**Men of War**

by **LadyBraken**

**Summary**

Grindelwald is rising. Europe is preparing to war. The prohibition is creating new underground's powers. The Great Depression will soon strike in the entire world. The ISS is threatened every day. The MACUSA is panicking. Albus Dumbledore is facing his old demons. Somewhere, the young Mr Riddle is testing his new powers at the orphanage, unknown to the wizarding world. A certain Obscurus is running around to seek safety. His Magicozologist friend is running around for reasons.

And Harry... Harry is trying to avoid the worst.
This is a time-travel story to the 20'. I'm doing a lot of recherches, so it should be timely-accurate! It should be quite a long fic (I know I should end one before starting another, but the idea was stuck in my mind for quite some time, so there it is). The update should be something very irregular, as usual, as my muse come and go!

Thanks to the wonderful Beta, adlertypewriterco who helped me sooo much with the infinies tribulations of the English Grammar.

There is a bit of german in this. I don't speak a word of German: if someone see a mistake, please tell me and forgive me! It's just that it's needed in the plot, even if I hate to use a language I don't understand, not every wizard can talk English. (And I only talk french, English, Spanish Latin and Ancient Greek so yeah German is quite unknown territory for me)

Warning: considering the time-periode, this fic will retrace the first wizarding war and the Second World War. So general trigger warning: death, PTSD, eventual torture, graphic description of violence (including on children), manipulations (mind fuckery and all these things), depression, diverse traumas, and we may see Numengard in action and concentration camps. Joy, my friends. (And also, adults do adults things, so I don't exclude sexual themes and smutty scenes at some point)

So rating's there for a reason. Of course, I will tag before every chapter to warn y'all.

As I do a lot of paintings, you will probably find illustrations for this and my other fics on deviantart at LadyZombiedraws, and you can follow my Tumblr, Ladybraken, where I'm very happy to answer any question/recommendations on my fics! (And where I also post the in-process of art and fanfic, eventual snippets and I swear a lot because... life, y'know?)

~LadyBraken

Update: The pairings are decided, I'mm change the tags at some point. Thank you people :)
The sky above the Black Forest was dark and threatening. A freezing wind made the trees shiver, and the animals hide under the cover of the forest. No man was outside his home. A heavy, crushing atmosphere was haunting the hole area. Something sinister, something that shouldn't be here. Clouds twirled, thunder rolled. No muggle could have understood why everything suddenly seemed to be sentient, and dangerous. They just ran away, whispered the old tales of the Black Forest, one of the oldest of Europe. Stories of monsters, devils. Stories of witches.

They didn't know how right they were.

Abnona lived in this forest. Abnona was the forest. It had been for centuries, maybe for millennium. It had been here when the fist bush started to grow, when the first bird landed in that bush. It was a fugitive revelation, like the quarry which immediately caught sight or discovered, fled. It was the strange feeling of eyes on your back, the ridiculous notion that the trees wanted to mislead you. A dark presence of the sylvan, ageless and crushing. Like the forest was, but certainly didn't want you to be.

It was a source.

Somewhere among the trees, a wolf howled.

The place was saturated with magic. Raw, untamed, savage – of the most dangerous kind. However, the one that was producing this magic – because someone had to be producing it- was nowhere to be seen. A chill was running down every creature's spine. The pressure was heavier each second that passed, air trying to crush the earth.

In front of the piercing dawn, the mist had risen. A defensive reflex of the creatures of the night against the sun and covered the black valleys of pines with a thick and cold layer.

The light of the sunrise had been contaminated by something dirty, by colors too unnatural which projected more shadow and threats than any millennial tree. Every mile, every crevice, every stone was alive enough to kill, yet waited. All the little traps of the forest, all the roots judiciously placed waited. Each cloud charged with electrical anger, every drop of water that made the steps trip, waited.
Abnona waited with *glee*.

The tension smashed its breaking point in a loud crack that could have passed for the thunder for inexperienced ears. A blinding light exploded and something fell from the maelstrom slowly appearing in the sky.

