, and Harry forced himself to move away from the basilisk skeleton, instead making his way to the centre of the chamber and staring up at the giant head of Slytherin.

“Where were you?” he asked Riddle. “You never replied to me, I thought you were…”

_Dead?_ Riddle said shortly.

“No… just… gone. It was days Riddle-”

_I couldn’t talk,_ Riddle spat out, and Harry frowned in confusion.

“What do you mean you couldn’t talk?”

_The other presence, it forced itself in again and threw me back. It took some of my energy, I was weak and needed to recover._

“Oh,” Harry said softly. “I thought you had gone.”

He couldn’t stop the feeling of relief that had momentarily swept through him, and knew Riddle had sensed it.

_Did you miss me that much?_

“You’re the only one who doesn’t talk to me with pity,” Harry admitted, sitting down on the cold stone in front of the statue of Slytherin.

_What’s there to pity?_

Harry chuckled to himself. “You don’t know the half of it. I don’t suppose you heard the conversation with Dumbledore, just after Voldemort invaded my mind?”

_No._

“Right well… it turns out Snape is right… Voldemort can control me, or he will be able to,” Harry said. “I contain a part of Voldemort’s soul, which makes it easier for him – especially with you here – and now I have to do occlumency lessons with Snape twice a week, so I don’t become a weapon. Oh, and Dumbledore doesn’t want me doing anything practical, like learning spells, though I have no idea why…”

Harry trailed off, biting his lip. “I don’t know how Dumbledore expects me to defeat him, even if my power is ‘love’ or whatever, he hasn’t even told me how that will _help_—”

_You’re a horcrux, aren’t you?_ Riddle asked suddenly.

“Y-Yeah, that’s what Dumbledore told me—”

_Potter, who is Voldemort?_
Harry paused. “What are you talking about?” he asked uneasily. “I told you, Voldemort’s this dark wizard.”

No, I think you know what I mean. Who was Voldemort before? Riddle demanded.

“Before what? What does it matter-”

Tell me, Riddle said angrily.

Harry sighed, looking down at the floor. “I think you already know the answer to that,” he said quietly.

There was silence in the Chamber for the longest time, with the exception of the water drips that broke up the quietness as they splashed onto the stone floor. Harry tried to pull his sleeves further down his wrists, suddenly feeling the chill.

So, I manage it then, immortality.

Yet there was no triumph in Riddle’s voice. In fact, there was no emotion in his voice except cold truth.

“You do,” Harry said reluctantly. No need to lie when the truth was obvious. Harry had been telling Riddle about Voldemort for weeks. “In fact, I’m surprised you didn’t realize, when we were down here before-”

Harry shut his mouth quickly in horror at what he had possibly revealed. If Riddle didn’t remember him… and didn’t even remember that he himself was Voldemort, then he clearly didn’t remember their conflict in the Chamber in Harry’s second year. And Harry was not about to reveal who had really killed the basilisk. Riddle would probably kill him.

Riddle however, was too busy with his own questions to worry about what Harry was saying.

How many? How many horcruxes?

“Seven.”

It is possible, Riddle said, mulling over the fact. Why did I turn you into a horcrux though?

“You didn’t, not really. It was an accident when you… when you killed my parents.”

I suppose that explains why you’re a Parselmouth, Riddle mused.

“Yeah, I got that from you.”

Someone tried to kill me, Riddle said suddenly. The diary… someone tried to destroy it…

Harry shifted uncomfortably.

But who… Dumbledore, Riddle hissed. He never trusted me. Of course, he would try and find my horcruxes. He’s the one destroying them.

“If Dumbledore wanted you dead then I’m sure he would’ve taught me how to at least be somewhat of a threat to Voldemort,” Harry mumbled. “Don’t worry, Voldemort – I mean, you – will make quick work of me.”

Potter, Riddle said slowly. Do you know why Dumbledore isn’t teaching you any spells?
“I have no clue, but at this rate I’m just going to die, and what good is the Boy Who Lived dead?” he said humourlessly.

But Potter, that’s precisely what he wants.


Dumbledore wants you to die.

“N-No, no he doesn’t,” Harry said angrily. “I-I’m… I’m the Saviour, I have to defeat Voldemort, h-how can I when I’m dead? He wouldn’t want that, h-he’d just leave me to die in the ruins of my parents’ home, not save me and-”

Potter-

“No, shut up! I’m not going to die, I’m sixteen for Merlin’s sake, I-I have to do my NEWTs, I’m gonna become an Auror, get married and have kids-”

Potter, listen-

“Dumbledore wouldn’t want me dead! H-He wouldn’t! H-He’s not raising me for the slaughter, I- I’m not just a pawn in his game, he cares about me, Riddle, tell me Dumbledore doesn’t want me dead,” he pleaded.

If it makes things better, I don’t think Dumbledore exactly wants you dead.

“But then why-?”

Potter, listen to me, Riddle snapped. You are a horcrux, you are keeping Voldemort – keeping me – alive, and the only way I will ever die is if you die. I have no doubt that Dumbledore wishes you could live, but I’m afraid that would mean that I survive, and that is something he could never ask for.

Harry slumped forward, the disbelief that had flooded him slowly giving way to hopelessness.

“Voldemort’s not going to kill me,” he said dully. “He wants to turn me into a weapon against Hogwarts. Only after I have slaughtered everyone here will he finally grant me that mercy.”

I expect so.

“And just as I thought my life surely couldn’t get any shittier,” Harry muttered in defeat.

They sat in silence for a while, Harry watching the reflection of Slytherin in a puddle not too far away. He didn’t think about anything at all, trying to keep his mind blank of everything. He figured that if he even thought back on the conversation in Dumbledore’s office, then he wouldn’t be able to stop himself from doing something stupid – like smashing Slytherin’s stone face or even stabbing himself with a basilisk fang to get Voldemort’s horcrux out of him.

He looked around the Chamber, the memory of it from his second year too raw and fresh in his mind. Harry wondered why Riddle had brought him here. Dimly, he remembered the circle of dark-cloaked figures around him, slowly moving in.

“That nightmare…” Harry said slowly. “That wasn’t mine, was it?”

What are you talking about?
“You know exactly what I’m talking about. I didn’t recognise anything in that nightmare, except for that window. And I think you know where that window is.”

You have no right to know.

Harry snorted. “I just found out I’m one of your horcruxes, Riddle. I’m going to die. I think your secret is safe with me.”

There is no need for you to know.

“What not?” Harry asked in despair. “You know I’m a dead man walking, I’ve always been a dead man walking. What do you think I’ll do? Go around Hogwarts telling the school Tom Riddle’s secrets? If you get your way they’ll all be dead anyway.”

It is none of your business! Riddle hissed at him, anger bouncing around his skull.

Not wanting to cause Riddle to fly into another rage, Harry dropped the subject, staring at the ground glumly.

“I have nightmares too, you know,” he said quietly. “Sometimes I see snippets of what Voldemort is doing… I see the people he’s torturing... the people he’s killed. Sometimes… I recognise them. After Cedric died, I had nightmares for weeks.”

In reply to Riddle’s unspoken question, Harry allowed him access to the memory of Cedric’s death. He played through it, despite the ache in his heart as the good-natured Cedric, who had tried to help in him the tournament, was blasted back by a jet of green light. He recalled the way Cedric had been lying on the ground, completely motionless with his eyes glazed over and staring at the stars.

I did that.

It wasn’t a question, but Harry nodded anyway.

“It was my fault,” he admitted. “I got to the cup first. Cedric was… h-he was struggling. And I went to help him and then he said… h-he said I should take it. I was the one who suggested we both take it. I was the reason he was at that graveyard, and I was the reason he was killed. He should have never been there.”

That’s Gryffindor for you, always wanting fairness, Riddle remarked.

Harry expected to be hurt by Riddle’s words, but found he felt nothing. Maybe his Gryffindor streak had been to blame.

“A Slytherin wouldn’t have done that.”

A Slytherin wouldn’t have accepted help. A Slytherin wouldn’t have even made it to the final.

“You admit it? I would have beaten you?” Harry asked, lips twitching up into a small smile.

Riddle scoffed. I would have figured whatever the tournament offered without help.

Harry went silent, enjoying the rare peace that the Chamber offered. Without the threat of death from a basilisk or Ginny slowly dying, it was quite nice here. Away from everyone else, knowing no-one could interrupt him. It was damp and wet and uncomfortable on the hard ground but Harry still craved its privacy.
“Are you still going to teach me spells?” Harry asked curiously. Why would Riddle even bother now, knowing it would only hinder his future self?

_I’ve never quit before, why start now?_

“B-But… you know I’m learning this to go against Voldemort, right? Who is technically you?” he frowned.

_Might as well give myself a good challenge. I do hate easy fights._

“I mean, you can’t really win though, can you? Because then you’d kill me… which you don’t want.”

_Sacrifice a horcrux I can easily make again in the future in exchange for the life of Britain’s Saviour… or keep you alive as a constant thorn in my side… not one of my more harder dilemmas_, Riddle mused.

“But it’s your soul,” Harry protested. “You can’t just have such blatant disregard for your own soul, can you?”

_Why not?_

“Isn’t it better to have all the pieces together? Don’t you feel… I don’t know, empty?”

_I feel alive. And that is most important._

Harry breathed in deeply before letting it out, eyes wandering over the hall. He was getting cold, his fingers already numb. But he didn’t want to move, not just yet.

“You know it’s weird, but… I enjoy talking to you,” Harry admitted. “Maybe I’m just as equally fucked up as you, but it’s a relief not to have people talking to you with awe or pity.”

_I know the feeling._

“People spoke to you with awe and pity?” Harry asked in surprise.

_Oh yes, who could resist the darling Tom Riddle? Genius student with such a sad background. People looked at me with such revere and sympathy it was sickening. I could have crucio-ed every last one of them and they would be begging for my forgiveness, such was the mere power of me._

Harry scoffed. “Have you ever been humble?”

_Are you telling me that it didn’t once make you secretly pleased when people would be silenced by your mere presence? Sickening as it was, it had certain rewards, Riddle’s velvety voice hissed. I could make them tell me anything, do anything… even think anything._

“I would hate that,” Harry murmured truthfully. “I don’t want people to revere me. I want to be normal.”

_Why be normal when you can be more?_

“Because ‘being more’ is exactly why I have to die,” he mumbled. “I’m sure you’re fine, searching for immortality but me? I don’t exactly have as much of a future.”

_You don’t have to die._
“Yes, I do, or how else with Voldemort die?”

*Maybe he doesn’t. Think about it, Harry, you could be one of the most powerful wizards in the world, everyone at your fingertips. You want to be normal? Normal is blending in with the crowds, where no-one knows your name and no-one remembers you after you die. You could become a god to them.*

Hearing Riddle’s soft, gentle voice say his real name made Harry hesitate. It washed over him like a warm bath and suddenly, he didn’t feel so alone in the Chamber. He didn’t feel so alone in the world.

He didn’t want to die, not really. He could help the world, use his powers for good unlike Voldemort-

Voldemort. Who Riddle was suggesting would be immortal and using his own power to gleefully torture and kill muggles and muggle-borns. Harry snapped out of the trance Riddle’s voice had put him in.

“No!” Harry hissed. “I would never want to be anything like Voldemort, I’d rather die.”

*Die then, and become forgotten,* Riddle said carelessly, and hurt prickled at Harry’s heart.

“I’d rather live a short life making people happy, than an eternity making them miserable.”

You think they know you? You think they care? You are nothing to them Potter, you are the Boy Who Lived and that is all. You are a mascot, a pawn in their game.

“That isn’t true.”

*Isn’t it?*

Harry gave a small smile, shaking his head. “They know me as the Boy Who Lived, yes, but they want to know me. Ron, Hermione, Neville… the Gryffindors… they want to know the real me. They ask me what game I like best, talk to me about our subjects like we’re classmates, not like I’m better than them. Maybe I’m a mascot to the Ministry, but in Hogwarts I’m just Harry, and that’s more than I ever thought I’d have.”

*You are never just Harry, as I was never just Tom.*

“Did you try to become Tom? Or did you insist on Riddle?” Harry questioned. “Even now… changing your name to Voldemort so no-one can see the real you… you never gave them a chance-”

*They never wanted it, they wanted a leader, someone they could follow and I provided,* Riddle snapped.

“You remind me of Malfoy,” Harry said suddenly. “He has these two cronies… Crabbe and Goyle but… I don’t think they’re friends. Sometimes I wonder if they talk about class o-or their summer holidays… I think it’d be awfully sad if they don’t. And I wonder if anyone asked you about your summer holidays, or if anyone’s even asked what your favourite class is-”

*Of course they have.*

Anger was burning red-hot throughout Harry, pulsing from Riddle but he ignored it.
“Do you ever consider talking to them about class? Or do you just think you’re too good for that? You’re not better than them, you’re not better than anyone—”

*I am better than every filthy mudblood that has stepped foot in Hogwarts, they don’t even deserve the ground purebloods walk on-

“But you’re not a pureblood.”

Harry shrieked out in pain as what felt like burning hot liquid thundered through his brain. It felt like it was bashing against his skull, trying to get out and ripping him apart in the process. After a while, Riddle let up and Harry breathing shakily against the cold stone. He slowly sat up.

“Sorry.”

Riddle ignored him.

“I-I’m not a pureblood either. Though I don’t think it makes any difference. Hermione’s a muggleborn, and she’s the smartest witch I know.”

More silence. Harry sighed.

“Alright, ignore me then,” he grumbled, getting up off the stone floor. He yawned, covering his mouth and suddenly remembering that it was the middle of the night. “But just to let you know, I’m happy to talk whenever and I will talk whenever, and if you want you can talk back too… Tom.”

Harry felt another stab of pain, but it was half-hearted.
When Harry entered the Potions classroom the next day, all the cauldrons were already set up. Making his way to his place in-between Ron and Hermione, he glanced to the front where Professor Slughorn was bustling around inside the ingredients cabinet.

“What do you suppose it is this time?” Ron asked, leaning his chin on his desk, eyes watching the professor. “If its anything that involves stirring after you add a tiny bit of the same ingredient over and over again, I’m out.”

Hermione snorted. “And how were you planning on passing your NEWTs?”

“Don’t need to, do I? Once Harry causes You-Know-Who to kick the bucket, they’ll be begging to hire us,” he said smugly and Hermione rolled her eyes.

“I hope you have a Plan B,” Harry told Ron with a slight smirk. “Who’d want to hire you- ow!”

Ron had hit Harry on the arm with his textbook and Hermione sighed, muttering ‘boys’ under her breath.

“Alright then class!” Slughorn said gleefully, rubbing his hands together. “As I’m sure you are all aware, Valentines’ Day is quick approaching us!”

He looked around the classroom beaming, perhaps expecting smiles and nods, but everyone stared blankly back at him.

“Now, as I am sure you are all aware, amortentia – the most common love potion – is particularly popular this time of year. Now, the use of such a potion is of course deeply frowned upon and I would think very carefully before attempting to use one.”

He glanced around the class, nodding meaningfully.

“As for today’s lesson,” Slughorn continued. “You will be producing a love potion antidote, the recipe of which can be found on page 156 of your textbooks.”

Harry opened up his textbook, eyes trailing down the list of ingredients before joining in classmates in ransacking the herb cupboard.

He set about adding the four Wiggentree twigs, stirring the potion carefully as he read the next line of ingredients.
To his left, Hermione’s potion was already a deep blue, and to his right Ron was yawning as he chopped up his Wiggentree twigs.

The minutes ticked by slowly, Harry methodically going through each step of the recipe.

‘Am I doing this right?’ he asked Riddle in his mind.

He thought Riddle was still ignoring him, but then the Slytherin spoke.

_You’re doing as expected._

Harry frowned. Was that good?

_It’s acceptable._

Harry sighed, deciding ‘acceptable’ would have to do.

‘Are you still mad at me?’ he inquired internally, adding the extract of Gurdyroot the book asked for.

_Doesn’t matter if I’m mad or not, you’ll soon be dead either way_, Riddle said shortly.

Thanks for the vote of confidence, Harry thought, stirring his potion a little too aggressively.

‘Even if I am dead soon,’ Harry decided. ‘We might as well get to know each other better. Keep your private life private, I don’t care, but don’t just ignore me. The moment I die, you die too remember. Both present day Riddle, and the Riddle stuck in my head.’

_Leave the potion_, Riddle ordered. _You’re not meant to be stirring right now._

Harry glanced to the book in surprise, and realized Riddle was right. He hastily put the ladle to the side of the cauldron.

_What could you possibly want to know about me?_

Harry shrugged, watching the rest of the class. Half of them, like him, were also waiting for their simmering potions to turn red, whilst the other half had either moved on or were a few steps behind.

‘Just… anything,’ Harry thought. ‘Tell me about Hogwarts in your day… mundane stuff, like what your classmates did.’

_Apart from them worshipping the very ground I walked on?_

‘Yes, apart from that’.

_How dreadfully boring._

Riddle went silent and Harry tried to brush off his disappointment. He knew Voldemort had always been a private person, so it wasn’t that much of a surprise that he didn’t want to share anything about his life at Hogwarts with Harry, even if it was only mundane everyday stuff.

Noting that his potion had turned the desired red shade, Harry added a spoon of gurdyroot extract to its bubbling depths.

_Herbert Rodgers blew up a cauldron once_, Riddle said quietly. _My fourth year, we were attempting
a Befuddlement Draught. I think he must have stirred it anticlockwise, or added the wrong amount of sneezewort. I think a couple of people had to go to the infirmary, seemed to think they were famous Quidditch players.

‘Yours went perfectly, I assume’? Harry smirked, keeping an eye on his potion.

*Naturally. I had perfected the Befuddlement Draught in my third year.*

‘How come?’

*I needed it.‘*

‘Why?’

*An experiment. In my fifth year, two third year girls attacked each other in the Great Hall with an assortment of hexes and jinxes. I think one of them was going to ask me to Hogsmeade, Riddle mused.*

‘Did you ever go to Hogsmeade with anyone?’ Harry questioned Riddle. It was hard to imagine Voldemort with any kind of girlfriend, apart from Bellatrix but as far as Harry could see, Voldemort didn’t care much for her.

*No.*

‘Did you ever want to?’

*No.*

Harry stirred his potion, watching as it slowly lightened to an orange.

‘I had a disastrous time at Hogsmeade with a girl once,’ he told Riddle. It was Valentines’ Day and she… well…

He let Riddle into his memories, allowing the Slytherin to gain amusement from his own suffering and embarrassment, not even caring anymore that this was the same man who wanted to kill him.

*I think I made the right decision in staying away from that kind of scene,* Riddle said in amusement. *I will never understand how the Boy Who Lived is so inept at any kind of social contact with the opposite gender.*

‘Hey’, Harry’s mind protested. ‘I can talk to Hermione just fine’.

Riddle’s amusement grew and Harry scowled, but Riddle’s glee at Harry’s failures was still miles better than his burning hot rage inside Harry’s skull.

Harry wondered if Riddle would allow him to call him Tom. Bizarre as it seemed to him, Riddle had become almost like a close companion during the past few months. Not exactly a friend, but someone he could just talk to everyday. Ron and Hermione didn’t know yet that Harry had to die, and so Harry sought comfort in the only person who he could, Riddle, and though the older student did not offer such comfort, Harry still felt a weight off his shoulders all the same.

*Try it and see what happens.*

‘What?’ Harry thought in confusion.

*Calling me Tom, try it and see what happens,* Riddle said, a tinge of warning in his voice. But the
rest was laced in amusement, and Harry frowned.

‘Are you going to strike me down with another headache in the middle of class’? he questioned suspiciously.

*You’ll just have to find out.*

Harry glanced into his almost finished potion. He just needed to let it simmer until it turned pink and then once it cooled, it would go clear.

‘Does my potion look alright… Tom?’

A tiny pinprick of pain suddenly stabbed into the side of Harry’s head and he winced.

*It looks acceptable,* Riddle said, the enjoyment in his tone now plain as day.

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Harry trod carefully around Riddle for the next few days, but by the time the weekend rolled around, Riddle seemed much more content with him. On several more occasions Harry had chanced calling him ‘Tom’, and each time was met with that same pinprick of pain, but after a while Harry realized he didn’t care about the minute pain. If Riddle wanted to really hurt him, he could, as evident by that time in the Chamber.

Eventually, Riddle too stopped bothering to keep up appearances and grudgingly allowed Harry to continue calling him Tom. As a way to pacify and thank him, Harry continued visiting the library and reading up on European myths. Hermione’s searches for a suitable vessel came up fruitless every time as Tom rejected each and every object she offered, but he did not seem in any great hurry to find one.

After every object Tom rejected Harry would ask him what he wanted for a vessel, and Tom’s reply would always be the same: he needed a powerful, magic object. After this statement, Harry would roll his eyes and make a snide comment about vanity before Tom would subject him to another round of pain.

He didn’t know whether he was just getting used to it or if Tom was just getting bored, but Harry swore it wasn’t as painful as the headaches used to be.

He suggested once that if Tom wanted to go back down to the Chamber he need just ask, for Harry didn’t mind but Tom declined rather snappishly. It took Harry a while before he remembered the basilisk skeleton still laying under Hogwarts, and realized that it was probably a bitter image for the Slytherin.

Saturday afternoon found Harry back in the Room of Requirement, casting spell after spell on the moving mannequin.

Harry threw a Confundus charm at the mannequin but it blasted his spell away with *protego*. The mannequin threw a leg-locker curse at Harry, that threw him across the room as it hit and Harry bit his tongue in pain as his head made contact with the wall. He tried to crawl away but his legs refused to move, and he glanced up to see the mannequin raise its wand again.

A jet of blue light shot out of the mannequin’s wand and soared towards Harry. He used his arms to throw himself to the side and the spell hit the wall that had been behind him. With an ear-splitting bang, the wall blew up, throwing smaller pieces of rock around the room.
Harry pressed his face into the stone floor, squeezing his eyes shut against the rubble falling around him. Rolling to the side, he shouted ‘bombarda!’ and the side of the mannequin was blown off. It stumbled in place for a moment, before throwing another curse at Harry.

Harry rolled out of its way, muttering a quit counter-spell for the leg-locker curse and crawled away from the debris, taking shelter behind one of the bookcases. Another spell hit the side and books flew past Harry’s head.

One of the books hit him in the side of the face, pressing his glasses into his face until Harry felt blood drip slowly down his cheek. He pushed himself to his feet and dived out from behind the bookcase, throwing another spell at the mannequin that threw it across the room. It hit the wall and cracked apart, small wooden fragments falling onto the floor with a clatter.

Harry stumbled over to the mannequin, breathing heavily as he kicked one of the pieces.

“There,” he said proudly, throwing himself into one of the nearby armchairs.

*It’s an improvement on your last time.*

“I should hope so. There’s blood all over my face.”

*It's war, there’s meant to be blood,* Tom scoffed. *Episkey.*

Harry felt warmth go through him, and lifted a hand to the side of his face. The cut was completely gone, and he wiped away the remaining blood with the sleeve of his cloak.

“Thanks,” he said in surprise.

*The Boy Who Lived can’t have a scar now,* Tom said in a mocking tone.

“I mean, I already do. And you’re getting better at that.”

*At what?*

“Casting spells.”

*It was only a simple healing spell,* Tom said snidely.

“But you can do more powerful spells,” Harry argued. “Like that day with Snape’s practical.”

*Not really,* Tom said after a while of deliberation. *I don’t have enough strength yet. Simple protection charms are still a new-found discovery for me in this form, and like I said before, it takes a momentous amount of energy.*

“That’s good though, right? Because then Voldemort won’t be controlling me for ages.”

*I’m merely a horcrux, who knows what the physical form of myself can do,* Tom said, bitterness lacing his tone.

Harry’s expression softened. “I’m a horcrux too,” he said, trying to be reassuring though he didn’t quite know why. “And I’ll be honest, I prefer you over… physical you, Voldemort.”

*I’m not a fluffy kitten, Potter. The things I do in your time I was quite capable of in 1943. Don’t underestimate me.*

Harry shrugged. “I’m not. I am fully aware that you have the ability – and the desire – to torture
and kill innocent people. It’s fucked up, don’t get me wrong, but you’ll talk to me whilst Voldemort – I mean, you – would just mock me, maybe torture me a bit before killing me.”

Merely self-preservation, I assure you.

“I know that. But it still makes a nice change. You’re more charismatic, I suppose,” Harry added without thinking. He frowned as Tom gave a throaty chuckle.

No need for charisma when you already have everyone’s attention.

Yeah, through torture and fear, Harry thought bitterly.

How else would you go about it?

“Dumbledore has people’s attention, and it’s not from fear. And I highly doubt he’s killed anyone. Minister of Magic as well, I suppose. Though I don’t doubt Scrimgeour has killed a few people.”

Tom scoffed. They’re subjected to rules and goals other people have set for them. I answer to no-one.

Harry massaged his temples, repressing a sigh of annoyance. If these past few months had proved anything, it was that Tom Riddle was stubborn, and no matter what Harry said, it would never dissuade him from his own version of the truth.

“Should we do another round then?” he suggested instead, glancing over to the ruins of the mannequin.
By the time Valentines’ Day came around, Harry was well and truly exhausted. With Snape’s occlumency lessons twice a week and Tom’s tutoring – not to mention all his other lessons – Harry felt like getting into bed now that it was half-term and sleeping for a hundred years.

Unfortunately, despite not having to go to any classes, not everyone else had the same idea.

It was at the Gryffindor table in the Great Hall at breakfast time when Lavender Brown came sidling up to sit next to Ron. He didn’t even look at her, too busy shoving scrambled eggs in his mouth as she just sat there, not touching any food.

“Lavender?” Hermione frowned, glancing at the girl who usually sat next to Parvati. “Is something wrong?”

“Oh, no, not at all,” Lavender said with a nervous laugh. “I-I just…”

She glanced at Ron next to her, who was reaching for the bacon.

“Ah,” Hermione said, turning back to her own food.

Harry glanced between the two in confusion.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, frowning. “There’s a spare seat next to Parvati, why are you here and why do you keep staring at Ron-”

He cut off with a hiss as Hermione elbowed him in the side. Lavender was glaring daggers at him.

“Wait, what?” Ron asked with his mouth full, looking up at Lavender in surprise. “Oh, hi Lavender, what are you doing here?”

Lavender gave a small giggle that Harry swore he had never heard from her before. Or from anyone for that instance, except for maybe the first years.

“Well, you know what day it is, right?” she asked, looking at the red-headed wizard intently.

“Umm… Wednesday?”

Hermione gave a small cough that might have been a snort of laughter.

“Yes, Valentines’ Day,” Lavender continued, moving her gaze from Ron to instead check out her manicured nails. “I-I was just wondering… that is, if you’re not busy… whether… w-whether you’d like to go to Hogsmeade today?”

Ron thought about it, before realization struck him and his eyes widened, mouth paused in the chewing of his food. He slowly swallowed, pushing some of his scrambled eggs around the plate.

Lavender nodded, looking back up at him with hope flickering in her eyes.

“Err… I-I mean, I guess… I didn’t really have anything else planned-”

“Great! I’ll meet you in the common room at one,” the blonde squealed, beaming as she stood up and flounced back to Parvati, who had been watching them out the corner of her eye. She immediately pulled her best friend down onto the bench next to her, whispering in her ear. Lavender grinned and whispered something back in an equally as excited tone.

Ron was staring at them, mouth hanging open.

“W-What just happened?” he asked, turning to gape at Harry and Hermione.

“I think you just got asked on a date,” Harry pointed out helpfully, loading more bacon on his plate. “More bacon?”

Ron took the offered bacon numbly, still looking shocked. “B-But… Lavender… I mean, she doesn’t like me, does she? I mean, not like that?”

“Evidently, she does,” Hermione said curtly.

Ron’s shocked expression morphed into a grin.

“Alright,” he said happily. “I got a date.”

“Whatsoever you do, don’t let her take you to Madam Puddifoot’s Tea Shop,” Harry told him, shuddering at the memory of frills and pink petals falling from the ceiling.

“As if,” Ron snorted.

“Oh please, as if you could even get a table there on Valentines’ Day,” a new voice snorted, and Harry turned to see Ginny slip into the seat Lavender had left.

“I could, if I wanted to,” Ron argued.

Ginny raised an arched eyebrow. “Sure you could.”

“I could!”

“Go on then, book a table, before they run out,” Ginny teased and Ron opened his mouth to retort before he shut it again, sulkily returning to his breakfast.

“Hey Ginny,” Hermione said lightly. “You had any plans for today?”

She shared a meaningful look with Ginny, and Harry glanced between the two of them in confusion. Did all girls’ have this ability to secretly converse with each other? He wondered.

What, like us? Tom noted in amusement. It pains me to see just how oblivious you are.

Harry frowned. ‘What do you mean?’ he thought to Tom.

Wait and see, was Tom’s reply, but before Harry could figure out just exactly what he meant by that, Hermione touched his arm lightly.
“Yeah, I know,” she was saying to Ginny. “Why don’t you go to Hogsmeade today, Harry?”

“What, with Ron and Lavender?” Harry blurted out in surprise, and Tom gave another amused cackle.

Hermione sighed, rubbing her forehead tiredly with one hand. “No… with Ginny.”

“I was going to just hang out with Luna but she’s busy,” Ginny told him, but there was a note of hesitation in her voice.

Harry looked over to the Ravenclaw table, where Luna was staring dreamily up at the ceiling. She didn’t look very busy.

“Oh err… OK then… sure,” Harry said and Ginny smiled at him.

“You want to meet at the Entrance Hall at twelve or something?” she asked.

Harry nodded and she flashed him another smile, before getting up and moving down to sit with her classmates.

“You’re going on a date with my sister,” Ron said suddenly in an accusing tone, pointing a fork at Harry. “I-I don’t think I should allow this-”

“Oh, come on Ronald,” Hermione scoffed. “You’re going on a date with Lavender and let’s be honest, Ginny could do a whole lot worse than Harry.”

“Yeah, but it’s weird,” Ron muttered. “She’s my sister.”

“So, you noticed,” Hermione said in a curt voice. “Anyway, I think Harry and Ginny go well together, she’s liked him ever since her first year-”

“Can we not talk about me while I’m right here?” Harry protested.

“Sorry,” she said apologetically. “But anyway, I must be going. I have to go to the library before it becomes swarmed with seventh years.”

“The library?” Ron said, as if the very room had offended him in some way. “It’s half-term Hermione, give work a rest.”

“It’s not schoolwork, and I can’t,” she said, glancing towards Harry before getting up. “I’ll see you two later.”

She left the two still seated at the table, and Ron and Harry stared at each other.

“Well,” Ron said awkwardly. “D-Don’t… just don’t hurt Ginny, I guess.”

Harry smirked in sudden amusement. “See you in Madam Puddifoot’s, then.”

And, ignoring Ron’s horrified look, Harry also left the Great Hall.

‘I’m about to go on a date with Ginny Weasley’, Harry thought to himself, staring into the mirror in the dormitory bathrooms. He had no idea how this was going to go. Sure, Ginny was sweet and caring and fiercely independent and he had shared more than a few hesitant glances with her at the Burrow. But a date? Harry had very little experience with the dating world, and his short-lived
relationship with Cho could hardly be counted as it was.

‘Tom, help me’, he begged the presence inside his mind. Surely Tom Riddle must know a lot more about romance than he did? Sure, he found it beneath him to fall in love and enter a relationship but still, there must have been some girls, right?

_Begging for my help? How unbecoming of the Saviour_, Tom said in amusement.

Harry groaned, hitting his head against the tiled wall. “I don’t know how to f-flirt or do any of this,” he admitted in a mumble, and Tom’s amusement increased tenfold.

__Obviously.__

“So, what do I do?” he hissed, keeping his voice low so no-one else would hear.

_As far as I’m aware, you talk, you seduce, and then you take._

“What? Did you never just go on a nice Valentines’ date with a girl?” Harry grumbled.

Tom gave a soft chortle. _You don’t want to know what I did with my dates._

“To tortured them?”

_Not quite… though it did involve some screaming. Prayers to Merlin, prayers to me…_

Harry was filled with confusion, until Tom granted him a little snippet into his life. A rather pretty witch, brown waves of hair plastered to her forehead with sweat as her face scrunched up in pleasure, throwing her head back into the pillow...

“Get that out of my head!” Harry snapped, flushing bright red.

_You didn’t like it?_

“I don’t want to know about your sexual escapades,” Harry grumbled, trying to flatten his hair down with no avail.

_You asked for my help._

“Yeah, with a date! Not with… not with…” he lowered his voice to a barely audible hiss. “Not with that.”

_Why? Has Harry Potter, Boy Who Lived, got practically no experience with dating but is a master at sex?_

If possible, Harry flushed even deeper. Tom caught on quickly.

_No? _he asked, clearly enjoying Harry’s distress. _Is it possible that Britain’s Saviour and most eligible bachelor is a virgin?_

“I’ve been busy battling Dark Lords, if you didn’t know,” Harry growled. “Besides, it’s not like there’s any rush-”

_Changed your mind about dying then?_

Harry froze, before scowling and storming out the bathroom, slamming the door behind him and startling Neville, who was rummaging through his suitcase.
He blinked at Harry’s expression. “You alright there?”

“Fine,” Harry muttered, leaving the dormitories and going into the common room.

Ron was playing chess with Dean, frowning to himself as he tried to figure out his next move.

“I’m going to Hogsmeade,” Harry said shortly, and Ron nodded vaguely, eyes glued on the chess board as Harry left through the portrait of the Fat Lady.

*I thought you were OK with dying?* Tom asked him.

“How can anyone be OK with being murdered young? Harry fumed to the Slytherin. ‘There’s so much I still wanted to do.’

*You can still do some of them. You’re not going to be murdered today,* Tom scoffed. *It’s like you said, Voldemort is attempting to control you and use you as a weapon before he kills you.*

“Yeah but I’m still not going to be able to do half the things I wanted to do,” Harry muttered as he brushed past people giving him confused looks.

*Like what? What did you want to do?*

“W-Well… well I hadn’t thought about it but… get a girlfriend for one-”

*Done,* Tom said in a bored tone. *That dreary girl last year.*

“That hardly counts-”

*You went on a date and announced yourselves as a couple, did you not?*

“Well, kind of-”

*There you go,* Tom said matter-of-factly. *You had a girlfriend, short-lived as that relationship was. What was next on your list?*

“Umm… I-I didn’t really think about it,” Harry said awkwardly, waiting for the moving stairs to go still before going down them. “I guess lose my virginity-”

*You could achieve that by tonight,* Tom said.

Harry shook his head. “No, if I ever do it, I want it to be meaningful, I-I want it with someone I love-”

*You like this red-haired girl, I’ve never seen you act so stupid around anyone else.*

Harry frowned at Tom’s bluntness, despite the truthfulness to the statement. “Yeah, I like her… but I don’t love her, at least not yet. It takes time, you know?”

*No, I wouldn’t know. Why waste my time with love?*

“Why have sex if there’s no love?”

Tom laughed. *Sex has nothing to do with love, there’s no connection between them and the only ones who put a connection with them deserve to have it used against them.*

Harry sighed as he finally entered the Entrance Hall. There were a few other people mingling
about, obviously waiting for people, but no sign of Ginny yet.

“That’s also on my list of things to do then,” Harry decided. “Fall in love.”

_You would think that you would want to avoid more tragedy. You’re rather a masochist, Harry Potter._

Harry shrugged. Maybe he was.

“Harry,” Ginny’s voice said brightly, and Harry looked up to see her approaching him. “You ready to go?”

Harry nodded, getting up. “Yeah sure, where to first?”

“It looks freezing out there – the Three Broomsticks?”

Harry sighed in relief. “Absolutely.”

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Half an hour later, Harry and Ginny were both seated in the comforting warmth of the Three Broomsticks, both clutching glasses of butterbeer. Harry watched everyone else bustling around them, several other people on dates – he even saw Michael Corner with a girl he didn’t recognise a little way away from them, heads leaning towards each other chattering happily.

Ginny was watching Harry looking around the pub.

“Madam Puddifoot’s has nothing on this place, does it?” she remarked. “I went there once, with Dean but… it was nice, but more of a summer place, you know?”

Harry nodded, turning his gaze back on Ginny and taking another sip of butterbeer.

“I found it atrocious,” he admitted. “It’s not my sort of place.”

Ginny’s lips twitched up into a smile. “No,” she said in amusement. “I suppose it’s not. Was that Cho’s choice?”

Harry, who hadn’t even been aware that Ginny had known about his and Cho’s date, nodded.

“I heard it didn’t go well,” she said.

“Yeah, we got into an argument.”

“So did Dean and me. Maybe it’s not us, maybe it’s the tea shop’s fault.”

Harry grinned. “Maybe it’s something in the tea.”

“Or the lace,” Ginny said. “I thought there was a bit too much of it around.”

_Tell her she looks beautiful._

Harry choked slightly on his butterbeer, and Ginny glanced to him in concern.


Tom sighed in exasperation but Ginny didn’t seem disappointed; on the contrary, she smiled happily at Harry.
“Thank you,” she said quietly. “You do too.”

They sat in silence for a while, but it wasn’t uncomfortable. Watching the people come and go in the warm pub across from Ginny, Harry felt more comfortable than he had for a while. Maybe he could enter a relationship with Ginny. She was smart, funny and didn’t put him on a pedestal like so many of the other girls seemed to want to do.

Harry’s eyes met with Ginny’s brown ones and she gave a small smile, quickly bringing her glass to her lips.

“Where else did you want to go?” she asked.

“I-I don’t know, you choose.”

“I don’t know either, I kind of like it in here.”

“Then why don’t we stay?” Harry suggested. “We don’t have to go anywhere, and it’s warm in here. Let’s just get another drink each and stay and talk.”

“Talk about what?” Ginny mused.

“I-I don’t know… whatever you want.”

“What if I don’t want to talk?” she whispered, glancing up at him.

Harry swallowed thickly. “T-Then we can just sit here I guess? I-It’s what we’ve been doing for the last few minutes, so we can-”

“But what if I don’t want to do that either?” she interrupted him.

Harry stared at her, unsure of what to say.

“Well…” he said slowly. “What did you want to do?”

“Well for starters…” Ginny began, tracing a finger round the edge of her glass. “I wanted to thank you properly.”

“For what?” he asked, bewildered.

Ginny gave a small, sad smile. “For saving me down in the Chamber. I-I caused such a mess that year and… and you saved me.”

Harry shrugged, staring at the ridges in the table as if it were the most fascinating thing he had ever seen. “You didn’t cause a mess, it wasn’t your fault-”

“No, it was You-Know-Who’s fault,” Ginny muttered, anger tinging her voice.

Harry was suddenly very aware of Tom’s presence in his mind, listening in.

“We don’t have to talk about that,” he said desperately. “Come on, it’s Valentines’ Day, we shouldn’t be thinking about… about him.”

Ginny’s expression softened as she looked at him. “No,” she said. “I suppose not. But I still think I should thank you.”

“You just did, didn’t you?” Harry asked in confusion.
Ginny let out a small laugh and edged her chair around the side of the table, closer to him. “No, I meant properly,” she said, shaking her head in mirth.

“Properly? How-?”

He cut himself off as Ginny’s eyes flickered down to his lips. Slowly, she leaned in, her fiery orange hair slipping over her shoulder and tickling his skin.

Harry’s eyes shut, every nerve suddenly much more alive in his body. He could feel her warm breath on his lips, could almost taste the butterbeer on it…

Ginny’s soft lips pressed against Harry’s, and he had just begun to move his lips against her gentle ones when she was suddenly ripped away from him.

A force pushed out of Harry and sent Ginny flying out of her chair, crashing to the floor as she let out a yelp of pain. Harry immediately jumped up, bending down to her side as half the people in the pub turned to see what had happened.

“W-What was that?” Ginny asked in alarm, head whipping side to side as Harry helped her to her feet.

“I-I don’t know,” Harry said desperately. “I don’t know what happened…”

Ginny frowned, looking around suspiciously before she shrugged it off.

“Maybe I just fell out of my chair,” she said uneasily, with a small laugh. “It happened once in Charms… maybe I’m just really clumsy, yeah, that’s it.”

Harry smiled in relief, and picked her chair up for her, but Ginny shook her head.

“I’ve changed my mind,” she said. “Do you want to go for a walk? It seems an awful shame just to stay in here all day.”

“Err… sure, yeah, let’s go.”

Ginny reached out to grab his hand, and Harry felt her small fingers entwine with his, but then Ginny was thrown to the floor once more with a surge of magic that had raced through Harry out of nowhere.

“What is going on?!” she spluttered, pushing herself to her feet.

“I don’t know!” Harry cried out, but she was eying him suspiciously. “C’mon, let’s get out of here, let’s walk around Hogsmeade-”

“Actually, I think I need to head back,” she said abruptly. “I-I have work to do. It’s probably best to go.”

Harry sighed, but nodded. “Yeah, alright.”