The thing landed on the floor with an horrible crashing sound and the next second, it was like nothing at all had happened.

Breathing. Why was it so hard the Breath? His lungs burned, no, all his body burned. Everything was dark and blurry and it hurt.


He took a minute to calm himself. He was pretty sure that whatever the situation he was in, it couldn't be worse that previously. Not that it helped to calm him down. The bile's taste was atrocious, but at least it masked the blood's.

He slowly sat up and look around him.

He wore only his cloak of invisibility, wrapped around his legs. His hand was clenched around his wand. No, not his wand, not the soft piece of wood and phoenix feather.

The Elder Wand.

And on his finger ...

He watched with fascination the stone. She was shining with a black light, begging him to use it. But he knew better, now. He had learned.
Images, shouts passed before his eyes at that simple thought. He narrowed his eyelids and pinched his nose with his fingertips. He could not be distracted now.

He had broken many branches while falling, and a slight crater was dug in the ground around him. He was really surprised not to have something broken - if not died. But it seemed that his luck always chose the most incongruous moments to make itself known. He was surrounded by tall trees with black foliage. The ground was covered with ferns, dead branches, and green grass and the mist sticking to his skin wetly. Some ray of sunlight pierced through the trees, depositing puddles of gold on the ground and vegetation, faded by the fog. There was something eerie in the place.

Of course, it was why they had chosen it to be here specifically. One of the last places that had resisted the burnedland's politic by its sheer magical potential.

Harry draped himself in the cloak, if only to warm himself. He had got used to the hunger, the pain, but never, quite to the cold. Strange how one's body could react to a thing.

Careful not to trip or walk on something sharp, he started walking through the trees. Harry is quite happy to be alone, he wouldn't want to obliviate some poor muggle in hysterics, or worst, to have landed on someone. He shuddered at the thought and cast it aside, alert. He needed to concentrate on the immediate situation. To be alone and helpless in an unknown forest bring too many bad memories for comfort.

Well, at least the last time he wasn't alone and he knew when he was. Because the black forest was in Germany and he was pretty sure that it wasn't quite safe at some period of the history. Especially since he didn't know a single word of German. French, yes, he had learned during the second war, but German? Too far stretched for him. He wished Hermione was here with him. Thinking about his old friend made him purse his lips in a tight line.

He sighed. First things first, he needed to focus. He couldn't concentrate with all these thoughts in his head. Keeping his mind cold and functional was a necessity.

Somehow, he should thank Voldemort for that lesson.

Careful not to use magic in case there is any wars around here, he sat on a root and closed his eyes to concentrate. Merlin, he could still feel the ache of his fall and the atrocious taste in his mouth.

Harry crossed his fingers together, he started to steady his breath. Then, he focused his attention on
everything around him. The ruffle of the leaves, the sound of the fox's paws, the breeze in his hair. The buzz of the magic, the tug of the wand between his hand, praying to be used, because it would be so easy. Bugs are eating a carrion somewhere. The stone around his finger at its familiar, too familiar energy whispering sweet lies in his head. The warmth of the cloth, secured and safe, around his shoulders like the arms of a mother.

He stood. He had to find clothes, food and a shelter. He hoped the place wasn't a no man's land, otherwise, he would be screwed magnificently. Not that it would quite change from the usual.

Well, he was here to make it change, wasn't he?

Harry had to hurry, he may not have much time. The pun made him smile. Aware of everything around, him, he walked for hours. The mist fell, leading to a clear but cold autumn's day. Harry needed to find a wizard's home to floo to a big city, and by rebound, end in England, or even better, at Hogwarts. Harry wondered if Dumbledore was already a teacher. He hoped Riddle wasn't already a student. With a bit of luck, Riddle wasn't even born.

Considering that he is the one wishing it, he had all the chances to meet Riddle, even in the depth of a German's forest. Figures.

His steps are light and almost soundless, courtesy of years on the run.

He wondered how different it would be. Technically, he was in another dimension, as this time had happened for him, but not for the rest of the world. He hadn't quite had the time to study much of the era, especially what was and wasn't discovered in magic, which ought to be a problem at some point. He could change what had to, but maybe presenting himself as a magical genius wasn't such a good idea.

He really didn't need the spotlights (he wasn't even sure that he could actually explain half of it).

After a while, his stomach started to ache. He hadn't eaten in awhile- far too long actually, even if he was used to it.

He finally distinguished a clearing through the now sparse trees. And - thank Merlin- a house in said clearing. Of course, he could transfigure clothes, but he didn’t know what people were wearing at whatever time he had landed into, and nothing could compare to the feeling of soft, clean fabric.
Harry ran more than he walked towards the civilization finally regained. The house was covered with large stones, and smoke rose lazily above its roof. It was picturesque but did not help Harry to locate himself in time. This type of building still existed in his day. He truly hoped that the ritual worked, or else he would not have hoped to remain at large for long.

He went around the house to check that there was no one inside. It was his lucky day.

He used a simple wandless spell to unlock the window at the back of the house and entered. The room was quite homey, with raw wood furniture. It made him think about the Weasley's, even if it was obviously muggle and empty. Even at the war's peek, the Burrow had never been empty. Even when there was no more Weasley’s to live in it.

With an ease coming from practice, Harry started to methodically inspect the house. He first took some clothes – just one outfit, he didn't want to take more than what he needed. He found enough clothes in the bedroom, and considering the fashion, he could say that the ritual had worked.

Relief crashed over him as Harry dressed himself. It must have been the late 20' or the early 30'. Right on time, but he didn't expect any less from Hermione. He looked at himself in the mirror. He guessed that it would do. And having muggle clothing may help him to blend in with the masses.

At least, he was sure he could use magic here. He had taken some underwear, a pair of brown trousers, a simple white shirt, a vest and an old jacket. Once dressed, he cast a spell to braid his hair that had grown far too long during the last few years. He cast a spell to shave his beard (maybe he would grow it properly one day, but right now it only make him look homeless). Satisfied with the result, and not wanting to linger in that place more than necessary, he took a piece of sheet and cut into it.

Once a makeshift bag was made from the sheet, he took the remains of the fabric to tie his wand to his wrist, and bandaged his palms with the last bands, reflex defense. One never knew when one had to catch a blade with bare hands. He walked round the little house, and realized that there were only two rooms, plus a pantry.

He felt very badly about having to take food, but he needed a minimum to reach the first city. He took some boxes of concerves, a gourd, a small saucepan and some herbs he recognized.

Harry finally found an old newspaper, in German. He should have learned more languages in his
youth. At least he managed to understand the date pretty much. 1928. He was in the midst of Grindelwald's rise to power, which made him think that he really had to go back to England as soon as possible.

He had not read much about the Snatchers, but his experience of the Death Eaters made him say that he preferred to avoid falling on these charming people. Especially if their master came to learn who he was ... England. England was a good choice.

He nibbled a few cakes—despite hunger he could not force himself to eat more.

He heard a metallic noise behind him.

Well.

Raising his hands in the air, he slowly turned around to meet an old man. He couldn’t quite describe the man in question as all of his attention was focused on the very large gun he was holding.

“Was machst du hier?” asked the old man with a clear threat in his voice.

Harry wasn’t sure if it was good to explain that he was English… He just nodded, hoping that it would work either way.

“Verstehst du, was ich sage?”

Harry had absolutely no idea of what that man was saying, but he was very close to use his wand. at the very least to make that gun move away from his face.

He hated guns.

But he hated unnecessary violence even more, so he tried to look as unthreatening as possible, congratulating himself for shaving his beard earlier. Without it he looked younger - well, actually, he looked his dear age of 20.
The old man didn’t seem to be the one to be discouraged by the prospect of killing young men. He lived alone, in the woods… If he talked, no one would believe him…

Hadn’t Harry broke the Status of Secrecy at the glorious age of 12, after all?