Ginny gave him an apologetic smile. “We should do this again though, another time. I had fun, despite…”

She trailed off, and then reached out to pat his shoulder or pull him into a hug, but then seemed to decide against it, nodding at Harry and hurrying off out of the pub.
Harry slowly sat back down in his chair, groaning.

‘What was that?’ his mind snapped to Tom.

*What was what?*

Harry gritted his teeth. He knew that surge of magic had been Tom, there was no other reason for it.

*Oh that,* Tom said conversationally, as if they had been discussing the weather. *I was helping you.*

Harry almost choked on the remains of his butterbeer. ‘Helping me? You threw her to the ground!’.

*Yes, I did.*

‘Why?!’

*I thought it would have been obvious.*

‘Well it isn’t,’ Harry’s mind seethed. ‘So if you’d like to explain yourself, that would be great.’

*I’ll paint a picture, shall I?* Tom snapped. *Imagine the date goes well, you and Red over there hit it off, kiss and declare yourselves boyfriend and girlfriend to the happiness of all your little friends. Maybe you even *make love* – he said the phrase in a mocking tone – and then, several months down the road, Voldemort comes to collect. You die, as expected, and suddenly Little Miss Weasley is finding herself with a dead boyfriend. She locks herself in her room and cries and cries and no-one, not even dear, dead Harry Potter, can console her. That is to say, if Voldemort hasn’t already killed her first in front of you.*

Harry sat back in his seat, gaping as he thought over what Tom had told him. He hadn’t thought about that fact he would be dead and leave Ginny alone. He had seen what it had done to Cho, and certainly didn’t want the same sort of grief for Ginny.

How could he have been so selfish? Reluctantly, Harry had to agree that maybe Tom had been helping him. In his own fucked up way, of course.

“*Oh,*” he said.

*Yes, *oh* indeed,* Tom said savagely.

“Still didn’t need to throw her to the ground though, you could have hurt her. She probably thinks I did it to her.”

*Good, would you like to explain to her who really did it? That the Dark Lord Voldemort is stuck inside Harry Potter’s head and he has refused to tell anyone?*

‘I told Hermione’, Harry thought sullenly.

*Half-truths.*

Reluctantly, Harry got up from the table, and starting to make his way out the pub into the bitter cold. Everywhere he looked there seemed to be couples walking around and holding hands.

“I hope Ron’s date went better at least,” he remarked, before slowly making his way back to the school.
OK so I debated whether to upload this today or not for some time. It has not been beta-ed (completely my fault, springing a load of chapters on my beta without much time to prepare) so there may be some mistakes, sorry, and there may be a few tiny edits in the future, but nothing too major

However it's almost been a week since I last updated so I thought you guys deserved an update, especially with all the comments and love for the last chapter ^-^

I'm almost in triple digits for bookmarks and comments for this story which I am also really excited about x

When Harry entered the common room he almost bumped into Hermione, who had just come in as well with a huge stack of books in her arms.

“Oh, sorry,” he said, reaching over to take half the books off her.

She smiled gratefully at him and they went over to the seats near the windows, dropping the books on the coffee table.

“I didn’t expect you to be back so soon,” Hermione said, taking the first book off the pile and skimming through it.

“Yeah err… the date didn’t… umm… Ginny needed to get work done,” Harry said, leaning back in his chair.

_Half-truths_, Tom reminded him.

‘Shut up’, Harry thought back.

“Oh, well Ron left about half an hour ago, so if you were looking for him-”

“No, I just didn’t want to stay in the cold,” he told her. “Are you really just going to do research all day?”

“Of course,” Hermione said briskly. “We need to get this spirit out of you, especially with You-Know-Who having access to your mind. Perhaps by getting rid of it, the link between you will narrow again.”

Harry highly doubted it, but he didn’t say so.

“Is it awkward?” she asked suddenly, glancing up at Harry. “Having it… having it inside your head all the time?”

“Better than Voldemort,” he said. “And ‘it’ s a he, by the way.”

“Oh, right, sorry. Does umm… does he have a name?”
‘Err…’

‘What do I tell her?’ Harry asked Tom frantically.

_Tell her the truth._

Harry snorted inwardly. Like that would go down well.

‘Thomas,’ Harry decided. ‘At least, that’s what he told me.’

Hermione frowned, clearly not expecting the spirit’s name to sound so human.

_Thomas?_ Tom asked in amusement. _Merlin forbid you ever need to deceive Voldemort, you’re absolutely terrible at it._

‘She’s not going to assume Tom Riddle if I say Thomas’, Harry’s mind stated. ‘And Hermione knows that I know who Tom Riddle is, she’ll never think that I’m actually helping you’.

_Yet here we are._

“OK then… Thomas,” Hermione said, testing out the name. “I found a couple more items, but I’ve almost cleared out the library, so hopefully these will do.”

She flicked through the first book to the desired page and showed it to Harry, who leaned over to examine the sketching of the object.

_No._

“He doesn’t like it.”

They slowly made their way through the huge stack of books, Tom rejecting each object offered to him. Finally, Hermione fell back into her chair tiredly.

“I think there’s a couple more bookcases to go,” she murmured. “Hopefully we’ll find something there. If not, I’ll go into Hogsmeade and look there – they surely must have something.”

“Sorry about all of this,” Harry sighed. “I know you have enough on your plate-”

“Harry, don’t worry about it, honest,” Hermione smiled. “Besides, I’m learning a lot, and this stuff really is fascinating. After this is over I might look back at those Egyptian artifacts, they’re quite amazing really-”

She was cut off as the portrait opened, and Ron and Lavender stumbled through, Lavender clinging onto Ron’s arm and giggling whilst Ron grinned. Hermione raised an eyebrow at them.

“Hey,” Ron said, as Lavender left to go seek out Parvati. “Lavender and I were going to go get some dinner from the kitchens later, you want to join?”

“No thanks,” Hermione said. “I don’t fancy being a third wheel.”

“Yeah, I’m gonna have to pass too,” Harry told him.

“Oh, OK then,” Ron said, looking decidedly happier as he threw himself into one of the chairs, legs hanging over the arm. “How did your date go?”

“She had to go do work,” Harry replied.
“Eh, shame. Guess where Lavender and I went to though? OK, so we did end up going to Madam Puddifoot’s for a bit – just a bit!” he said to Harry’s smirk. “But anyway, they have these eclairs and oh my god, they’re so good. But after that we went to Honeydukes which has this new kind of flavour of Chocolate frogs, they have these little bits of caramel in–”

“Weren’t they great?” Lavender squealed as she suddenly appeared behind Ron, placing herself in his lap and winding her arms around his neck.

Much to Harry and Hermione’s chagrin, she leaned forward to kiss him, pushing her entire body into his. Hermione coughed uncomfortably.

Inside his head, Harry could clearly feel Tom’s distaste.

_Tacky_, he said snidely.

‘Did you not snog every girl you came across’? Harry asked him.

_Not every girl_, he retorted. _A select few lucky ones that I needed something from. And not all girls, either._

Harry made a noise and Hermione looked over at him. Ron and Lavender were too busy snogging to pay them any attention.

Harry tried to cover it with a cough and Hermione returned to the book she had been reading.

‘You’re gay’? he questioned Tom. He had never taken Voldemort to be homosexual. Then again, he had never thought of Voldemort’s sexuality.

_No._

‘But you’re sexually attracted to men?

_I’m not sexually attracted to any of them_, he said in a bored tone.

‘B-But… but then why–’

_Is this how you wish to spend Valentines’ Day?_ Tom asked him in amusement. _Studying the great Lord Voldemort’s sexuality? I’d be happy to give you the tour of all the people I’ve fucked, but I’ve rather forgotten. Or don’t particularly care. I don’t tend to linger on the memories._

Harry scowled. ‘I don’t want to know who you’ve fucked’.

_Don’t tell me you’re not the least bit curious – most people are._

Harry felt his own annoyance radiating through him at Tom’s laugh, and quickly grabbed a book off the table, opening it to a random page and immersing himself in the words.

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Dinner was a rather sordid affair, with Ron gone off to the kitchens with Lavender and Hermione busy reading at the table. Harry glanced over to Ginny once or twice, but she didn’t look over at him, chatting with her classmates.

He felt lonely, Harry decided, stabbing at his potatoes. He didn’t remember ever feeling like more of an outsider.
‘Knowing you’re about to die really makes you realize all the things you’ll miss,’ Harry thought, looking at all the students around him enjoying their half-term.

_You don’t have to die_, Tom reminded him, but Harry ignored him.

He’d much rather die and lose out on a long life than ever think of purposely hurting others over something as stupid as blood.

He excused himself early from dinner, and slowly trudged back to the common room. However, he had only just turned the corner out of the Great Hall when he bumped into someone.

He bent down to pick up the magazine they had dropped, before realizing it was a copy of _The Quibbler_.

“Oh, hi Harry,” Luna said in an airy voice as he handed the magazine back to her. “Is St Valentines’ Day treating you well?”

“Err… not really, no-”

“I’m not surprised,” Luna said, fixing him with her pale gaze. “Nargles like to come out at this time of year, you know. It’s the flowers.”

“I don’t think it’s the Nargles,” Harry assured her.

Luna merely shrugged, opening _The Quibbler_ upside down at a random page.

She passed by Harry in almost a daze, singing under her breath to herself. Harry watched her retreating figure, before hurrying to catch up with her again.

“Hey, Luna?” he called out.

“Hi, Harry.”

“I-If you… if you found out that you were going to die,” Harry asked hesitantly. “W-What would you do? Like if you still had things you wanted to do?”

Luna thought about it, watching him. She didn’t seem suspicious of Harry’s sudden question about death, or if she did then she was a remarkable actress, Harry thought to himself.

“I think I would try and get everything done while I could,” she said dreamily. “Because some things you can only do now, especially whilst Venus is aligned.”

Harry watched her as she turned and drifted off again towards the Great Hall, mulling over her words. It was well enough saying you should do what you wanted before you died, but actually doing it was another thing altogether.

With a sigh Harry continued on his way to Gryffindor common room. He changed his mind though when he saw how busy it had gotten, and instead made his way up to the dormitories.

He fell back against his bed, staring at the canopy as if it held the answers he wanted.

“I feel like I’m just waiting for death at this point,” he murmured. “Before it was always a matter of life and death, but at least I had a choice. This time… I don’t. My occlumency is going nowhere and I feel like it’s only a matter of time before Voldemort succeeds in possessing me, and then it’ll
be all my fault.”

*Why think about it?* Tom asked him. *You’re going to die, so why bother even considering what you may or may not cause? You’ll be dead.*

“Yeah but I don’t want to take out a bunch of people with me,” Harry sighed. “Ron… Hermione… Ginny… I just want them all to be safe. I’ll end myself before letting Voldemort kill me but I can’t do that to them, I can’t make it look like I’ve just given up. Because I haven’t. It’s just unfair, Tom.”

*Life is unfair,* the other said shortly.

“I want to enjoy my last few days,” Harry decided. “Without the threat of death over my head. Do you think it’s possible to obliviate myself?”

*No, not unless you want brain damage.*

Harry sighed. “Great. I’ll just spend it staring enviously at others then. I spent my childhood like that, so why not spend the last part of my life like that as well?”

*You can enjoy your life now.*

“Not without hurting those I leave behind,” Harry commented, thinking of Ginny.

*You don’t need the witch.*

Harry rolled his eyes. “Then please, what do you suggest?”

*Some people turn to drinking.*

“I’m not drinking the rest of my life away,” he scoffed.

*Some other kind of stress-reliever then.*

“What did you use?” Harry asked curiously, unable to imagine Tom drinking.

A flash of amusement suddenly raced through Harry, along with something else he couldn’t figure out.

*It doesn’t matter.*

“Why not?” he asked, suddenly interested. “You must have gotten stressed, right?”

*It’s hardly stressful being me,* Tom said snidely.

“Well then, tell me what you would do in my case,” Harry huffed. “Imagine it, you’re going to die no matter what – so don’t even suggest joining forces with dark lords – and you can’t become involved with anyone or do normal teenager things, because you’ll just hurt them. What would you do?”

*Take what I want from people,* Tom said. *Who cares if I hurt them.*

“I care,” Harry snapped. “Give me an option that doesn’t involve hurting people.”

Another flash of amusement went through him.
Do you really want to know what I’m thinking? Tom said, mirth radiating off him.

“Yes, why else would I ask?”

You won’t like it.

“What? Are you going to suggest I torture muggles?”

No, Tom said slowly. But you won’t like the fact that I suggested it.

“You haven’t even suggested anything to me yet! Trust me, I’m glad for anything.”

Harry was suddenly hit with another one of Tom’s memories, of a different girl this time, hands bunching up the sheets in fists as her mouth opened in a silent scream.

Harry groaned out-loud. “Will you stop?” he hissed. “How many times do I have to tell you that I don’t want to know about your… your…”

I believe the phrase you used was ‘sexual escapades’.

“Exactly!” Harry fumed. “And for your information, I’m not getting involved with anyone, I told you!”

I’m not suggesting you get involved with anyone, merely yourself.

“What do you- oh.”

Harry went bright red as embarrassment flood through him. Tom cackled, finding entertainment in Harry’s humiliation and despair.

“No,” Harry spat. “D-Don’t even… don’t even suggest that! You’re… urgh.”

You said you would be glad about anything I suggested, Tom said innocently.

“Within reason!”

Out of all the things I could have suggested, this is one of the more tamer suggestions, Potter.

Harry turned over in the bed and buried his face into the pillows, trying to block out everything Tom was saying. Just as he thought his life couldn’t get any worse, now he was talking with the future Voldemort about wanking? The absurdity would make him laugh, if it didn’t make him want to jump off a building instead.

I don’t know why you’re overreacting about this.

“Shut up,” Harry said, his voice muffled by the pillow. “I don’t want to talk about this with you.”

Aww, is Potter shy? Tom mocked with glee. Can Potter not get off with the Big Bad Dark Lord watching him?

“Shut up!”

It must have been months, Potter, surely you must be desperate by now? Tom continued, enjoyment flooding through him at Harry’s distress.

“Not desperate enough, trust me.”
Oh, I’m sure I could make you desperate enough.

Harry let out a hollow laugh. “You’ve got to be joking. Y-You’re a fucking murderer, nothing you could ever say could ever turn me on. I-I’d rather fuck a goblin.”

Is that a bet? Tom asked dangerously. I’ve secured myself people with stronger morals than you… Harry.

He purred Harry’s name, and Harry repressed a shiver that wanted to take over his body. No-one had ever said his name like that before.

“You’re a murderer,” he said weakly.

I’m not a murderer, Tom said in a smooth voice. I haven’t killed anyone, and the only people I have claimed for myself very much wanted it, I can assure you… would you like to see?

He gave Harry another flash into his memories, of a guy this time, panting and groaning in pure pleasure into the mattress. Harry flushed.

“You killed Myrtle,” Harry said. “Y-You are a murderer, even if she was the only one-”

That was an accident, Tom said soothingly, not sounding surprised that Harry even knew who Myrtle was. Perhaps he assumed that Harry had looked up the first time the Chamber was opened. The basilisk killed her purely by accident, it wasn’t me. And I closed the Chamber immediately afterwards, no-one else got hurt...

“You want to hurt them though, you want to hurt people, you want to hurt me,” Harry snarled, but it came out half-hearted.

Of course, I do, Tom told him. But I can make you want it. I can make you crave the pain. Trust me, Harry...

“No, I don’t want-”

You can’t fight this, Tom told him in amusement. I’ll wait, I’ll wait a thousand years but you’ll come to me. You’re already aroused.

He was right, of course, Harry thought angrily to himself. He was aroused, the mixture of Tom’s silky voice and words had gone straight to his groin and Harry suppressed a groan of frustration.

You want to touch yourself, don’t you? Tom continued, well aware that he had Harry eating out the palm of his hand now. You’ll get to, don’t worry. But first, let’s play a little, mm? Show me some of that Gryffindor bravery.

“Tom…” Harry said weakly. “I can’t…”

Why not? Is it because of Voldemort? He’s a thousand miles away, Harry. You know you’re going to die, so why not enjoy yourself? No one need to know.

Harry rolled onto his back, suddenly feeling hot in the room. He had a good point, Harry thought distantly to himself. Harry was going to die, so why couldn’t he do this? He wasn’t doing anything with Tom after all, he was just jerking off. Everyone did it.

That’s right, now put a silencing charm around the bed, Tom purred and Harry obeyed, before dropping his wand to the side.
Excellent, now undress.

Hesitantly, Harry pulled his jumper off, dumping it to the side of the bed before unbuttoning his shirt and letting that fall to the side too.

Stop, Tom hissed as he reached for his fly. Leave that for the moment.

Harry settled back against the covers, breathing out heavily and squeezing his eyes shut. Maybe if he tried hard enough, he could imagine this was someone else. But there was no mistaking Tom’s voice – it was wholly unique.

How does it feel? Tom asked in amusement. Half-naked to the mercy of the future dark lord. Do you feel scared Harry? Do you feel turned on?

Harry’s breaths came out in little shudders and Tom gave him another memory, of a teenage wizard leaning over the side of a bed, gasping in pleasure.

“Fuck,” Harry hissed, hands going for his fly again before he stopped, letting them hover over the zip.

That’s right, don’t do anything without my permission, Tom said in satisfaction. You’re mine, Harry, and I will enjoy you how I wish. Begging to be allowed to touch yourself, almost at the edge of climax without any contact. That’s how I want you.

“I don’t beg,” Harry growled out, and Tom laughed lightly.

Oh, you will, he said in amusement. I’ll have you begging by the end. What would your friends think, hmm? What would the papers say if they could see the famous Harry Potter, writhing and begging to Tom Riddle, the absolute darling of Hogwarts? I guess we’re both darlings here, we go well together...

Harry couldn’t stop the shudder that went through him, cock straining against the material of his boxers at Tom’s words.

They’re still down there, you know, Tom remarked. Your classmates are talking amongst themselves in the common room, playing chess or doing work or just relaxing by the fire. Completely unknown to them is the fact that just above their heads is their Golden Boy, jerking it off to the sound of Voldemort’s irresistible voice.

Harry let out a short laugh. “Can’t help but compliment yourself, can you?” he said.

Tell me I don’t have a voice that just makes you want to touch yourself, Harry, Tom said, and Harry swore if he was physical, he would be smirking. You want to see what I look like? Would that help push some of those guilty feelings aside?

Another memory flooded Harry’s mind, this time of a sixteen-year-old Riddle looking in the mirror, straightening his tie and meeting his reflection’s dark, seductive gaze. A small smile played on his full lips and Harry bit down hard on his own lip.

You want me, Tom taunted. You want me just like everyone else has. I even caught Slughorn looking once or twice. How does it make you feel to know that rather than be with all those others, I’m with you right now? Does it make you feel special?

Harry shuddered in appreciation. He had never felt this kind of intensity before. Sure, he had wanked off, but it was in the privacy of his own thoughts. He definitely did not have someone
saying these things to him, making him desperate before he had even touched himself.

That’s right, Tom soothed. Give in to me, there’s no need to fight. I’m right here, I’m not going anywhere. We have all the time in the world.

Harry let out a whimper, his hand immediately slapping over his mouth in horror.

No need to feel guilty, Tom said in amusement. You want this, I know you do. Why fight what you want? You’ve already sacrificed so much… let yourself have something purely for you this time… you deserved it…

“Tom,” Harry whispered in a strangled voice, before shaking his head. “C-Can’t…”

Says who? Says your moral compass? Ignore it, focus on me and only me right now.

Harry felt lax against the bed, turning his face to press it into the cool material of the pillow.

Tom sent him another memory, a view of another wizard, eyes scrunched up in pleasure and head tipped back slightly. It wasn’t the man who held Harry in fascinated arousal, but the sight of Tom’s hands, long, slender fingers splayed out on the man’s chest. Despite the delicate appearance, they were forceful in holding the man down as he writhed in pleasure and Harry gave a low moan.

Take off the rest of your clothes.

Harry did so quickly, shedding his jeans and underwear and throwing them to the side. His cock lay stiffly against his lower stomach and Harry turned away, not wanting to acknowledge the effect that Tom’s voice had had on him.

Look at yourself, Tom ordered. Do it.

Reluctantly, Harry glanced down towards his erect cock.

Do you see what I can do to you? You haven’t even touched yourself. The Boy Who Lived, hard purely through my voice alone. Don’t worry, it’s nothing new, I’ve had plenty of others writhing at the mere sound of me.

“D-Don’t want to hear about your sexual escapades,” Harry ground out, forcing his tense muscles to relax.

Are you jealous? Tom asked in amusement. I’m not with those others, am I? I’m with you, right where I want to be.

Even though he knew it was all lies, that Tom was only here because he was quite literally trapped in Harry’s mind, Harry couldn’t help letting Tom’s soft voice pour into every fibre of his being. He groaned, fingers clenched in a fist on the sheets as he tried to stop himself from touching.

Beg for me.

“N-No,” Harry said through gritted teeth. “I don’t beg.”

You do, for me you do. For me you’d do anything. Isn’t that right? You wouldn’t want to disappoint me, would you?

Harry’s breathing got deeper as he shut his eyes again, shivering at Tom’s voice.

Well? Tom asked. Do you want to disappoint me? Mm?
“N-No…”

I know you wouldn’t. And I’ll reward you… I’ll give you all of me… I’ll give you so much pleasure that you won’t be able to think of anything else apart from me… I’ll make you scream louder than you ever have, all you could ever dream of Harry… you just need to ask for it. Beg for me.

Harry’s knuckles were going white as he gripped the sheets, not wanting to give in but also wanting it more than anything else in the world.

“P-Please…” he stuttered.

Please what?

“Tom,” Harry whined.

Tell me what you want, Harry. I’ll let you do anything you want, you just need to ask.

“L-Let me… let me…”

Yes?

“Let me touch myself,” Harry whispered, feeling guilt rush through his body. But it did nothing to his erection, which stood firmly upright.

I think you can do better than that, Tom scolded and Harry almost cried with frustration.

“P-Please,” he forced out. “Please… let me touch myself.”

Are you begging for it?

“Yes, please…”

Ask me for permission. Ask me for permission to touch yourself.

“T-Tom,” Harry whimpered. “P-Please Tom… please let me touch myself, I-I’m begging you…”

Tom gave a throaty chuckle as Harry let his head drop back on the pillow, eyes stinging with tears of pure frustration. He hadn’t come since November, before Tom had lodged himself in his brain. He’d been too busy to really think about it but now he was so close it was driving him mental.

You can touch, Tom said after a moment’s deliberation.

Harry sighed in relief the moment his hand came into contact with the sensitive skin of his cock. He fisted a hand around it, slowly stroking up and down and feeling all the tension in his body slip away.

Look at yourself, Tom said quietly. The Golden Boy… sneaking away to wank off… if only they could see their Saviour now.

Harry cried out, back arching as he quickened his pace, sliding his palm over the head of his cock and collecting the pre-cum that had gathered there.

Say my name. Say who’s doing this to you.

“Tom,” Harry groaned out, spasming slightly when his hand brushed against his sensitive slit. “Fuck, Tom…”
Harry could feel Tom’s triumph racing through his veins and a flood of memories invaded his mind, Tom’s memories of his conquests in various positions, all with the same blissed-out expression on their faces. A couple were even on their knees, looking up at him with adoration clear on their faces, begging to be touched.

But Harry rejected these memories of unknown Hogwarts students, turning his face away from them and instead sending one thought over and over again to the Slytherin.


*You want me?* Tom asked in smug satisfaction. *Is that what you want? For me to be here right beside you, replacing your hand with my own?*

He sent another image, this time of his own hand on another student’s cock, teasingly sliding up and down as slow as he could. He showed Harry images of his hands all over their bodies, feathery light touches gliding over sweat-glistened skin and making his escapades cry out in pleasure.

Harry let out a shuddery gasp, feeling a familiar knot in his stomach as his hips jutted erratically, Tom’s soft laughter echoing through his skull.

*Tell me what you want,* he told Harry. *Say it, tell me and I’ll let you cum.*

“You,” Harry forced out in a moan. “J-Just you.”

*Say my name. Tell me who it is exactly that you want.*


*Yes,* Tom hissed in satisfaction. *Let go, Harry, let it all go.*

And Harry did. He came with a cry of ecstasy, cum splattering his stomach and hand and as he did so, he let all the stress go. The stress of Voldemort controlling him, of his imminent death and of the guilt that threatened to consume him at the idea that he had just climaxed to Tom Riddle’s voice.

His back arched up as shudders of his orgasm raced through him, making every nerve in his body come alive and Harry swore nothing in the world had ever felt as good as this just had. After what seemed like an age but was probably only a few seconds, his body went lax, falling limp into the sheets and Harry gasped for air.

His heart was thudding erratically against his chest and the cum on his skin was going to start drying but Harry didn’t care. He didn’t have a care in the world, and decided that if Voldemort was to turn up now and kill him, he’d gladly let him.

For several minutes he laid there, catching his breath and allowing his pulse to return to normal. Tom whispered a cleaning spell in his mind and immediately the evident of Harry’s recent activity vanished off his skin. Harry sighed in relief, stretching out on the bed.

“Tom?” he murmured sleepily, pressing his face into his pillow.

*What?*

“Thank you,” Harry said simply, and was soon asleep.
Harry woke up the day after Valentines’ Day feeling confused. He had slept soundly, without any nightmares and woke up feeling oddly refreshed and complete. It took him a while before he remembered what he had done the night before.

“Ah, fuck,” he groaned, falling back against the pillows. What on Earth had he done?

Harry couldn’t believe that he had actually done that. He had jerked off, with Tom Riddle watching him and talking to him. And the things he had said… Harry swore again as he desperately tried to push the memories aside, before they threatened to consume him and force him to do something stupid, like try and obliviate himself.

You’re not going all guilty Saviour on me now, are you? Tom asked in amusement.

“Don’t talk to me,” Harry grounded out as he fumbled for his clothes.

Did anyone get hurt? No, I don’t think so. Therefore, there’s no reason to feel guilty.


You just jerked off, Tom said in a bored voice. Congratulations, you are the first person in history to ever do so.

Harry pushed the curtains around his bed and aside and went to the bathroom, intending to take a shower as hot as possible to scrub away any trace of last night.

He let the water heat up until it started to burn but still it stood under its spray, pressing his forehead into the tiles and trying to wipe the memories away. It would really be the cherry on top of the cake if Snape were to go finding this memory in one of their lessons.

Tom thankfully stayed silent as Harry quickly dried off and got dressed, heading down to the Great Hall for breakfast without waiting for Ron or Hermione.

He felt too ashamed to face them.

The food tasted like dust in his mouth, and Harry struggled to swallow it, instead staring dully down at his plate. Even Hogwarts seemed to be mocking him.

Room of Requirement? Tom suggested quietly as Harry pushed his plate away uneaten. He nodded numbly and got up, the bench scraping against the stone floor under him.

He headed towards the third corridor, not really paying attention to anyone around him.

When he got to the Room of Requirement, and entered his usual training room, Harry headed over to sit down on one of the chairs, eying the mannequin. He didn’t really feel like fighting today.

Oh, stop with the pity party, Tom snapped at him.

“I can’t help it!” Harry snapped back, equally as annoyed. “I just jerked off to my future murderer, so I’m sorry that I’m not gleefully skipping around the castle!”

Did you like it?
“What?” Harry hissed.

_Last night, did you enjoy it?_

“I-I… it doesn’t matter if I did or not! I-It was wrong!”

_Says who?

“Says me! Y-You’re a murderer, a sick, depraved-”

_Not yet, Tom said sharply. The person you're describing hasn’t done any of those things, yet.

The ‘yet’ didn’t go unnoticed to Harry.

_All you did was give into your desires, Tom said smoothly. That’s all. You didn’t kill anyone, you didn’t hurt anyone. You simply gave into what you wanted. And why not? Don’t you deserve that? One tiny evening against the expanse of all the months you’ve given up fighting as a mascot for the Ministry. You could even think of it as clearing your mind of worries in order to be in peak condition to fight Voldemort. Are you still stressed out?_

Harry frowned, thinking about it. Apart from his obvious stress at what he had done to Tom’s voice, he felt rather calm and relaxed. Yesterday getting into a relationship seemed like the most important thing but today… today he couldn’t care less.

_You see? Tom said in a soft voice. No harm done, don’t worry, you aren’t tarnished. You’re still their Golden Boy.

Harry snorted at the absurdity of Voldemort comforting him but he didn’t bother to fight against it. He was tired of fighting, he just wanted to have that same bliss he had felt in the first few seconds after waking up.

“I guess so…” he said slowly. "But never again, I mean it. I can't... urgh, I can't even think about it-"

_Enjoy the last moments of your life, if you are so keen to end it.

“I’m not keen to end it, I just don’t want to become a Dark Lord with Voldemort.”

_Same difference.

Tom sent another memory Harry’s way, of another cauldron catastrophe in Potions back in 1943. Harry felt a glimmer of amusement despite himself, and after a moment’s deliberation sent Tom one of Seamus’s many explosions throughout his years in Hogwarts.

In response, Tom sent him the memory of a third year’s charm going wrong and antlers growing on her head.

_They went on like that for half an hour, exchanging memories of their time at Hogwarts, and Harry was surprised to find himself actually enjoying this, last night's events forgotten for the moment. Here, in the Room of Requirement, their training at the back of his mind, Harry found an odd peace in sharing stories with the man who would grow up to kill his parents.

It worried him for a bit, before Tom sent him the same image of himself from last night, the one where he was looking into the mirror. After that Harry felt another wave of calmness claim him, and forgot about his role as the Boy Who Lived._
“I didn’t grow up well,” he said finally, into the quiet of the room.

*With those muggles?*

“Yeah, my aunt and uncle. T-They… they were…”

He swallowed heavily, and felt Tom prodding tentatively at his memories. He allowed the Slytherin through, and allowed the memories to flood his mind, of the birthdays he spent forgotten in the cupboard under the stairs, of Dudley and his friends chasing him around the school, holding him down and twisting his arm until he cried and then how Petunia would snap at him when he tried to tell her.

He showed him the boiling hot summers spent outside in the flowerbeds, watching through the window at Dudley gulping down glasses of lemonade, and how Vernon would banish him to his tiny bedroom if he got in the way of the TV.

Tom’s anger was subtle at first, but then it enveloped him like a tsunami.

*Filthy muggles,* he spat. *How can you tell me they don’t deserve to die? Every one of them is rotten to the core-*

“No, they’re not,” Harry said tiredly. “The Dursleys don’t account for all muggles, just as you or I don’t account for the entire wizard population.”

Tom scoffed in disbelief, so Harry sent him another memory. This time it was of a little girl he had once seen playing in the park near his house, her parents watching her with smiles on their faces, praising her when she brought them back a stone she had found.

Tom turned away with disgust at the latest memory and Harry sighed in defeat. He sent the memory of the most recent Christmas with the Weasleys, the one Tom was with him for. He showed him the Weasley brothers laughing around a game of Exploding Snap, and of Quidditch with all the Weasley children outside.

Tom seemed to relax at this, and Harry smiled gratefully.

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After two hours in the Room of Requirement, Tom had finally suggested that they actually train, and Harry had done a couple of rounds of fighting with the mannequin, which he emerged from victorious and pleased with him. Tom had grudgingly admitted that he had improved quite a bit, and Harry had felt a rush of pride for himself.

He grabbed a some food from the kitchen – Tom demanded a couple of different pastries – before heading back to the Room of Requirement.

*I want you to face the boggart again,* Tom told Harry.

Harry nodded, and made his way over to the closet that rattled every few minutes. He took a deep breath, going through all the spells he had learnt in his mind.

“Alohomora,” he said, and the door of the closet slowly creaked open.

Immediately there was a cackle, similar to Tom’s laugh but it held none of Tom’s warm gleefulness. It was just cold and harsh and sent a shiver through Harry.
“Harry Potter,” the boggart disguised as Voldemort hissed as it glided out the closet towards him.
“The Boy Who Lived…”

It lifted its skeletal hand, gripping Voldemort’s wand between its finger as it pointed the end at Harry.

Harry forced himself to breathe evenly, gripping his wand tightly by his side.

Focus.

A jet of light shot out of the boggart’s wand towards Harry who threw up a quick *protego*. The spell was instantly cast away and into the nearest wall, which exploded. Harry threw himself to the side quickly, scrabbling to his knees and glancing up to see Voldemort looking at him in amusement.

“You’re going to die either way,” he said in amusement. “Why drag it out? Come on Potter… face your death.”

Harry yelped as another jet of light came shooting towards him, throwing up another defensive spell and watching Voldemort’s rebound back to him.

The boggart carelessly brushed away its own spell as if it were nothing, and came closer to where Harry was on the floor.

Harry threw another shield around him, extending it so Voldemort was forced back and the boggart stumbled slightly, before regaining its footing and continuing to glide towards him.

“Harry… there’s no need for this,” it said silkily. “Don’t you want to be reunited with all your friends? What about your godfather, don’t you want to see him again?”

Harry threw spell after spell but despite them pushing Voldemort back each time, the boggart still came closer, a cruel smile on its face.

Harry tried to throw up another *protego* but panic was already settling in, and his shield fizzed out almost immediately.

He crawled backwards away from the boggart, mind listing all the offensive spells. He considered a Severing Charm momentarily, before realizing that a charm like that would be harmless against the Voldemort boggart.

*Defensive spells*, Tom merely told him and Harry cursed.

Harry turned to throw another spell at the boggart but shock froze him in place when he saw just how close it was. Voldemort was staring down at him curiously, a small smile on his face as he cocked his head.

Harry lifted up his wand to throw out an offensive spell – Tom’s instructions be damned - but then the boggart’s form started shifting, and Voldemort’s face disappeared into blackness as the boggart moulded itself into the same door it had last time.

It stayed as the door for a few seconds, before morphing back into a smirking Voldemort, and then back again into the door.

“*Reducto*,” Harry shouted, watching the light shoot from his wand and hit the ever-changing boggart. It explosion into tiny pieces, which liquified and then joined together, shooting back into
the darkness of the closet.

Harry sat on the floor, breathing heavily as silence settled around him.

“Well…” he said at last. “That was…”

You defeated it, I guess, Tom said abruptly.

“But what was that door? I know you know it, it’s your worst fear,” Harry demanded as he stood up. “It’s appeared twice now, Tom, you might as well tell me.”

I have no obligation to tell you anything, Tom said angrily. We’re here to face your worst fear, not mine, so forget about what you have seen.

“But I can’t just forget about it-”

Try, Tom snapped, and that appeared to be the end of it.

“Alright but… I’m not going to use it against you, you know. I mean, it’s a door, you really expect me to show up fighting Voldemort with a door?” Harry tried to joke, but Tom was still annoyed.

Harry sighed, sitting down in one of the armchairs.

“Look, I’ll drop it, OK?” he said, trying to keep the peace. “Just… stop being so mad at me. If anyone has the right to be angry, its me.”

You? Tom questioned with a snort.

“Yes, me. You deliberately took advantage of my desperate state last night for your own gain and then forced me to spend my half-term training.”

So, you admit you were desperate?

Tom’s amused tone didn’t annoy Harry like it probably should have, instead it just made Harry smile, grateful that he wouldn’t have an angry Voldemort in his head.

“If I had been of the proper state of mind, I would have never done such an action, I assure you,” he said haughtily.

I could have you writhing and begging for me wherever I wanted, even if you were in the ‘proper state of mind’, Tom purred.

Harry repressed the urge to shiver.

When at last Harry made his way back to Gryffindor tower, he was in a much better mood. Currently grinning at one of the many Hogwarts stories Tom was telling him – this one about the time he had spent an entire night in the kitchen, reading whilst nibbling on whatever the house elves would happily give him – Harry opened the portrait and entered the common room.

As soon as he did he saw a flash of curly brown hair, before Hermione had leapt on him and was hugging him tightly.

“Oh, Harry!” she said, hands gripping his jumper. “Where on Earth where you?!”
“Err… training,” Harry asked in confusion as Hermione released him. “Where did you think I was?”

She stared at him with a mixture of sorrow and anguish, before grabbing his wrist and dragging him over to a more secluded spot by the window.

“Hermione, what’s up?” he asked, suddenly worried. “Is it Ron? Did something happen?”

“Oh no,” she reassured him. “But I need to tell you… I-I was doing research for the vessels, and I-I… well I was running out of ideas.”

She bit her lip, sitting down in her chair and waiting for Harry to do the same. Hesitantly, he sat down opposite her.

“I-I didn’t really understand what he needed,” she confessed. “He didn’t give me much to go on, just a magical object. But he rejected everything I showed him, right?”

Harry nodded in confusion. “Yeah, said it wasn’t magical enough or something.”

Hermione nodded frantically. “Yeah so I was confused, and I started researching into cases where wizards and witches have had other souls inside their minds a-and I…”

She trailed off, looking as though she was about to cry.

“Hermione?” Harry asked in concern. “I-I don’t understand, what’s wrong?”

“H-He wants a magic object to suck its power out, right?”

“Yeah, and its energy,” Harry frowned, not understanding where this was going.

“Well… t-the thing is…” she hesitated. “Thomas keeps rejecting these other objects because… because he’s already found a vessel.”

Harry stared at her in disbelief. “W-What? What vessel has he got?”

Hermione looked up at him sadly. “You.”
Hey, sorry for the long wait between updates, I went back to uni for my second year and I've been too busy to update but here you are at long last :) 

This is a bit of an angsty chapter, I hope you don't mind, and hopefully I will be updating sometime this week, quicker than I did before

Many thanks for the continuous love and comments x

For a moment, Harry couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

Tom had found himself a vessel in Harry? No, that wasn’t possible. Why would Tom send him on a wild goose chase if he was draining the magic out of Harry?

Harry paled as the realization dawned on him. Tom had been distracting him. That’s why he wanted him in the library, looking up objects that he knew full well he had no use for. That’s why he had offered the training lessons, as a further distraction before Harry could become suspicious about what vessel he actually wanted.

Harry thought back to the conversation with Tom, when he had told him that the only thing good enough were the Hogwarts’ founder’s items. That had been another wild goose chase, no doubt Tom had been hoping Harry would start a long and pointless investigation into whereabouts the items were.

Harry sunk deeper into his chair, gaping at Hermione.

“N-No,” he mumbled. “I-I’m not… no…”

She nodded. “T-They… what happens is once a spirit lodges in a person’s mind, they begin to use the vessel’s energy and life force to extend their own, becoming more powerful as they do so.”

Tom’s sudden ability to use simple charms, Harry remembered. Had he gained that power by draining Harry? Was that why he couldn’t face the boggarts for long enough?

Harry frowned. He didn’t feel drained though, he hadn’t noticed anything out of the ordinary.

“W-What happens after?” Harry croaked. “After they’ve drained them?”

“Well… they die,” Hermione said quietly, confirming Harry’s worst fears.

He shook his head numbly. “No, you’ve got it wrong, y-you must have. Check again, there must be something else-”

“There isn’t anything else, Harry!” she insisted, as Harry stood up and turned to go to the dormitories.

He needed to think. He knew Tom Riddle was Voldemort, knew he was a murderer and that he
enjoyed the torment and suffering of others he deemed unfit to study magic. But barely an hour ago they had been enjoying each other’s company, sharing memories of Hogwarts, which had been their true home.

As stupid as it may seem, Harry had thought that maybe they didn’t have to be bitter enemies to the end. Sure, Voldemort would kill him, but perhaps Harry could find company in the Hogwarts student called Tom Riddle.

Harry stormed up the spiral stairs to the boys’ dormitories, Hermione following close behind.

“But there is something else you should probably know,” Hermione said desperately as they entered the sixth-year boys’ room.

“What?” Harry asked in a pleading tone, turning to face her. “What is it?”

“In all the cases of possession,” Hermione said slowly. “T-The victims, the vessels, they usually die pretty quickly… much quicker than you… than you…”

“When was I meant to die?” Harry whispered.

“You said it was November that it started, right?”

Harry nodded, and Hermione frowned.

“I-It’s weird Harry, y-you should’ve been dead by Christmas, I-I don’t understand why… I don’t understand why he’s dragging it out—”

Harry gave a humourless laugh. “Oh, so he’s dragging it out, is he?” he said harshly. “Of course he is, why bother granting me a quick death? Do you hear that, Tom? Do you?!”

Tom was silent in his mind, keeping to himself.

In pure anger and frustration, Harry turned and kicked one of his textbooks, sending it across the room and into a wall.

“Harry!” Hermione said in alarm. “I-It’s all right, now we know, w-we can find a solution, force him out—”

“You don’t understand!” Harry said bitterly. “H-He wouldn’t… he wouldn’t do this, he wouldn’t do this to me…”

He trailed off as he realized just what he had said. Then he gave another cold laugh.

“I’m so fucking stupid,” he whispered, sitting down on his bed. “Of course, why the fuck would he care? Was I honestly so thick in the head to think that Tom fucking Riddle wouldn’t want to drag out my death as long as possible?!?”

He grabbed another of his textbooks that had been on his side-table and threw that across the room too, ignoring Hermione’s shocked expression.

“W-What did you say?” she asked in anguish.

“You know what? I’m going to die anyway, so really, who cares if it’s Tom Riddle or Voldemort at this point—”

“That’s Tom Riddle?” Hermione asked, pointing a shaky hand to Harry’s head. “T-The spirit…
“Yeah, I know, I’m housing the future dark lord in my skull,” Harry spat. “Please, tell me what an inept Saviour I am, who offers refuge to the one person he probably shouldn’t.”

Hermione was staring at him, fear and sadness flickering in her brown eyes. She looked torn behind hitting Harry or pulling him into a hug.

“Oh Harry,” she finally settled for saying in a soft voice. “Oh, Harry.”

“I-I just… I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” Harry confessed, his eyes stinging with unshed tears. “What is wrong with me?”

“Nothing’s wrong with you,” Hermione immediately assured him, sitting down next to him. “You’re a good person, that’s all-”

Harry snorted. “There’s good, and then there’s raving mad. Let’s be honest Hermione, I’ve just told you that I’ve had the past self of Voldemort in my mind since November, is your first reaction to tell me how good I am for offering him shelter? He may be sixteen but he’s still an evil git-”

A rush of pain stabbed through Harry and he gritted his teeth.

“Knock it out, will you!” he said savagely, ignoring Hermione’s jump.

“I-I… I suppose it makes sense,” she said faintly. “I-I mean… he did use Ginny as a vessel after all, in the Chamber.”

Harry froze. He had completely forgotten about that. Of course, how could he have not even considered that Tom wanted to use him in the same way? How was it that Tom had managed to charm him into thinking the Slytherin to be simply a misunderstood person, when really he was just looking to achieve immortality? He was just as dumb as everyone else who met him.

Harry thought of the various students Tom had seduced, that Tom had *shown* him. Tom had probably been secretly laughing the whole time, displaying how little he cared for people right in front of Harry’s face but Harry had lapped it all up, lapped up Tom’s lies like some mindless fool.

“Oh yeah… the Chamber,” he said angrily. “The Chamber where I killed the monster roaming the halls of Hogwarts.”

He threw a memory at Tom, of a twelve-year-old Harry stabbing the sword of Gryffindor right through the mouth of the basilisk. Tom’s fury and rage poured over him like molten lava and Harry felt a stab of satisfaction at Tom’s pain. Let him suffer.

“Harry, you need to tell someone,” Hermione insisted, placing a hand on his arm. “You need to tell Dumbledore, o-or even Snape, just any professor, they’ll figure out a way to get him out of your head, you don’t need to die-”

“Tell them then,” Harry said shortly. “Tell Rita Skeeter if you must, I’m sure she’ll get a laugh out of this. In fact, let’s go to Dumbledore right now, I have something to ask him, come on.”

He got up and stalked out of the dormitories, Hermione barely keeping up. Everyone stared at them in surprise as Harry raced through the common room but he didn’t care; he was too fuelled with anger to pay much attention to his surroundings.

“Harry, please, slow down!” Hermione begged, running to keep up with his long strides. “You
need to calm down, we can think about this rationally—"

“"You said I needed to tell Dumbledore, well that’s what I’m doing.”

He practically growled the password at the gargoyle and it gave him an irritated look as it granted him passage. Harry ran up the stairs two-at-a-time as Hermione followed, banging with a fist on the huge wooden door.

“Harry, please!” Hermione cried, tugging on his arm. “Shouting isn’t going to help—”

“Then what is Hermione, mm?” he asked, turning to her. “Tell me what to do. T-Tell me you know how to get Riddle out of my head for good. Tell me a solution and I swear to you, we’ll do it. Right here, right now.”

Hermione fell silent, casting her eyes down as the door opened.

“Mr Potter, I suggest you go somewhere else to have your tantrum,” Snape snapped at him the moment he saw the two. “The headmaster and I are talking—”

“Let them in, Severus.” Dumbledore sounded tired.

Harry brushed past Snape and stopped in front of where Dumbledore was sitting at his desk, his chest heaving with exertion.

“Good evening, Mr Potter, Miss Granger,” Dumbledore said politely, nodding to each of them in turn. “Would you care for a lemon drop?”

“Professor, we-” Hermione began but Harry had had enough.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he said angrily.

“Mr Potter,” Snape hissed, storming over to Dumbledore’s side. “How dare you speak to the headmaster in this way? Twenty points from Gryff-”

Dumbledore held up a hand to stop Snape, and the professor scowled at him.

“You knew I had to die,” Harry said accusingly to Dumbledore. “Y-You knew, you knew Voldemort would have to kill me to destroy the horcrux inside me, that there was no other way.”

Dumbledore’s blue eyes pierced through him, before he dipped his head slightly in acknowledgment.

“I did,” he said gravely.


“Why did you keep it secret?” Harry fumed. “Why would you let me think that I had some hope, some chance of defeating him? I never had a chance! I was doomed the moment he killed my parents, and you knew it.”

“Potter, the only way the Dark Lord can be defeated is with all the horcruxes destroyed,” Snape spat out. “It’s not as if we’re just leaving you to die, there is reason—”

“Oh, so that’s it, is it?” Harry said humourlessly. “You put me up on this pedestal as your Saviour, and then you leave me to die so you can live happily ever after. Did it ever occur to you that maybe I wanted to live too?”
“Harry, no-one here wants you to die,” Dumbledore said in a solemn tone. “I have been endlessly searching for another answer for all these years, hoping that there was some other way. Trust me when I say if there had been any other, we would have taken it. I did not tell you because I did not want you to live a life with that hanging over your head. You deserved better than that, and you still do.”

“Well it doesn’t matter anyway,” Harry said bitterly. “Because even if there was another way, Riddle would have killed me. He’s in my head, you know, slowly suck out my life force.”

“What in Merlin’s name are you on about?” Snape seethed.

“Tom Riddle, the sixteen-year-old Riddle from the diary, he’s in my head,” Harry told them. “That’s why the link between Voldemort and me is so strong. It’s like you said, Professor, it’s like there’s twice the horcrux in me. It’s because there are two residing inside me now.”

A shocked silence settled over the office. Hermione was staring at Harry worriedly, while Snape looked as though he couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Only Dumbledore remained unmoved, head bowed slightly in thought.

“How long?” Dumbledore asked finally, his eyes serious.

“November, I found the diary in the library.”

“I see.” Dumbledore pressed the tips of his fingers together, brows furrowed in thought as he looked somewhere over Harry’s shoulder. Snape glanced at Harry suspiciously, before leaning down to Dumbledore.

“Headmaster, could it possibly be true?” Snape hissed. “S-Surely… surely there can’t be two horcruxes, the diary was destroyed-”

“Evidently not, Severus,” Dumbledore said lightly.

“What do we do?” Hermione asked in a fearful voice. “H-He’ll kill Harry, we have to get him out-”

“Unfortunately, Miss Granger, it’s not that simple-” Dumbledore began, but Snape interrupted him.

“We’ll force him out,” he spat, whipping out his wand and approaching Harry but the next second a huge force had pushed out of Harry and threw both him and Snape to the floor.

Harry groaned in pain as his head hit the floor, gripping his hair in fistfuls as the stinging pain slowly disappeared.

“I think Mr Riddle would object to that,” Dumbledore said, frowning as he watched Snape get to his feet, the ex-Potion’s professor’s face flushed with anger.

“So what do we do? Wait for the Dark Lord to just destroy both of the horcruxes? Is that even possible?” Snape asked.

Dumbledore leaned back in his chair, hands clasped over his lap.

“For now, we do nothing,” he said in a sombre voice. “Especially as it is quite evident that Mr Riddle can indeed hear everything Harry hears. For now, we must continue as normal, Harry will continue to have lessons with Professor Snape, and what went on in this room must not leave it.”
He looked at them all in turn with a serious expression. “It is imperative that no-one else must know about this. It is of the upmost importance. Do I have your understanding?”

Snape dipped his head as Hermione murmured an agreement, and Harry looked up at Dumbledore before also giving a stiff nod.

“You two may return to your dormitories,” Dumbledore told Harry and Hermione, and they both turned to leave the office.

Harry glanced over his shoulder at Dumbledore, who was still watching him gravely as Snape whispered something in his ear.

And then the door closed behind him and Harry could see no more.

They didn’t speak on the way back to the tower, though Hermione kept sending him worried glances. Harry ignored her, the anger slowly fading out of him and being replaced with exhaustion.

As soon as they reached the common room Harry headed off to the dormitories, not even looking at Hermione as he left.

He threw himself onto his bed, ignoring the confused glances of Dean and Seamus who were getting ready for bed. He drew the curtains around his bed and threw up a muffling charm, staring up dully at the thick red material of the canopy.

“Why don’t you just end me already?” he whispered tiredly. “You know I’m going to die anyway, why not do it sooner rather than later?”

Tom didn’t reply.

“I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised,” Harry sighed. “You’re Tom Riddle, Heir of Slytherin. What did I think? That you were actually a good person? Anyone who could justify the torture and murder of innocent people isn’t a good person. Just go ahead and kill me, Riddle, I don’t care anymore.”

And, rolling over in bed, Harry shut his eyes and waited for sleep to claim him.
Harry went through the next few days in a numb trance. He hung out with Ron and Hermione, played chess and went out to Hogsmeade but the mask of happiness he tried to wear never quite reached his eyes, and both of them noticed.

Ron tried to talk to him once about it but Harry had brushed off his concerns, telling him in a curt tone that he was fine, and not to worry about it. Ron had dropped it after that, though he still looked at Harry with worry. Hermione was also full of concern for him, but didn’t try to talk to him about what had been said in Dumbledore’s office.

Tom was also completely silent in Harry’s head, and Harry didn’t bother to try and talk to him. When lessons started up again, Harry threw himself into them, but he was distracted and began to make simple mistakes, even with Hermione whispering corrections to him.

Now that Tom had stopped helping him in Potions, Harry’s potions came out botched again. He tried to read the Half-Blood Prince’s corrections, but he was still distracted and always ended up stirring his potions more than he should, or adding the wrong amount of ingredients. Slughorn would eagerly approach his cauldron at the end of every lesson, expecting another streak of genius, but would quickly back off every time, a look of disappointment clear on his face.

A week after Harry had found out about Tom’s real intentions, he was out on the Quidditch pitch, sitting on the grass with his Firebolt next to him, staring up at the evening sky.

For a moment he just stared at the darkening blue expanse, thinking how up there in the universe, Voldemort didn’t matter. Voldemort didn’t pose a threat to them, Voldemort was nothing to them. Harry bitterly wished he could feel that carefree, wished that his only worry at the end of each year was exams, rather than a murderer out for his blood.

Out the corner of his eye, Harry noticed a group of students slowly approaching him, talking together. He frowned, it was still February and thus the weather was still cold and harsh – who would be outside in this weather?

“… and so my mother sent me a huge pack of them,” one voice said above the rest, scoffing. “Honestly, I could ask for anything from her and she’d sent me a hundred more than I actually need.”
Harry’s heart sank as he recognised Malfoy’s voice, and he watched as the group of Slytherins moved closer.

“My mother acts like I’m still in first year,” Harry heard Zabini say. “She acts as though I’m starving here.”

Malfoy went to say something, but then he caught sight of Harry sitting alone, and grinned.

“Well, well, what have we got here?” he sneered, pushing past the others to come closer. “I don’t think Quidditch is on this late at night.”

Crabbe and Goyle guffawed and Malfoy smirked as he settled in his leadership role.

Harry chose not to make a retort, ripping up grass and shredding it in his fingers, jaw clenched.

“I think he’s giving you the silent treatment, Draco,” Zabini grinned, looking over to the blonde boy.

“Oh no, whatever will I do?” Malfoy said in a mocking tone. “Noticed you aren’t Slughorn’s favourite anymore, Potter. You must be devastated.”

“Piss off, Malfoy,” Harry growled, reaching for his broomstick and getting to his feet.

“Oh you’re not leaving, are you?” Malfoy asked in fake-concern. “I thought we were having a conversation. Come on, Potter, have a chat with me.”

“Go have a chat with your cronies,” Harry said, not in the mood for a verbal sparring match with the blonde Slytherin.

Malfoy appeared to think about it for a moment, before shaking head. “No, I don’t think so. I think I want to talk to you.”

“Why are you sitting out here all alone?” Zabini asked him. “Why is the poor, wittle Saviour all alone?”

“Yeah, where’s your mudblood girlfriend and that Weasel?”

Harry’s hand clenched on his wand, and he spun around to face the group of Slytherins.

“Don’t call them that,” he spat.

“Why?” Malfoy asked in surprise. “It’s what they are, isn’t it? The little mudblood and the blood traitor-”

Harry shot a stinging hex out his wand but Malfoy deflected it easily, delighted in how easily he had gotten to Harry.

“At least I have friends,” Harry growled at him. “You can’t seriously call these goons you hang out with friends, can you? You wouldn’t have to pay them to hang out with you if you did.”

Malfoy’s face scrunched up in anger and he sent a jinx Harry’s way, but Harry dodged it.

“Better that then the company you keep,” Malfoy sneered.

“Who says we’re hanging out with him for his money?” Zabini laughed. “We have plenty of our own money. You see Potter, unlike Weasley, we don’t have to grope and beg our Saviour friend
Harry threw another stinging hex, this one at Zabini and the Slytherin’s eyes widened momentarily in surprise before it hit his shoulder.

“You’ll pay for that,” he snarled at Harry, grabbing his shoulder.

“Where are your friends anyway?” Malfoy asked in a mocking tone, grinning as he watched Harry get angry. “They off snogging in a closet somewhere? Aw, poor little Boy Who Lived is all alone, no-one wants to be with the Saviour, the only good you’ll do is dead-”

Harry dropped his wand and broom, charging at Malfoy and knocking the taller boy to the ground. Malfoy yelped in surprise and cried out as he hit the ground, Harry reaching back a fist to punch him but before he could, he was dragged off by the burly figures of Crabbe and Goyle.

“How dare you?” Malfoy spat, pushing himself off the dirt and pushing himself down. “You want to fight, Potter? I’ll show you a proper wizards’ duel, not that pathetic muggle fighting.”

He drew out his wand again, pointing it at Harry and Harry struggled to get out of the way, elbowing Crabbe in the stomach before diving for his own wand.

Just as his fingers touched it however, Malfoy’s hex hit him, and Harry felt the familiar jabbing pain of a stinging hex go through his side. He winced but brushed the pain off, grabbing his wand and rolling onto his back to point it at Malfoy.

“Flipendo!” Harry shouted and Malfoy was thrown back, landing in a sprawling heap on the grass. When he pushed himself up, his blonde hair was in his eyes, and his face was flushed slightly in anger.

Zabini was glancing between him and Harry, and Harry suddenly felt as if he’d made a terrible mistake in humiliating Malfoy in front of his classmates.

“Diffindo!” Malfoy roared, and a jet of pink light burst out of his wand. Harry tried to jump out the way but he felt the spell shoot past his arm, tearing his cloak and cutting into his skin.

Harry hissed in pain and he looked down at the cut across the side of his arm.

“Draco, c’mon, let’s just forget about him,” Zabini murmured to Malfoy, tugging on his arm and glancing worriedly to Harry. “It’s not worth it.”

“Yeah, go on, run away,” Harry spat at Malfoy. “Hide behind your friends. Are you a Slytherin or what, Malfoy?”

Malfoy scowled at him, pushing Zabini aside as he faced Harry head on.

“I’ll show you what a Slytherin can do,” he hissed. “Cruci-!”

He didn’t get to finish the incantation however, as another force pushed it way out of Harry, flinging Malfoy away and throwing him to the ground.

Shocked at Tom’s sudden involvement, Harry lifted his wand and pointing it at Malfoy, who was still on the ground.

“Leave, Malfoy,” he ordered. “Leave me alone.”

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” Malfoy jeered, getting to his feet. “So you can run along and tell
all your Gryffindor friends how the great Harry Potter beat Draco Malfoy in a duel. Well, I’ll show
you that Malfoys are never beaten—”

He threw another spell at Harry and Harry didn’t even need to do anything as Tom’s protection
spell dissolved the spell instantly. For the first time, Malfoy looked uncertain at what to do.

“Scared, are you?” he asked, though there was a note of hesitation to his voice. “Stop hiding
behind your protection shield, Potter. Fight me, like an actual wizard.”

He drew his arm back to throw another curse at Harry, but the next second Malfoy had been lifted
several metres up in the air, and then slammed straight back down again.

“Potter!” Malfoy screeched, getting to his feet shakily. “Y-You’ll pay for that! I’ll tell my father
about this, and you’ll be sorry! Y-You and that band of mudbloods and blood traitors you keep
around you!”

Zabini grabbed Malfoy’s arm, dragging him away from Harry and Malfoy hastily went with him, a
scratch across his cheek from where he had hit the ground.

He sent a glare at Harry, before hurrying off with Zabini, Crabbe and Goyle lumbering alone
behind them, sending more hateful looks Harry’s way.

Harry watched them go, the cut on his arm beginning to dribble blood down his skin and stinging
with pain as the bitter wind hit it.

*Episkey.*

A warmth spread throughout Harry, healing his cut until all that remained was a tear in the fabric
of his cloak and rapidly drying blood. Harry’s exhaled heavily as he forced his tense muscles to
finally relax after the confrontation with Malfoy.

“Self-preservation, I guess?” Harry spat to Tom, grabbing his broom off the grass.

*Yes.*

“Yeah, wouldn’t want your precious vessel to be damaged now, do you?” Harry huffed. “Want it in
perfect condition for your takeover.”

*Something like that.*

“Don’t know why you even bother,” he ground out as he started to make his way back to the
school. “Voldemort’s going to kill me, remember? You probably should have found a vessel that
wasn’t going to die.”

*Probably.*

“You know, you could at least appear to be sorry,” Harry seethed. “You tricked me into letting you
stay in my mind whilst I did research for ‘potential vessels’.”

*You couldn’t have gotten rid of me even if you did know the truth,* Tom scoffed.

“I could have,” Harry said angrily. “I-I could have stabbed myself with a basilisk fang. I was
thinking about it, you know? Down there in the Chamber, the skeleton was right there and you
would have been powerless to stop me—”

*Go on then.*
“Huh?”

*Stab yourself with a basilisk fang, let’s see what it does,* Tom taunted him. *Since you’re already going to die, why not do it on your own terms?*

Harry paused, narrowing his eyes at Tom’s response. Part of him actually wanted to do it, to go down into the Chamber and just end it all. He wouldn’t have to wait any longer, and he could get rid of both horcruxes inside him and bring Voldemort closer to his death.

But at the same time, Harry knew he couldn’t do it. How would Ron and Hermione react to the news that he’d committed suicide? Hermione would perhaps understand, but she wouldn’t be able to forgive him for that. He was meant to be a fighter, he couldn’t just give up.

Sighing, Harry resumed walking back to the castle.

You can’t do it.

“Fuck off,” Harry snapped at Tom, and the Slytherin fell silent.

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It was in the Great Hall at dinner the next day when an agonizing flash of hurt tore through Harry. He cried out in pain, the others around the table looking up at him in alarm.

“How’s Harry? What’s wrong?” Harry heard Ron ask him, but he couldn’t reply, his jaw clenched tightly shut and his fingernails digging into the hard wood of the table.

He could feel it again, that ice-cold liquid slowly dripping through him, freezing his blood and locking all his muscles into place. Voldemort’s presence swept through him like a plague, trying to reach every part of him but it wasn’t strong enough, and kept being pushed back.

Harry pushed away from the table, clambering to a standing position but then his knees buckled beneath him, and he fell to his knees on the hard, stone floor.

“So close…” Voldemort’s cold, harsh voice hissed in his mind. “So very close…”

Harry shouted out, pressing his forehead against the cool floor as he tried to force the other out of his head.

“Harry!”

“What’s wrong with him?”

“Give him some space!”

Voices were speaking all around him, different hands grabbing at his arms, trying to pull him in all different directions. Harry weakly tried to bat them away as Voldemort attempting to force himself into Harry’s mind.

It was like trying to fit something that was simply too big, and Harry suddenly felt a rush of burning hot as Tom struggled back against the force that threatened to suffocate him in Harry’s mind.

As Harry tried to draw oxygen into his burning lungs and force Voldemort out of his mind at the same time, the people surrounded him seemed to grow exponentially. Harry’s mind flashed back to the nightmare, where the faceless cloaked figures had surrounded him, coming closer and closer.
and a surge of panic rushed through.

Magic seemed to crackle through every fibre of his being as both Harry and Tom sought freedom from the crushing weight of Voldemort, and it burst out, throwing several students back.

There were sounds of pain and outrage and the crowd had backed away from Harry, but he still felt desperate for air.

“Harry,” Harry heard Dumbledore’s calm voice break through his mind. “Fight this Harry, you can do it.”

Harry let out a strangled gasp, images of Voldemort sitting in Riddle Manor, one long-nailed finger stroking Nagini’s head as he furrowed his brow in focus flashing through Harry’s mind. Harry’s strength evaded him quickly and he slammed his head against the stones, not even noticing the pain flash through his mind.

‘I can’t do it’, Harry thought desperately to himself. ‘I can’t keep him out, he’s winning’.

As weak as Voldemort had become, Harry was weaker still, and he whimpered in pain as his muscles clenched up. He pushed against Voldemort, throwing the other somewhat out of his mind but the Dark Lord returned, pushing back against Harry.

“Harry, concentrate, don’t let him in…” Harry heard Dumbledore murmur, but the headmaster’s voice seemed miles away.

Harry felt exhausted, felt his hold on keeping Voldemort at bay waning, but then a new surge of energy rushed through him. Tom’s anger felt like it was burning him from the inside, but Harry could only feel relief after the freezing cold touch of Voldemort.

Tom pushed against the presence of Voldemort, claiming this vessel for himself and refusing to die by his own hand, and the combination of both Harry and Tom’s efforts pushed Voldemort further out of the reaches of Harry’s mind. The dark wizard tried to cling onto Harry’s mind, anger raging through him stone-cold, but he was already weakened by the attempt to possess Harry, and at last Harry felt the remnants of Voldemort’s presence dissipate.

Harry lay there on the cold ground, staring up at the enchanted ceiling of the Great Hall, feeling every muscle in his body ache and burn.

Tom was equally as drained as Harry felt, and he could still feel Tom’s anger through him, slowly ebbing away to reveal the Slytherin’s fear.

“Is he gone? Harry?” Dumbledore was saying to him, but Harry couldn’t reply. He couldn’t do anything but stare up at the ceiling, marvelling at how carefree the stars looked.

His last coherent thought was again how nice it would be to be that untroubled, before the darkness claimed him.

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His dreams came in short bursts, of London streets in the dark, rain pouring down as figures huddled under umbrellas hurried past.

He was a child again, no more than seven or eight, staring out at the street below, watching all the people past, never even glancing over to him. It was like they didn’t even notice him, the boy staring through the slightly cracked window.
Anger and hopelessness flood through him, and the next thing he knew Harry was in the Dursleys’ garden, repotting plants in the sweltering heat, the sunburnt skin on his shoulders peeling as he watched Dudley sitting in the air-conditioned living room, a tub of ice-cream on his lap and eyes fixed intently on the TV.

He had never felt so alone, but the Harry in the Dursleys’ backyard only felt sadness and defeat, not the overwhelming bitterness and anger that had consumed him when Harry had been staring out the window.

One thought drifted to the front of his mind. I had never been in that window, he thought to himself. I don’t recognise that street at all.

His mind turned to Hogwarts, of Ron and the rest of the Gryffindors screaming their voices hoarse when they won the House Cup in Harry’s first year. And then later on… wandering the dark halls at night, sneaking away to the girls’ bathroom to have conversations with an thousand year old basilisk who knew more about the castle than any of the professors did…

Finally, Harry found himself back in his first year, in the empty classroom that had housed the Mirror of Erised in 1991. He approached the mirror, expecting to see his parents but instead the mirror morphed into a door, an old, cracked door that Harry had seen twice before but had no explanation for.

His hand shakily reached for the old brass doorknob, breath catching in his throat before he swallowed and twisted the doorknob.

The door wouldn’t open.

Harry felt a bubble of panic rise up his throat as he tried to open it again with no avail. He threw his entire bodyweight again the wood, praying above anything that the door would open but it stood solid and firm, a cold harsh entity in his mind.

Harry cried out, hitting the door with his hands until he had splinters and blood slowly trickled down his wrists and then he slid down to the floor, staring back into the Mirror of Erised.

Harry could see nothing.

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“Get them out of here!”

“You know I don’t have the authority!”

Angry, hushed voices made their way to Harry’s ears and he frowned slightly. He just wanted to sleep, he felt so exhausted and this bed was so comfy…

“They have no right! Simply ridiculous – what do they expect to achieve?”

The voices were making Harry’s head hurt, and he groaned.

“Harry?” another voice said, right by his side. “Are you awake?”

“Give him some space,” a new voice said gruffly. “If that had happened to me, I wouldn’t wake up for a hundred years.”

Harry heard the voice next to him – a girl’s voice – squeak in distress.
“What if he never wakes up?” she asked fearfully. “W-What if... what if You-Know-Who gave him brain damage? Oh god, oh no-?”

“Don’t be stupid, Harry hasn’t got brain damage,” the other voice said, but it sounded unsure.

Harry mumbled under his breath, and he felt someone’s light touch on his arm.

“Harry?” the girl asked hesitantly. “Are you awake? Can you hear me?”

“Open your eyes, mate.”

Slowly, Harry cracked his eyes half-way open, only to shut them again at the onslaught of blinding light. He gave another groan.

“S-Should we tell Madam Pomfrey?” the girl asked.

“I think she’s still talking to McGonagall.”

“Ron...?” Harry slurred. “Hermione?”

“Harry, you’re awake!” Ron said in relief.

Harry hesitantly opened his eyes again, letting them adjust to the light slowly before he glanced around. He recognised the infirmary instantly, he had been in here so many times. To his left was Ron, who was half-leaning over him with a look of concern on his face. To his right, Hermione was also looking concerned, her hand resting on Harry’s arm. She removed her hand, clasping her hands together and watching him fretfully.

“Are you OK?” she whispered.

“What happened?” Harry asked hoarsely, his throat dry.

Ron immediately turned to his side and grabbed a glass of water.

“Here, drink this.”

Harry accepted the glass, gulping down the cool water and inwardly sighing as it cooled his parched throat.

“I-It was pretty terrifying,” Ron told him once Harry had handed the empty glass back to him. “You sort of just... collapsed.”

“Collapsed?”

Ron nodded, sharing a look with Hermione.

“You were screaming,” the brunette witch said softly. “A-And thrashing on the floor, w-we didn’t know what to do. We tried to help you but...”

“It was weird, this spell kind of... came out of you,” Ron tried to explain. “Pushed us all back. You gave us a scare, Harry, we were at a loss. You should’ve seen Dumbledore.”

Harry looked at him in confusion but it was Hermione who answered.

“I’ve never seen him look so worried,” she said in a quiet voice. “He was at the professors’ table and then all of a sudden... h-he was right next to us, trying to snap you out of it.”
What was going on?” Ron asked Harry. “Was it You-Know-Who? Did you see someone attacked?”

“No, it was…” Harry tried to explain, but then remembered what Dumbledore had said about not telling anyone. But surely Ron didn’t count? Ron had been with Harry and Hermione throughout almost everything that had happened with You-Know-Who.

He looked over at Hermione, who nodded at him.

“H-He’s trying to possess me,” Harry admitted to Ron, who gaped at him.

“What?” he whispered in horror. “Possess you?”

Harry nodded glumly. “The mind link between us… it’s stronger now. So he can… he can cross it.”

“And in the Great Hall, that was…?”

“Yes,” Hermione murmured. “It’s getting worse, isn’t it?”

Harry didn’t reply, but he didn’t need to. They all knew that it was only a matter of time before Voldemort would take Harry over completely.

Outside the infirmary, the angry voices were still speaking, now too quiet to make out the words.

“It’s Madam Pomfrey and McGonagall,” Ron told Harry. “They’ve been going on like that for a while, I have no idea what they’re talking about. You, I presume.”

“Great,” Harry muttered.

The voices of Madam Pomfrey and McGonagall suddenly stopped, and there was silence before the door was pushed open and Dumbledore entered, eyes drifting over to the trio of friends.

He smiled gently. “Good afternoon, Harry.”

“Afternoon?” Harry asked in confusion, glancing between Ron and Hermione, who nodded at him. “H-How long have I been asleep for?”

“About sixteen hours,” the headmaster answered, standing by Harry’s bedside.

“Ah, good, you’re awake,” Madam Pomfrey said, bustling into the room and catching sight of Harry immediately. “Bit of a nasty fit you must’ve had there, but I’ve got just the thing, don’t worry.”

She left to go into her office, before returning with a couple of vials, one filled with red liquid and the other with a cloudy, white one.

“Drink these up, there you go,” she said briskly, handing the vials to Harry and waiting until he had gulped them down before moving on.

Harry made a face at the taste of the potions, Ron taking them from him and setting them to the side.

“Headmaster, I’m afraid he’s still there,” Madam Pomfrey told Dumbledore pointedly in a low voice, brow furrowed with annoyance and Dumbledore nodded.
“Not to worry, Poppy,” he said in a reassuring tone. “I’ve told Minerva to keep them busy until I can talk to him.”

Harry looked to Ron and Hermione again, but they were looking just as lost as he was.

Dumbledore waited until Madam Pomfrey had disappeared back into her office before turning back to Harry.

“What do you remember?” he asked Harry.

Harry frowned. “I—I… I remember coldness. Lots of coldness. A-And… darkness. I could see him, sir, I could see Voldemort in my head, in Riddle Manor.”

Ron flinched at the mention of Voldemort’s name, but Dumbledore was nodding solemnly.

“He’s getting stronger,” he murmured, more to himself than anyone.

“Sir, who is waiting for you? W-Who is ‘he’?” Harry asked bewildered. “What’s going on?”

Dumbledore glanced briefly over to the door before back again at Harry.

“I’m afraid it’s not good news,” he said gravely.

The three students looked at each other, worry etched on their faces.

Dumbledore gave a sigh, and it sounded tired. “I’m afraid the Minister of Magic has found out about this, Harry. Rufus Scrimgeour and several Aurors are here to take you away.”

“Take him away?” Ron blurted out in disbelief. “Take him where?”

Dumbledore looked over his half-moon spectacles at Ron sorrowfully. Hermione seemed to catch on and gave a small gasp, grabbing Harry’s arm again.

“To Azkaban, Mr Weasley,” Dumbledore replied.

Chapter End Notes

(btw on a second reading of this chapter I can't help but read innuendos everywhere so I'm sorry, that was seriously not on purpose)
Azkaban prison. Harry’s mind was swarming with images of the building that he had seen on the front of *The Daily Prophet*. The ghastly, tall building in the middle of the Northern sea, battered by the harsh winds.

“But they can’t!” Hermione cried. “It’s illegal, Harry’s still a minor, they can’t!”

“He’s still Harry, he isn’t a Dark Lord,” Ron was protesting. “Just find a way to keep You-Know-Who out of his brain, Azkaban is just…”

“It’s ridiculous!” Hermione finished for him. “It’s preposterous. What is Scrimgeour thinking—”

“He’s thinking that he has a duty to Britain, Miss Granger,” Dumbledore said somberly. “He knows the consequences of Voldemort taking over Harry’s mind, and that he is getting stronger. He does not want a massacre on his hands. Putting Harry in Azkaban is the only choice he can see.”

“B-But… But there must be some other way,” Hermione said desperately.

Dumbledore shook his head. “Not for the Minister. I’m hoping to come to some other kind of arrangement—”

“Lock me up in Hogwarts if you have to,” Harry interrupted him. “Seal me away with as many charms as you need, I don’t want to hurt anyone—”

“Of course you don’t,” Dumbledore said gently. “I will of course be requesting that the Minister instead thinks of keeping you in Hogwarts, under my guard. You are after all, the Boy Who Lived and it wouldn’t do well for Scrimgeour to put the public’s Saviour in Azkaban.”

“I’m sure he’d twist it to be something positive,” Ron growled and Harry couldn’t help but agree.

Scrimgeour was paranoid, just as the public was with Voldemort on the loose. Harry wasn’t entirely sure that if the Minister revealed that it was possible for Voldemort to possess Harry that the public wouldn’t attack him themselves.

There was suddenly a loud commotion outside the infirmary, and McGonagall’s voice could be heard rising above everything else.

“You cannot go in there! I told you, the headmaster will be with you when he can!” she was saying angrily.

“I’m afraid this matter cannot wait!” another gruff voice said back, and then the doors burst open to reveal Rufus Scrimgeour, McGonagall next to him with her arms crossed and glaring at him.
“I told him that he couldn’t be here, Albus,” McGonagall said to Dumbledore. “But he insisted-”

Dumbledore held up a hand to stop her. “It’s quite alright, Minerva. Minister, if you would like to head up to my office now-”

“There’s no need for that, Albus,” Scrimgeour said. “I see Harry Potter is here-”

“You just try and take him, see what happens,” Ron tried to snarl at the Minister, but it came out weak.

“I think it would be best if you two return to your classes,” Dumbledore told Hermione and Ron. “Minerva?”

McGonagall nodded stiffly as Ron and Hermione slowly got up, Ron shooting suspicious looks at Scrimgeour.

The formidable witch escorted the students out of the infirmary and the door swung shut behind them, leaving Harry alone with Dumbledore and the Minister of Magic.

“Harry is aware of your plans for Azkaban,” Dumbledore told Scrimgeour. “As I’ve told you before, Minister, I believe this to be unnecessary-”

“Unnecessary?” Scrimgeour growled. “The boy is being possessed by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named! I can’t think of any place safer-”

“Azkaban is hardly safe for a sixteen-year-old boy-”

“I wasn’t talking about his safety,” Scrimgeour said grimly, jerking a finger in Harry’s direction. “Don’t play ignorant, Albus, you know exactly what would happen if He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named got into his mind. Is that what you want for Hogwarts?”

“What I want is the safety of my students,” Dumbledore told him firmly. “All of them,” he added, looking to Harry. “And last I checked Harry is still a student here.”

“And I want the safety of the British public!” Scrimgeour hissed. “I don’t want to do this, but I’m afraid I have no other choice-”

“One always has a choice, Minister,” Dumbledore commented. “If Harry remains at Hogwarts, I can keep an eye on him. Azkaban will only put him further into Voldemort’s grasp.”

“Nonsense-”

“He freed his followers once, what makes you so sure that he won’t manage to get Harry as well?”

There was silence as Scrimgeour stared at Dumbledore in disbelief. He seemed to be thinking over the headmaster’s words, lips turned down in a grimace.

“Hogwarts is not safe!” he finally said in an aggressive tone. “As long as this boy remains here, every student’s life is in danger!”

“Harry would be kept away from the other students, of course,” Dumbledore said. “Do you believe that I would ever let harm come to my students, Minister? Do you think me to be that careless?”

“I believe that you are not the great wizard you once were, Albus, and that you put too much faith in people,” Scrimgeour retorted. “The Dark Lord is coming for this boy, mark my words, and when he does we’ll all be very sorry indeed.”
“I think that by now everyone is quite aware that Voldemort is after Harry,” Dumbledore noted.

Scrimgeour straightened up, looking at Dumbledore with open resentment.

“This is not the end of the matter,” he told the headmaster. “I have a duty to the public, Albus, and I will not be swayed from sending a minor to Azkaban if that is what needs to be done. He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named will not kill any other innocents, not on my watch.”

He turned and stalked out of the infirmary without a look back, letting the door slam shut behind him.

“Am I going to go to Azkaban, sir?” Harry whispered, breaking the uncomfortable silence.
“Because if I need to… if it will keep people safe-”

“It will not, Harry,” Dumbledore said gravely. “But I’m afraid, no-one is safe anymore.”

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Harry lay in the infirmary that night, Madam Pomfrey having insisted he stay under her care until the next day to make sure he was alright.

Now that he was finally alone with his thoughts, he took the time to think over his options. He knew Voldemort was going to possess him, and then kill him after he had done what he wanted to do. Harry had accepted his death by now, really there were worst things that could happen.

Of course, he had hoped Voldemort would have dealt his death quickly, but that didn’t appear to be the case anymore. No matter where he was, anyone near him was going to be in danger when Voldemort took over his body. If he were in Hogwarts, innocent students were going to die. If he were in Azkaban, whoever they had locked up was going to die. They were criminals, yes, but that didn’t mean they deserved to die.

Maybe Voldemort would even use his body to recruit Azkaban’s inmates over to his side. Harry was sure it wouldn’t take much persuading for some of them.

Now that the reality of his position in the war had truly sunk in, the idea that Harry was once worried about Tom killing him and regaining his physical form was laughable. He wondered what Tom would do when he was physical again. Would he go and join forces with his future self? Or would he go out to become a Dark Lord in his own right?

Harry reached into his mind, trying to find Tom’s presence, and felt a tiny shadow of him at the back of his brain. Tom had been well and truly exhausted by Voldemort’s attack, and Harry remembered the fear that had radiated from the Slytherin after Voldemort had gone.

“Tom?” he whispered into the silent infirmary. He was the only patient, but it wasn’t lonely. On the contrary, it was quite nice to have space to himself.

The shadow pulsed slightly, but didn’t speak.

“What are you going to do, Tom?” Harry asked. “When you take over my body? Where will you go?”

He thought back to Hermione’s words, about how he should have been dead by Christmas and frowned. Why was Tom dragging out his death? Usually Harry would have expected it to be so the victim felt as much pain as possible, and Tom felt satisfied in his place of power but Harry wasn’t feeling any pain.
He didn’t feel drained, or tired. In fact, after the initial few weeks of Tom’s residence in his head, Harry had felt completely fine.

“Why are you dragging out my death?” he asked the silent shadow. “Maybe it’s because you know that if I die, so does a piece of Voldemort’s soul, of your soul. But then what are you doing? Why are you still in my mind?”

Harry lifted his hand to lightly touch the lightening bolt scar on his forehead.

“I think I had a dream about your past,” Harry continued. “About that window, in London. I-I don’t really understand what I was seeing but… I felt your loneliness. And I’m sorry, I know how it feels.”

He let his hand drop back down to the bed, staring up at the dark ceiling. Why had Tom assisted him in pushing Voldemort out of his mind before? Harry figured Tom would have wanted to help his future self, not hinder him.

Harry hesitated.

“I-If you need energy…” he said slowly. “You can take some of mine. I-I mean, I’m a dead man walking, aren’t I? S-So… if you need some, just to get your strength up… you can.”

The shadow pulsed in response.

Harry tried to delve back into his lessons, but it was almost impossible with the threat of Voldemort looming over his head.

Tom was slowly recovering, taking snatches of Harry’s energy to restore himself and Harry swore if he thought about it, he could feel the groginess at the corner of his subconscious. Every teacher had been informed of keeping an eye on Harry, and Harry noticed that some of them trod carefully around him and kept their wands at the ready, as if he might suddenly throw a killing curse at them.

On Friday afternoon, Harry entered the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom alongside the rest of his classmates, sighing in relief.

He never thought he’d be glad to have a class with Snape, but at least Snape didn’t treat him any differently. He still sneered at him, and looked for reasons to dock points but it was better than the constant looks of fear Harry had become used to in some other classes.

“I expect silence when you enter my class,” Snape snapped at them, and a hush immediately drew over the room. “Today we are going to be studying Inferi, chapter ten of your textbooks will go into more detail-”

Snape stopped speaking, his eyes narrowed in irritation as he stared at the student who had interrupted him. Malfoy had shot his hand up in the air, looking rather smug.

“Mr Malfoy?” Snape asked smoothly. “You have a question?”

“Professor, I was just wondering why were weren’t going over more protection spells?” Malfoy said innocently, but his thin lips were pulled up in a smirk. “Especially if Potter’s going to go raving mad and start hexing us-”
Noises of protests came from the Gryffindors – most of them had no idea what Malfoy was even talking about – whilst the Slytherins broke out in grins and sniggers. Snape was unamused though, staring at Malfoy with an unreadable expression.

“I have not the slightest idea what you are talking about,” he said airily, turning back to the board.

He flicked his wand and the words ‘INFERI’ appeared on the board in thick white chalk. But Malfoy wasn’t finished.

“But surely you’ve noticed it,” Malfoy piped up. “All the teachers, sir… they’re all acting strangely… and that evening in the Great Hall. They say he’s finally off his rocker, is that right, Potter? Is it St. Mungo’s next?”

“Mr Malfoy, please concern yourself with chapter ten of your textbook, rather than the dreary affairs of Mr Potter,” Snape said curtly. “And if I hear one more sound from any of you about anything that is not related to this class, I shall start handing out detentions.”

Malfoy fell silent, though he darted suspicious looks at Harry. Harry was just grateful that the class was finally concentrating on their work, and he opened his textbook to chapter ten and began to read.

Does he ever stop talking? Tom asked in a tired voice.

‘Tom? You’re OK?’ Harry thought hesitantly.

Am I OK? Tom repeating in a mocking tone. You’re the most oblivious Saviour I’ve ever heard of.