In a swift movement, he surrounded himself by his cape, becoming invisible to the poor man that had now his eye rounds as plates and didn’t know where to point his gun. Harry pondered the idea to break the weapon, but he decided to get out as soon as possible instead. He had taken a lot -too much- from this man to destroy something that might keep him alive on a daily basis. Jumping through the window that he had judiciously let open, he ran into the forest.

At the end of several hours, he was still not really out of the forest. He knew the sylvanwas helping him, but magic could not help it. As the day fell, and the cold slowly enveloped him, he huddled up against the trunk of a tree, and, having placed protections all around him, allowed himself a half-sleep. The bruising of a stag resounded through the trunks.

He awoke with a start at dawn, soaked in sweat. He could not remember his nightmares thanks to his sudden progression in occlumency. Thanks also, to the fact anchored in his mind, that reality was always worse than what his imagination could produce.

He sniffed and frowned. It was high time that he washed himself if he did not want to attract predators for tens of kilometers. His steps led him without having to think about a stream that was flowing slowly. The rays of the sun scattered the surface of the running water in golden sparks, covering the liquid with shimmering colors. But what Harry preferred was the crystalline sound of moving water.

He quickly got rid of his new clothes, rolling his shoulders to chase away the sleep of his muscles. He bent his clothes neatly and put them in his bag, which he put on the top of his head. He would not leave his things behind him, he had learned. One can find himself running from Death Eaters naked once, never twice.

Harry slowly entered the water, giving himself time to get used to this coldness. Back at the bank, he put the bag on one of the rocks that protruded in the middle of the stream. He walked slowly to the deepest point, and had only water to his hips.

Putting his wand on the rock, which he had managed to keep within a yard of him, he plunged underwater. He emerged to take a big breath of air and to put back as quickly as possible his wand on his wrist. It was not good to leave the Elder Wand on a rock and unattended. Once the most powerful wand in the world was firmly attached to his wrist, he began to wash.
But no matter how much he washed himself, he still felt dirty because…

… because the very air was reeking Dark Magic.

Someone was watching.

“Hello young man.” Said a deep voice in his back.

Somewhere between the branches, the root, the mist and the ground, Abnona laughed.
Hello world!

Thank you for all the kudos already! I'm posting this second chapter quite quick, I have sooo much inspiration for this thing. Too much possibilities, and not enough canon to stop me *evil laugh*

Also, I'm in holidays so it may help ( even if I have so much work that I can't see the end of it)
I still have for beta the wonderful Adlertypewriter

I'm still not sure for the pairings, even if indeed I think I'm going for a main Harry/Albus. But just tell me what you think of it!

Also you can still find me on tumblr under 'LadyBraken', where I post a lot of my art that you may find in my fics, or art in general, and where you can actually ask stuff if you want.

I think I will try to stay at one chapter/ week but it may become hard when I go back to school so we'll see.

I do hope you will like this chapter!

~LadyBraken

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry caught his breath. He was ready to strike. Every alarm in his body was screaming bloody murder. His wand seemed light and hot in his hand, whispering, almost begging that *it would be so simple to just make the problem disappear*...

Forcing himself to stay calm, he didn't turn around yet.

He couldn't know if the man was a wizard or armed in any way. Something was sure: the man spoke English and knew Harry did too somehow. Which wasn't good, or could be.... even worse. The real question was: what was the extent of his knowledge? To tell the truth, Harry had expected to arrive unnoticed by the wizarding world and stay low the time to gain England. So much for that.

Sometimes, he wondered if he should even try to make plans.
Making sure he was alerting the other of his movement, he slowly turned around, a protecting shield ready on his lips.

On the bank, sitting on the bare ground and leaning on a tree was a man. He was quite charismatic, his head tilted to the side in consideration, his golden blond hair reaching his shoulders and framing his face. He was wearing an open military uniform, but it looked used, old his shirt was let open. The shadow of a beard underlined his strong jaw, clenched in concentration, or maybe it was his natural expression.

He was playing with his wand, making it wing between his fingers like the young man in front of his couldn't be a threat. The wooden stick passed from one finger to another with a surprising regular rhythm.