‘Do you remember what happened?’ Harry asked him internally.

Not much.

‘You’re getting stronger’, Harry told him. ‘Future you anyway, Voldemort. He’s getting stronger and I-I… I don’t know how much longer I can keep him off.’

Then you die, Tom said simply, his voice missing the snide tone Harry had become so used to.

Yes, Harry thought to himself. Then I die.

It was only when half the lesson had already gone by and Snape had started asking questions, that Harry realized he hadn’t even been reading the chapter, just staring at the picture of an Inferius.

Harry wondered if he would end up like that, a half-decayed body reanimated and sent to do Voldemort’s bidding, eyes sockets empty and bones jutting out of pale, rotting skin.

He shuddered, and could feel Tom’s equal disgust in his mind at being forced into mindless slavery.

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That weekend, McGonagall escorted Harry to one of the many towers of Hogwarts, where he was to stay for the foreseeable future.

She unlocked the door and opened it, reveal a circular room with a four-poster bed in the centre. A little to the side was a door, leading into what Harry assumed to be a bathroom, and on the other side were two armchairs with a small table in the middle.
It looked like a normal, private bedroom, and Harry wondered if this room was a replica of the ones given to the Head Boy and Girl.

He dragged his suitcase into the room, setting it down before sitting on the bed, looking around him. McGonagall gave him a sad smile before backing out of the room, the door closing behind her.

Up above the rest of the students, in this circular room with only the view of the lake, Harry felt more alone than ever. The only thing that seemed to make the room feel less lonely was that Tom was still here, even if they weren’t exactly on the best terms. It was all Harry had.

Ron and Hermione had promised they would still see him, and Harry had classes as normal but he felt like he was living with the Dursleys all over again – trapped and isolated from the rest of the world.

McGonagall had explained to him on the way to the room that in order to appease Scrimgeour, Dumbledore had this room prepared, numerous spells and enchantments on it to protect both Harry and the other students.

Right now it felt like Harry’s tomb.

It was only nine o’clock in the evening, but Harry got ready for bed and slid under the covers, wishing he were back in his old dormitory, with Neville and Ron’s light snoring, and the way Dean would always stay up the latest, reading football magazines by wand light.

This quiet, empty tower didn’t feel the same, and the sheets around him felt wholly unfamiliar. He tossed and turned amongst them for hours, but couldn’t find a position comfy enough and eventually gave up, moving to sit by the window. He stared out at the grounds, still wet from the rain earlier that day. Clouds were still covering the night sky, so Harry couldn’t see any stars or the moon, and he wished he could take his broom out for a bit.

Instead he sat with his memories, reliving the days of flying in a small breeze, the cheers of the people in the stands as another goal was made. The days where the only thing on his mind had been the small, golden Snitch.

It took a while before he realized Tom was watching his memories too, a quiet viewer in the back of his head.

Harry stopped thinking of Quidditch then, his mind immediately going back to Voldemort and his imminent death, and he leaned back against the windowsill, his thoughts turning dark once more.

In response to the sudden emotional pain that flooded through Harry, Tom forced some of his own memories to Harry’s mind – of Potion lessons, different coloured concoctions bubbling in various cauldrons as pale, slender-fingered hands expertly chopped up ingredients.

He showed Harry several lessons and various Potion explosions from other students, but lingered on the memories of a younger-looking Slughorn praising him, telling him that Tom had a ‘streak of genius’ the likes of which he had never seen before.

“Vain git,” Harry whispered, and Tom gave a hollow laugh.

They sat there in the silence, staring out at the dark Hogwarts ground, letting their memories of Hogwarts drift about in Harry’s mind. There was no order or meaning to the memories, but that was what Harry liked best.
Hogwarts had been his home – and Tom’s too – so even the simplest memory of walking down the moving staircases held so much more meaning for them than it would for any other student.

When Harry finally retreated back into bed, he fell asleep quickly, his dreams filled with Hogwarts’ feasts and Quidditch matches.

“Malfoy’s been talking, the ferret,” Ron scowled as he twisted to stare at the Slytherin table.

“About what?” Hermione asked in confusion, sipping her pumpkin juice.

“What do you think? About Harry.”

Harry tried to ignore the stares of the professors and various other students as he tore off a bit of his croissant and popped it in his mouth. The pastry was tasteless in his mouth, and Harry struggled to swallow it.

Most of the Hogwarts students had no idea that anything was going on with Harry, his fits had become something of a known occurrence, though this was the first time they had witnessed it. They probably just thought Harry’s scar had flashed in pain again. Harry snorted. If only they knew the truth.

There was a sudden commotion outside the Great Hall, and Harry – alongside the rest of the student body – immediately glanced up.

There were loud, argumentative voices that could be heard, though Harry couldn’t make sense of what they were saying, and whispering suddenly broke out again, curious looks from every house table darting to the double doors.

They suddenly opened, and Argus Filch hurried through, lips pursed in annoyance as he practically ran up between the tables to the professors’ table.

Dumbledore was not present that morning, and so Filch muttered something to Snape and McGonagall. McGonagall immediately went pale, the only colour in her face two red spots of anger on her cheeks, whilst Snape’s expression only hardened marginally.

By now the entire hall was staring at the interaction between Filch and the two Head of Houses, talking between one another as they waited to see what would happen.

“What’s he doing here?” Ron frowned, eyes glancing between the double doors and the professors’ table at the opposite side. “What’s going on?”

Snape looked over to Harry, and Harry tried to figure out what the professor was thinking but it was futile. Snape’s face was an unreadable mask.

“Get them out of here!” McGonagall snapped suddenly, pushing herself away from the table and striding down between the tables. “I will not have them interfering!”

“Harry,” Hermione hissed, her eyes filled with fear. “I-I think it’s the Ministry, Scrimgeour must be back-”

“What does he want now?” Ron fumed. “Dumbledore won’t let him do anything-”

“Dumbledore’s not here,” Harry said, glancing over at the Headmaster’s vacant seat.
“Maybe he’s already talking to them?” Hermione said hesitantly. “Maybe- Harry, wait! Where are you going? Wait!”

But Harry had already pushed away from the table, following where McGonagall had gone and ignoring the sudden burning stares of everyone around him.

“Harry, stop-” he heard Ron hiss but he quickened his pace, the commotion outside becoming louder the closer he approached the double doors.

He was not going to let the Minister just come in and escort him out like he was some kind of criminal. Harry figured after all these years he deserved better than that. He was going to meet them face on and enter Azkaban as a free man if that’s what it took.

He pushed open the doors, instantly spotting McGonagall and a man he didn’t recognise in a heated conversation.

Another two identically-dressed men stood nearby, frowning, and Harry figured that they must be the new guards of Azkaban. He started to approach them, to demand that if they wanted to take him away then they’d do it now, without fuss, but a hand suddenly clamped down on his shoulder.

“What do you think you are doing?” Snape hissed in his ear, yanking Harry back.

Harry tried to struggle out of his grip but it was no use. Snape’s grip was like iron.

“Let me go,” he snapped back. “If going to Azkaban is what it takes for Hogwarts to be safe, then I’ll do it-”

“You foolish, arrogant Gryffindor!” Snape snarled. “You think it is that simple? You think the Minister is just going to give you a nice, comfy room in one of the most dangerous prisons in the world, and the Dark Lord will just forget about you?”

“It’s better than if I just stay here,” Harry spat. “I’m not going to be responsible for hundreds of deaths-”

“Don’t be fooled Potter, Scrimgeour is a dangerous man, and he will stop at nothing to ensure the Dark Lord doesn’t succeed in his plans-”

“I think we can take it from here,” a smooth voice interrupted them, and Harry looked up to see one of the Azkaban guards standing there, a steely glint in his eye. “Let the boy go.”

Snape’s hand released Harry and Harry moved away from the professor, straightening his robes.

“You will come with us,” the other guard said in a quiet voice. “We will not hesitate to use force if you do not comply.”

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” Harry said through gritted teeth.

The guard raised an eyebrow, but turned and started to walk out of the Entrance Hall.

“What? You cannot do this, I won’t allow it!” McGonagall suddenly argued, standing in front of Harry and the guard leaving. “You bring the Minister down here, I will hear the words from his mouth only. And Albus, someone get Albus-”

“I’ll see to it that the headmaster is made aware of this,” Snape said icily, before stalking out of the hall, black cloak sweeping along the ground behind him.
“I’m afraid you’re going to have to stand aside,” one of the guards said coldly to McGonagall. “By orders of the Minister.”

“You get him down here,” McGonagall fumed. “You get him down here and then I’ll stand aside, but not before!”

The other guard stepped forward, reaching into one of his cloak’s pockets to withdraw a folded piece of parchment secured by a wax seal.

McGonagall’s hands shook as she took the parchment, adjusting her glasses as she stared in disbelief at the official seal. Her mouth opened and closed for several seconds, before she pressed her lips together. Her fingers made quick work of the wax seal, cracking it before unfolding the parchment. Her eyes trailed over the scrawling writing, her face slowly draining of colour.

“Permission from the Minister himself,” the guard who had handed over the parchment said coldly. “You’ll see his signature at the bottom.”

The man who had been talking with McGonagall stepped up, a smile on his lips though it didn’t reach his eyes. Harry wondered who he was.

“We must be off,” the man said politely, dipping his head to McGonagall. “We mustn’t waste any more time.”

One of the guards suddenly pushed Harry from behind and he stumbled forward, beginning to follow the other guard who had turned and was striding out of the Entrance Hall.

McGonagall stood frozen in the middle of the Hall, her eyes still glued on the letter.

“Harry?” a voice suddenly called, and Harry glanced behind him to see Ron and Hermione, the doors pushed open just enough to allow them to see in.

Hermione went as pale as McGonagall when she saw the guards escorting Harry out of the hall, and anger suddenly filled her eyes.

“Are they taking you?” Ron asked in horror.

“You can’t take him to Azkaban!” Hermione cried out, trying to push past to Harry but McGonagall held out an arm to stop her.

Harry tried to send a reassuring smile their way, but it probably ended up like a grimace.

“No, but Harry!” Ron called out. “They’re not-

The rest of Ron’s sentence went unheard as the doors slammed shut between them, and Harry was outside the castle.

The wind whipped around him and Harry shivered, wrapping his arms around himself to try and keep warm. He hadn’t brought a cloak with him, thinking that he had only been going down to breakfast that morning.

Then again, he wouldn’t need a cloak in Azkaban, Harry thought to himself. They’d probably only take it away.

He wondered what the meals would be like in the prison. Definitely not Hogwarts standards, but hopefully it was edible.
Harry, the two guards and the other man made their way down the stone path, away from Hogwarts and towards Hagrid’s hut. There was no-one else outside, and the silence felt like it was smothering him – a thick, uncomfortable blanket surrounding the four people.

What’s going on? Tom asked in alarm.

‘We’re going to Azkaban’, Harry told him. ‘Scrimgeour doesn’t want Voldemort possessing me in Hogwarts’.

Tom’s presence seemed to flutter around in Harry’s mind, battering itself against Harry’s skull. Harry winced at the dull ache.

‘It’s the only way’, his mind hissed to Tom. ‘I don’t want to go either, but it’s this or killing everyone in Hogwarts, and I can’t have that happen’.

Get those people away from me, Tom growled back, the battering growing more insistent.

‘I can’t’, Harry tried to tell him. ‘They’re Azkaban’s guards, they’re here to escort me-’

You don’t understand, Tom said, apprehension filling his voice. These aren’t Azkaban’s guards.

Harry frowned. ‘Yes, they are, ever since Voldemort came to power Azkaban’s changed, these are the new guards-’

This is a different uniform, Tom snarled. I recognise it, we have to go, you have to leave-

“Ah, Mr Potter,” a gruff voice interrupted Tom, and Harry looked around in surprise to see that they were already down the hill, on the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

Scrimgeour was watching him, a solid figure against the wind that had pick up, frown lines etched into his face.

He nodded to the man who wasn’t with the guards, and the man immediately strode off towards the forest.

“Where are you taking me?” Harry said, suddenly nervous over Tom’s warning. “I-I’m not going to Azkaban, am I? Where am I going?”

Scrimgeour gave him a look of regret, before shaking his head.

“No,” he said quietly. “You’re not going anywhere.”

Harry felt relief flood through him, but Tom was still fearful, throwing his presence against Harry’s skull in attempt to escape.

The idea that something could make Tom Riddle so scared made Harry take a few steps back from the Minister, but he immediately bumped into the hard figures of the men he had thought to be guards.

“What’s happening?” Harry whispered, eyes wide but a sudden gust of chilly wind made him shiver.

That’s funny, Harry thought to himself. It’s unusually cold for March.

That’s when he saw it. A shadow making its way out of the Forbidden forest, the strange man leading the way. Around his feet, grass began to curl and freeze over, and Harry felt a sudden hole
in his chest, like a punch to the gut. The scaly, rotten hands reached out for him, and Harry would have run away if his feet hadn’t been frozen to the ground.

There was a Dementor at Hogwarts, and the man was leading it straight to Harry.

Chapter End Notes

For those of you wondering why Scrimgeour is going to the extremes, they're in a middle of a war and paranoid, and the Ministry's involvement was vital for how I wanted the story to progress, just so you guys don't think I'm going from 1-100 for no reason x
There was a high-pitched ringing in Harry’s ears as he watched the Dementor glide closer to him. The Minister had taken a few steps back, discomfort clear in his eyes and even the men behind Harry had backed up.

_Run, Tom hissed in his ear. Run!

Harry tried to, but he was frozen in fear. The Dementor came even closer, decayed hands reaching for Harry and the ringing in Harry’s ears turned into a woman’s scream. His mother’s scream.

It vibrated around his skull, drowning out any coherent thoughts he might’ve had, and Harry felt his legs start to weaken underneath him.

“_Not Harry, anyone but Harry!” the voice begged in pure terror, and Harry could see flashes of green light behind his eyes.

Tom’s surge of energy and desire to escape struck every nerve ending in Harry’s body, and he stumbled back, panic beginning to take over his mind.

_A Patronus, summon a Patronus_, Tom screamed at him.

Harry’s hand made its way into his trouser pocket, searching for his wand in desperation but he couldn’t find it, instead yanking out a couple of spare quills and some parchment. They fell to the grass uselessly, and Harry reached into his other pocket, fingers gripping the slender wood of his wand.

Tom’s fear at his own death consumed Harry, and the wand nearly slipped out his fingers. He fumbled for it, tightening his grip and forcing it up at the Dementor, but the words to the incantation had escaped him.

The Dementor was close, too close now, and it was only coming closer, it’s hands reaching greedily for Harry, already sucking the happiness out of him and their surroundings. Harry couldn’t even feel the presence of the members of the Ministry of Magic anymore, they might have even fled, but Harry couldn’t find the strength to run. His energy was waning out of him, and despite Tom’s short, frantic bursts of energy, it wasn’t enough to help.

His shoes slid on the rain-soaked grass and Harry fell backwards, landing sprawled on the grass. The Dementor came to claim its prize, and Harry’s view of the morning sky was blocked by the hooded figure, the ripped hole in its face where the mouth was supposed to be opening wider and wider.

Harry’s mind was awash with terror and he couldn’t think straight. His mother’s scream still pierced through his thoughts and he kept seeing that deadly green light, over and over again, killing the woman who stood in front of him protectively.

Tom had fled into the back of Harry’s mind, pressing himself against Harry’s head and Harry felt both of their horror.

The Dementor swooped down, skeletal hands by the side of Harry’s head and Harry felt something being yanked inside of him. His very soul was ripping in two, being dragged out of its body by the creature above him and the scream in his mind became louder, mingled with Harry’s own scream.
He felt something push its way up his throat, blocking his airway and Harry struggled to breathe, body convulsing as he tried to push the lump away but it kept coming up, forcing its way out.

Another scream joined Harry’s, but he couldn’t figure out where it was coming from. It seemed to be everywhere at once and was the most terrible sound he had ever heard.

The lump suddenly forced its way out of Harry’s throat, and Harry felt another immense pressure from behind his eyes that also thrust its way out.

Slowly, a small, glimmering white light floated away from his face, writhing in the frosty air. Harry stared at the light, pain stabbing at his heart as he saw it battered against the wind. It was squirming, twisting away from the Dementor but its attempts were futile – the Dementor was unrelenting.

Harry thought he heard someone shout his name, but all he could concentrate was the brilliant ball of light in front of him, slowly drifting away towards the Dementor’s gaping mouth.

Was that his soul? Harry didn’t know. He didn’t feel like his soul had been yanked out of him. Surely if he had, he wouldn’t be able to think right now?

And yet there was something strangely familiar about the small white light, about the way it clung desperately for life and writhed away from the Dementor. Slowly, realization dawned on Harry.

That wasn’t his soul, it was *Tom’s*.

Harry tried to reach out for the light, to save it from the hideous death of the Dementor’s Kiss but he couldn’t move. He was so tired, so very tired…

Another shout, and then another, much bigger brilliant white light pierced through the Dementor. Harry squeezed his eyes shut from the intensity of the light, and he felt oxygen being pulled back into his burning lungs as the Dementor was thrown back.

Someone had come to save him, Harry thought to himself. He could finally breathe again, but he was still aching in every fibre of his being.

“Harry!” a girl’s voice was screaming, and Harry tried to turn his head in the direction of the voice but it hurt too much.

He saw a flash of red-hair out the corner of his vision and his lips turned up into a small smile. Ron and Hermione. They had thrown the Dementor away. They weren’t going to let him die.

Slowly, the small ball of light that was Tom’s soul drifted down, resting on the wet grass. It pulsed rapidly, the light slowly ebbing away from it.

Harry stared at it sadly. No, he couldn’t let it die. He couldn’t let *him* die. Maybe if Tom Riddle was lying on the grass himself then he could, but he couldn’t let that tiny ball of light go out. It looked harmless, too innocent, and Harry had sworn to himself that no more innocents would die.

Harry struggled to roll to his side, clawing at the grass as he tried to push himself across the ground. He had to find something, had to find *anything*…

His hands grabbed a hard, thin shape in the ground, and he pulled it towards him, blinking at it in confusion. It was one of his quills, one of the ones that had fallen to the ground when he had been searching for his wand.
Desperately, Harry reached out a hand and cupped it around the soul, pressing his closed fist to the quill. 

He released Tom’s soul, and the light fell onto the quill, hovering there momentarily, before it was absorbed into the object.

Harry fell back against the grass, hand clutching the quill tightly.

“Harry!” he heard Ron’s voice say, before his two best friends were suddenly beside him, grabbing at his clothes. “Talk to us Harry!”

“Quill…” Harry mumbled, trying to press the quill into Ron’s hand. “Take… the quill…”

“What? Hermione, I think he’s delusional, what’s he saying?” Ron was asking in panic.

“Quill,” Harry said more insistently, eyes already drifting shut in exhaustion. “Quill… keep… safe…”

He felt Ron take the quill off him and sighed in relief, before falling into that welcome darkness.

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The Infirmary was becoming almost like a second dormitory for Harry. Madam Pomfrey had even told him once that the number of times he had been in here was more than the entire Gryffindor Quidditch team’s time in there put together.

So Harry was not surprised when he finally cracked his eyes open to see the familiar room. He shifted a little to get more comfortable, and then drifted off back to sleep.

When he woke up again, a large array of sweets was sitting on the desk beside him, and Madam Pomfrey was resting a hand against his forehead, checking his temperature.

“Afternoon, Mr Potter,” she said briskly, grabbing a potion off the desk. “Drink up.”

Harry didn’t even question what was in the potion, he knew that no matter how weirdly they tasted, all of Madam Pomfrey’s healing concoctions did their job. So he gulped down the contents of the tiny vial in one and the medi-witch took it off him.

She bustled around him, plumping up his pillows and rearranging the sweets on his table and Harry looked at her in confusion. Though Madam Pomfrey cared for all of her patients with fiery protection, she never usually stayed right by their side. Her lips were pursed though, and she watched the door to the infirmary carefully, as if something might come in and take Harry away.

“What’s going on?” Harry asked her. “How long have I…? W-Was it Quidditch?”

Madam Pomfrey looked at him. “You’ve been unconscious for two days, Mr Potter. And no, it wasn’t Quidditch.”

“Then what-”

“Are you up for guests?” she interrupted him. “I believe your friends want to visit. I had them stay away while you recover, you went through a lot of trauma.”

“Err… y-yeah, can I see them?”

She nodded and left his side, going over instead to the infirmary doors.
She opened one and peered out, and then huffed. “How long have you been waiting here?” she asked in a sharp tone, but there was a concerned undertone to it.

“Is he awake?” Ron asked, peeping around the witch. His face broke into a grin when he saw Harry, and he brushed past to go over to his side. Behind him, Hermione followed, her eyes slightly red from tears.

“You absolute idiot, Harry!” she said, shaking her head in disbelief. “W-Why would you… what in Merlin’s name made you go with them?!?”

“I-I…”

Harry frowned, trying to figure out what Hermione was talking about, before he remembered with a start. The people from the Ministry… the letter from Scrimgeour… walking down the hill from Hogwarts before… before…

Harry’s jaw clenched as he remembered the ghastly feeling of the Dementor hovering above him, its ripped mouth sucking the very happiness out of him… sucking out his soul…

But it didn’t suck out his soul. It sucked out Tom’s.

“The Dementor…” Harry whispered.

“It was horrible, mate,” Ron said quietly, looking nauseous at the memory. “I-I knew those guys weren’t from Azkaban – dad had shown me pictures of the new uniforms of the guards – and I tried to warn you, b-but they rushed you out.”

“Dumbledore was furious,” Hermione told Harry. “After you’d gone McGonagall marched straight to his office and we followed, but Dumbledore was already on his way down with Snape.”

“I’ve never seen him so mad,” Ron said in bafflement. “H-He… it wasn’t like Dumbledore at all, not the Dumbledore I’ve seen. He went straight outside, his wand all out and… and then we saw you. You were just lying there, with the… with that thing above you.”

“I couldn’t breathe,” Hermione mumbled. “I-It was like there was no happiness left in the world. I wanted to just curl up in a ball and cry. But then Dumbledore cast a Patronus – it was amazing, actually – and the Dementor went away.”

“Then there was like this intense showdown between Dumbledore and Scrimgeour,” Ron said, waving his hands in the air as if recreating the scene. “They didn’t talk at all, just stared at each other. He left in the end, Scrimgeour that is, and he took those guys with him and the Dementor.”

“You’ve been in here for two days,” Hermione whispered. “We didn’t… we didn’t know if it had succeeded. We didn’t know if you were ever going to wake up.”

“We’ve been outside the infirmary for ages,” Ron added. “Madam Pomfrey wouldn’t let us in.”

Harry stared at them in disbelief, before his gaze moved to the ceiling, deep in thought. It hadn’t sunk in that the Minister of Magic had tried to have him executed yet. He remembered how Snape had told him mere moments before that Scrimgeour was dangerous, and would do anything for the light side to win. Harry hadn’t realized what that had entailed at the time.

He can come so close as well… Tom had already been torn out of his body –
“Ron,” Harry said suddenly. “Where’s my quill?”

Ron shifted and frowned at him. “The quill?”

“The quill I gave you, you still have it, right?” Harry asked desperately. “I-I told you to keep it safe, I said-”

“I know what quill you mean,” Ron said slowly, before sharing an uncomfortable look with Hermione. “I-I was really confused why you wanted me to keep it… b-but I did, I had it in my hand and then McGonagall was asking me what you had given me and I…”

He trailed off, biting his lip.

“Where is it?” Harry asked, hardly daring to breathe. “What did you do with it?”

“I didn’t do anything!” Ron insisted. “I-I told McGonagall that you had given me the quill and to keep it safe, and then Dumbledore-”

“Dumbledore took it from him,” Hermione finished. “He seemed to know exactly why you had given it to Ron, though we both were completely lost, and he asked for it.”

“I-I figured I should,” Ron said in bewilderment, looking between Harry and Hermione. “I mean… it’s Dumbledore, I thought it would be safer in his hands if it were important-”

“Where’s Dumbledore?” Harry demanded, struggling to get out of bed but Hermione pushed him back. “I need to see him, let me out-”

“Mr Potter, you will return to your bed this instant,” Madam Pomfrey exclaimed, pushing Hermione aside to shove him back against the pillows. She pulled the sheets right up to his chin. “I won’t have you straining yourself, not after… not after what happened.”

Her hands seemed to shake as she said it, and she turned away quickly.

“I have to see him!” Harry insisted. “It’s important-”

“Awake at last, Harry?”

Harry turned to see Dumbledore standing at the entrance, hands clasped in front of him. He peered over his spectacles and his blue eyes seemed to twinkle at Harry.

“Professor,” Harry began. “Y-You have something, I need-”

Dumbledore held up a hand to stop him. “Calm yourself Harry, several things need to be dealt with beforehand. Firstly, I must insist that you follow the orders from Madam Pomfrey – you have been through a tremendous amount of stress and will need time to recover.”

Reluctantly, Harry relaxed against the mattress as Madam Pomfrey handed him a couple more vials. He dutifully gulped them down before she took them away again, and slowly felt the ache in his muscles begin to subside.

“Where’s Scrimgeour?” Harry asked. “I-Is he… does he still want me gone?”

“The Minister is back at the Ministry,” Dumbledore explained. “He’s angry, yes, and I have no doubt that he will make another attempt at… ah, securing you.”

“It’s not legal,” Hermione whispered.
“He’s the Minister, it doesn’t have to be,” Ron said sullenly.

“Scrimgeour is not an evil man, Mr Weasley,” Dumbledore said. “However, desperate times make even the most level-minded man paranoid. He is simply doing what he believes to be right.”

“But he is right,” Harry said, ignoring Ron and Hermione’s protests. “I am a danger, aren’t I?”

“I believe that things may have changed,” Dumbledore said slowly. “And I believe we will just have to wait and see.”

He glanced over to the pile of sweets next to Harry’s bed and smiled, turning one of the cartons so he could see the front.

“Don’t strain yourself, Harry,” he reminded him as he turned away. “You still have many friends here.”

“But sir!” Harry called after the wizard, and the headmaster glanced back at him.

“Yes, Harry?”

“Where… where is my quill?” he finished lamely.

Dumbledore’s lips turned up into a smile that indicated he knew full well that Harry wasn’t just talking about a quill.

“It is in my possession. Get some rest, Harry,” he told the student firmly, before leaving the room.
Harry spent another two days in the Infirmary before Dumbledore came to visit him again.

Now that they knew Harry was out of danger – for now – Hermione and Ron had turned to talk about classes. Hermione brought him his homework, already completely by her and Ron helped himself to the sweets given to Harry by various people.

“Fred and George have even sent you something,” he said in wonder, picking up one of the latest products to hit Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes. “News travels fast.”

“Are you surprised?” Hermione frowned at him. “You do realize Harry was almost killed, right?”

“Yeah but the papers are keeping it all hush-hush, aren’t they?” Ron argued. “I suppose it wouldn’t do well for Scrimgeour for the fact that he tried to have the Boy Who Lived executed to come out in public.”

“Then how do Fred and George know?” Harry asked him in confusion.

Ron frowned, mouth full of chocolate frog. “I did tell Dad, figured he should know, since he’s in the Ministry and all. He must’ve told them. God, Mum’s gonna have a fit when she finds out. Might make him quit his job.”

“Do you think Dumbledore told your aunt and uncle?” Hermione asked Harry in concern.

Harry snorted. “If he did they’d probably start supporting Scrimgeour.”

“But they wouldn’t want you dead,” Hermione insisted. “I-I know they weren’t the best upbringing, but this is something else altogether.”

“Yeah, it’s only a rogue Minister on the loose,” Ron said, pressing his face into the opening of a carton of sweets to find a particular colour. “Oh wait, he isn’t rogue. That’s even worse.”

“You’re missing an awful lot of class,” Hermione told Harry. “It’s especially vital at this time of year, with exams just around the corner.”

“He has all of Easter to catch up,” Ron complained. “Hermione, the guy almost had his soul sucked out, give him a break, would you?”

The doors to the infirmary opened with a creak, and Harry glanced over to see Dumbledore enter the room, dressed in bright blue robes that matched his eyes.

He dipped his head in greeting at the three students. “Nice weather we’re having, isn’t it?” he said cheerfully.
Harry glanced over to the window, where a watery sun had indeed begun to shine.

“Professor-” he began, wanting to ask once more about the quill but Dumbledore stopped him.

“I know what you’re going to ask,” he told him. “And I must ask if you would like to walk with me for a while, Harry. I’m sure Madam Pomfrey won’t object to you being out of bed for a bit.”

Harry paused for a moment, before sliding out from the sheets. He felt a bit exposed, only dressed in his pyjamas and turned to try and find his clothes.

Madam Pomfrey had left them on the table not covered in sweet wrappers, and Harry grabbed them, quickly darting behind the curtain to get changed. Once he was dressed he came back out, and Hermione and Ron had gone.

Dumbledore had not moved, but when he saw Harry was ready, he turned and starting to lead the way out of the infirmary. Harry quickly hurried after him.

They walked in silence for a while, Dumbledore exchanging greetings with some of the portraits and taking the time to look out the windows at the grounds.

After several minutes of wandering down the castle corridors, Harry couldn’t remain silent any longer.

“You know what is it, don’t you?” he blurted out, and Dumbledore glanced over to him. “The quill, you know what it is.”

“If you are asking me whether I am aware that the quill you gave to Mr Ronald Weasley contained Tom Riddle’s soul then yes, I knew.”

“I-I… I had to,” Harry said, feeling the sudden need to explain why he had put Tom’s soul in the quill rather than leaving him to die. “I couldn’t just leave him there… he looked innocent. I know he’s Tom Riddle and he’s a dark wizard, but I just couldn’t, sir, I couldn’t.”

Dumbledore gave him a small smile. “Voldemort is a dark wizard, Harry, but Tom Riddle has not done half of the things his older self has. I do not believe that Mr Riddle deserved to die at the hands of the Dementor.”

“Where is he?” Harry asked.

“Do you know how souls feed on their vessels and absorb their energy?” Dumbledore said instead.

Harry shook his head. “I-I just thought they took it.”

“Not quite. You see, how souls absorb that energy is through one simple thing – the vessel’s emotions.”

“You mean… Tom Riddle was using my emotions to come back to life?” Harry asked in confusion.

Dumbledore nodded, and they turned the corner into another corridor. “Yes. It is also how he used Ginny Weasley to regain his physical form – her emotions, spilled out onto the diary’s pages. Funny thing, how powerful emotions can be, and yet we are hardly aware of the potential.”

Dumbledore hummed slightly under his breath, and Harry recognised that they were heading to his office.
“You might wonder, Harry, how Tom was able to use your emotions for his own gain,” the headmaster continued. “We cannot be emotional all the time – at least, not enough to bring back a soul’s physical form. So one would have to look at something else in order to feed oneself. Something highly emotional, something that resides entirely in our minds.”

He looked over to Harry, a twinkle in his eyes. But Harry was completely lost.

“I don’t understand, sir,” he frowned. “What was Tom feeding on in my mind?”

“Was he never insistent on gaining access to something?” the old wizard asked. “Something that may not have made sense to you?”

Harry thought about it, but he really couldn’t think of anything.

“I mean,” he said slowly. “The only thing he was really interested in were my memories- wait, hang on. He was using my memories?”

Dumbledore gave a small nod.

“B-But… he stopped,” Harry protested. “After I told him not to, he didn’t look again-”

“Never again?” Dumbledore asked, raising an eyebrow. “You never allowed him access to your memories?”

Harry’s heart sank. He had, of course. In fact, had he not spent the night before the Dementor attack sharing memories with Tom?

Dumbledore seemed to know exactly what he was thinking.

“Yes, Tom Riddle always did have a certain charm about him,” he said pleasantly. “It did not surprise me in the least that he always managed to get his way in the end.”

“But sir, where is he now?” Harry asked tentatively. “Is he…?”

He trailed off, not wanting to think about the possibility that Tom Riddle was dead. He was a horcrux after all, so it would make sense for Dumbledore to have let him die. Harry had to die after all.

“Tom Riddle is fine,” Dumbledore told him, as they faced the gargoyle in front of his office. He said the password and it jumped aside, allowing them to climb the spiral staircase.

“He’s fine? But how-”

“He just needed memories to regain his strength,” Dumbledore said. “The Dementor took a lot out of him as well, even more so than you. Fortunately, it just so happens that when you get to my age, you have rather a lot of memories. Too many, in fact. So many that one might be tempted to ah, let’s say to store them somewhere.”

He gave Harry a small wink, before opening the door into his office. Harry’s eyes immediately drifted to the Pensieve to the side of the circular room.

“He’s…?” Harry gaped at Dumbledore, before slowly approaching the large stone basin.

He stared into its watery depths, spirals of light floating around on the surface. Harry’s fingers gripped the edges as he leaned over further, trying to see right down to the bottom.
“He was looking at the memories of himself,” Dumbledore said quietly from behind Harry. “Every memory I had of him. Once he had finished with those, he moved onto the memories of you.”

“Of me?” Harry asked in confusion. “But why?”

Dumbledore smiled “Curiosity, I suppose. It’s not every day one is trapped in the mind of another for several months. I think he was rather surprised to see your life.”

“Why?” Harry couldn’t help but ask again in bewilderment.

“I’m afraid Tom never did have much empathy for others. No doubt he was aware that you have not had the perfect life, but it most likely did not occur to him that there was another who had a life even worse than him.”

“What’s he looking at now?” Harry wondered, resisting the urge to reach out and touch the water’s surface.

“He is not in there.”

Harry turned to face Dumbledore in confusion. The headmaster still had that knowing smile on his face.

“Where is he?”

At this Dumbledore moved towards his desk, reaching out to pick something up. When he handed it over to Harry, Harry recognised his quill, the one that had contained Tom.

He looked up in confusion, the quill held loosely in his fingers but Dumbledore had already moved away, approaching another door opposite the Pensieve.

He knocked twice before standing to the side.

“You have a visitor,” he said softly, and there was silence for the longest time, before the door opened.

Harry stared open-mouthed at the figure in the doorway. Dressed in a long black cloak, the man stared back at Harry, a curious look on his face as a smirk tugged at the corner of his lips.

With long slender fingers, the man adjusted the collar of his robes, and then pulled the sleeves further down his wrists. Wavy black hair fell around his chiselled face and his dark brown eyes stayed on Harry, studying the student intently. Harry’s eyes drifted over the figure’s sharp, angular cheekbones, the defined jaw-line, his full lips, and then up to meet his gaze.

Tom Riddle was back.

Harry’s legs felt weak beneath him as he stared into the face of a younger Voldemort. He felt struck by a sudden rush of wariness, and sat down in one of the seats in front of Dumbledore’s desk. Tom’s lips turned further up, as if pleased by the effect he still had.

“Harry Potter,” he said in a silky tone. “We meet at last.”

“You’re back,” Harry said numbly.

“I am, are you surprised to see me?”

Harry nodded his head uncertainly, aware that Dumbledore was watching the interaction between
them with interest.

“I hardly think I need to tell you both that this must remain secret,” he warned them. “Scrimgeour is watching Hogwarts, alongside Lord Voldemort himself. Fortunately, most of the residents of the castle are unaware as to your true identity, Tom, and I shall like to keep it that way for now. Those who would recognise you… well, we shall have to try and prevent that from happening.”

“I shall like my old room back,” Tom said firmly.

Dumbledore dipped his head. “That can be arranged.”


He slumped back in his chair, completely lost by the sudden turn of events. Tom was a horcrux, why was Dumbledore allowing him to live? Not only to live, but to remain at Hogwarts.

“Why did you save him?” Harry asked Dumbledore in confusion. “H-He’s…”

“Why did I save him?” Dumbledore said, raising an eyebrow. “Harry, my dear boy, why did you?”

Harry was stumped and Dumbledore’s eyes seemed to twinkle in amusement before he turned to Tom.

“You can floo to your room,” he told the Slytherin. “Make sure you are not seen.”

Tom turned and left back into the room he had come from. Harry stayed seated, still staring at the space Tom had just left.

“I still don’t understand sir,” he said hoarsely. V-Voldemort… y-you just let him in Hogwarts. Tom Riddle, I mean. And if… if Voldemort – the actual Voldemort – takes over my mind, then you have two of them. I don’t know if… I-I’m sorry sir, but why…”

“Voldemort was able to get inside your mind because of Mr Riddle’s presence,” Dumbledore said in a quiet voice. “Now that Tom is now out of your mind, there is a chance that Voldemort will not be able to access you in that way again.”

Harry stared at him in disbelief. “R-Really?”

“I do not know for certain, but it is worth it to wait and see, don’t you think?”

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled at him over the half-moon spectacles.

“But sir,” Harry tried again. “What if he… what if he still becomes Voldemort? And there’s another one?”

Dumbledore smiled at him at that.

“Ah, but what if he doesn’t?” he said lightly.

And, not for the first time, Harry wondered if Dumbledore was the greatest wizard in the world, or just raving mad.

Chapter End Notes
So the moment you have been waiting for, Tom Riddle is back and we can finally get on the romance train.

Also I just wanted to share with you my thoughts on how I'm writing Dumbledore's character. I dislike the idea of dark!Dumbledore and I'm trying very hard to keep him from seeming an evil character, so I don't want you guys thinking he's the bad character in this. I also however don't want to present Dumbledore as entirely 100% good never-does-anything-wrong, because that's not the way Rowling wrote him.

Please leave a comment on what you think of this chapter and the general story, I love reading feedback from you guys :) x
Tom had taken up residence in one of the rooms that he had occupied as a prefect. It was down in the dungeons, near to where the Slytherin dorms were. Harry had wondered how Tom had managed to secure a room all to himself as a prefect – usually this was reserved primarily for Head Boys and Girls – but then remembered that this was Tom Riddle he was dealing with.

Slughorn had probably granted Tom the room through some excuse Tom had given about schoolwork or the likes.

Dumbledore had taken every precaution to keep Tom’s presence a secret, and the sheer number of repelling charms and protection spells that had been put on it were enough to rival the ones on Harry’s own private room.

At Dumbledore’s request, Harry had stayed up in his tower all by himself. The headmaster still wasn’t sure if Voldemort would be able to possess him anymore, and didn’t want to take any chances. Whilst Harry agreed with this, the little room was still a rather lonely place, and now he didn’t even have Tom in his head for company.

Harry tried to stop himself from seeking out the Slytherin’s company, telling himself that they had both gotten what they wanted, now that Tom was physical again and Harry didn’t have him in his head. But it didn’t help. There seemed to be a great hole in his mind now, and Harry sometimes found himself reaching in his mind for Tom, before realizing the other was gone.

It was at night, when Harry was trying to get to sleep in the too-quiet room that he wondered what Tom was up to. What did he do during the day? Surely it must be dull having to stay in the same room all the time. At least when he was in Harry’s mind, he could go about Harry’s day with him.

Having spent the night tossing and turning restlessly, Harry groggily made his way down to breakfast and joined Ron and Hermione at the Gryffindor table.

Ron had Lavender to his other side, who was chatting excitedly in his ear, clinging to his arm. Ron nodded and mumbled in response several times, but his eyes looked out of focus and he yawned several times. Harry smirked as he thought that Ron probably hadn’t predicted this when he had first agreed to go on a date with Lavender.

“Oh for goodness sake!” Hermione snapped next to him, slamming down her copy of *The Daily
Harry was slowly starting to regain his title as Slughorn’s favourite, thanks to the help of the Half-Blood Prince. However, although the scrawling notes in his book were a familiar sight, Harry couldn’t help but think that he would prefer to have Tom’s smooth voice in his head, his tone smug as he reiterated the answers.

At the end of the day, when Ron and Hermione had left him to make their way to the common room, Harry decided that he couldn’t bear to go back up to his isolated tower room, and instead found himself walking down to the dungeons, towards the Slytherin dormitories.

The charms let him through easily enough – after all, he wasn’t the one they were trying to keep away – and all too soon Harry was in front of the door to Tom Riddle’s room, hesitating as he questioned what he was doing here.

Why wasn’t he going to talk to Ron or Hermione if he didn’t want to be alone in the Tower? Because, Harry’s mind argued back, if Voldemort did happen to possess him, then he wouldn’t want them to be in harm’s way. It was much safer to be with Tom.

But it would be better still to be alone, a small voice in Harry’s subconscious whispered.

Harry shook his head irritably. What was he even thinking? He shouldn’t be anywhere near this room. Sure, Tom had become somewhat of a pleasant companion for those long months. But that was then, when they had been forced into each other’s company. They were practically at opposite sides of the castle now. They had no reason to talk.

Harry sighed, staring down at his shoes before abruptly turning around the walk away. The door
opened and he stumbled lightly, glancing behind him in alarm to see Tom leaning against the doorframe, looking at him with amusement.

“Usually one tends to knock on a door,” he said, smirk ever-present on his face. “Or did you expect it just to open for you?”

“N-No, I just…” Harry trailed off, scowling. Of course Tom would find him here, dithering outside his room like a nervous schoolchild. And of course he’d find Harry’s embarrassment funny. He always had.

Tom raised an eyebrow at him, lips twitching before he turned and strode back into the room.

“I don’t particularly care which side of it you find yourself on, but shut the door won’t you?” he called back, and Harry quickly entered the room, closing the door behind him.

Tom’s room was larger than Harry’s, that was plain to see, and though it held the same basic furniture, the room seemed much more lavish.

There was a four-poster bed, identical to the one in Harry’s tower, but this one had green covers on it, with a dark green canopy. Two plush black armchairs were by the fire place, seated on a round rug and Harry stared at them.

“Your room is nicer than mine,” he accused, looking over to Tom.

Tom smirked. “I’m a prefect,” he noted. “What are you?”

“I-I’m… I’m the Chosen One,” Harry said indignantly, but saying it sounded wrong.

“Really?” the Slytherin said with his head cocked. “Last I heard, the Ministry doesn’t typically try and execute Chosen Ones.”

Harry glared at Tom, and the other seemed quite amused by this. Turning away, Harry’s eyes trailed over the bookcases against the wall.

“So that’s what you’ve been doing,” he said suddenly, going over to them. “I wondered how you were keeping yourself entertained.”

“There’s always something else to learn,” Tom said nonchalantly. “Dumbledore provided me with them from his private library. Mad old coot, you’d think I’m a welcomed guest-”

“Harry Potter, you are oblivious, aren’t you?” Harry asked in surprise, and Tom gave a laugh. It made him shiver.

“You are, aren’t you?” Tom said with a smirk. “I’m a prisoner, or did you not notice? It’s been over fifty years since I’ve been at Hogwarts, so perhaps things have changed but last time I was here, guests weren’t kept behind a spell barrier.”

“You can hardly blame him,” Harry argued. “You grow up to become Voldemort, people wouldn’t exactly take it well if they knew you were in the school.”

“They might,” Tom considered. “If they knew how their Saviour welcomed me with open arms.”

“I didn’t welcome you!” Harry snapped. “I didn’t expect you to be all… physical.”
Tom raised an eyebrow at this, and Harry suddenly felt like he was in deep trouble.

“Physical?” the Slytherin purred, taking a few steps towards Harry. “Was that what distracted you, Harry Potter? My body?”

“No!” the other spluttered. “But the last I had seen you, you were just this ball of light and then-”

“And then the Chosen One saved me,” Tom said in a mocking tone, smile growing wider as he came closer to Harry. “How will I repay you?”

Tom was mere inches away from Harry now, his hands resting on the shelves either side of Harry and Harry squeaked in surprise.

“Did you tell him?” Tom breathed, and Harry turned his face to the side, not wanting to look into those dark, enticing eyes.

“Tell who what?”

“Did you tell Dumbledore what his little Saviour had been up to?” Tom asked in a soft voice. “Did you tell him that whilst the rest of the school remained oblivious to the danger they were in, you hid away in your four-poster bed with the curtains drawn, touching yourself to me?”

“I didn’t touch myself to you!” Harry ground out. “I-I just…”

“Just what?” Tom asked in a sickly-sweet voice.

“You were just there,” Harry said stoutly, but he felt himself shrink into the bookcase behind him as Tom eyed him up.

“I was just there?” he murmured. “So it wasn’t my voice that made you feel that way, then? It wasn’t my voice that made your body react so strongly? It wasn’t my voice that made you arch your back up as you came all over the sheets…?”

Harry was breathing hard now, not daring to look at the older boy.

“You see, Harry, I think it was,” Tom whispered next to his ear, warm breath tickling his skin. “And I think it was because of that night that you saved my life, and it is the reason you’re here right now, all alone in my chambers. You want me, Harry Potter, admit it.”


“I have,” Tom replied in that same soft, gentle voice. “Such terrible things… the things I’ve done Harry, the things I’ve made other people do… why, I’m sure it would come as such a shock to an innocent creature like you…”

“I’m not innocent!” Harry snapped, and he made the mistake of meeting Tom’s gaze.

Tom was looking at him like a hunter might view its prey – a hungry, intense look that burned into Harry’s soul.

“Of course not,” he said graciously. “I know you’re not innocent… no-one innocent would bring themselves to climax at the sound of the Dark Lord’s voice.”

“I didn’t-” Harry began but Tom shushed him.
“It’s all right,” he said with an impish smile. “Your secret is safe with me.” 

He pushed away from Harry, retreating to one of the two armchairs by the fire. Harry blinked in surprise, not quite ready to move yet and tried to ignore the stab of disappointment that went through him.

When he could finally get his feet to work, Harry stumbled over to the door, ripping it open and sighing in relief as the cold air from the corridor seemed to wake him up.

“Oh, and Harry?” Tom said lightly from where he was reading a book.

Against his better judgement, Harry turned to look at the Slytherin. Tom smirked.

“You still owe me two favours,” he reminded him, and Harry flushed, before leaving the room and slamming the door shut behind him.

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Once Slughorn had set them to work on their latest potion – another rather fiddly one – Harry’s eyes scanned over the Half-Blood Prince’s notes, taking them in and getting to work.

He set the potion to simmer, keeping his eyes open for any colour change, when he noticed eyes on him across the room. Looking over, he saw Malfoy smirking at him, leaning over to whisper something in Zabini’s ear. Zabini sniggered, also looking up at Harry.

Harry ignored them, turning back to his potion but then a sopophorous bean flew through the air and hit him on the side of the head.

Harry winced, reaching up a hand to rub the sore spot, glaring at Malfoy whose smirk had grown wider.

The blonde boy glanced over to Slughorn, who was currently occupied with Pansy Parkinson’s potion.

“You are scared yet, Potter?” Malfoy taunted in a low voice. “Must have you trembling in your shoes right now.”

Harry turned back to his potion, deciding that he couldn’t be bothered to get into an argue with Malfoy. The Slytherin took glee in getting to him.

“What are you talking about Malfoy?” Harry hissed and the other’s eyebrows rose in mock surprise.

“You mean,” he said with an exaggerated gasp. “You don’t know?”

“What?”

Malfoy glanced back to Slughorn, who was still distracted, before leaning across his desk with a cruel grin on his face.

“He’s moving,” he said smugly. “They say he’s coming towards Hogwarts.”

“Oi Malfoy, get on with your own work why don’t you, you slimy git,” Ron’s voice suddenly
interrupted them.

“Oh I am,” Malfoy said with a sneer. “You see, unlike you Weasel, I can multitask. It’s one of the many skills I possess. Though, it must take you some great skill in managing to look like an absolute train wreck every day-”

“Just ignore him,” Hermione said. “You know he’ll say anything to cause a scene.”

“I’m not lying,” Malfoy said. “And I’d be careful if I were you, Granger. Because, when You-Know-Who gets here, it’ll be the mudbloods he’ll get rid of first-”

There was a loud scraping noise as Ron kicked his chair back, wand out and at the ready but Hermione grabbed his arm, yanking his arm down again. Slughorn turned around and blinked at them.

“Is something the matter?” he asked. “Mr Weasley, your potion is the wrong colour completely.”

Ron went red and scowled as Malfoy let out a cackle.

Slughorn looked over at Malfoy’s cauldron. “And yours is on the verge of overheating,” he said warningly. “You don’t want this potion to bubble, Mr Malfoy.”

Malfoy glared at Slughorn when the professor’s back was turned, assisting Pansy once more.

“Some wannabe Death Eater you are,” Harry said in a low voice to Malfoy. “You can’t even say your master’s name-”

“And I suppose the fact that you say it on a daily basis will save you, will it?” the Slytherin said snidely. “Face it, Potter, your days are numbered. My father says he’s heading straight for the school. So I’d start running if I were you – and take your mudblood girlfriend and blood traitor friend with you.”

Ron’s let out a snarl under his breath and Harry tensed next to him, but neither of them made a move to attack Malfoy. Malfoy was smirking at them, raising an eyebrow before turning back to his potion. Only Hermione remained calm, shredding herbs and sprinkling them into her almost-finished potion.

“You think it’s true?” Ron hissed to them. “Do you think he’s on his way here?”

“If it were true, why would Malfoy reveal that information?” Hermione said simply. “You-Know-Who would want the element of surprise.”

“Yeah but Malfoy’s not exactly someone who thinks about these things,” Ron muttered. “Bloody git, does he think he’ll really have a great time under his reign?”

“Better time than any of us,” Harry said darkly, and they fell silent.

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“I need to continue the lessons.”

Tom didn’t reply, holding up finger to ask Harry to wait as he finished reading the paragraph he was on. Harry huffed in annoyance, shifting his feet as he waited.

Once the Potions class had been let out, Harry had mumbled out some excuse to Ron and Hermione before making his way to Tom’s chambers. If Malfoy was telling the truth – and it was
safer to assume that he was – then Harry needed to be able to defend himself. He knew he had to
die, but not without a fight. Voldemort wouldn’t see him as weak or helpless.

Harry had burst open the door, not even bothering to knock and was met with the sight of Tom in
the same armchair as before, reading a different book this time. Tom hadn’t even looked at him or
made any movement to show that he was aware of Harry’s presence until Harry had spoken.

With nimble fingers, Tom bookmarked the page he was on and set it aside on the table next to him.
He stretched out his agile body before relaxing back into the armchair, seeming totally at ease as
he placed his hands back on the arms of the chair, meeting Harry’s gaze.

“Good afternoon,” he said politely, though a small smirk lingered on his lips. “I didn’t hear you
knock.”

“That’s because I didn’t.”

“Ah.”

“I need more tutoring,” Harry said through gritted teeth. “It’s important.”

“I wasn’t aware that you needed tutoring to die,” Tom said pleasantly. “But if you’re looking for
that then I’m afraid I’m not the right person.”

“I’m not going to die!” Harry snapped, and Tom raised an eyebrow. “I-I mean, I am but… I’m
going to fight first. I’m not going to make it easy.”

“You’ve had tutoring,” the other said simply.

“I need more.”

“Why?”

Harry sighed, running a hand tiredly through his hair before glancing to the spare chair and then
Tom questioningly. Tom dipped his head in agreement and Harry sat down in the chair, sinking
into its comfort. For a moment Harry just stared into the flickering flames that warmed the
dungeon room, Tom’s long figure opposite him.

“He’s coming here,” Harry finally admitted into the silence. “I-I was told by the son of one of his –
I mean, yours I guess – Death Eaters. Voldemort’s on his way to Hogwarts, and I need to know
how to fight before I die.”

“You’ve had tutoring,” Tom repeated. “Are you telling me that after all these months under my
careful guidance that Harry Potter is still just as useless at defending himself?”

“No-” Harry began to protest but Tom flicked his wand and before he could react, Harry’s own
wand soared out of his hand and into the Slytherin’s waiting palm. Harry scowled.

“I see,” Tom said in amusement, twirling Harry’s wand. “What makes you so sure that you’ll learn
anything this time?”

“I have learnt! You didn’t warn me-”

“Oh, excuse me for my insolence,” Tom laughed. “I should have asked for your permission before
disarming you. I forget, was that the first rule of duelling?”

“All right, you’ve made your point,” Harry said irritably. “Are you going to teach me or not? You
must be looking for something to keep you occupied – you can hardly read forever.”

Tom’s dark eyes still held Harry’s, setting his wand to the side and turning his attention to Harry’s wand, tracing his fingers down the wood.

“What do I get in return?”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked in confusion. “I just told you, it’ll keep you entertained—”

“For a short while,” Tom said simply. “But after a while even disarming the Chosen One can get awfully dreary.”

“Well what do you want?” Harry asked in despair.

At this Tom’s smirk widened, and he settled himself further back in his chair.

“What I would like from you, Harry Potter,” he said. “Is another favour.”

“Another favour? You already have two from me! Two that you still haven’t—”

“-claimed?” Tom finished inquiringly, and Harry nodded. “As I have told you once before, Harry Potter, I always come to claim. But if you doubt me, then what harm is accepting another favour?”

“Because I don’t know what you plan to make me do,” Harry said through gritted teeth.

“Nothing that you won’t want to do yourself,” Tom said smoothly. “Oh yes,” he said to Harry’s look of disbelief. “Whilst using my advanced knowledge of spells and potions to force someone to do what I want has its merits, I find much more satisfaction in making people do what they always wanted to do in the first place. They protest so bitterly I find, but the outcome is rather enjoyable.”

“What do you make them do?” Harry whispered, hardly daring to breathe.

“Do you really want to know, Mr Potter?”

Stiffly, Harry nodded.

“I make them take their place where they belong,” Tom said. “At my feet, grovelling and begging. You sit across from me with all these ideas, Harry; all these little fantasies of your role as the Golden Boy in this world. Heroic, brave… oh, how the people must scream their praises for you. But there is only one person who can remain on a pedestal for so long, I’m afraid, and soon you, like many others, will take their place beneath me.”

“How did you end up like this?” Harry suddenly whispered, as the victory vanished from Tom’s
eyes. “You can think all you want that that pedestal is where you want to be, but you know that’s not the truth. You are right about one thing though – I am exhausted. I don’t want to be on a pedestal any longer, and I don’t want to be their ‘Golden Boy’. I want to be Harry Potter, and if that means I have to mingle in the crowd and become forgotten then that’s what I’ll do.”

Tom eyed him carefully, Harry’s wand frozen in his grip.

“I was wrong about you,” he said carefully. “How could I have once thought that we could work together to rule this sad, pathetic world? You may be their Saviour, but you are nothing special.”

He threw Harry’s wand back at him and Harry fumbled to catch it, sliding it back into his cloak pocket.

“I’ll tutor you, if you want,” Tom said snidely, getting up from his armchair. “But you are dead, either way.”

Chapter End Notes

So in case you couldn't already tell, this story is going to be long.

I never meant it to be as long as its going to end up but I really want Tom and Harry to have a realistic relationship without sacrificing one or both of their characters. To do this, I'm basically trying to break Tom down to a point where he has equal footing with Harry.

Essentially this chapter was all about how easily Tom will resort to manipulating Harry to get his way or just to prove he can and I don't want that to be the basis for their relationship. So first I have to take it to a point where neither one of them is manipulating the other in the name of 'romance'.

Thus the story is going to be long, because its actually taking a lot longer than I predicted, and I don't want to force two characters together because its not believable to write and its certainly not believable to read.

So if you don't want to sit for a while longer to get to the romance then I apologize and fully understand, but this is going to be the way I'm writing it.

xx
The Forbidden Forest

Chapter Notes

Thank you again for the love and understanding on the last chapter. I now have a slightly more clear idea on where this story is going so here is another chapter :)  

Much love x

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“He’s been seen!” a screech suddenly shouted across the Charms classroom. Professor Flitwick, from where he had been at the front marking essays, frowned at the sudden commotion.

“What is going on?” he asked. “You are supposed to be reading the chapter on-”

“But sir, he’s been sighted!” the voice exclaimed again, and Harry twisted around to see Seamus’s panicked face, the colour drained out of it. “He’s been sighted!”

“Good heavens boy, who?” Flitwick asked impatiently.

“You-Know-Who!” Seamus cried, and instantly there was uproar that Flitwick was hard-pressed to try and control.

“Where?!” someone yelled.

“Is he coming here?”

“What’s the Ministry doing?!”

“What the fuck are we doing, run!”

“Mr Thomas, please sit back down in your seat,” Professor Flitwick said irritably, and Dean slowly lowered himself back in his seat where he had been prepared to run.

“But it’s true!” Seamus insisted, waving a copy of The Daily Prophet. “Says right here, it says ‘He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named sighted near Perth’. He’s coming up here, sir! Up to Hogwarts itself!”

“A load of codswallop, most likely,” Flitwick said in an indignant tone. “If we believed every report about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named then we’d be in a right mess, wouldn’t we? Why, the other day it was reported that he was down in Wales-”

“But what if it’s true, sir?” one of the Gryffindors shouted. “S-Shouldn’t we go somewhere? Shouldn’t we-”

“And where would we go?” Flitwick asked. “Is Hogwarts not the safest place in Britain? I can hardly think of somewhere better to be at a time like this.”

“So we’re just supposed to carry on learning Charms?” Seamus asked in disbelief.

“Of course, it is essential to maintain a normal routine-”
“Bullshit!”

“Mr Finnegan, language. You-Know-Who is hardly going to be able to enter Hogwarts, now is he? It is impossible! You are all perfectly safe here.”

Seamus was still looking doubtful, but he slumped back into his chair. Dean leaned over and whispered something to him.

“Now then, I want you to continue with the chapter for today,” Flitwick said. “Because anything you don’t finish today remember, is your homework.”

There was a chorus of groans amongst the class, but Flitwick nodded in satisfaction as they all went back to work.

“What do we do?” Ron hissed to Harry and Hermione.

“There’s nothing we can do,” Hermione said quietly. “You heard Professor Flitwick – Hogwarts is the safest place for us.”

“Yeah but…” Ron trailed off, frowning. “I don’t fancy being locked up in here, knowing You-Know-Who’s just waiting outside.”

“None of us do, Ron,” Hermione said with an eye roll.

“Bet some of those Slytherins are pleased,” the red-head wizard muttered. “Look at Malfoy’s smug face. Ferret-face.”

Harry just mumbled something incoherent, feigning interest in the conversation but really, his mind was on his imminent death at the hands of Voldemort. It seemed much too quickly, Harry had thought he’d at least get his exams out the way first.

Sighing in resignation, Harry turned back to his textbook and continued reading where he had left off.

--------------------------------------------

There was a small tap at his window that startled Harry out of his work. It was a Saturday night, which typically meant that he and Tom would have been training all day, except Harry had no idea where the older student had wanted to train.

He had gone to the Room of Requirement that morning and found the training room set up as usual, but Tom hadn’t turned up, and after a whilst Harry realized that there was no way the Slytherin would be able to go to the Room without being seen. Plus the charms Dumbledore had placed most likely kept Tom locked in.

Rolling his eyes at his own stupidity, Harry had returned to his private room and began work on the mountain of homework he had been set.

Only now, at around eight at night, there was a sharp tap at his window.

Pulling back the curtains, Harry was startled to see a small, tawny owl outside, a small folded piece of parchment tied with string to its leg.

He unlocked the window and opened it, allowing the owl to swoop inside and settle itself on the back of an armchair. It held out a leg for him to take the letter and Harry did so, unfolding it until
he could see elegant black handwriting.

*My chamber, now.*
- TR.

Harry turned the parchment over, expecting more writing, but there was none. Apparently Tom was the straight-to-the-point type. He threw the parchment into the fire, watching the evidence of his dalliance with the future Lord Voldemort disintegrate into ashes before grabbing his shoes and after a second’s thought, his cloak.

It took him ten minutes to make his way through the castle and to the dungeons, but he saw barely anyone. Those he did see didn’t give him a look, not suspicious as to what Harry Potter was doing hanging around the Slytherin common room.

When he came to a stop outside Tom’s door, he hesitated, but then knocked.

The door immediately opened to reveal Tom, dressed immaculately in dark green robes today, and the Slytherin dipped his head slightly before moving to the side to allow Harry in.

“Harry Potter,” he said pleasantly.

“I got your note,” Harry said stiffly, looking around the room. There was no training equipment set up, and for a moment he wondered if they were just going to read chapters today. With Voldemort coming ever closer to Hogwarts, he felt like he needed more than just theory.

“Evidently.”

Tom brushed past Harry, taking a book that had been resting open-paged on the armchair and closing it, setting it on the growing pile of books on the table.

“What am I doing today?” Harry asked. “Are we just doing theory? Because I think-”

“We are not doing theory,” Tom said. “In fact, Harry, we are doing something rather different.”

He turned to face the Gryffindor, the light from the fire casting flickering shadows across his face. He looked like some kind of fallen angel, and Harry repressed the urge to move away.

“What are we doing then?”

Tom smiled. “I am claiming a favour,” he said softly, and Harry frowned.

“W-What? But why-”

“Because the time has come to move on from training in the Room of Requirement,” he said briskly. “We are going into the Forbidden Forest.”

Harry stared at him, wondering if he was joking.

“What?” he stuttered. “The Forbidden Forest? B-But… no! We can’t! You can’t be seen, I can’t be seen going into the forest-”

“There are ways of travelling unseen.”

”Can you even get outside this room? Dumbledore-"

”Apparently the old coot thinks that I may want to explore the castle tonight. Barmy fool.”
“Even if we do that, you said the favour would be something I want! I don’t want this,” Harry argued. There was no way he was going into the Forbidden Forest at this time of night, and especially not with a future dark lord. It was practically suicide.

Tom raised an eyebrow. “This is what you want,” he said slowly.

“No it isn’t,” Harry snorted. “What I want is to be in bed right now.”

“No you don’t,” Tom said lightly. “You will come into the Forbidden forest with me. And do you know why? Because then you’ll be alone with me, with no-one else around us. And that is what you want.”

Harry let out a burst of laughter. “Alone with you? Hardly! I may not be some kind of genius Chosen One, but I’m not stupid. There’s no way I’m going in there with you.”

Tom shrugged. “This is your training. I won’t continue it in the Room of Requirement – it is too risky. And what I have planned can only take place in the forest.”

Harry hesitated. He needed more training, especially if Voldemort was approaching Hogwarts. But what did Tom have planned in the forest? It was outside of Hogwarts’ grounds, so there was nothing to stop him from apparating away. Alongside that, there was nothing to stop him from murdering Harry first, and then apparating.

“You’re going to apparate, aren’t you?” Harry asked suspiciously, narrowing his eyes at the Slytherin.

Tom’s lips twitched. “I still have things to do here,” he said softly. “Besides, I cannot. One of the old coot’s charms.”

“What things do you have planned?”

Tom stepped closer to Harry, and the other’s breath hitched. Tom leaned down to whisper right into Harry’s ear, breath unsettling a few messy locks of hair.

“That is none of your concern,” he murmured, before straightening up and brushing past a frozen Harry.

“What are we doing in the forest then?” Harry asked when he could finally find his voice.

“You’ll see, shall we?”

Tom stood next to the door, gesturing for Harry to go through.

“We’ll be seen,” Harry tried instead.

At that Tom pointed his wand at Harry. Harry flinched but Tom ignored him, tapping the end of his wand on Harry’s head and Harry felt the familiar effects of a Disillusionment Charm trickle down his body. He watched as his skin took on the colour and texture of the room, and when he looked back to Tom, he was casting the charm on himself.

“Let’s go,” Harry heard Tom’s voice say, and he followed the small ripple in the air out of the room.

They passed through the spell barrier easily – once again Harry wondered what in Merlin’s name Dumbledore was trying to do, if Tom was free to come and go whenever he pleased – and walked
silently through the corridors of Hogwarts. Harry was glad for his cloak once they left the castle, for March in Scotland was still essentially winter.

When they reached the border of the forest, Tom removed the charm from both of them, and Harry sighed in relief as he came into sight again. Not being able to see oneself was a rather alarming situation, he found.

Tom murmured a quick ‘Lumos’ under his breath and the end of his wand lit up in a brilliant light. Harry did the same, and soon they were making their way across the dead leaves on the ground.

“Do you know where we’re even going?” Harry asked nervously, looking around. Everywhere looked the same to him.

“Of course I do,” Tom said easily, ducking nimbly under a branch.

“So… are you going to explain why we’re here?”

“Do you always feel the need to fill silence with questions?” Tom asked in amusement.

“I’m just saying, it’s a bit suspicious, that’s all-”

“Here we are,” Tom said suddenly, stopping so abruptly that Harry almost bumped into him.

Glancing around Tom’s form, Harry saw him staring at a small plant with long, slender leaves.

“What is it?” he asked in confusion.

“You don’t recognise it?” Tom inquired, reaching down with his wand and mumbling something. The soil around the plant immediately upturned, and the plant along with its roots came soaring out. Tom shrunk it with another spell before placing it in his cloak pocket. “It’s asphodel, you use the powdered roots in Potions.”

“So we’re out here to collect potion ingredients?” Harry frowned. “No offense, but I don’t think Voldemort is going to be defeated by powdered root-”

Tom let out a sudden laugh, it made goose bumps erupt on Harry’s skin, though whether that was from fear or something else he did not know.

“I hardly see why I would take offense at that,” Tom said in mirth. “I also think it would take a lot more than powdered root to get rid of a great wizard such as myself-”

“Yeah but he’s not you,” Harry said.

“Of course he is. Did you not say it yourself, Harry? I am going to grow up to become Voldemort. He is me.”

Harry fell silent at this, and they walked a few more paces into the forest, Tom collecting various plants and other potion ingredients along the way.

He had just tucked another root into his cloak before he suddenly froze, and he looked up in alarm.

“Tom?” Harry asked in confusion. “What’s wrong-”

“Be quiet,” Tom hissed, holding out a hand to stop Harry.

Tom was staring into the dark depths of the forest and Harry strained his eyes and ears to try and
get a sense of what Tom was so on edge about, but came up with nothing. He slipped his hand into
his pocket, grabbing his wand and holding it tightly by his side. Next to him, Tom did the same.

Tom stood frozen for a minute, hand still up to silence Harry before he took a couple of steps
forward.

“Stay here,” he murmured to Harry.

“What? No!” Harry said in a low-voice. “Are you crazy? I’m not letting whatever it is get me, I’m
coming with you-”

“Stay here,” Tom ordered again, but Harry wasn’t listening.

“I can defend myself!” he whispered indignanty. “I don’t need you telling me to stay put-”

There was a rustle in the distance and Harry’s head snapped up.

“Probably just some wildlife,” Tom murmured. “I’ll go and check.”

And, before Harry could protest anymore, Tom had stalked off into the forest, and darkness soon
swallowed him.

Harry reluctantly stayed where he was, knowing that he wouldn’t be able to find Tom anyway in
the darkness, even with his wand light, and staying put was the only way Tom would be able to
find him again. Hopefully.

He glanced around nervously, clutching his wand a little tighter, before raising it up. The light
shone over the dirt and leaves at his feet, and Harry turned on the spot, searching through the trees
as far as he could. There was nothing to be seen, only the tall intimidating trees of the Forbidden
Forest and beyond that, unmoving shapes in the dark.

“I’m being paranoid,” Harry muttered angrily to himself, dropping his wand back to his side. “I’ve
faced worst things-”

He was cut off as there was a loud crack in the distance. Harry spun around, trying to find the
source of the sound but he could barely see as it was.

“Expelliarmus,” a voice hissed, and Harry’s wand flew out of his hand to the ground.

Harry stumbled back, panic filling him as he saw a dark shape moving in the forest. No, it couldn’t
be… Voldemort couldn’t be here, at Hogwarts?

But that cold, harsh hiss was only too familiar to Harry.

“Stupefy!” the voice snarled, and Harry threw himself out of the way of the red light that came
towards him.

His palms hit the dirt, and Harry looked around desperately for his wand. He saw it lying a few
feet away, the light from the lumos spell still in place. He pushed himself up and scrambled
towards it as another jet of red light narrowly missed him.

“Diffindo!”

Harry felt the spell sore past his ear, nicking the skin just below it but he ignored the tiny cut,
reaching out to grab his wand instead. His fingers touched the wood and he hastily dragged it
towards him, gripping it and turning around, throwing out a disarming spell.
The spell missed its mark, harmlessly hitting a tree instead, but it was enough to momentarily illuminate Harry’s attacker. With a start, Harry realized that it wasn’t Voldemort who had approached him in the dark.

“Tom,” Harry snarled, the older smirking at him from where he stood above Harry.

Tom didn’t reply, but flicked his wrist and another burst of light – blue this time – came towards Harry. Harry threw up a protego, and took his chance with the offensive before Tom could cast another spell.

“Flipendo!,” he shouted, and, unprepared for Harry to take the offensive, Tom thrown to the ground.

Tom hissed in pain before throwing another spell at Harry. The spell hit Harry in the arm and his skin suddenly felt like it was burning, bubbling under the agonizing effects of the pain.

Clutching his arm in pain, Harry threw a ‘bombarda’ in Tom’s general direction and it hit a tree to his right, forcing the Slytherin to twist his body away from the flying fragments of wood and dirt.

“Is this it then?” Harry growled furiously. “You brought me here so you could kill me?!”

Tom didn’t reply, jaw clenched in anger as he shot another jet of light at Harry’s feet. Harry stumbled a few steps back as a thick curtain of dirt suddenly rose up, choking him and stinging his eyes as Tom threw it towards him. Harry threw a stunning spell through the thick mass of dirt, but evidently missed as Tom’s responding spell threw Harry into a tree. He hissed in pain as his head collided with the hard trunk and for a moment Harry was dazed.

It must have only been a couple of seconds that Harry was distracted, but it was long enough for Tom, who flicked his wrist again and roots from the tree burst out of the ground. They slithered around Harry’s ankles, forcing them together and Harry yelped.

“Diffindo!” he shouted at the roots, and whilst his Severing Charm ripped a couple of the roots off, twice as many took their place.

Tom flicked his wand again and Harry was suddenly yanked to the floor, before the roots twisted and threw him across the clearing.

Harry scrambled away from the approaching roots, firing another explosive charm at them and watching the roots blow up into bits of bark.

Gripping his wand tightly, Harry summoned the bits of root, before flicking his wand over in Tom’s direction. The root fragments followed, and Tom threw up a shield, watching the root fall harmlessly to the ground.

“Give up, Potter,” he sneered, wand pointed at Harry’s face as the Gryffindor slowly stood up to face him. “You can’t beat me.”

“Oh yeah?” Harry snapped. “Just watch me.”

He threw a ‘confringo’. Tom nimbly stepped back to avoid it, like Harry had hoped, but the blasting curse hadn’t been aiming for the Slytherin, but rather the tree that Tom had just backed into. The resulting blast threw Tom towards Harry, and he fell into the ground with a thud, rolling over in the dirt before coming to a stop.

Tom wrenched himself up, rage evident in his eyes as he threw another severing charm at Harry.
Harry twisted to get out the pain but felt white-hot pain cut across his stomach. Gasping out in pain, Harry barely had any time to recover before diving away from Tom’s next curse.

He landed harshly on the ground, wincing as he scraped up his arm. His view was suddenly obscured by Tom’s legs, and Harry looked up to see the older standing above him.

“*Imperio*,” Tom said softly, before Harry had time to react and a cool sensation flowed though Harry, relaxing his muscles.

If Harry concentrated, he could almost feel all the stress and tension leave his body. He felt a million times lighter and he wondered if he had secretly been carrying amount some enormous bag or something and didn’t realize.

*Stand up* Tom’s voice echoed around his head, and Harry was surprised to realize how much he missed having Tom’s constant presence in his mind.

I don’t have to stand up, Harry told himself, but glancing up at Tom’s slightly smug expression, he decided to play along.

Slowly, Harry stood up, trying to keep up the appearance of complete relaxation. It wasn’t that hard to achieve, considering how powerful Tom’s illegal spell had been, despite only being sixteen.

“I knew you couldn’t last against me,” Tom purred, satisfaction gleaming in his eyes. “My, my, Voldemort will make quick work of you—”

“No, he won’t,” Harry said icily, and Tom’s eyes narrowed.

“Do you truly believe that?” he asked lightly. “*Bow to me.*”

Another soothing wave washed over Harry, but he no longer cared.

“No,” Harry said shortly, and Tom’s eyes widened before Harry shouted ‘*expelliarmus*’ and Tom’s wand flew out his hand.

It landed between the two of them, and for a moment the two students stared at each other, each daring the other to make the first move. Around them, the forest was deathly still, and the only thing that could be heard was their laboured breathing.

“Sorry,” Harry said, breaking the silence. “I didn’t ask before disarming you, how rude of me.”

Tom’s lips twitched up in a smirk. “I should give you detention for that,” he said softly. “Disarming a prefect is against the rules.”

“Not when they’re trying to kill me,” Harry growled, before pointing his wand at Tom’s. “*Accio wa-*”

Tom threw himself to the ground, snatching up his wand and throwing a tripping jinx at Harry. The Gryffindor almost hit the floor but pushed himself up just in time to hear Tom shout ‘*locomotor mortis*’ and saw a flash of light before suddenly the muscles in his legs tightened almost painfully.

He fell back down to the ground, finding that he couldn’t move his legs at all now and glanced up in panic as Tom stood over him once more, wand pointed at his face.

“You’re dead,” Tom said, triumph etched into his voice.

“Just do it already then,” Harry hissed. “Get it over with.”
Tom raised an eyebrow in surprise, wand still trained on Harry. “I don’t think so, we have so much more ground to cover.”

“What are you talking about? You brought me in here to kill me, well congratulations, no one is around here to see me die and you can walk out of here free,” Harry snarled. “Kill me, but I swear Voldemort will die.”

“I am not going to kill you, Harry Potter,” Tom said in a bored voice. He finally dropped his wand, and the leg locking curse on Harry was broken. “This was just the first lesson.”

“Wait,” Harry said in confusion, scrambling to his feet now that he could. “That was training?”

“Did you think I had brought you all the way out here just to collect plants?” Tom asked in amusement. “My, my, you are something. Though I must say you surprised me, I did not expect you to last that long-”

“I disarmed you!”

“And you didn’t take the opportunity to finish me off,” Tom taunted. “If I had been Voldemort, you would be dead by now.”

“Well… alright but… just warn me next time, OK?” Harry growled, but he knew it was pointless. As much as he hated to admit it, Tom’s surprise attack was much more beneficial to him than if they had planned a duel in the Room of Requirement.

Chapter End Notes

Really sorry if the action was confusing, I'm trying to practise writing them better but its surprising how fast you run out of canon spells to use
Revelation

Tom attacked Harry out of the blue twice more after that. Once he had asked Harry to put a book back in the bookcase in his Chamber before smashing Harry’s head against the shelf, and another time Harry had barely stepped into the room before he had had to avoid a stunning spell.

The second time that he was attacked, Harry was so angry with being surprised instantly that he had thrown everything he had at Tom, until the other was left wandless and breathing heavily next to the fireplace, a flicker of pride in his eyes.

“I always knew I would be a good teacher,” he had said haughtily after taking his wand back. “This is just proof of that.”

Harry had rolled his eyes, but said nothing.

The other times Harry met with Tom they went through lists of spells, sitting opposite each other on the plush black armchairs with a thick book each. Growing more confident with each lesson that passed, Harry finally felt like he had a chance against Voldemort. At least until he had to die. Secretly, Harry had started to get a savage kick out of the idea of his own death – the idea that Voldemort would be blind to securing his own death through sheer triumph at aiming a killing curse at his mortal enemy was a comfort to Harry.

It was half-way through March that there was a loud tapping at the door to Tom’s chambers whilst Harry was there.

They both froze, wondering who could have possibly made it through the charms. Harry had seen no-one else anywhere near Tom’s chambers, but realized that it was most likely Dumbledore.

Tom stood up, making his way over to the door and opening it, allowing for a large, disgruntled tawny owl to swoop in, dropping a letter on the table before flying again.

Tom closed the door, before taking the letter off the table and glancing at the front.

“It’s for you,” he told Harry, holding out the parchment.

Frowning, Harry took it, and opening it up to read the letter.

Dear Harry,
I must request your presence in my office this weekend, Saturday at 1pm. The Minister of Magic Rufus Scrimgeour will also be in attendance, as I believe we have come to an arrangement regarding your unique situation.
Professor Dumbledore

“Huh,” Harry said once he had come to the end. “I wonder what kind of arrangement.”

Tom swiftly snatched the parchment out of Harry’s hands, eyes scanning the words and the crease in his brow becoming more prominent.

“Absolutely not,” he said shortly, dropping the letter back on the table. “He’s completely mad if he thinks you’re going.”

“What are you talking about? I am going-"
“Have you learnt nothing?” Tom hissed, spinning around to fix Harry with a heated glare. “The minute you step foot in his office Scrimgeour will kill you.”

“No, he won’t—"

“The evidence rather points to the contrary, I’m afraid,” he said frostily. “But if you have so little value on your life—”

Harry jumped up. “Dumbledore will be there,” he said firmly. “He won’t let the Minister harm me—”

“He sent a Dementor after us, did you forget that?” Tom snapped. ”Scrimgeour is not going to let you walk out alive, and Dumbledore is powerless to stop him. The old fool is blind—”

“I know very well what Scrimgeour did last time,” Harry said angrily. “But I won’t allow it to happen again. I’m on my guard—”

“And what is your guard worth, compared to the Minister of Magic?” Tom sneered at him. “If he wants you dead, he will have you dead. Or else you’ll become a traitor and if you’re lucky, you’ll just be thrown in Azkaban.”

“My guard is worth a lot more than you think it is,” Harry seethed. “I’m not some helpless little boy.”

Tom scoffed at this and Harry’s jaw tightened in anger.

“I disarmed you!” he snapped. “Several days ago you – the great Heir of Slytherin – stood defenceless a few feet away because of me. So yeah, I do think I have a chance against Scrimgeour. Why do you have such a problem with me going? Why do you care what happens to me? You can’t argue self-preservation anymore.”

Tom stood still, scowling at Harry with his eyes narrowed in fury. He seemed to tense up for a moment, before his muscles relaxed and he turned, sitting back into his armchair.

“I’ve taught you for too long,” he said eventually. “Too long for you to throw your life away for this—”

“Oh bullshit,” Harry growled. “This isn’t just about keeping me around as a trophy, it isn’t about self-preservation and it’s not about keeping me as your vessel intact. So what is it, Tom? Why are you trying to protect me?”

“I’m not trying to protect you!” Tom spat out, venom coating his voice as he seemed infuriated at the very idea. “I’ve taught you spells – offensive and defensive – but no matter what it seems I can’t teach you how to not be so stupid and reckless—”

“I’m a Gryffindor,” Harry said. “It’s what we do.”

He turned to leave, not wanting to stay in Tom’s company a moment longer if the Slytherin was just going to rant about all his tutoring gone to waste but the next second he had been slammed into the door, Tom pressing against his back.

“You step into that office, you are never coming out,” Tom hissed in his ear as Harry froze beneath him. “Trust me in that.”

“Trust me that I will,” Harry spoke back.
“You are a foolish, arrogant boy, and it will lead to your death.”

“I’m already going to die. You know that. No matter how much tutoring you give me, you know I’m going to die eventually, by your hand.” Harry paused as realization came to him. “Why did you bother?”

Tom released Harry and stepped back, and Harry turned around, eying Tom warily.

“I told you,” the other said stoutly. “I wanted to give myself a good fight-”

Harry shook his head. Maybe before he would have fallen for Tom’s lies, but not anymore. “That’s not true. You’re not training me to entertain Voldemort, you’re training me to disarm him. There’s a difference.”

“What are you suggesting?” Tom said stiffly. “That I’m training you to defeat Voldemort, to defeat me? Why would I do that?”

“I don’t know.”

Tom stared at him for a couple of seconds before looking away.

“Go then,” he said. “But be on your guard.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I’m always on my guard,” he said. “It’s one of those things that come with having someone trying to kill you.”

Harry thought he saw a look of genuine amusement Tom’s eyes, but then he blinked and it was gone.

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“Are you crazy?”

Harry looked up to see Ron staring at him in disbelief. Next to him, Hermione had the same expression.

“Dumbledore’s going to be there-” Harry tried to argue but it was no use.

“Dumbledore won’t be able to go against the Minister,” Hermione tried. “There’s only so much he can do-”

“What do you expect me to do? Just ignore the letter?”

“At least let us go with you,” Ron said. “We’ll stop Scrimgeour if he tries anything-”

“Ron, he’s the Minister of Magic!” Hermione said, aghast. “Just what were you planning on doing?”

“A good punch in the face might shut him up-”

“No-one’s punching anyone in the face because neither of you are coming with me,” Harry interrupted. “His last two attempts to get me haven’t done anything, and this time Dumbledore is going to be in the room. He won’t let anything happen, OK?”

Ron slumped back in his seat, muttering under his breath while Hermione just looked worried.
“If it’s any consolation,” Harry said with a grimace. “I’ve faced worst. C’mon, Scrimgeour’s hardly worse than Voldemort.”

Ron and Hermione dropped the matter, though throughout the week they kept darting concerned looks at Harry and once or twice Harry even caught them whispering together, only to abruptly stop when Harry entered the room.

He knew that they were only worried for him, and that the last time Harry had gone off on his own with the Minister then he had almost had his soul sucked out by a Dementor but Harry wished they understood that he had no choice. He couldn’t be an enemy to both Voldemort and Scrimgeour, he needed the Ministry’s support against Voldemort. After all, his fifth year had been a testament to how badly it could result for Harry if the Ministry were against him.

It was a pleasant Friday evening that Harry had decided to sit by himself in the Gryffindor common room. Hermione was at the library and he and Ron had just played a game of chess, which Harry had lost at.

Graciously admitting defeat to Gryffindor’s reigning chess champion, Harry had retreated to one of the armchairs by the window to get started on his homework. He was just finishing off Professor Sprout’s essay on Venomous Tentacula when a shadow fell over him, and he looked up to see Ginny slip into the armchair opposite him.

“Hey Ginny,” he greeted, finishing the sentence he was on before setting his quill aside.

“Hey,” she said with a smile. “How’s homework going?”

“Eh, same as usual. Convinced Snape’s trying to kill us with the workload,” Harry said with a grimace. “Listen, about Valentines’-”

“Harry, it’s fine,” Ginny interrupted. “I kind of understood, I guess I might have pushed you and you have all these-”

“Wait, wait, what?” Harry frowned. “You thought that was me?”

Ginny shifted uncomfortably. “Well, it’s not unusual to do wandless magic in stressful situations-”

Harry, who was fully familiar with the bouts of magic he had achieved before he had even known he was a wizard, shook his head.

“It wasn’t me,” he said firmly. “It was…”

He trailed off, debating what to tell Ginny, who was looking at him curiously. He couldn’t tell her that it had been Tom Riddle, she had already been through enough because of him. She would never forgive him for granting safety to the man who had traumatized her in her very first year at Hogwarts.

Finally, Harry decided to settle on the version of the truth that he had told Hermione.

“There’s a sort of spirit in my head,” he told her carefully. “Or there was anyway. He cast the spell, not me.”

“A spirit?” Ginny said slowly, but she seemed to believe him. After all, unlike him and Hermione, Ginny had grown up in the magic world and perhaps being possessed by spirits was a lot more common than he had initially thought.
“It’s common then?” he asked her curiously. “You’re not surprised.”

Ginny however, shook her head. “Oh no, it’s not common. Most spirits have hardly the kind of power to actually reside in someone’s head… but in a castle this old… I suppose I can’t really be surprised to hear that one turned up. Nor can I say that I’m surprised that out of all the people who this could have possibly happened to, it turned out to be you.”

Harry snorted. “Just once I’d like a normal school year.”

She grinned at that. “No, you wouldn’t; you’d get bored with no school rules to trample on in your quest to save the world.”

“I never really had a choice.”

“I suppose not. But if you want, I can help you have a normal school experience,” she said slowly. “If only for one evening.”

Harry glanced down at his almost-finished essay. “And doing extra homework isn’t that?”

Ginny shook her head and stood up, grabbing Harry’s wrist and pulling him up too.

“Come on,” she said, turning away to head towards the exit. “Follow me.”

“Where are we going?” Harry asked in confusion as he stood to follow her, the two making their way out through the portrait and into the corridor. “It’s gonna be curfew soon-”

“Not for another hour,” the redhead dismissed, leading the way down the hall.

Harry stayed silent as they made their way through a maze of different corridors, trying to figure out where they were going but it was hopeless. They could have been going anywhere – these were the same corridors he had walked a hundred times already, it was hard to narrow it down to one destination.

Eventually though, they stepped outside and Ginny gave a sigh of relief as they crossed the threshold onto the grounds of Hogwarts.

“Looks different in the evening, doesn’t it?” she said in admiration, still walking but she had slowed down to a leisurely pace.

“It does,” Harry agreed.

Whilst during the day the grounds were usually filled with various students, either studying or baiting the giant squid, at night there was a quiet chill over the atmosphere, but it didn’t bother Harry in the slightest. The grass glittered with raindrops and the two Gryffindors had to tighten their cloaks around them as a soft, chilly wind picked up but other than that it was a rather tranquil experience.

The two walked in silence for a few minutes longer, until finally the Quidditch pitch came into sight. Ginny turned to him, a mischievous glint in her eyes before she flicked her wand above her.

“Accio broomstick,” she called, and a few seconds went by before there was a whistling sound and Ginny’s broom came flying towards them, straight into her waiting hand.

With one last glance at Harry, Ginny unclipped her cloak and, slipping a leg over her broom, the redhead kicked off, shooting up into the air. Her abandoned cloak gently floating down to rest on
the grass as Harry watched her fly, before he decided to summon his own broom.

There was something so natural about flying, Harry decided, as he seemed to leave all his cares and worries down on the grass alongside Ginny’s cloak. Here, above the ground in the evening sky he could finally feel free. With a burst of energy, he took off around the pitch before doing a couple of loops in the air, grinning madly.

Across the pitch Ginny was zig-zagging in and out of the hoops that lined both sides of the field, her fiery red hair shining through the darkness against her pale skin. Ginny slowed, breathless, and turned to catch Harry’s gaze. She grinned and slowly flew towards him.

“Feel better yet?” she asked when she a few feet away.

“Didn’t even realize how stressed I had been before this,” Harry admitted.

“I figured you would be,” Ginny said. “It’s almost the Easter holidays so let’s be honest, by this time you’re usually pretty deep into an adventure.”

Harry almost laughed. “No adventure this time, I’m sorry to disappoint,” he said with a grimace. “Just the usual Voldemort stuff.”

“Oh you could say ‘Just the usual You-Know-Who stuff’ and make it sound boring,” she teased. “Come on, let’s practise some Quidditch.”

“With what?” Harry asked. “We don’t have any equipment-”

“We have our brooms…” Ginny said slowly.

“Yeah but we’d need other stuff, like bats-”

“Neither of us are Beaters,” Ginny pointed out.

“-and you’d need a Quaffle to practise,” he tried instead but Ginny’s mysterious smile grew wider.

“I just practised,” she shrugged, nodding over to the hoops she had been flying through. “It’s your turn.”

“I-I’d need a Snitch-”

“I’ll be your Snitch.”

“-and unless you’re planning on- hang on, what?”

Ginny began to drift away from Harry. “I said, I’ll be your Snitch,” she repeated. She smiled mischievously at him, before shooting away on her broom before Harry could think of a reply.

“Come on, Potter,” she yelled back. “I thought you were good at this?”

Slowly, Harry began to grin before he flew after her. Even though his Firebolt was superior to hers in speed, Ginny was three times as good at manoeuvring as Harry, and every time he thought he had her, she would suddenly duck underneath his broom and take off in the opposite direction, or turn sharply to the other side.

Twice she led him through the hoops, slipping through each one as if it were second nature to her. Harry followed her just as fast – albeit, slightly clumsier – before she flew to the other side of the pitch to repeat the entire thing.
It was only when Ginny flipped upside down to fly under him again that Harry took his chance, jumping off his broom and onto hers, knocking the witch off and sending them both flying to the ground.

Before they could hit it however, Harry threw out a cushioning charm and they both landed harmlessly on the grass, their brooms landing a few feet away.

“OK, I was not expecting that,” Ginny said breathlessly, sitting up.

“Turns out jumping off my broom is a specialty of mine,” Harry replied. “At least, that’s what Fred and George told me.”

Ginny turned to look at him, a small smile gracing her lips.

“I’m sorry,” Harry said. “About the Three Broomsticks thing, back in February-”

Ginny rolled her eyes. “If you think I’m still grieving over being thrown to the floor a month later, then you clearly don’t know me very well.”

“I’d like to though.”

Ginny paused, and raised an eyebrow. “Trying to make friends with all the Weasleys?”

“No-!” Harry began to protest, but she was laughing.

“I’m kidding, Harry,” she said with a grin. “I’d like to know you better too.”

She edged forward slightly, her breathing quickening slightly. She leaned closer to him, and her hand landed on his accidently but Harry didn’t move, his eyes locked with hers. Ginny was still now, trying to gauge Harry’s reaction and, finding no opposition, she leaned in slightly closer.

The warmth of Ginny’s skin against his made Harry suddenly realize how cold it was outside, and he sat up a little more, closer to Ginny. His eyes drifted down to her lips before his vision went slightly blurry with how close she was, and he closed his eyes. The next thing he knew, her lips were pressed to his, moving cautiously.

He responded hesitantly, not entirely sure whether to lead or even what to do. The kiss in the Three Broomsticks hadn’t really prepared him. After a while however, he slowed and their lips stopped, just pressed against each other. Ginny slowly pulled away and Harry opened his eyes, blinking at her in surprise.

Neither of them spoke for a moment, staring at the other and waiting for them to speak up. Harry swallowed thickly.

“Ginny?” he said hoarsely.

“Yes?” she said in a soft voice.

“I-I… I think I’m gay.”

Ginny froze and looked at him for what seemed like an eternity. Her mouth opened and closed but no sound came out, and then her brows furrowed in confusion.

“What?”

“I-I think… I think I like men? I-I mean I...” Harry said, hardly daring to even believe it as he said
it himself. He had never really given much thought to his sexuality before this, far too preoccupied with other parts of his life but now, as he was saying it, it was almost a revelation to himself as it was to Ginny.

“Oh.”

Ginny was silent for some more time, thinking it over. She stared down at her hands, pale against the dark grass and Harry distantly wondered how long it was until their curfew was in place.

“You know…” Ginny said eventually, breaking the silence. “I-I’ve had guys say things after I’ve kissed them that’s taken me by surprise… one guy announced he loved me… but that’s the first time someone’s ever come out as gay.”

“Sorry.”

“Harry Potter, gay,” Ginny said in wonder, ignoring Harry’s apology. “Rita Skeeter is going to have a field day, you know that, right?”

“Wait, you’re not upset?” Harry frowned. “I-I just kissed you… and said I was gay.”

“I know, I was there,” Ginny said, lips twitching in amusement. “Of course, I’m not entirely happy – I don’t just kiss people for any old reason, you know, I do like you as more than a friend – but what good is getting upset over it? At least now you know, you can be happy. I want you to be happy, Harry.”

“Oh, well that’s good then. Because I like you too – though as a friend. I would hate to lose that.”

“Me too,” Ginny said softly, but then she frowned. “Hang on, it’s not Ron is it?”

“Not Ron what?”

She looked at him in exasperation. “He’s not the one you like, is he? Oh god I’d never live it down. My brother stole my crush-”

“It’s not Ron,” Harry assured her. “It’s not… it’s not anyone, really.”

“You said ‘really’,” Ginny said quietly. “You do like someone, don’t you?”

Harry shook his head. “No, I just realized after I kissed you-”

“That maybe a certain someone’s kiss was better?” Ginny asked lightly, a playful tone to her voice.

“I-I haven’t kissed anyone else- well, apart from Cho but-”

“You honestly don’t have feelings for a particular guy?”

“I…”

When Harry thought about all of his male classmates throughout all the Houses of Hogwarts, he realized he didn’t like any of them in that way. He loved them all dearly as friends, but there was no-one he liked more than that. In fact, he’d probably be happier kissing Ginny then some of them.

But he knew Ginny wasn’t the one he wanted. Knew that even though he didn’t want any of the guys at Hogwarts, it was closer to what he wanted than Ginny. What did he want?
“I don’t know what I want,” Harry murmured. “I never really thought about romance, I guess. This morning when I woke up I had no idea I was gay, I never thought about it before. I guess I just figured I had other stuff to worry about.”

“Forget about You-Know-Who,” Ginny said firmly. “Pretend you’re just another student at Hogwarts with the same problems and concerns that the rest of us have. What do you want?”

“Someone who doesn’t treat me differently,” Harry said instantly. “If I was just another student, then that would be fine but… I don’t want to be with someone who just sees me as the Chosen One. I want to be Harry.”

“Who treats you like Harry? Who do you want?”

Who did treat Harry like he was just another student? Hermione and Ron did, that was for sure, but Harry couldn’t imagine either of them in that way. The Gryffindors now treated him like he was another student. Though Dean, Seamus and Neville might have started out in their first year looking at him like he was their Saviour, by this point they were just classmates.

But once again, Harry couldn’t dig up any feelings for them other than pure friendship. When he really thought about it, the only other person who really just looked at him like he was normal was Tom, but even to the Slytherin he was still the Chosen One, it was just said in a sarcastic way.

Tom didn’t care for Harry’s fancy titles or his life before Hogwarts or even it during Hogwarts. No, Tom’s interest in Harry extended only as far as it concerned himself. And that shouldn’t have brought such relief to Harry as it had.

Try as he might, memories of that night in his four poster-bed, touching himself to the sound of Tom’s voice echoed around his mind. As much as he tried to deny that it was anything other than a normal wank, no other such sessions had lingered in Harry’s mind as this one had. No one else’s voice had that kind of power behind it, the power to make Harry’s hair stand on end and a chill go down his spine even when he said the most innocent of things.

But Tom was a future Dark Lord, and had no such interest in menial things like romance and relationships. He carried around the memories of his sexual conquests like trophies, not as fond moments. And it hadn’t been care and tenderness in Tom’s voice that night – it had been seduction and triumph. Tom was playing a game with him, a game in which Harry quite happily allowed himself into.

Maybe Tom had ignited that new spark of sexuality in Harry that he had never given much thought to before, but there was no love between them.

He was about to tell Ginny so, about to tell her that there was no one in particular that he wanted and that the awkward kiss between him just made him realize his sexuality.

“I can’t,” was what came out of Harry’s mouth instead, though.
“Have a seat, Harry.”

Harry glanced between Dumbledore, seated behind his desk and then at Scrimgeour, who was standing stiffly next to him. Reluctantly, Harry sat down in the offered chair.

“We have a great many things to discuss,” Dumbledore said, ignoring the chill that had suddenly seemed to spread across the room. “Lemon drop, Harry?”

“I don’t think this is exactly the time, Albus,” Scrimgeour said shortly and Harry, who had just been about to reject Dumbledore’s offer, reached over a took a sweet.

“We are in no rush,” Dumbledore said smoothly, taking a lemon drop for himself. “Please, Rufus, I insist. They are rather good. I’m rather fond of muggle sweets. Rubeus has offered to make me some caramel actually. I’m quite excited.”

Harry, who had had the unfortunate luck of trying to eat Hagrid’s caramel – and then trying to prize his jaw apart afterwards – looked up at Dumbledore in alarm and Dumbledore seemed to know exactly what he was thinking, winking at the student.

“Albus, we are in the middle of a war,” Scrimgeour snapped, clearly not enjoying the conversation about sweets. “The Ministry’s in an uproar as it is – we have no idea who may be on our side or not, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named may still have spies, ones that he had newly recruited so we have no idea-”

“I fully agree that this is a problem that must be dealt with,” Dumbledore said. “But it does not need to happen now, whilst Mr Potter is present. I have no doubt that he will find the conversation not to be the most intriguing. Politics never is, really. I suggest that we move onto the subject of his future. That is what you are here for after all, isn’t it?”

Scrimgeour gave a stiff nod. “Precisely. Now perhaps you may think I acted rashly before-”

“Rashly?” Harry couldn’t help but blurt out. “You tried to have me executed!”

“I tried to have the Dark Lord’s weapon executed!” Scrimgeour snapped, raising himself up to his full height, like a snake ready to attack. “You cannot expect to inform me that there is a possibility for the Dark Lord to possess Harry Potter and think that I’ll… what? Forget about it? Do nothing and pray that the Dark Lord will not pursue this path? I’m afraid I didn’t become Minister on sitting around and doing nothing, Albus.”

“I have no doubt about that, Rufus,” Dumbledore said gravely. “However, it is my belief that Voldemort may not be able to possess Harry anymore.”

Scrimgeour’s eyes widened in surprise. “No? What happened?”

“I believe…” Dumbledore said slowly, thinking over his words and Harry wondered just how much the headmaster was going to tell the Minister. If Scrimgeour was to find out about Tom Riddle’s residence in the dungeons, then the three of them would most likely be named traitors and all sent to Azkaban. Or even executed.
“I believe that it may have something to do with your Dementor,” Dumbledore finished. “I’m hardly an expert in this area of course, but I believe something to do with the trauma may have damaged to link. Alongside Harry’s occlumency lessons, of course.”

“He cannot possess the boy?” Scrimgeour asked suspiciously, looking at Harry with disbelief. “That is it? He is cured?”

“Perhaps,” Dumbledore said lightly. “I’d like to continue the lessons, of course, but I think now it has become apparent that there is no need to remove Harry from Hogwarts.”

The headmaster turned his head slightly to smile reassuringly at Harry and the Gryffindor found himself letting out a breath he hadn’t been aware that he was holding. He wasn’t going to go to Azkaban. He wouldn’t be executed, he could stay –

“I’d like to be certain,” Scrimgeour said icily. “Might I suggest time in Azkaban? If indeed He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named cannot possess the boy, then there is nothing to lose-”

“Apart from my sanity,” Harry growled and Scrimgeour turned to look at him. “If I’m not a danger to anyone, then I’m not going to Azkaban. You can bring as many guards and dementors to take me as you like, but until I’m an actual danger to everyone around me, then I refuse to go with you.”

“You are a danger,” Scrimgeour said quietly. “You will always be a danger whilst the Dark Lord has you marked as his own enemy.”

“Then I guess everyone at Hogwarts is a danger,” Harry said through gritted teeth and he swore he saw Dumbledore smile out the corner of his eye.

“He is right, of course,” Dumbledore said in a calm tone as Scrimgeour looked as if he wanted to drag Harry off to prison right there and then. “After all, I have given evidence against Voldemort and against many of his followers. If you insist on taking Harry to Azkaban due to him merely being an ‘enemy of the Dark Lord’, then I suggest that you find me a cell there too, right next to your own.”

Scrimgeour turned his glare onto Dumbledore, but this one was mixed with disbelief.

“You are putting Hogwarts at risk,” he said in a warning tone, after a few moments of silence.

“Hogwarts is safer than anywhere else is for Harry. And for everyone else. Voldemort cannot enter, either physically or through Harry’s mind.”

“You are aware that he is moving towards Hogwarts?” Scrimgeour said.

“It was his first home, Minister, it hardly surprises me that Tom Riddle wants to return to his roots,” Dumbledore said lightly. “Nonetheless, Voldemort cannot enter.”

Scrimgeour stared at Dumbledore for several moments, before turning to glance over at Harry. He seemed lost for words and Harry vaguely thought that the expression didn’t suit the ex-Auror.

“Let Harry stay here,” Dumbledore said gently. “He is in less danger here, than anywhere else, as are my students. I am fairly confident that the link has been sufficiently weakened. Harry, have you had anymore attempts from Voldemort?”

Harry shook his head. “N-No, not since the Dementor attack.” And since Tom was taken out of his mind, he added silently to himself.
“Then there is hope,” the headmaster said, beaming. “Minister I assure you, if Voldemort makes another attempt to possess Harry and it becomes apparent that the mind link is still strong enough to provide passage for him then we shall discuss another safe-place for him. But until then, I must insist that he stays here. After all, he has exams coming up and I’d rather he not miss out on his education.”

Scrimgeour frowned for a moment, before giving a brief nod.

“Alright, he stays here,” the Minister conceded. “But only as you are here to keep an eye out. I’d still rather that precautions are put in place.”

“Of course,” Dumbledore agreed, dipping his head in agreement.

“We still have several things to discuss, Albus,” Scrimgeour said. “But I think that can wait for today. The Ministry needs me, but I hope we can have another meeting in the near future.”

“Of that, I insist, Minister.”

Scrimgeour gave another nod to Dumbledore, before giving a quick nod to Harry in acknowledgement and sweeping out of the room in a flash of deep red robes.

The door closed behind him with a click, and Harry turned back to Dumbledore, who was unwrapping his lemon drop.

“Thank you,” he said quietly to the headmaster.

“There’s no need to thank me, Harry, as I told you before, you still have friends at Hogwarts,” Dumbledore said. “Even ones you may not be expecting.”

Harry must have looked confused, for Dumbledore gave a brief smile before explaining.

“I received protests against this meeting,” he said. “Miss Granger and Mr Weasley voiced their concerns – largely Miss Granger if memory serves.”

“Yeah,” Harry said awkwardly, unwrapping his own lemon drop. “They weren’t happy with the idea.”

“They weren’t the only ones,” Dumbledore said lightly. “I believe Mr Riddle had a few choice words to say about it as well.”

Harry, who had just popped the lemon drop in his mouth, choked on the tangy sweet and had to turn away to cough it back up out of his throat.

“Tom Riddle?” he said in disbelief once the sweet was out of his throat. “Tom came to see you about this?”

“He did,” Dumbledore said solemnly, but there was a hint of a smile on his lips. “Something about foolish, arrogant Gryffindors doing stupid things that no Slytherin would ever think about. If it makes you feel better,” he said to Harry’s indignant look. “I don’t think you were the only Gryffindor he was insulting.”

“He said I wouldn’t leave the room alive,” Harry said. “Said I was no match for the Minister.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” Dumbledore said. “You appeared to be quite a match for him today. I expect Scrimgeour did not expect the Boy Who Lived to have any opinions about his own life.
Men in power never do when it comes to their mascots.”

“I don’t want to be their mascot.”

“No, I don’t expect you do. But you are, however, and that is what you must deal with,”
Dumbledore said simply. “However, mascots have their own power, Harry, perhaps even greater
than the Minister’s powers.”

“I don’t have power like him,” Harry argued. “I don’t have the media and hundreds of Aurors at
my service. Scrimgeour would at least stand a chance against Voldemort. I don’t.”

Dumbledore bowed his head. “I don’t think Scrimgeour has any power against Tom Riddle,” he
said with a knowing smile. “And I think you on the other hand have a great amount of power. You
just have to learn how to use it.”

The headmaster stood up, clasping his hands in front of him and looking down at Harry with a
tinkle in his eyes.

“Might I suggest,” he said lightly. “That you see Mr Riddle now, I’m sure he is waiting to tell you
more about foolhardy Gryffindors and intelligent Slytherins.”

“Yes,” Harry said as he stood up as well. “I suppose he probably is.”

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“You’re alive,” Tom said haughtily, from where he was over by the bookcase, putting a hardcover
back.

“I am,” Harry agreed, hovering over by the door.

“Thought you’d be on your way to Azkaban by now,” Tom said.

“Oh, Scrimgeour certainly tried,” Harry said grimly as he sat down in the nearest armchair.
“Dumbledore wouldn’t let him, and neither would I for that matter.”

“No more heroic Chosen One?” Tom asked, a hint of curiosity in his voice. “No more sacrificing
yourself for the good of others?”

“I’ve always been somewhat of a danger to everyone here,” Harry mused. “I am the Boy Who
Lived and Voldemort will kill me. However, it doesn’t appear that he can possess me since you
become all… physical. And Voldemort can’t enter Hogwarts anyway. Once I am ready, I’ll go out
and meet him. But for now, I’d rather just finish off the year as normally as I can.”

“Voldemort can’t enter Hogwarts, but I am here, am I not?”

“You’re not Voldemort.”

“We discussed this,” Tom said, an edge of warning to his voice. “I am Voldemort, and I am
capable of terrible things, Harry. Don’t think me as one of your pathetic classmates, who cannot
even perform a non-verbal spell—”

“They’re not pathetic,” Harry growled. “And don’t worry, I’m not that delusional.”

“So why do you trust me this much?” Tom asked, and Harry was suddenly aware that the Slytherin
had moved closer, so close behind him that he could only just feel his warm breath across the back
of his neck.
Harry forced himself to stay seated, rather than twisting around or else moving to the other armchair. He would not let Tom on to how much the lack of space between them bothered him.

“Dumbledore trusts you not to murder everyone here,” Harry said, his voice shaking a tiny fraction. “He trusts you not to murder me. So I suppose I can give you the benefit of the doubt.”

“What if you can’t?”

Harry froze for a moment, before finally giving in and turning his body to glance behind him at Tom, hand resting lightly on his wand just in case.

“Are you going to hurt me?” Harry asked.

“I could,” Tom said quietly. “It would be so very easy.”

“Would it? I’ve disarmed you, remember.”

Tom smirked. “I remember. I was quite impressed.”

“That’s high praise coming from the, what was it again? The ‘darling of Hogwarts’ I believe, was it?”

If he hadn’t spent so much time around the Slytherin, he might have missed it. But there was no mistaking the tiny twitch in the hand that clutched Tom’s wand. Harry felt the pressure on his own wand but was ready, and silently cast up a *protego* that Tom’s disarming spell fell uselessly against.

“You’ve learnt,” Tom said carefully, a flicker of an indecipherable emotion in his dark eyes.

“I have a good tutor,” Harry said, slowly standing up from the armchair and facing Tom.

Tom cocked his head curiously. “Perhaps you are a match for the great Lord Voldemort after all,” he said softly.

Harry began to smile but then Tom’s hand twitched again and, unprepared, Harry felt a great force push against his chest, throwing him across the room and into the wall opposite the door.

“But then again,” Tom said, amusement lacing his voice as he watched Harry struggle to his feet. “Perhaps not.”

“*Expelliarmus*” Harry tried but with another flick of his wrist Harry felt himself get slammed into the wall with the same force against his chest. Unable to push against the force, Harry was left to watch as Tom slowly approached him as a hunter might approach its catch.

“Attacking with a verbal spell is never a good idea, Harry,” he whispered, closing the distance between them. “You give the enemy the upper hand.”

“Oh you,” Harry tried to argue. “Anyone else-”

“But you’re not fighting anyone else,” Tom said matter-of-factly, his warm breath fanning over Harry’s face. “You’re fighting *me*. And I am too fast for you.”

“That pride will be your downfall one of these days,” Harry said lightly but Tom merely smirked.

“You’re not the greatest wizard in the world, you need to become at least second best.”
“Or just incredibly lucky,” Harry said quietly, hardly daring to breath. “I did it before.”

“You did,” Tom said simply, reaching out a hand to Harry’s scar.

Harry instinctively flinched and Tom paused for a moment, before he lightly traced the lighting-bolt with the tip of one finger. Harry had been expecting blinding pain, like the last time Voldemort had touched his scar, but surprisingly found that there was no pain. Just the sensation of Tom’s cool finger tracing his scar over and over again.

“Such a messy situation,” Tom murmured, eyes fixed on Harry’s scar. “Quite unbelievable. If I hadn’t seen Dumbledore’s memories of it being recounted then I’m not sure I would have believed it myself.”

“Do you think I have a chance?” Harry asked as Tom withdrew his hand. “Against Voldemort? Do you think I have at least some sort of chance?”

“To draw the fight out a little bit longer?” Tom asked. “Yes, perhaps. It’s a shame we don’t have the boggart anymore, fighting someone with looks like mine must be distracting for you, mm?”

Harry scowled at Tom’s smirk. “It wasn’t that good, so you might as well forget that night.”

“Wasn’t that good?” Tom asked sweetly, his smirk growing wider. “That’s because it was your own hand. It’s never is as good.”

Harry opened his mouth to make a scathing retort, but something else was bothering him. Now that Tom had brought up the subject of the boggart, Harry realized that he wanted to ask Tom something. Something that had been bothering him for some time.

“Why is your greatest fear a door?” he whispered.

Tom froze, and immediately pulled away from Harry, dropping the spell that was keeping Harry to the wall, but Harry didn’t move.

“Tom, don’t ignore me, I want to know,” Harry insisted, and Tom glared at him.

“I don’t care that you want to know,” he sneered. “It doesn’t make it your business.”

“What could the Heir of Slytherin possibly have to fear from a door?” Harry wondered aloud. “You’re clever, great at duelling, you can charm anyone to do anything you want – and not with magic. I just don’t understand why that’s your greatest fear. I thought your greatest fear would be… well, death.”

Tom was breathing heavily, half turned away from Harry, his dark stare piercing into Harry’s green eyes.

“You’re searched the world for a way to become immortal because you despise death that much,” Harry continued, well aware that he was currently playing with fire. “So why a door? Why the window from your memories? I know they’re linked. And they’re linked with that rainy street I saw in your nightmare. They’re all linked and somehow, they’re your greatest fear. What is it, Tom?”

“You think I am going to tell you, my greatest enemy, my worst fear?” Tom asked dangerously. “Why would I do that?”

“Because I’m not your greatest enemy,” Harry said simply. “I’m Voldemort’s greatest enemy. And
you’re not Voldemort. Not yet anyway.”

Tom turned away from Harry, going over to the armchair that Harry had vacated and sitting down, leaning his chin on one hand as he stared into the fire.

“Who am I going to tell, Tom?” Harry said softly. “Believe it or not, I’m not so keen for all my friends to find out that I regularly come down here to chat with Tom Riddle. The only other person I could actually tell is Dumbledore and why would I do that? He knows I need to die. I know I need to die. There is no need for your greatest fear—”

“Then why do you want to know?” Tom asked. “Pure curiosity?”

“I just don’t understand, that’s all. You seem fearless.”

“Complimenting me will do nothing to persuade me to tell you,” Tom said lightly, and Harry inwardly sighed in relief that Tom wasn’t angry.

“That’s a shame, because I had so many compliments I wanted to tell you. Ah well, best forget them then.”

Tom glanced up at Harry and raised an eyebrow. “There is nothing you could tell me that I haven’t heard already,” he said.

He turned back to the fire and for several minutes silence fell. Tom looked as if he were contemplating whether to tell Harry about the door, and so Harry stayed quiet. After a few restless minutes of standing up, he sat down in the opposite armchair, looking over to the fire as well, but the flames contained nothing interesting.

“It is from my childhood,” Tom said, and his voice was so quiet that for a moment Harry thought he had imagined it. When he looked over to the Slytherin, he hadn’t moved a muscle, but then Tom’s lips moved again.

“When I was growing up, I had the same room for eleven years,” he said softly, still staring into the fire. “The same wooden flooring and the same peeling, green wallpaper. The same furniture, the same window and door. Most of my memories of my childhood comprise of that small, dingy room somewhere in London. From my window, I could see the street outside the orphanage, and could watch the people passing by.”

Tom went silent again, and Harry didn’t dare interrupt his thoughts. He couldn’t imagine growing up in such a dismal-sounding place. As horrible as the Dursleys were, and as horrible as that cupboard under the stairs was, at least he was allowed in an environment that looked attractive. The Dursleys were all about appearances, and when he wasn’t shut under the stairs, he could wander the pretty suburban house.

Tom did not have such luck.

“I told you my parents were dead,” Tom suddenly said, turning to glance over at Harry. “That wasn’t true.”

Harry frowned. Of course it was true, Voldemort was an orphan, just like he was, Tom killed his father in-

Harry paused in his thoughts. When did Tom kill his father? Evidently it had been after the Tom who had opened the Chambers, but when exactly it happened, Harry was not sure.
“My mother died giving birth to me,” Tom said slowly. “My father was nowhere to be seen and never came for me. Until my fifth year I had no idea who he was. I used to look out that window and wonder if one of the men was my father, coming to collect me. It never was.”

“I couldn’t think that,” Harry said quietly, when Tom said no more. “I knew my parents were dead. But I still hoped… I hoped that perhaps my grandparents would come for me, or some other relative. I didn’t have a window to look out of but if I did…”

“What do you mean you didn’t have a window?” Tom asked abruptly, dark brown eyes fixed on Harry. “You grew up in a house, I saw it, in Dumbledore’s-”

“I didn’t sleep in any of the bedrooms,” Harry admitted quietly. “For the first eleven years I slept in a cupboard under the stairs.”

Tom seemed to tense up, before he turned back to the fire. It seemed to grow a bit brighter, and the flames seemed to reach a little higher with the anger and crackle of magic radiating off Tom.

“Filthy muggles,” Tom muttered under his breath.

“Yes, they were,” Harry said.

Tom was silent for another few minutes, but then he spoke again, his voice dropping to barely a whisper.

“Sometimes the people would come into the orphanage,” he told Harry. “I would see them glance to the building as they approach and I would just know they were here for one of us… I used to… I used to think that perhaps…”

“Perhaps they were there for you,” Harry finished for him, and Tom gave a stiff nod.

“It never was,” Tom said. “And eventually I decided that my father must be dead and I must be an actual orphan. But even orphans get adopted. Every so often we would be in our rooms and we would hear a knock, somewhere along the corridor. A visitor would have come, and they wanted to meet one of us. Sometimes they made several knocks along the corridor. There was never a knock on my door until I was almost eleven years old.”

“And that was about Hogwarts?”

“Yes. That was Dumbledore. He introduced me to a world where I belonged. A world where I wasn’t some filthy orphan in a rundown orphanage somewhere in London’s less glamorous streets. I was a wizard. And I was good at magic, better than my peers.”

“But after all these years… it’s still your worst fear?” Harry asked in disbelief. “The door that was never knocked upon until Dumbledore turned up?”

“All I ever wanted for a large part of my childhood was for my father to come for me,” Tom said, his voice so quiet that Harry had to strain to hear what he was saying. “Then it was just for anyone to come for me.”

The room went quiet once more, aside from the crackle of the fireplace and Harry mulled over Tom’s words. Tom had spent his childhood like Harry had, waiting for someone to come for him. He had watched out that window and wondered if one of them was his father, and then he had waited at his door hoping that there would be a knock.

Even when Dumbledore had come and taken him to Hogwarts, the image of the window and the
door were still ingrained in Tom’s mind. Harry remembered a snippet of a conversation he had had with Dumbledore, about how even those closest to Tom – the future Death Eaters – were never considered his ‘friends’. They were just his followers, like Crabbe and Goyle were to Malfoy.

Tom Riddle’s greatest fear wasn’t death… it was abandonment, and the loneliness that had come with it. And that was a feeling Harry knew only too well.

However, when given the chance to have friends and a surrogate family at Hogwarts, whilst Harry had joyfully leapt upon the opportunity, Tom, hardened and bitter by his childhood, refused to even open up, the door and window still in his mind.

“Looks like we both had shit childhoods then,” Harry commented, trying to bring light to the uncomfortable sadness that lingered over the room. “But that’s in the past now.”

“Yes, it is,” Tom said simply.

“What do you want, Tom?” Harry asked suddenly. “I know what Voldemort wants, he just wants to live forever and have complete power but… I don’t know what you want.”

Tom stared into the flames for a moment longer, before he pulled his gaze away to meet Harry’s.

“I don’t know,” he said honestly.

Chapter End Notes

I am sorry for the continuous use of the sherbet lemons, but I do really like them
“You’re what?” Ron exclaimed, scrambled egg falling out of his mouth that had gaped in surprise.

“I’m gay,” Harry repeated slowly, glancing between Ron and Hermione’s expressions.

“B-But… but my sister,” Ron said in confusion. “You… you’re not going out with her? I-I thought… but Valentines day! Does she know?”

“She was the first person I told,” Harry assured Ron. “And she’s fine with it.”

“Oh, good then. Because you wouldn’t want to see Ginny when she’s mad.”

“I’m sure the ladies of Britain will be thoroughly disappointed though,” Hermione said with a smirk. “I think they had rather high hopes for themselves.”

“Ladies of Britain?” Ron said aghast. “Not all of them I hope.”

“Oh no, just Rita Skeeter’s avid fanbase. Mostly middle-aged women. She puts out a chart twice a year you know, on the top ten most eligible bachelors and you’ve been at the top of the last five.”

“Well I guess the next chart will have a new number one then,” Harry shrugged, not caring in the slightest about how eligible he was.

“Oh, I’m not too sure about that,” Hermione said lightly. “You’re still an eligible bachelor, you’ll just have a different group of suitors.”

“I swear to god if men start sending me letters-”

“If they’re howlers then I’m leaving, mate,” Ron said seriously. “If I hear one more lovesick poem then I will go bonkers.”

“Lavender still sending them?” Harry frowned and Ron groaned, hiding his face in his hands.

“Do you know what rhymes with ‘ginger’?” he said, his voice muffled.

“Nothing really,” Hermione frowned. “Well, nothing entirely-”

“Yeah, Lavender just used it twice,” Ron muttered. “In the next poem, I had hair the ‘colour of autumn leaves on a dying September day’.”

“At least she’s creative,” Harry tried to reassure him, but he was holding back a grin.

“No, she just stole the lyrics from that latest Celestina Warbeck song and thought I wouldn’t notice. Mum’s played that song so many times over the holidays it was burnt into my mind.”

“Oh yeah, I remember now,” Harry said in realization. “Wasn’t that about the guy she cheated on?”

“Merlin knows, Harry.”

“What’s happening with you and Lavender anyway?” Hermione interrupted. “If you don’t like her then why are you dating her?”

“I’m not dating her!”
“She seems to think so, she’s telling people you’re her boyfriend,” the brunette witch commented and Ron went pale.

“She can’t do that, can she?” he panicked. “I never agreed to that. We went on one date! We never discussed a relationship, we aren’t… are we?”

“I’m going to be honest, I really wouldn’t know,” Harry said. “Then again, Cho and I didn’t exactly sign a contract, it just happened.”

“Do girls just not bloody discuss anything?” the redhead said in despair. “How are you meant to know where you stand with them if they just make the decision all by themselves and not tell you?”

“Go talk to her, tell her how you feel,” Hermione sighed.

“No, screw that, I’m not telling her anything. Now she knows how it feels,” Ron said, scowling at Lavender chatting with Parvati as Hermione looked exasperated.

“Well good luck then with your new girlfriend,” Harry said, getting up from the table. “I’ll meet you Transfiguration.”

If Harry had struggled with Transfiguration before, it was nothing compared to this year’s work. The lesson today – conjuring birds out of thin air – was received by the class with looks of confusion and utter hopelessness and even Hermione had stayed paused in her seat for a few seconds before getting on with the task at hand.

Half of the lesson had gone by before there was a knock at the door, and all Harry had managed to do was strain his wrist from flicking it too hard.

McGonagall glanced up from where she had been grading essays and strode over to the door, opening it to reveal a nervous second year Hufflepuff clutching a roll of parchment.

“Note from Professor Dumbledore,” the boy said, holding out the message. “Said it was for Harry Potter.”

McGonagall took the offered parchment, glancing at the name addressed on it and Dumbledore’s seal before she nodded to the young student.

“You may return to your lesson,” she said curtly, and the Hufflepuff bounced away, the door shutting swiftly behind him.

The Professor handed a confused Harry the roll of parchment, her lips pursed as she eyed the trio’s work so far. Only Hermione had managed to conjure a bird, which was desperately trying to fly but kept falling into Hermione’s lap.

Ron had his tongue sticking out the side of his mouth in concentration as he waved his wand, but as soon as McGonagall returned back to her desk, he set it down and exhaled loudly, clearly having given up.

“What’s it about?” he asked, nodding to the parchment that Harry had put in his bag.

“Don’t know, haven’t opened it yet.”
“Reckon it’s about You-Know-Who?” Ron said, before his eyes widened slightly. “Maybe it’s about the Minister. Maybe he’s come back.”

“If Scrimgeour had come back for Harry then I think there would be more urgency,” Hermione said, quickly catching her bird that had thrown itself off the desk. “He’d hardly just send some student to warn him.”

“Well, we’ll find out after class anyway,” Harry sighed.

“Ooo maybe he’s giving you work to do? In preparation?” Hermione asked hopefully.

“God I hope not,” Ron muttered. “Have you seen how much we have to do over Easter?”

“Well if you had started revising at Christmas like I advised you, then you wouldn’t have so much,” Hermione said snidely.

“I believe you still have half an hour left of this lesson,” McGonagall’s curt voice broke through their conversation. “And only Miss Granger has managed to produce a bird out of you three. I suggest you quieten up and *practise*.”

The three fell silent, Harry now noticing that several others of their classmates had managed to produce a bird – Seamus’s was sitting on his head.

Harry picked his wand up, muttering the incantation under his breath as he flicked it. A small puff of bright yellow feathers flew out the end of the wand and settled on the table, but with no bird in sight. McGonagall was not impressed.

Once the lesson was over and they had been dismissed, Harry immediately reached for the parchment, breaking the wax seal and unrolling it. Ron and Hermione stood next to him, reading it over his shoulder.

*Dear Harry,*

*I must request your presence once more in my office, as I believe we still have a great many things to discuss concerning Lord Voldemort. Please be at my office at 7pm on the Friday before the holidays start.*

Professor Dumbledore

“What can you still have to discuss?” Ron asked in disbelief.

“I don’t exactly know much anyway,” Harry replied, rolling the parchment back up. “Honestly, any information by this point is valuable.”

--------------------------------------------

Harry winced as he was thrown to the ground for a second time that evening, his head hitting the side of the plush armchair.

“You’re distracted,” Tom said briskly, looming over Harry with his wand held loosely in his right hand. “Pay attention.”

Harry groaned, thumping his head back on the floor. “Got a lot on my mind.”

“Well don’t.”

“Great advice, thanks,” Harry muttered, pushing himself to his feet. He barely gotten up however
when another jet of light burst out of Tom’s wand and Harry was thrown across the room and sent sprawling on the floor. He hissed as his head just scraped the hard marble of the fireplace.

“I’m sorry, did you expect me to wait for you?” Tom mocked as Harry scowled at him. “I think you’re confusing a fight to the death with some amateur third year duel.”

“No, I just think this is more for your personal entertainment than me,” Harry said, getting up for the third time.

Tom frowned at him, head cocked slightly to one side as he lifted up his wand at Harry. Another jet of light flew out but Harry, having enough of being mocked by Tom for one night, threw up the strongest protego he could.

Tom’s eyes widened momentarily before he was thrown back by the shield and into an armchair, his hair messed up and falling in his eyes. He glared at Harry.

“What in Merlin’s name was that?” he snapped, brushing down his robes as he stood up.

“If you really think I’m just here to be attacked by you you’re wrong,” Harry snorted. “Besides, it hardly my fault you weren’t even prepared for a protego. Maybe I should be training you-”

“Silencio” Tom hissed and though Harry’s lips continued to move, he found that no sound came out.

He tried to give an indignant sound but when that also failed, he settled for narrowing his eyes at the Slytherin.

“I wasn’t attacking you,” Tom huffed now that Harry was silent.

Harry opened his mouth to make a sharp retort but then closed it again, crossing his arms in irritation.

Tom lifted his wand again and Harry flinched back but the next second warm light flowed over him and Harry could feel the familiar workings of a healing charm.

“You had a cut,” Tom said nonchalantly as he waved his wand once more before turning away.

“I get a lot of those,” Harry said after a moment’s hesitation, before finding out he could talk again.

“So do I, but you don’t see me walking around like some fallen hero,” Tom muttered, inspecting the armchair nearest to him for a moment before waving his wand and moving it slightly to the right.

“Been in a lot of to the death fights have you then?” Harry scoffed. “You don’t seem the type to pick fights with students.”

“Oh they weren’t students,” the other man said, sitting down in the armchair and looking over to Harry. “I would often have to fight when seeking something.”

“Like what?”

Tom’s lips turned up slightly in amusement. “I thought you wanted me to train you?”

“And we did, or rather, I turned up and you threw me into the floor multiple times and injured me.”

“So you admit I won this time?”
“I did beat you with a *protego* spell,” Harry pointed out. “I hardly think that can be considered a win for you.”

Tom watched him for a moment, before glancing over to the fire.

“I sought out unicorns in the Forbidden Forest,” he murmured, resting his chin on his hand. “And along the way I encountered many a beast.”

“Why unicorns?” Harry asked warily, his mind going to his first year, and the sight of Quirrell hunched over the dead corpse of a unicorn.

“How much do you know about unicorn lore?”

“Not much. I did my Care of Magical Creatures OWL last year on them. I-I know…” Harry hesitated, and Tom looked back at him in curiosity.

“What? What do you know?”

Harry forced himself to look into Tom’s dark gaze. “I know their blood can keep you alive,” he said steadily. “Even if you are seconds from death.”

“A cursed life,” Tom said softly. “Not really a life at all. I read tales of wizards and witches made desperate who have succumbed to such a crime to stay alive.”

“And you wouldn’t?” Harry blurted out without thinking. “If you needed to stay alive?”

“A cursed life,” Tom mused, thinking it over. “I should not think I would be of the correct mind if I resorted to that. A cursed life hardly makes for much success in ventures.”

“Then why did you seek them out?”

Tom remained silent for a while, his gaze flickering back to the fireplace.

“Because I could,” he said quietly, but Harry could sense hesitation underlying the statement, as if there was something Tom was deliberately trying to keep hidden.

Slowly Harry sat down in the opposite armchair, leaning back and watching Tom’s tall, silent form.

“It was in my fourth year,” he said slowly. “Everyone else was studying for their exams but not I. I was consumed by this… this obsession about unicorns. I wanted to know everything about them, where they came from, where their magic was sourced from. For days I barely slept nor ate, I stayed in the library researching.”

“But why?” Harry frowned. “What did you want from a unicorn?”

At this Tom briefly smiled. “I was told by one of the professors that unicorns were amongst some of the rarest of creatures, extremely pure and good, and that the chances of seeing one, let alone catching one were slim. Especially for me.”

“Especially for you?”

The smile faded slightly from Tom’s face as he turned to Harry. “Unicorns react much more favourably to the company of women,” he told Harry and Harry, who had been taught this by Hagrid, nodded.
“Did you find one?” Harry asked curiously.

“I saw one, briefly,” Tom murmured. “The night before my Potions exam I went out into the Forbidden Forest to seek one out. Got into a nasty fight with a hippogriff. I think I had stumbled too close to her nest and she defended it well. I was alone in the dark, injured and not knowing how to return to the castle. But I pressed on. I didn’t care whether I never made it out of the forest. I had to see a unicorn, had to prove that I could do what many other students had lied about doing.”

Tom fell silent, and the only sound that could be heard was the constant crackle of the fireplace. Harry studied the Slytherin opposite him. Tom Riddle was different to anyone he had ever met. He held a certain charm and beauty that no other student came close to, and for a moment Harry could understand the obsession with unicorns.

Unicorns were beautiful, had an extremely powerful magical core and were rare. Tom could almost be described as a unicorn, were it not for the fact that unicorns, as their fundamental characteristic, were good. Tom was not so.

There was something about Tom that drew Harry to him. But it wasn’t the beauty, or the charm, or the intelligence. Maybe at the start it was, but now Harry was intrigued by him for a whole other reason – his obsession of the magical world. The way Tom described how he would research the myths of the magical world, the most powerful magical artefacts and rare creatures reminded Harry of a boy taken aback by wonder at the idea of a whole other world. And that was something he could relate to.

Harry suddenly remembered how Tom had reacted at Slughorn’s Christmas party. The way he had told Harry to ask the professors questions about the type of wood used in wands. Harry hadn’t given much consideration to it before, but now he understood.

Tom was fascinated and obsessed with everything magic.

“And you saw one?” Harry said quietly. “A unicorn, I mean.”

“I did,” Tom replied in a soft voice. “I saw a flash of white and turned to look. I saw its body, saw its horn but then it was gone.”

“And you never sought them out again? That was just the end of it?”

Tom gave a nod. “Yes,” he said. “That was the end.”
“Have a seat, Harry.”

Harry sat down in the chair opposite Dumbledore’s desk. The headmaster himself was standing next to the Pensieve, his wand to his temple and as Harry watched he drew it away from him, a shining, white string attached to the wand.

Dumbledore dropped the memory into the Pensieve, before turning to smile at Harry.

“We have a great many things to discuss, Harry, firstly concerning Lord Voldemort and secondly Mr Riddle.”

Harry didn’t say anything, but watched as Dumbledore made his way to his desk, sitting down in the large oak chair.

“As you are most likely aware, Voldemort is heading towards Hogwarts,” Dumbledore said gravely. “He is most likely angered about failing to procure a weapon from you, and seeks to attack. As such I want to be prepared.”

“But sir, if I need to die-”

Dumbledore held up a hand quickly and Harry shut his mouth, staring at the old wizard in concern. Dumbledore looked exhausted, deep frown lines etched into his face and though he smiled at Harry, it did not reach his eyes which remained sad.

“Let’s not speak of such things right now,” the aging Headmaster said. “I regret leaving you in the dark all these years, but I felt like you already had such a burden to bear, that I did not want to force you to look at the life of your enemy.”

“You’re going to show me Voldemort’s life, sir?” Harry asked in surprise.

Dumbledore nodded. “Yes, I think it would be best for you to know about the life of the man you are up against.”

Dumbledore stood up, beckoning for Harry to follow him before he headed over to the Pensieve. But Harry stayed seated.

“Sir?” he called out hesitantly. “I-I’ve… I’ve been training with To- Riddle, I mean. Is that OK?”

If Dumbledore was surprised about the confession, he didn’t show it. He merely gave Harry a small smile.

“I think that is perfectly fine, Harry. Tom is an exceptionally gifted student and has much to offer.”

“So you’re not worried, sir?” Harry asked in confusion. “You’re not worried that he… that he might try to recruit me to the dark side o-or… or attack me?”

“When we are faced with hindsight, of what Tom Riddle could become, it is very easy to see the student as the dark wizard,” Dumbledore said gravely. “Tom Riddle is volatile and potentially dangerous, but he is also very much a scared child. And Hogwarts is still a friend to all those who need one.”

Once again the headmaster beckoned Harry over and the Gryffindor got up, going over to stand
next to the elder at the Pensieve.

“Now I must ask this of you, Harry,” Dumbledore said, as Harry watched the swirls of light dance in the water. “Tom Riddle must know nothing of this, understand?”

“I understand, sir,” Harry replied, knowing full well that Tom would not react kindly to an invasion of his past. However, if Dumbledore was asking him to look into Voldemort’s past, then it must be important in defeating the dark wizard. And that was more important than Tom’s anger.

Harry was deep in thought on the way back to the Gryffindor common room when loud voices interrupted him.

“What do you mean you won’t wear it?” a shrill voice spoke out, that made Harry freeze around the corner. “I got it for you-”

“Yeah err… no offense-” Harry recognised Ron’s awkward stammer. “- but I can’t be seen with that at home. Do you know how Fred and George will react? Not to mention my mum-”

“You haven’t told her yet?” Lavender said in a hurt voice. “Why haven’t you told your mum about us?”

“Well, it’s a bit weird-”

“What’s weird about it?” Lavender asked, her voice taking on a dangerous tone that had Harry wondering whether he should make a run for it. “We’ve been dating since February, Ronald, I think-”

“But we haven’t though,” Ron tried to argue and Harry winced, lips twitching up slightly in a smirk at his best friend’s predicament. He would rather take on Voldemort than an angry Lavender Brown any day.

“What do you mean? I asked you out, you said yes!”

“I said yes to Hogsmeade, I didn’t say yes to-”

“You know what? Fine! If it’s such a burden to go out with me, then I guess we’re done!” Lavender snapped, and Harry heard her footsteps storm down the corridor away from him.

Moving away from the wall, Harry turned the corner to see Ron staring off after Lavender, mouth slightly open in shock.

“Girlfriend trouble?” Harry asked with a smirk.

Ron jumped in surprise and turned around to scowl at the other wizard.

“Shove off, Harry,” he muttered. “Trust me, this is a good thing.”

“At least they’ll be no more poems,” Harry said cheerfully as they headed to the common room together. “I was afraid I’d have to move to the Slytherin table to avoid them-”

“Well at least I have someone,” Ron retorted. “Or… did have someone… wait, does this mean I’m single now?”

“Join the club.”
Ron was silent for a moment, and when Harry glanced over to him his brows were furrowed in
thought.

“Can I ask you something?” the ginger wizard asked hesitantly.

“Yeah,” Harry said warily. “What is it?”

“Do you like someone then?” Ron blurted out, before looking mortified at what he had said. “I
don’t know if this is like inappropriate, but you said you were gay and I was just wondering what
made you think that… I mean, is it Dean or Seamus…?”,

Harry shook his head. “No, it’s no-one. Don’t worry, the sanctuary of your sleep is still safe.”

“Wait, so how do you know then?”

“That I’m gay?” Harry questioned, and Ron nodded. “I don’t know… I just do. Until this year I’ve
never given much thought to relationships, I had a lot going on-”

Ron snorted. “Yeah but what about Cho?”

Harry shrugged. “I mean I think I liked her? I don’t know. It’s not something I think about even
now.”

“Yeah but you need a relationship, mate,” the other wizard argued. “You’re the bloody Boy Who
Lived, it’s just embarrassing if you’re single.”

“I think Rita Skeeter would beg to disagree.”

“How was the meeting with Dumbledore anyway? What did he want?” Ron asked curiously.

“It was… a lot,” Harry said slowly, mulling over the events of that evening. “He showed me
Voldemort’s past.”

Ron’s eye twitched slightly at the dark wizard’s name but other than that did not react like he once
used to. It suddenly occurred to Harry that Ron and Hermione had been through just as much as he
had the past few years, and had been in just as much danger. A wave of affection for his friends
swept through him, before it was interrupted by Harry’s own guilt.

His friends had risked their lives for him to help defeat Voldemort, and here he was, saving Tom
Riddle from dementors and visiting him in the dungeons whilst they sat oblivious in the Gryffindor
common room.

“Wait like when he was at Hogwarts?” Ron asked. “Bet he was a right git. Bet he was like Percy.
You know, minus all the dark magic.”

“I saw him at the orphanage,” Harry said quietly, frowning as he remembered it. “He was… he
was lonely. Like I was.”

“Yeah except you didn’t grow up to be an evil bastard,” Ron snorted. “Being lonely is no excuse.”

“I’m not trying to make an excuse, h-he’s evil and sick and twisted but… I don’t know, I never
expected to feel sorry for him, that’s all.”

“Just don’t go making a habit of it, OK?” the other wizard laughed as they reached the portrait of
the Fat Lady.
But try as he might, Harry couldn’t get his mind off the eleven-year-old boy he had seen in Dumbledore’s memory, sitting on the bed waiting for something to happen.

“Everyone’s going home for the Easter.”

“That’s what tends to happen, yes.”

Harry shifted in place where he stood next to the door to Tom’s chambers. The Heir of Slytherin was lounging in his armchair, a book held open by one pale hand whilst he leaned his chin on the other one. Though he kept his gaze on the pages in front of him, his eyes didn’t move, and Harry had a feeling he wasn’t even reading.

“How many of these have you read?” Harry asked in wonder, glancing over to the bookcase.

“All of them. Twice.”

“Are they that interesting?”

“Not all,” came Tom’s drawl.

“So why are you reading them again?”

Tom looked over the edge of his book at Harry and raised one eyebrow.

“What else do you suggest?” he said quietly. “Sit here and wait for myself to go insane?”

“There must be something to do except read,” Harry argued. “We could duel-”

Tom scoffed. “And defeat you again? Potter, there comes a time where even I grow tired of endless wins.”

“You don’t get endless wins,” Harry snapped. “I defeated you the past two times-”

“I let you.”

“Well then don’t this time.”

Tom scowled at Harry, who crossed his arms.

“The past two and a half weeks all I have done is read and duel,” Tom snarled, slamming the book shut. “I am not some rodent you can trap in a cage. I got more freedom at the bloody orphanage. You want to be useful, Chosen One? Find me something to do.”

“Like what? Perhaps some first years to terrify? A basilisk to set upon the school?”

Tom dropped the book to the floor, reaching up and massaging his temples with long, slender fingers.

“Anything that will distract me from your inane drivel,” he muttered. “I don’t know how long Dumbledore expects me to be trapped in here. I might as well just get into contact with my future self if this is the thanks I get from the so-called ‘good’ side.”

“What thanks did you expect?” Harry asked in wonder. “You’re a future dark lord. Did you expect to just go wandering Hogwarts?”
Tom froze, before glancing up at Harry with a curious look on his face.

“I’m a future dark lord,” he said slowly. “I’m the most powerful wizard alive…”

“Well,” Harry said awkwardly. “No, not exactly…”

But Tom had already latched onto an idea. He stood up swiftly and approached the door, pushing it open tentatively. He stared for a moment at the space in front of him, before reaching out a hand.

His fingertips barely made it over the threshold before they were forced to stop, like there was an invisible wall. Tom frowned, eyes narrowing in concentration as he pushed against the barrier and Harry could see tiny blue sparks fizz where his hand met the wall.

“What are you doing?” Harry snapped. “Trying to get yourself killed? You’re no match for Dumbledore’s charms. Hell, even your future self isn’t.”

Tom ignored Harry, pushing against the charms and Harry could see a vein pulsing in the Slytherin’s neck that reminded him oddly of Uncle Vernon when he got angry.

Tom hissed out a curse in Parseltongue before wrenching his hand away from the barrier, body heaving with exertion. The blue sparks danced in the air momentarily, before vanishing and the doorway looked once more like any other doorway.

“How did you get out before?” Harry frowned. “When we went to the Forest?”

“Dumbledore allowed me time out to see the castle,” Tom muttered, examining his hand for any side effects of the charms. “Decided to take advantage of it to go to the Forest. It seems I am grounded once more though.”

Before Harry could blink, Tom had suddenly raised his wand and sent it lashing down towards the barrier. An explosion of blue sparks shot out from the barrier and the Slytherin was sent flying back into one of the armchairs, his hair tousled and hanging down in front of his furious dark gaze.

“Dumbledore,” he spat, pushing himself out of the chair and twisting his wand hand until a stream of silver light burst out and hit the barrier, followed by a red light and then a bright pink one.

“Tom, stop!” Harry shouted out as Tom threw curse after curse at the barrier with no avail.

When, out of frustration and anger, Tom directed a curse at one of the bookcases instead, sending splinters of wood flying across the room, Harry jumped in front of him and grabbed his wrist.

“Stop it,” he snapped. “You can’t undo Dumbledore’s charms.”

Tom growled impatiently and threw Harry off, lifting his wand once more to the barrier.

“I’m the Heir of Slytherin,” he argued. “I’m a descendent of Salazar Slytherin himself and what is Dumbledore compared to that?”

“Someone more powerful than you,” Harry said, and Tom glared at him, eyes burning with rage before he finally let his arm drop to his side.

Silence fell over the room, and Harry glanced over to the destroyed bookcase and the books scattered on the floor. Slowly, he bent down and picked one up, brushing off fragments of wood before he put it to the side.

When he looked back at Tom, the student was still standing facing the doorway, his entire body
tensed up and ready to fight. He looked like a wild animal, or a bomb that could explode at any
time but for some reason Harry felt no fear in his presence.

“I’m not his prisoner,” Tom muttered bitterly, breaking the silence. “I don’t care what he thinks of
me o-or what I become, I’m not his prisoner, I’m no-one’s captive.”

“You’re a guest,” Harry tried, but the resultant scowl from Tom showed that his attempt at
pacifying the situation failed. “OK fine, you’re a prisoner. But this is the best you’re gonna get.
You think the Ministry would allow you a private room and several full bookcases? They tried to
execute me when I had potential to become Voldemort’s weapon, it’s not hard to guess what they’d
do with you.”

“What would I do?” Tom said suddenly, cocking his head to the side. “Were I to bump into… into
Voldemort, how would I react?”

Harry didn’t reply, the curious gleam in Tom’s eye scaring him.

“Do you really want to be like him?” he asked softly after a moment’s silence.

“Immortal? Insanely powerful?” Tom questioned. “Or having the entire wizarding world under my
control?”

“Did you ever just think of being normal?” Harry asked. “Why is it always about immortality?
What’s so great about immortality? Or having people under your control?”

“I wouldn’t expect you to understand,” Tom said in a sharp tone, abruptly turning around and
making his way back to his armchair. He flicked his wand at the fireplace and the flames grew
bigger, casting the room into an eerie light.

“I could, if you would just explain-”

“I don’t believe we have training tonight, Potter,” Tom said, ignoring Harry completely. “So if you
would like to make your way back to your tower, I think that would be best.”

Harry scowled at the Slytherin, but it was wasted when Tom’s focus remained entirely on the
fireplace, lost in his own thoughts. Standing up straighter, Harry turned to leave the private
chambers before he stopped and glanced over his shoulder at Tom.

“You know, funny thing about Gryffindors,” he said slowly, as Tom made no sign to show he was
listening. “We’re rather stubborn. We don’t tend to leave things alone, even if it means danger for
us. Especially if it means danger for us.”

And with that, Harry turned around and stalked out of the room, shutting the door firmly behind
him.
A Tense Conversation

“Are you sure you’re gonna stay here?” Hermione pleaded as she hugged Harry tightly at the Hogsmeade train station.

“You know my mum is always happy for you to stay at the Burrow,” Ron added, dragging his suitcase over to the two. “Or you can always stay at 12 Grimmauld Place, after all, it is yours since…”

He trailed off, biting his lip awkwardly but Harry gave him a reassuring smile.

“It’s fine, I have things to do here anyway,” he said. “Dumbledore’s promised to give me a few more lessons as well, and I might as well get some defence spells learnt.”

“We were all going to play Quidditch,” Ron sighed. “Was hoping you would be on my team, you’re the best Seeker Hogwarts has seen in ages, I could’ve made a bet and won some money or something.”

“But more importantly we’d miss you, as a friend,” Hermione interjected, giving Ron a look. “More than just about placing bets.”

“Well yeah obviously, and Harry knows this but I’m just saying, easy money-”

Ron was cut off by the loud horn of the train and a panicked look came across Hermione’s face.

“We’re gonna be late if we don’t hurry,” she hissed, picking up her suitcase. She handed it over to Ron who took it in confusion, staring at her.

“Hermione, I’ve got my own case to worry about here-”

“I-I know, I just needed to talk to Harry about something,” she said. “I’ll meet you on the train, it’s something to do with work.”

“Oh, please spare me,” Ron groaned dramatically, picking up his own case and hauling the luggage over to the train. “Good luck, mate, she’ll probably be owling you a revision timetable over the holidays.”

Hermione waited until Ron has disappeared into the train before turning back to a confused Harry.

“I told you I would be revising,” he said. “But I have some other stuff I need to-”

“No, no, not that,” Hermione said with a shake of her head. She offered him a small smile. “I’m glad you see how much happier you are since you got rid of… well, you know.”

Harry frowned at her. “What…?”

“You-Know-Who,” she said slowly, as if it were obvious. “You were so stressed out before and-”

“Hermione, Voldemort is still alive-”

Hermione shut her eyes and let out a long exhale, before she opened her eyes and looked over at her best friend. Harry had the strangest feeling that she was trying to stop herself from smacking some sense into him.
“Not that You-Know-Who,” she reiterated. “The younger one, the one stuck in your head?”

“O-Oh… him.”

“It’s just…” Hermione chewed her bottom lip anxiously, looking as though she was wondering how to put her thoughts into words. “I-I’m not happy at all with what the Minister attempted… the idea of execution is just horrific and barbaric, and I’ll be complaining to the Ministry when I can but… at least it got rid of him. You don’t hear his voice anymore, do you?”

“In my head?” Harry questioned, and the bushy-haired witch nodded. “No, no Tom’s not in my head anymore.”

At this Hermione beamed at him. “It’s as I thought. He must’ve been killed by the Dementor. A Dementor’s Kiss must be one of the things that destroys horcruxes, I suppose. Anyway, you have been seeming much happier since.”

Harry shrugged awkwardly, not wanting to admit to his best friend what had actually happened to Tom Riddle. He wasn’t entirely sure how she would react to the knowledge that for the past few weeks he had been living in the Slytherin dungeons.

“I should be getting on the train,” she said suddenly, glancing behind her at the bright red Hogwarts train. “I’ll owl you, OK? Don’t forget to do some studying.”

“Of course,” Harry agreed to her plea, and she gave him one last quick hug before she rushed off towards the train with the other stragglers.

Harry stayed there for a while, watching the train pull out of the station until it was only a speck on the horizon. He shoved his hands in his pockets, listening to the bustle around him before deciding it was probably time to get back to Hogwarts.

Unfortunately, Snape had insisted that since he would be staying at the castle for the holidays, then he would have time for one last Occlumency lesson that evening, and Harry was dreading it. He hadn’t much improved, but he had managed to make Snape more impatient and irritated than he had thought he’d ever seen the professor.

It was just as well that he had other reasons for going to Snape’s classroom.

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When Harry pushed open the door to Snape’s classroom that evening, the professor was sitting at his desk, hunched over several papers, a frown present on his face.

“Err… professor?” Harry asked, unsure whether he had just imagined Snape inviting him in the classroom or not.

“Take a seat Potter and remain silent.”

Harry did as he was told, sitting down at the nearest desk and taking out his wand. After a few moments of Snape ignoring him as he continued grading, Harry started tapping his wand on the desk subconsciously, bored out of his mind. He was jolted out of his thoughts when he felt Snape’s gaze burning a hole in his skull and hurriedly put his wand back in his pocket and his hands on the desk.

Snape returned to grading essays and Harry let out a small sigh, leaning back in his chair and staring up at the ceiling. He wondered what Tom was doing at this very moment. Probably reading,
or else trying to get through the barrier.

As intelligent as Tom Riddle was, Harry doubted the student would be able to get through any charms set by Dumbledore himself, as even Voldemort with all his power still feared the old Headmaster.

“Legilimens.”

Harry felt a force push itself into his brain and suddenly he was back at 12 Grimmauld Place, Sirius laughing at the table at Christmas as he raised his glass to Harry, as if they were in on some secret joke.

Then he was waking up in the Gryffindor common room, demanding to see Dumbledore about news that Arthur Weasley had been attacked-

“Control your mind,” Snape’s voice hissed through his subconscious as Harry was suddenly released from the spell. He gasped for breath, leaning against the desk as memories of his late godfather assaulted him.

“I wasn’t ready!” he spat out angrily, grabbing his wand.

“You must always be ready,” Snape snapped. “The Dark Lord will not wait for you to be ready, Potter, now close your mind!”

No sooner had he said that then the ex-Potions Professor was back in Harry’s mind, and Harry was struggling to keep him out. Flashes of memories past through his mind – first year Halloween feast then third year’s Quidditch match then back to second year - but Harry refused to let Snape delve into any one.

Snape released him and the student scowled at him, breathing heavily with exhaustion.

“Better, but if I had tried a little harder I could’ve broken such a weak defence,” the professor sneered at him. “Again.”

Snape cast the spell at him continuously for the next hour, never letting up or giving Harry a break. After a while Harry managed to throw him out of his mind, but this only made Snape more determined that he make sure that he could repeat the same results and Harry audibly groaned when he cursed him again.

It was nearing half nine in the evening when a loud crash from above disrupted Snape before he could raise his wand.

Snape scowled at the ceiling and turned back to Harry, muttering something under his breath that sounded like ‘Peeves’.

“Err sir, what was that?” Harry asked, begging for a chance for Snape let him have a break.

“None of your concern, Potter, we still have another thirty minutes;” the man sneered, raising his wand again.

Harry inwardly sighed and prepared himself for another assault on his mind, but before Snape could cast the spell there was another loud crash, followed by a booming noise.

Snape cursed, and strode over to the door before looking back at Harry.
“If I come back to find that anything is missing or changed, there will be severe consequences,” he snapped. “Until I return you are not to move a muscle, understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

Snape left the classroom, slamming the door behind him and Harry breathed out in relief, sagging back against the desk.

He allowed himself a few seconds to relax before he glanced nervously over to the door through which Snape had left. He wouldn’t be back for some time, Harry thought to himself as another crash resonated throughout the room. I’ll be as quick as I can.

Harry pushed himself off the desk and trotted over to the door which he knew led to Snape’s private potion stores. Typically, the professors would lock their private stores when they had left but since Snape had to stay and tutor Harry, then Harry was hoping that the stores would remain unlocked.

He cursed his luck when the door wouldn’t budge for him and almost gave up right there and then before deciding to try out a simple *alohomora*. To his immense surprise, the door unlocked easily. Snape must’ve been planning on putting more difficult spells on it once he left, Harry decided, but wasted no more time as he stepped inside the small storage space.

Quickly he grabbed as many ingredients as he could, checking out a few of the labels on them but grabbing others purely by sight. He shoved fistfuls of roots and various ingredients into his cloak pocket, making sure he had a wide variety before slipping back out of the store.

He closed the door just as he heard footsteps start to approach the classroom. Whispering the locking charm under his breath, Harry listened for the click of the lock before he hurried back to his original position. He had barely gotten back into place before the door opened to reveal a scowling Snape.

He eyed the Gryffindor suspiciously and Harry hoped he didn’t look too guilty or out of breath, but evidently Snape didn’t notice anything array as he closed the door behind him.

“Let’s get back to it,” he said in a cold voice, before lifting his wand once more.

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It was another couple of days before Harry could visit Tom again. He had decided to at least get a start on his schoolwork so that he wouldn’t be leaving it all to pile up at the end of the holidays, when the exam stress would finally sink in.

But after spending hours hunched over essay after essay, Harry decided that he deserved a break from work, especially considering most of the spells he was writing about he had read so much that they didn’t seem real anymore.

It would be easier to visit Tom now, Harry thought to himself as he grabbed his cloak and bag and made his way down to the Slytherin dungeons. There were much less people around to notice him going down to the dungeons, and he didn’t have to make excuses about going to the library or practising Quidditch to Ron or Hermione.

He was glad for that, because lying to his friends had eerily become normal for him these days – as much as he wished he didn’t have to keep secrets from them, he couldn’t tell them about Tom, not yet anyway. As hard as he tried, Harry could not think of a single reason that would justify letting Tom live, but he knew somewhere that he couldn’t just let him die.
Tom hadn’t committed half of the crimes Voldemort had, and Harry had this stupid idea that Tom did not have to be destined to become a dark wizard. Not that Tom thought the same way, it seemed he was determined to fulfil his evil destiny, if his admiration of Voldemort was anything to go by.

He momentarily hesitated when he reached the doors to Tom’s chambers. Why was he here? There were hundreds of other students to talk to, and even when Hogwarts was essentially empty there were many things Harry could do to occupy himself.

Even after all these years Harry still hadn’t fully explored the castle – it was so vast that he would be surprised if any student had – but for some reason unknown to him he was here, at the future Lord Voldemort’s private rooms waiting to be allowed in.

Harry snorted to himself. If only everyone could see their Chosen One now.

Before he could talk himself out of it, he finally knocked on the door and waited until he heard Tom’s silvery voice inviting him inside.

Slipping inside the room, a wave of heat from the fireplace flowed over through Harry and he sighed happily, flexing his fingers that had gone cold in the depths of the castle.

“I don’t believe we have training,” Tom said coolly, flipping another page of his book.

“No, we don’t,” Harry agreed. “But I brought you something.”

Tom glanced over at Harry as the Gryffindor dug his hands into his pockets, bringing out the various potions ingredients and setting them out on the coffee table. He then knelt down and opened his bag, taking out his cauldron and chopping knife before setting those next to the ingredients.

The other was silent as he watched him, Tom’s dark gaze boring into Harry’s head until Harry finally stood up and backed away from the display of potion ingredients, looking to Tom nervously.

“Come to do your potions homework here, have you?” Tom said with a slight sneer, but Harry could tell he was interested in what Harry had brought.

“You don’t need to be snappy at me,” Harry said tiredly. “They’re for you. I mean, obviously that’s my cauldron and my knife… but I can buy others if you want to keep those. I-I just thought… I thought this could keep you busy.”

“Scared I’ll escape?” Tom questioned, raising an eyebrow.

“No. I just don’t like the idea of you wallowing down here in your own boredom. I know what that’s like. I had it back at the Dursleys.”

Tom slowly approached the table, running his fingers over the various ingredients curiously.

“You got these from Slughorn?” he asked.

“Well… no, not exactly,” Harry said awkwardly. “I kind of stole them from Snape’s private stores.”

At this Tom looked at him with a mixture of amusement and exasperation.
“Of course, you would go down the more difficult route,” he said snidely. “I saw how Slughorn reacted around you in class, you’re his genius of the year. He’d give you any ingredient you wanted as long as it wasn’t dangerous. Can’t say the same about this Professor Snape.”

“Yeah but Slughorn’s stores only have the most basic ingredients,” Harry tried to argue. “I-I thought you’d want something a little more… complex.”

“This is indeed… surprising,” Tom said softly, letting his hand rest on the rim of the cauldron. “Could it be that my own enemy feels pity for me? That you would risk the wrath of your Defence teacher to provide me with entertainment?”

“You’re not my enemy,” Harry said. “You’re a companion that I’ve had since November and I’ve been on the receiving end of your boredom before, and I don’t want the same fate the for the bookcases you haven’t obliterated yet.”

He hesitated, watching Tom circle around the table to eye up the ingredients again with a look of burning hunger in his eyes.

“Just… just promise me one thing?” Harry asked, he saw Tom stiffen slightly. “Just… teach me something? You’ve taught me spells, but I want to know potions. I barely learnt anything with Snape and I was mostly using your advice this year with Slughorn. I want to know myself.”

“What do you want to know?” Tom asked, now rearranging the various herbs and roots.

“Anything.”

Tom looked up at him for a while, his eyes slightly narrowed in thought and his lips pursed.

“We’ll start simple,” he said. “Befuddlement Draught.”

Harry raised his eyebrows at that. “Simple? I did that for OWLs last year, that wasn’t simple-”

“Then you’re just going to have to keep up,” the Slytherin said lightly, picking out several ingredients that they would need to use.

Harry was about to ask Tom why they were immediately starting on a potion that took him ages to even complete last year, but he saw the satisfaction in Tom’s gaze as he worked quickly and efficiently. This was as natural to him as Dark Arts was, and besides, it wasn’t as if Harry had anything else to do.

A flick of Tom’s wand had Harry looking up in surprise, to see that where the coffee table had been now stood a sturdy Potions desk. Nodding in satisfaction at his transfiguration, Tom pushed several leaves of what Harry recognised to be sneezewort towards him.

“Start chopping,” he ordered, before busying himself with the rest of the ingredients.

Slowly, they settled into a routine as the sun began to start its slow descent down the sky. Without Snape looming over his shoulder like an overgrown bat waiting to deduct points, or Slughorn staring hopefully at his cauldron for some work of genius, Harry found that he could actually enjoy potion making.

It had a certain rhythm to it, and he chopped the sneezewort better than he had his entire time at Hogwarts. Even Tom gave a small nod when he saw them, dropping them into the cauldron and stirring it clockwise.
But what was most interesting was watching Tom work. Several times Harry was distracted by the pale, spidery fingers as they reached out and grabbed leaves and stripping them of their stems in what seemed like seconds. They looked very similar to Voldemort’s own skeletal fingers, Harry thought mindlessly to himself, except where Voldemort’s pale fingers reminded him of the dead, Tom’s were more graceful, much more elegant.

If Tom noticed Harry staring at him, he didn’t mention it, but rather immersed himself in the task at hand. Once all the ingredients were added he allowed Harry a turn at stirring, and Harry must’ve done it to satisfaction, because Tom did nothing but watch.

It was around five in the evening when they had finished and Tom poured some of the contents of the cauldron into a small glass vial he had conjured.

“There,” he said in satisfaction, popping a cork in the top and setting the vial on the desk.

“That’s the best one I’ve seen since Hermione’s,” Harry said, examining the colour of the potion.

“This is what a Befuddlement Draught is supposed to look like,” Tom said haughtily, admiring his handiwork. “Would you like to test it out?”

“Yeah, I’m gonna have to pass on that, I believe you.”

“What’s next then?”

“Next?” Harry spluttered. “We just made a potion!”

“Yes, but what next?” Tom asked as if it were obvious. “We have ingredients, and it’s only five. What else were you planning on doing? I thought your little friends had left for the holidays.”

Harry rolled his eyes at Tom’s deliberate condescension towards his friends but by now he was used to far worse.

“Many things,” he said absentmindedly, arranging the ingredients back into their organised piles. “We could talk… read…”

Tom scoffed at that and Harry smirked. “OK, maybe you’re sick of reading. We could still talk.”

“Oh please, bore me with more stories about how woeful it is to be the Golden Boy,” Tom said snidely.

“I haven’t said anything like that,” Harry scowled. “Just Hogwarts stuff. But if you want me to just leave, say so. After all, what else are you going to do? The only ones you can talk to are me or Dumbledore.”

Tom stared at him for a moment, a hint of irritation in his eyes but he knew Harry was right.

“I’m going mad in here,” he muttered, turning the desk back into a coffee table and throwing himself in his armchair. “It really has come to the point where I’d rather listen to your incessant chatter than learn something from these books.”

“I think you’ve learnt everything you could from those books,” Harry said, and Tom looked like he agreed, though he didn’t give Harry the satisfaction of saying it out loud.

As much as Tom complained about not being able to continue making potions, by the time darkness had fallen outside of Hogwarts he had not mentioned it again once, instead telling Harry
more about his time at Hogwarts.

He barely looked at Harry, instead taking to look into the fire but Harry didn’t mind, he preferred it actually. When Tom was looking at him, he tended to put up a mask but now, watching the fire crackle, Tom’s soft voice spoke quickly and eagerly about his lessons.

He almost appeared to smile once or twice, but as soon as it became noticeable, the mask came down once more and it would take more coaxing from Harry to get Tom to relax again.

“Tell me about the Chamber,” Tom said suddenly.

When they had stopped talking, Harry did not know, but somewhere along the line they had fallen into a comfortable silence, sharing each other’s company in the glowing warmth of the fire.

Harry tensed at the mention, and he felt Tom’s gaze on him.

“What about it?” he asked quietly, leaning back against the armchair.

“Just… tell me everything. How it started, how you found it… what happened down there.”

Harry let out a sigh, leaning his chin on his hand as he pondered what to say. Even though Tom had been the one to approach the subject, he didn’t want to say something that might send the Slytherin into a rage, especially when it concerned the basilisk he had come to care so deeply about.

“It was your diary, of course,” he murmured, the hair on the back of his neck prickling as Tom continued to watch him steadily. “Ginny – you know, the one I went on that date with – was possessed by it in her first year. She opened the chamber and eventually he – I mean, you – took her down there. I followed.”

“And you were what… twelve?”

“Yeah.”

“Twelve years old and you went down into Slytherin’s own Chamber to fend off a mythical beast that could kill just by her stare,” Tom said quietly. “Why?”

At this Harry looked up at the other student, but there was no malice in Tom’s eyes. Just curiosity.

“She was Ron’s sister,” he tried to explain. “And… And I couldn’t have anyone else hurt. Not when there was something I could do to stop it.”

“You didn’t know you could stop it,” Tom said, an edge to his voice. “You went down in a place that shouldn’t exist without any knowledge of what was down there to save some girl. I cannot decide whether you are insanely stupid or just suicidal.”

“What would you do?” Harry asked angrily. “Pretending that you weren’t the reason for it being open in the first place. Would you have just let your best friend’s sister die?”

“I would not have sacrificed my own life for anyone’s,” Tom hissed. “Does she mean that much to you? A first year you barely knew?”

“It didn’t matter who she was-”

“Really?” he asked. “You would have gone down there for anyone? What about that Malfoy boy? Would you have gone down for him?”
Harry turned away, and thought about it. It was true that one of the things that had prompted him to
go down into the chamber was knowledge that it was Ron’s little sister. But that wasn’t all, or even
the primary reason.

No, it was because there was someone down there, someone who would be left to die as the school
closed. And he couldn’t have that. Maybe it was out of some selfish need to keep the one place he
thought of as home open – eerily similar to Tom’s reasoning, Harry thought to himself – or because
he really was just some foolish Gryffindor who had a tendency to try and save the world.

But it didn’t matter why. Harry just knew he would have gone down there.

“Yes,” he said finally. “Even if it was Malfoy. I didn’t go down for Ginny, I went down for
everyone.”

“How heroic,” Tom sneered. “How can it be that the entire fate of Hogwarts once relied entirely on
a twelve-year-old boy? You don’t seem that special to me, so maybe it’s just that the teachers are
exceptionally dumb in this time.”

“Yeah well, I didn’t ask for it, OK?” Harry snapped back, Tom having finally pushed him to his
limit. “Do you think that was fun for me? Do you think I look back on the end of my second year
with happiness and nostalgia? That was terrifying, I thought I was going to die. Believe it or not,
Tom, I don’t particularly like having a dangerous snake trying to kill me on Lord Voldemort’s
command.”

“Then why did you go down there?”

“Because I had to!” Harry said, standing up and glaring down at Tom. “Fuck, maybe it’s because
I’m some stupid Gryffindor o-or maybe it’s the fact I’m the bloody Boy Who Lived but I was not
going to let some stupid Chamber close the place I called home. I wasn’t going to let Ginny die – I
wasn’t going to let anyone die – and that was enough for me to go down there and face you. It
wasn’t for the adventure o-or the glory. It was because if it wasn’t me, it would have been no-one
else. No-one else would have gone down there. No one else knew.”

Tom was silent, staring at Harry with an unreadable expression. Then he turned away to look back
into the fire.

Harry let his tense muscle go slack, not even aware he had been tensed up the entire. He grabbed
his cloak and bag from the floor and started walking towards the door but then the Slytherin spoke
up.

“Finish the story.”

“What?” Harry huffed, looking around. “I’m going to bed.”

“You never finished the story,” Tom said calmly. “I want to hear about what you faced down
there.”

“Yeah well I don’t want to.”

“Why not? Because you hate the memory? You can’t block out memories, I’m afraid, otherwise I
wouldn’t be here.”

“Not tonight, Tom, OK?” Harry said tiredly. “No offense but I don’t really want to share all my
near-death experiences by Voldemort’s hand to his past self.”
“Maybe you’re not such a foolish hero after all then,” Tom said simply. “Go if you must then, but I’ll be expecting a constant supply of potion ingredients. You promised to keep me entertain, and I trust you to keep to a promise.”

“What, like you?” Harry said with a humourless laugh, before he turned to open the door.

“I don’t break promises,” Tom said, before Harry stepped out of the room and closed the door, letting out a heavy sigh.

He took his time going back to the Gryffindor common room, mulling over the events of that evening. Making potions with Tom had been nice, it had been easy but after…

He found talking to Tom about Hogwarts to be as easy and as natural as flying a broomstick – they both held Hogwarts in the same kind of fond regard, so Tom would understand why simple things such as candlesticks instead of lights and the sounds of all the pupils at breakfast to be much more important to him than his classmates.

But he didn’t want to talk about his experiences with Voldemort. As stupid as it sounded, Harry wished he could pretend that Tom saw him as just that, rather than the Boy Who Lived and it had been a breath of fresh air.

He was tired of people viewing him differently than everyone else, and tired of repeating the same stories to people who saw them as exciting adventures, rather than the horror they were to Harry. Having a giant basilisk that could kill you if you turned around chase you when you were only twelve years old might seem exciting to some, but Harry wished more than anything he could have just had a school year full of homework and friends.

And even though Tom certainly didn’t regard him as being any kind of better person for his experiences, Harry would rather be able to pretend – just once, whilst he was in the other’s company – that he was just some Gryffindor, and Tom was just some Slytherin.

He supposed he couldn’t blame Tom too much, Harry thought to himself as he got ready for bed and crawled under the covers. Hearing stories about how imposing and terrifying he was must be a dream for him.

It took another hour for Harry’s jumbled thoughts to finally settle down, but once they did, he managed to fall into a sleep plague with images of basilisks and Tom Riddle, rising from the diary.
Harry desperately tried to avoid Tom the next day, knowing that the Slytherin would only ask about the Chamber which Harry was not in the mood for.

So after eating in the rather empty Great Hall at breakfast – there were only about five students in each house left – Harry made his way to the common room instead of his private tower, determined to finish off the homework he had started.

But the more he tried to distract himself, the more he found himself thinking of what Tom was up to. Without any other sixth year Gryffindor to talk to, Harry was immensely lonely in the common room. He thought if he was surrounded by other Gryffindors that it would distract him, but it only did the opposite.

Eventually he decided he had to get out of the common room for a bit, and decided to wander the castle.

Harry was deep in thought, thinking over his History of Magic essay and wondering if he had gotten the dates wrong when he suddenly bumped into someone.

“Oh I say, sorry I didn’t see you there,” Slughorn said as he beamed at Harry. “Enjoying your holidays so far, eh?”

“Err… yeah, professor,” Harry said awkwardly, bending down to pick up a book Slughorn had dropped and giving it back.

“Thank you, thank you- goodness, is that the time? Wish I could stay and chat, Harry, but I promised Professor Snape I’d bring along this vial for him to examine, excuse me.”

Slughorn bumbled past Harry, making his way down the corridor and Harry stared after him for a moment, before he found his voice.

“Professor!” he called, hurrying up to catch up with the Potions professor.

“Yes, Harry?”

“I-I was just wondering…” Harry said, trying to find the words to say and wondering why he was
even saying them. “I-I was wondering if I might borrow a few potions ingredients? I-I wanted to
practise over the holidays for exams-”

“Of course, dear boy!” Slughorn said happily. “Anything for my favourite student! Got to keep
that genius brain occupied, eh? Take as much as you want. In fact, the classroom is unlocked at the
moment, don’t tell Filch he’ll have a heart attack. I’ll be coming back in a moment but if you just
wanted to help yourself now, feel free.”

“Thank you, professor,” Harry said in relief, and Slughorn nodded once more at him before
moving on towards Snape’s office.

As soon as he had turned the corner Harry set off in the opposite direction, following the route he
would take several times a week to get to the Potions classroom. Once there he pushed open the
door, the empty classroom seeming entirely different in the early evening when there was no bustle
of students.

Harry made his way to the Potions cupboard, finding that it was indeed unlocked and viewing the
ingredients.

“OK so if I were Tom, which ones would I want?” he murmured to himself, wishing that Tom was
in his head so he could actually tell him.

Then again, it wasn’t as if he would be very fussy – the Slytherin was desperate for any kind of
ingredients to keep him occupied.

But then again, this was Tom Riddle, Harry thought grimly to himself. And where Tom Riddle
could make things difficult, he would.

Eventually Harry took a few of each of the ingredients, putting them in his bag and closing the
cupboard door after. Making his way out of the classroom, he fastened his bag and resigned
himself to heading towards Tom’s chambers.

As much as he hated to admit it, he had enjoyed the peace that had come with making potions with
Tom, and he craved that feeling again. If Tom bothered him about the Chamber, he would just
have to say no. He wasn’t about to let Tom have his way all the time.

When he at last entered the private room, Tom was already making a potion with the cauldron
Harry had left behind the night before.

After Harry had closed the door he stood there for a moment, watching the other work. Tom
seemed in another world as he worked, and despite himself, Harry had to admire the brilliance of
Tom working.

“You returned,” Tom said, breaking Harry out of his train of thought.

“You started without me,” Harry pointed out.

“Just because I was going to teach you something didn’t mean I couldn’t make something for
myself outside of class,” Tom said coolly, and Harry frowned.

“What are you making?” he asked suspiciously. “It’s not dark magic, is it?”

At this Tom smirked, bottling a sample of the dark green potion and holding it out to Harry.

“Why don’t you try it? See if I’ve gotten the recipe right?”
“Not bloody likely,” Harry muttered, putting his bag down and going over to the newly transformed potions desk.

“Probably just as well,” Tom said, putting the vial to the side. “It’s a jawbind potion, but if I made a mistake it might well have severed your entire jaw off.”

“I went to Slughorn like you suggested,” Harry said, ignoring Tom’s remark. “Got some more potion ingredients for you, though god knows why. Maybe I really am a fool.”

“At least you have something in common with your beloved Dumbledore,” the other said snidely. “He came to visit me earlier, saw the potions desk. Mad old fool just told me he was glad I was finding something to occupy myself. Why that man ever became Headmaster I’ll never know.”

“He’s a lot smarter than you give him credit for,” Harry shot back. “You seem to be under this delusion that you’re the only genius in the entire wizarding world.”

“I was certainly the only genius back when I was a student,” Tom sneered. “Edith Montgomery in fourth year thought she could make her own pimples invisible – made her entire head invisible instead. A fourteen-year-old who messed up a potion as simple as that. I was already at a fourth-year level when I was twelve.”

And just like that they were conversing like they used to do. Harry made a retort how Hermione Granger – who Tom saw scornfully only as a mudblood – managed to create a Polyjuice potion when they were twelve, and in return Tom told him how he had snuck a student Veritaserum that he had created himself when that student stole something off him, much to the humiliation of the student.

At some point Harry was next to Tom, chopping up the ingredients that the Slytherin told him too and stirring when the new potion called for it.

“Can I ask you something?” Harry asked when there was a lull in the conversation.

Tom didn’t reply, but instead added a few more sprigs of lavender to the potion. Harry decided to ask the question that had been bothering him anyway.

“Why didn’t you ever want friends?” he asked curiously. “When I came to Hogwarts for the first time after my miserable childhood it was one of the only things I wanted. I don’t get how you can be alone for your childhood and then force yourself to remain isolated.”

“Fluxweed,” Tom ordered, and Harry handed it over to him.

There was silence, apart from the constant chopping of the potion knife as Harry chopped up the ginger root.

“I would hate to be as paranoid as you,” Harry continued. “Never wanting to get close to someone in case they might use it against you-”

“You’re chopping them too finely,” Tom interrupted him, taking the knife off Harry and as he did so their hands touched briefly.

Harry blinked in surprise and glanced up at Tom, but Tom was already added the root to the potion. He didn’t know why but for some reason he had expected Tom’s skin to be ice-cold, especially here in the dungeons. But it was… warm. It reminded him more fiercely that the student was a living, breathing human being with feelings and dreams that may differ from Voldemort’s. It made him even more determined to find out why Tom isolated himself.
“You can’t ignore me forever,” he said. “You also can’t just ask me about some of the most terrifying, private parts of my life and not expect to tell me anything about yourself in return.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to know what it’s like to be a Slytherin,” Tom sneered. “We don’t like to giggle around like you Gryffindors seem to.”

“Actually, the hat almost sorted me into Slytherin, so perhaps I would know something about it,” Harry said. “Also, I may not be as intelligent as you or Hermione, but I’m not stupid.”

“The thing about Slytherins, Potter, is that we keep to ourselves,” Tom said snidely. “We have bigger things to worry about than the local gossip. Slytherins don’t have friends, we have allies. It’s not about me isolating myself. You can see it with the Slytherins in your time.”

“They’re friends,” Harry tried to argue, but then he thought of Crabbe and Goyle. Malfoy certainly wasn’t their friend, they were more like his bodyguards.

“I told you once before that you cannot rely on others, and that the only guarantees are the ones you carry through yourself,” Tom said. “Why play with fire by relying on others?”

“Because some things you can’t do all by yourself,” Harry said quietly, and he heard Tom snort in disbelief. “It’s true. I would’ve been dead a hundred times over if it wasn’t for Ron and Hermione and countless others. I pity you, Tom, because you’ve missed out on so much. If you weren’t so obsessed with power, you could’ve achieved anything.”

“I have no need for friends,” the other repeated firmly and Harry sighed.

He decided to drop the matter, clearly Tom couldn’t be addressed straight on. They clearly weren’t friends, and Harry wouldn’t have even considered them allies – they were technically mortal enemies.

But Tom wasn’t killing him or trying to harm him. Tom tolerated his presence, and had shared some of his life with Harry. Harry didn’t think any of Tom’s other allies were allowed to know about his childhood. But perhaps that was only because none of his other allies had ever had Tom in their mind before.

“Why don’t you tell me your side of the Chamber?” Harry asked him curiously. “I always knew you were the one who opened it the first time, but I’ve never really heard how you even came across it.”

Tom was silent for a while, and when Harry glanced over to him, his face was an unreadable mask, staring into the depths of the potion.

There were several minutes of silence, Harry continuing to chop ingredients and slide them over to Tom, who sprinkled them in bit by bit. Harry had almost forgotten he had even asked Tom a question when the Slytherin finally spoke up.

“I looked up my grandfather,” he said quietly. “He was the only one who wielded any results.”

“Results?”

“Did you expect me to come to Hogwarts knowing nothing of my past?” he scoffed at Harry. “They never came for me at the orphanage, but I was determined to know who they were, determined to know who they were and why they left me. I deserved that much. My mother had died giving birth to me and I foolishly thought that if my mother had been a witch, she clearly would have saved herself to raise me. So, I searched for my father, Tom Riddle Sr.”
“And you didn’t get anything?”

“No,” Tom said bitterly. “Why would I? My father is a filthy, despicable muggle who abandoned me first chance he got. My mother was apparently the magic one, though she allowed herself to die and left me in the muggle world. I didn’t even know her name. So I went with the only other relative I knew of – Marvolo, my grandfather who gave me my middle name.”

“Marvolo was descended from Slytherin?”

“I knew there was something about me,” Tom said softly, and Harry wondered if he had even heard him. The Slytherin was currently staring at the potion, his eyes filled with a kind of insane greediness and pride. “No longer was I Tom Riddle, poor, half-blood orphan boy, but I was the Heir of Slytherin, someone who would one day become Voldemort.”

Harry flinched at the name. He had never flinched at the sound of his mortal enemy’s name before, not when Dumbledore said it and not when Ron had reacted so violently to it. But hearing the student next to him call himself the wretched name in the same silvery tone that had haunted Harry since November was enough to make the hairs of his neck stand on edge. It sounded wrong, it didn’t sound like the Tom he had come to know anymore.

For the first time, Harry was afraid of the person next to him.

“You seem shocked,” Tom’s voice broke Harry out of his thoughts. “Did you really expect me to keep referring to myself by my muggle father’s name after I had found out who’s blood ran through my veins? I had always planned on changing my name once I found out. I needed something better, I needed something that would make people know exactly who I am.”

“It worked,” Harry said. “Now instead of being reminded of the genius Hogwarts student, they think of a twisted monster who’s barely even human anymore, he’s ripped himself apart too many times.”

“All for the greater good, for the pursuit of magic,” Tom said with a gleam in his eye. “I succeeded Harry, I succeeded where so many others dared not try.”

“Perhaps they did not try not because they didn’t think they could, but because they knew what it would entail.”

“They were cowards,” Tom snapped. “I needed to be better, I had to be better. I have been better than anyone else I have come across. I made all those at the orphanage fear me, I had the entirety of Hogwarts in awe of me, I was not to become some simple-minded Ministry worker, I was better than that, I was better than them all.”

“Is that what you truly believe?” Harry asked incredulously, putting down his knife to stare at Tom in disbelief. “I thought that this Tom Riddle was the one who had his soul intact but clearly something must have happened because you’re insane. You aren’t better because you made people fear you, and you weren’t the best at Hogwarts either. Dumbledore has and always will be better than you, and I bet every other professor at that school was as well.”

“I think I’ve let you become too comfortable in my company,” Tom said coldly, narrowing his eyes at Harry. “Even a caged hippogriff can still kill, Harry.”

“Do it then,” the Gryffindor challenged. “Kill me, and let’s see how Dumbledore reacts. Let’s see if you get to keep your comfy room or whether you’ll be given to the Dementors at the first chance. You might like to present yourself as fearless, but I know about one fear you cannot escape from
no matter how hard you try. You are going to die Tom, you always will. And I can make that happen a lot sooner if you want to start throwing threats around.”

“I would kill every last person to stand in my way before I let myself die,” Tom hissed, stepping closer to Harry.

Despite there only being a few inches of height difference between them, Harry felt like Tom was towering over him. But he hadn’t fought against Death Eaters and Basilisks to be beaten by Riddle.

“You’d have to go through me first and I put up a pretty good fight,” he snapped.

It happened before Harry could blink.

One second he had been glaring up at Tom and the next he had been thrown into the bookcase, covering his head as hardcovers rained upon him.

Harry didn’t even hesitate, didn’t even think about what he was doing before he threw a curse at the potions desk and it blew up right next to Tom.

The potion – Harry didn’t actually have any idea what they had been making - splashed into Tom’s face and Harry heard the other scream in agony, clawing handfuls of the blue potion off his skin before he threw another spell at Harry.

Harry jumped out of the way just in time before his usual armchair blew up, and splinters cut into his skin as he landed awkwardly on the floor.

“Come on now, Potter, let’s see what the great Chosen One is hiding,” Tom taunted, holding his wand loosely in one hand. “Let’s match the powers of the Heir of Slytherin against the Ministry’s \textit{pet}.”

“How many times have you tried to kill me now, Tom?” Harry asked, gasping for breath as he stood up. “Is it now six times? Six times that you’ve tried to murder me, and each time you’ve been unsuccessful. Slytherin must be so disappointed in his Heir-”

Tom let out a cry of rage and a jet of pink light burst out his wand towards Harry. This time he wasn’t quick enough about diving out the way and the spell cut across his torso, ripping his jumper and cutting a relatively deep line into his skin.

“You have not killed me either,” Tom hissed. “You can never kill me. Not without having to kill yourself. Because that’s how it will end, won’t it? You have no chance of killing Voldemort without killing yourself and then who will face against the great Lord?”

“That’s why I have friends, not allies,” Harry said, pushing himself to his knees and staring up at Tom. “Plenty of people would be happy to kill Voldemort. Plenty to do it.”

Tom flicked his wand and the books that had fallen from the destroyed bookcase threw themselves at Harry. Harry threw up a \textit{protego} and the books crashed to the floor, but all of a sudden, they ripped open in half and grew teeth.

“From your memory, Potter,” Tom said gleefully. “Third year Care of Magical Creatures textbook. I always thought it was a bit sadistic, but then again Rubeus always did have a habit of keeping the most monstrous pets.”

Harry desperately crawled backwards to escape the gnashing jaws of the savage books and threw an \textit{reducto} at them.
When the books were just scattered pieces of torn up paper, Harry pushed himself to his feet, bringing his wand up to face Tom, who was in the same defensive position.

“What are we doing?” Harry said with a humourless laugh. “Neither of us can kill the other. You can’t kill me without destroying one of your horcruxes and I can’t kill you without becoming just like you.”

“I’d rather get rid of a horcrux than keep you,” Tom snapped.

“Then kill me.”

For a moment Harry wondered if Tom actually would. He was glaring at the Gryffindor, shoulders heaving as he breathed rapidly, and his wand shook slightly in his hand with barely concealed triumph. His dark hair was in his eyes and his black gaze was like fire, so many emotions running wild that Harry couldn’t pin any one down.

Tom flicked his wand abruptly, and Harry’s flew out of the air and landed at the Slytherin’s feet. With a vaguely smug look, Tom slowly lowered his own wand.

“You didn’t kill me,” Harry said with surprise.

“I disarmed you, killing you would have been only too easy,” Tom said softly. “And I deserve more of a challenge than that.”

Harry glanced around at the destroyed room. There were pieces of broken armchair and bookcase all over the floor, and tiny scraps of smouldering paper still floated down from the air to rest softly on the debris.

“I think…” he said slowly, surveying the damage. “I think we should come to some sort of arrangement. We don’t talk about Voldemort or what you may become, nor about our place as mortal enemies.”

“And why would I agree to this?” Tom sneered.

“Because apart from Dumbledore I’m the only one you can talk to,” Harry said coolly. “And for the holidays you’re probably the most interesting person I can talk to. I don’t want us to stop meeting, but I do want to stop fighting all the time. I have enough of that with your future self.”

Tom looked at him for a moment, before finally giving a stiff nod.

“Perhaps you’re right,” he said. “I believe we both have much to learn from each other.”

“What do you have to learn from me?” Harry asked in disbelief.

“You seem to have an incredible amount of luck,” the Slytherin said, looking at Harry the same way way Hermione would view the library. “Perhaps there is some method to your madness, some hidden genius within you.”

At this, Harry snorted. “Hardly. But as long as this means we can continue civilly, then I guess I’ll pretend it was more than just dumb luck.”

Tom kicked at a piece of wood before turning his nose up at it, going over to settle down in his armchair – he had left that one untouched.

Harry waved his wand, organising all the debris into a pile in the corner but not bothering to get rid
of it. It was Tom’s room after all.

“I’ll need an armchair, if we’re to continue talking,” he told Tom. “After you, you destroyed mine.”

“You destroyed my books.”

“You had finished them.”

The corner of Tom’s mouth turned up in what might have been an amused look, but when Harry looked again it was gone.
Clash of Morals

Chapter Notes

heyy long time no see, and I'm sorry about that

I've been having to deal with a whole load of shit these past two months including moving to a brand new country for a semester so my life's been a little bit hectic

I haven't written anymore of this story, and when I read over what I've already done I have a couple of issues with it, but I decided to give you a chapter that is pretty much unbeta-ed.

I can't make any promises for when the next chapter comes out, but hopefully soon life will settle down and I can get back to a routine

xx

“Not good enough,” Tom said abruptly as he glanced into the cauldron Harry was stirring. “It should be lilac.”

“It is lilac,” Harry said indignantly.

“That is purple, not lilac,” the other said pointedly.

“Well I did everything you told me to-”

“Did you stir twice clockwise?” Tom interrupted.

“Yes, then I added the juice of the thirteen sopophorous beans-”

“Thirteen?” Tom interrupted. “I told you it only needed twelve, I gave you twelve-”

“And I added thirteen,” Harry interrupted. “It’s better for the potion. You lose the juice when transferring it so I added another one.”

Tom stared at him in disbelief before frowning.

“The book says twelve,” he said shortly.

“Yeah well the previous owner of my book says thirteen.”

“And you’d trust some student who probably failed their NEWTs over an established author?” Tom sneered.

“He’s never led me wrong before,” Harry explained. “Anyway, after I stirred seven times clockwise again-”

“Anti-clockwise, you mean.”

“No, I mean… oh.”
Tom leaned over to inspect the cauldron carefully and sniffed at the fumes.

“IT’s in rather remarkable condition for someone who stirred it wrong on the final step,” he said. “You got lucky once more.”

“Or I used thirteen beans instead of twelve.”

“Don’t push your luck,” Tom said, giving Harry a hard look. “You may be lucky, but you aren’t better than me at potions.”

“I don’t need to be, I’ve got the Half Blood Prince’s help.”

“Half-Blood Prince?” Tom sneered. “Who takes pride out of having muggle blood in their veins?”

“Someone better than you at potions,” Harry said, thoroughly enjoying himself now that Tom had been brought down a peg.

“Tell me,” Tom said coldly. “Does the Half-Blood Prince tell you how to create the perfect specimen of Felix Felicis? Does it tell you what to look out for the exact moment you add the thyme? The exact shade of gold you need?”

“Probably, he’s a genius,” Harry said and the other scoffed. “You can’t bear it, can you? You can’t bear the idea that there’s someone out there who might be better at something than you.”

“He might be as good as I am,” Tom shot back. “I’ll give you that. But some student scribbling silly little tips in a textbook will never be better than me, who studied hours into the night on the history of potion making and learnt the art of it.”

“All you need to do is ask Tom, and I’ll lend you the book so you can read it.”

Tom scowled at him. “I don’t need to learn things from a student.”

“Really? Because apparently you think there’s something to learn from me, and I’m very much a student.”

“You’re different. You’ve escaped death countless times, a feat that may come in useful for me. Not… potion tips.”

“You know there’s a saying in the muggle world, where if you’re the smartest person in the room then you’re in the wrong room or something like that.”

“I don’t take heed of muggle sayings,” Tom said shortly. “But in case you didn’t realise, I can’t leave the room.”

“I’ll leave the book here, OK? You can read it if you want or just glare at it all day; I don’t care. Now, can we carry on with this potion?”

So how did you find out where the Chamber was?” Harry asked curiously when they had called it a day at the potion desk.

His chair had been restored – apparently thanks to the castle, as Tom had decided to keep the fragments of chair as a reminder to Harry about how he stood below the Slytherin – and Harry now sat in it, watching Tom who was sending green sparks floating into the air.
“I might ask you the same question.”

“Myrtle told me,” Harry answered. “She never left that bathroom, you know.”

Tom looked like he couldn’t care less, flicking his wand again and sending the sparks shooting into the fire where the flames momentarily turned green.

“I found it through months of research,” he said slowly. “Once I found out my true heritage, it wasn’t long before I found out about the Chamber of Secrets. I was obsessed with finding it. It took me some time, I’ll admit. But once I figured out that the basilisk could realistically only travel through the pipes, it wasn’t long before my search led me to that bathroom.”

“Did you like it down there?” Harry asked curiously. “It seemed rather… dismal. I can’t imagine why you’d want to stay there longer than necessary.”

“It didn’t bother me,” Tom said softly. “It was a place of Slytherin, a place that had been built for me. A place to celebrate magic, and the rightful people to practise it.”

“Who’s rightful? Just purebloods? Or can half-bloods practise it too?” Harry asked quietly. “Because you’re a half-blood. I’m a half-blood. The Half-Blood Prince is a half-blood and he’s better at potions than you. Do none of us deserve to practise magic?”

“If I could I would not have had a filthy muggle father,” Tom said darkly. “But half-bloods are better than muggleborns any day-”

“Hermione is muggle born. And she’s better at me than pretty much any subject. Face it Tom, blood doesn’t have anything to do with it.”

“You would have Hogwarts open its gates to any old filth?” he spat. “You would let squibs and mudbloods and muggles wander around the castle, with no care or respect for its history or the art of magic.”

“Blood doesn’t change your attitude. I’m sure there’s people with the purest magic blood on earth that doesn’t care one bit about Hogwarts’ history. And I’d open Hogwarts gates to any student who wants to learn magic.”

“Teaching magic to muggles?” Tom scoffed. “And I expect you wish for us to lie with them as well.”

“Some of us don’t choose to lie with people based on their blood,” Harry snapped. “Or just to get our own way.”

“And how would you know?” Tom asked coldly, and Harry shut his mouth, fuming.

“It’s a rather sad and pathetic world you seem to envision,” he said quietly. “At what point does torturing muggles and alienating yourself start to bore you, Tom? At what point do you wonder whether it’s worth becoming immortal, and in return sacrificing a genuine life? Your seeking your own living death.”

Tom seemed to be shaking with pure rage, but he held it all back, staring down at Harry with an odd look.

“I will not be dust,” he hissed after a while. “I will not allow myself to deteriorate to a point where I am just the dirt under people’s feet. I will not die.”
“And what does immortality offer besides from being physical dust? You won’t have any meaningful relationships with anyone… no friends… just allies who are only with you out of fear, not any sort of loyalty. There will always be someone who is willing to stand up against you, and always people to flock to them. You will never have complete control Tom, you never can. Stop trying to have control over the world, when you don’t even have control over your life.”

“I have perfect control-” he snapped, and Harry realised he had hit a nerve.

“No, you don’t,” he said with a short laugh. “Alienating yourself so no-one will betray you is not control, it’s weak. It’s weakness because you can’t even bear the idea that something might go wrong-”

Harry felt the tip of Tom’s wand press against his throat, and he swallowed heavily.

“People are more likely to betray you as Voldemort than they are to you as Tom Riddle,” he said softly, forcing himself to look into Tom’s dangerous, dark gaze. “You’ve had more people betray and go against you as Voldemort than you had before.”

“Is that what you think this is about?” Tom said in a voice that was barely audible, pressing his wand deeper into Harry’s skin. “You may be content with a life of being a nobody, of pushing the boundaries of magic to where everyone else has and then settling down into your life but that is not me. How ungrateful you are to be born with the powers we have. How ungrateful every wizard or witch that has not seen the full extent of their powers is. Even Dumbledore, who I’ll admit is one of the most powerful wizards I have even seen, who defeated the dark wizard Grindelwald, does what now? Sits in a Headmaster’s office, his powers wasted.”

“Go discovering then,” Harry argued, trying to ignore the sting of the wand. “Uncover ancient myths o-or discover new potions… killing people is not using your powers, it’s wasting them and your intelligence.”

Tom was breathing heavily now, his face mere inches away from Harry’s and Harry had the strangest feeling that Tom had never had someone challenge him like this before. He felt like Tom was trying to size him up, trying to figure out a solution for a problem he had never had to encounter before.

“If you ask me, it seems like a waste of the Heir of Slytherin’s potential, if he’s limiting himself to the Unforgivables,” Harry said, desperately racking his brain for something that might make Tom back off.

Tom was a ticking time bomb, and any wrong move or wrong words could end Harry’s life in that second.

“And you?” Tom asked softly, shaking very slightly with uncontrolled rage or anticipation, Harry could not tell. “What will you do once this is over? If you are alive? Would you really just settle down? Seems an odd choice for the Chosen One.”

“I don’t know,” Harry admitted. “I-I was thinking of becoming an Auror. But at some point, yeah, I’d like to settle down. I’ve had enough of fighting and plotting and bloodshed. Aren’t you?”

Tom broke his gaze with Harry, his eyes flicking down to where his wand was still pressed to Harry’s neck and he hesitated for a brief second, before looking back up at Harry. But it was enough for Harry to know that there was still some part of Tom that could be swayed, even if only for a second.
“It will never be enough,” Tom hissed. “Nothing will ever be enough.”

He abruptly broke away from Harry, but Harry stood against the wall for a few more seconds in stunned silence, massaging his throat.

He watched as Tom crossed the room to the fireplace, resting his arms on the mantlepiece as he stared down into the flames, an unreadable mask over his face once more.

“I’m sorry,” Harry said quietly. “I can’t imagine what it’s like to never feel satisfied, even with all you’ve accomplished.”

Tom didn’t move.

“You seem to have it all really, the intelligence and the charm. I remember Ginny told me how charming you were to her in her first year, how quickly she trusted you. Voldemort never used his charm, but I suppose by then it was too late.”

“A first year,” Tom scoffed, still refusing to move from his position by the fire. “Gaining the trust of a first year was never going to be too hard.”

“Suppose you’re right. But what about me? You grow up to become the man who kills my parents and tears families apart. You plague my every nightmare and won’t rest until I’m dead. Yet here I am, talking to you without my wand raised or Dumbledore.”

“You are foolish if you trust me.”

“No, I don’t trust you. But I’m here, so there must be something about you that lured me in. How can you not take pride in the fact that you’ve got the Boy Who Lived defenceless here?”

“Perhaps you’re just incredibly dim-witted,” the other said with wicked amusement. “You may not trust me, but you have too much faith in me. The fact you’re even alive surprises me even more every day, Harry Potter, you really should be dead.”

“I guess we both should be doing things we’re not.”

When Tom did not speak again, Harry decided that that was the time to show himself out. On the way out he glanced back, to see that the Slytherin had not moved.

For some reason, Harry’s view of him had changed the past few days. He used to think Voldemort was nothing but a sadistic murderer, and had always been, but there was more to Tom. He was still sadistic, still brilliant, he still had a hatred against muggles and muggleborns and he was still an arrogant prick but he was more than just the two dimensional person Harry had assumed him to be.

Tom had fears. He feared death, he feared being irrelevant and he was extremely ambitious. So ambitious that the idea of ever not pushing the boundaries of magic or learning something was something he refused to even consider.

But he still feared other things, like abandonment, and Harry figured that it was this that had served to solidify his hatred of making himself vulnerable. Tom had most likely always been more reserved and highly self-serving and ambitious, but his childhood had probably pushed him over the limit.

And it was these fears that made Tom appear to Harry as more than just a sadistic murderer – he was human. As much as he detested his human self and sought to destroy it, Tom Riddle was human. He could think and feel, and he was warm to the touch.
Maybe the cold, barely-alive Voldemort was beyond all hope, but Tom was still very much alive and in reach.

Harry didn’t pity him or feel sympathetic – Tom had made his own choices after all – but he still couldn’t let the Slytherin ruin his own life. He would refuse to let Tom become Voldemort, or would die trying. As Hermione would put it, it was his ‘saving the world’ thing.

---------------------------------------------

Harry,
I have planned our next meeting concerning Lord Voldemort for 2nd April at 8pm in my office. The password is now ‘ice mice’.
Professor Dumbledore

Harry read the letter as he walked to Tom’s private chambers. The 2nd April was the day after tomorrow, and Harry wondered what Dumbledore had in store. Would it be more memories of a younger Voldemort?

He couldn’t say that he wasn’t intrigued – Harry found Voldemort’s childhood to be rather fascinating. But he wondered if Dumbledore would show him what Tom had done after Hogwarts – so far that part of his life was more or less a mystery.

“Enter,” was Tom’s usual reply when Harry knocked on the door.

Tom was already at the cauldron when Harry entered the room, adding a sprinkle of one of the many herbs surrounding him.

“Chop these up,” he said abruptly, pushing over a pile of ginger roots.

Harry approached the table but did not take the knife Tom offered.

“What were you planning to do in the future?” he asked curiously instead. “Back in 1943, I mean.”

Tom didn’t look at him, but stirred the cauldron three times anticlockwise before setting the ladle to the side.

“Why does it matter?” he said coldly. “I’m not in 1943 anymore.”

Harry shrugged. “Just wondering. What were you going to do after you closed the Chamber?”

Tom gave a half-shrug. “Finish my studies. Study magic.”

“Study magic?”

“I craved the day that I would be away from the limitations of Hogwarts,” Tom said, flicking his wand and the fire underneath the cauldron decreased slightly. “No longer would I have to charm and plead the teachers so that I would be allowed in the Restricted Section. No, I would be able to study whatever subject I wanted, whenever I wanted.”

“And what else?”

“And nothing else,” Tom said shortly. “I have no desire to work for anyone.”

Harry had nothing to say to that, so he continued to chop up the roots until Tom took them from him to add them to the cauldron.
After twenty minutes of working in a relatively comfortable silence, Harry cleared his throat. Tom did not look up.

“You wanted to know what happened in the chamber,” Harry said quietly, not looking at Tom either. It would be easier to talk about if he forgot for a moment that this was the very person responsible for the basilisk attacks. “I didn’t find it. Hermione did. The basilisk got to her a-and… and she already had the answers. She knew what it was, she knew how it was getting around. After that it was just about talking to Myrtle.”

“I barely knew her,” Tom said. “But from what I heard she was an irritating little girl. Never stopped whining.”

“She didn’t deserve to die,” Harry pointed out, and Tom didn’t say anything. “Myrtle told us – me and Ron that is – that she saw the basilisk by the sink. That’s how we found it.”

“You caved in the wall?”

“Yeah… Lockhart – our defence teacher who was with us – tried to obliviate us. He was a fraud, you see, and lied about half his own life. Anyway, the wand backfired and yeah, the wall collapsed.”

“What was I like?” Tom asked curiously. “In the Chamber?”

Harry thought back to his second year, and what his opinion had been of Tom Riddle before he knew who the Slytherin really was.

“You were… there was something about you I couldn’t put my finger on,” Harry said slowly. “It was like… you were charming, but I could tell that there was something… something else. Of course I was far too busy trying to make sure Ginny was OK to really think about it at the time.”

“And the basilisk? How did you defeat her?”

“Dumbledore’s phoenix, Fawkes, injured it’s, I mean her, eyes. After that it was mostly just me trying to aim with the sword and I got lucky. Again.”

“Remarkable,” Tom breathed. “A twelve-year-old boy against a thousand-year-old basilisk… and you got lucky.”

“Almost didn’t, I got bit. But then Fawkes was there and…”

“Phoenix tears,” Tom finished for him and Harry nodded.

“All in all, not a fun year,” he muttered, standing back and watching as Tom added the final ingredients. “Ever since I arrived at Hogwarts I’ve been waiting for a normal year and so far, I haven’t got one.”

“You and I, Potter, we don’t do ‘normal’,” Tom commented. “Normal is for other people, too naïve to view the world from anything but their small, narrow minds.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing, but I would give anything to be just like that. Not aware of the horrors of the world.”

“I want to ask you something.”

“Umm… OK?”
“Do believe that there is good and bad in the world?” Tom asked him, and Harry frowned.

“Well yeah, I mean Dumbledore is clearly good, I’m clea- well, I hope I’m good-”

“You believe that?” Tom’s eyes gleamed. “You believe that people are either ultimately good or ultimately bad?”

“I wouldn’t say that. I believe people have a choice.”

“Who decides what is good though?” the Slytherin asked. “If I seek out power and attempt to establish myself as the most powerful being, why is that necessarily bad?”

“I don’t care if you seek out magic,” Harry replied. “I don’t care if you become one of the most powerful people on earth or not. I care about whether people get hurt. And people do, Tom. Voldemort is only where he is right now because he slaughtered millions. And yes, I think that is bad. How can you not?”

“We are not all equal, Harry. There has to be a system, and someone always has to be in power. There is no fairness, or kindness in the world. There is only power.”

“You don’t have to achieve power through killing people.”

“Name one person that hasn’t,” Tom said coldly.

“Loads of people,” Harry argued, but already he could see flaws. The Minister was powerful, and he had been personally responsible for killing people as an Auror. Dumbledore defeated Grindelwald, you expect that he never ended someone's life?

“Truly, flawless examples,” Tom sneered. “You talk to me as if I’m the one in the wrong here, but I think you need to take a closer look at the world, Potter. Without power, the whole system crumbles. Without the system, there is anarchy. And there is much more slaughter in anarchy, I can assure you.”

“But what gives you the right to decide who lives and who dies?” Harry challenged him. “What gives you the right to decide that you have to be the one with the power?”

“Because I am far greater than the wizards out there,” Tom hissed. “Those people who fight and argue over silly little quarrels and subject the entire world to their bickering. Who cater to the muggles as if they were part of our society. Who sacrifice our own lives and keep us in the dark as if they’re ashamed of magic. It is the muggles who should be ashamed, not us.”

“Why? Why should muggles be ashamed for being born the way they are? What makes them that different from us?”

“Everything,” he spat.

Harry looked away from the Slytherin, starting to clear up.

“How? What have muggles ever done to you?” he said sharply. “It was your mother who decided to die instead of raise you – your pureblood mother. It was you who bullied the other children in the orphanage, the one child who had magic blood in their veins. Dumbledore showed me. It seems the only problem in your life is you Tom, not muggles.”

Tom had gone very quiet and still, and when Harry looked at him he was surprised to see the pure rage in Tom’s eyes, his mask forgotten.
“Dumbledore… showed you?” he growled out. “Dumbledore showed you his memories of me?”

“He did,” Harry stated. “Said it would be useful for when it comes to fighting Voldemort. It’s not about you, Tom.”

“He has no right,” Tom seethed. “No right to parade my memories of that… of that… of that disgusting place like I’m a display-”

“Look I get it, OK? I’ve had my memories invaded too – by Snape and Voldemort – and I know how horrible and invasive it is. But if Dumbledore says it necessary-”

“You are cannon fodder,” Tom spat. “That is all. You are nothing but a mascot, you are not an Auror or a Healer, your only duty is to die. So no, it is not necessary.”

“Well then why don’t you talk to Dumbledore then-”

At this Tom slammed his hand down, but Harry didn’t move. He was all too used to Tom’s anger outbursts by now. He watched as the Slytherin stormed over to the fireplace, grabbing something from a jar on the mantle and throwing into the flames.

The flames turned a bright shade of green when it made contact with the Floo Powder and cast a sickly glow onto Tom.

“Dumbledore,” Tom snarled into the flames. “Dumbledore, you will meet with me this instance, or I’ll-”

The flames suddenly shot up and Tom flinched back as Dumbledore, dressed in violent purple robes, stepped out of the fireplace and into the room. Harry felt a sudden chill go through the room.

“You’ll do what?” he asked pleasantly, as the flames turned yellow again, and the room returned to normal.

Tom was shaking with anger by this point.

“How… dare you?” he asked the headmaster. “How dare you show him the orphanage, how dare you display where I had to grow up to whoever takes your fancy-”

“It was to my understanding that Harry already knew about the orphanage,” Dumbledore said quietly, and glanced towards Harry who nodded.

“You have no right,” Tom fumed, ignoring Dumbledore completely. “You know that he is going to die, no matter what, you know he has to die so why show him my memories?”

“They are not your memories, Tom, they are mine-”

“They are my life!” Tom roared, and an abrupt silence fell after his outburst.

Harry, who had never heard Tom shout like that looked between the Headmaster and the future Voldemort. Tom looked a mess, his hair falling in his eyes and anger tinted his cheeks a faint pink. Dumbledore, on the other hand, remained as composed as he usually did, his hands clasped together in front of him as he looked down at the student in front of him.

“It is not an attack against you, Tom,” he said softly. “This is about Voldemort-”

“Voldemort is me,” Tom said, spitting out every word. “That is what I do after Hogwarts. I torture and murder and become immortal. Don’t try to pretend I’m someone that I’m not, Albus.”
Dumbledore’s face seemed to fall the tiniest amount as he stared at Tom, his age appearing more prominent than Harry had ever seen.

“I would never do such a thing,” he said quietly. “I know exactly who you are, Tom. And I know who you could grow up to be—”

“I could never grow up to be anyone but Voldemort. Do not claim ignorance, old man. You have never trusted me, you have always watched every step I take with a watchful eye and now it must bring you great joy to be able to tell me in person that you know for a fact that you were right all along.”

“It could never bring me such a thing.”

Tom didn’t speak for a moment, straightening up and levelling Dumbledore up carefully. He glanced across to Harry, before turning back to the headmaster.

“He will die,” he said simply. “Everyone in this room knows it. Do not try to mollify the situation by pretending that what he is learning is useful. Harry Potter must die. All you are doing is attempting to humiliate me. Well congratulations, now everyone in this room also knows where Tom Riddle had to live for the first eleven years of his life. In that filthy, wretched muggle place—”

“Do you think I care?” Harry interrupted, staring at Tom. “Is that what you believe? Do you believe I must mock Voldemort for growing up in that place, or that I pity him for that? I don’t. If anything, I pity him for never being able to grow close to anyone. But he made his own decisions. You make your own decisions. Voldemort’s childhood is the only part of his life that makes me feel the least amount of pure disgust towards him.”

Tom’s eye twitched, but he refused to look away from Dumbledore. Dumbledore tilted his head slightly towards Harry.

“You may not be able to understand it, but what I have to show Harry is important,” the headmaster said. “I will show him Voldemort’s past, whether you object to it or not. You have no claim to my own memories.”

“Then I will teach him,” Tom snarled. “You have always despised me, and I do not trust my past in your hands. Memories can be altered, and I will not have a biased view shown.”

“And you will show him an unbiased view?” Dumbledore asked with a small smile. “You will present your childhood as it was to Harry, without adding your own altercations? You must trust him to come to his own decisions about you, Tom, I believe that is fair—”

“I do not care about his opinion of me,” Tom snarled. “I care about my past being manipulated to cater to your muggle loving inclinations. You always favoured those pathetic people over me.”

“I will continue to teach Harry what I believe is essential for him,” Dumbledore said firmly. “Whether or not you choose to share your own past with him is another matter that I am not concerned about either way.”

He waited, but when Tom did not speak again, he turned back to the fireplace, taking powder out of the jar and throwing it into the fireplace.

“Good evening, Harry, Tom,” he said, nodding to each of them in turn before stepping into the flames and disappearing.

“I wish you wouldn’t do that you know,” Harry commented when the headmaster had gone. “You
and Dumbledore both, you talk as if I’m not here. I’m not some pawn in your game. Did you ever ask me what I wanted from these memories?’

“You don’t get a say over my past,” Tom sneered.

“No but I get a say over how you both treat me,” Harry said slowly. “I’m sorry but I’m not your puppet. You don’t get to feed me biased information about how you were abused by muggles, and how you did nothing wrong in return. And Dumbledore does not get to give me small snippets of information until I’m content enough that I’ll just blindly walk into the line of fire.”

“You came to me for tutoring, do not forget that-

“With spells and potions,” he shot back. “Funny thing is, Tom, I don’t really trust you when it comes to Voldemort. Somehow I have this feeling – and maybe it’s got something to do with the fact you’re a younger Voldemort – that I shouldn’t be looking to you for guidance on how to defeat him.”

“And you would prefer Dumbledore, would you?”

“Over you? Yes.”

“You are a fool to be manipulated by him,” Tom said coldly.

“Yeah, he probably is manipulating me. Most people in my life are. But he’s a good man and I trust him. I trust him with my life.”

Tom slowly approached Harry, seeming to tower over the Gryffindor as he placed his arms either side of him, effectively trapping Harry. Harry glanced up at him, his green eyes meeting Tom’s dark gaze.

“Good,” Tom said in a low voice. “Because that is exactly what you are doing.”

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