His piercing grey eyes never left Harry.

Harry was pretty sure he had seen him somewhere, which probably meant that he was a wizard (that and the haircut- typically wizard), but his mind was racing too fast on too many places for him to remember that particular information.

The man was a wizard, and he had caught Harry in a moment of weakness. He hated that.

What he hated, even more, was the impression that he was inspecting him like a piece of meat, or a very peculiar insect. Harry didn't try to protect his modesty, it was far too late, it didn't really matter and the stream was covering the... most important part. He was used to not being shy about his body, to a point where he couldn’t even think of it as something that people could be attracted to.

The idea of a body, he had said once to Poppy, who was trying to give him a blanket to hide him while she treated one of his wounds, was to be functional and alive.

Each and every one of his muscles was tense. Harry was very glad that he had learned occlumency, because he was pretty sure that the man was trying to read his mind. Or wanted to, anyway. Harry could recognize the stance, the gaze. The man was at least a soldier, and probably the type that loved his work. Maybe an Auror? Harry certainly hoped so, which meant that he probably wouldn't be.

They stood in silence, evaluating each other.
"Do you intend to dissolve in water, boy?" finally asked the man with a too feral smirk for Harry's tastes.

"Depends if you intend to stay here or not, I guess." He shot back.

He decided that he really didn't like the man. Not that he had done something... but his guts were telling him that something was wrong, and he preferred to be biased than in danger. It's easier to apologize when everyone is still alive.

The man chuckled at that, but it didn't reach his eyes.

The situation, albeit dangerous, was very awkward. Harry didn't know what to make of anything but certainly, wouldn't mind retrieving his clothes right now. But he couldn't let it show.

He stood his ground, making it known that he wouldn't move if the man didn't back up. The problem was the fact that he was disadvantaged as long as he was naked.

Deciding to go for it, Harry reached for his bag, never letting the blond man out of his sight.

He could appartate. He should appartate. Everything not to use the Elder Wand on someone. Yes, it was definitely the best thing to do.

"Do you have some food?" The man asked finally, stopping Harry in his movement.

"Are you proposing some or do you need some?"

Harry was actually starting to wonder if the man wasn't as lost as he was himself. He didn't look... clean, nor well fed.

The man stopped to play with his wand and got up. "The second one, I'm afraid." He said, and with one last glance up and down Harry, he just went back into the forest.

And that was the end of Harry’s warreness. He couldn’t for the life of him deny his help to someone
in need, and that man seemed to really need food. He sighed. All his reason was telling him to get out of here, to find somewhere safe, away from the man that had looked at him so oddly, but he knew that if he did that, his conscience wouldn’t let him in peace.

He walked to the land, grabbing his bag on the way. It took longer than expected because his feet sank into the cool mud, making him wince.

He dressed, noting that the stranger, if he had gone away, had done it deliberately slowly. He dried his hair with a wand and tucked it behind his ears so it did not fall in front of his eyes.

Harry sped up to catch the stranger. The man walked with his back straight, as steady as he was casual, and if he did not hold his wand openly in his hand, Harry could see the slight flexes that indicated he had it within range.

Definitely a soldier.

But Harry noticed something else. There was no sound in the forest. Not that the animals were silent, it was the whole forest that was silent. The wind played needlessly in the leaves, the birds had stopped. Harry felt the energy running under his feet, invisible.

The man ends up stopping in front of a wall of the mountain. He made a big wave. Slowly, the gray stone slowly disappeared, giving way to an opening that overlooked a natural cave. The man put his hands on his hips and looked at Harry smugly, raising an eyebrow.

Completely unimpressed by the display of wandless magic, if only because the man’s expression made him think of Malfoy (the hair may have had something to do with it), Harry simply nodded before entering the cavern.

He was the one with the food, for Merlin’s sake.

The place was not very big but was obviously inhabited for some time and made homey to serve as a hiding place. Some shelves were lined up on one of the walls. On the other one, there was a hole covered with stone to make a fire and a makeshift camp bed, only accommodated by some old blankets. On the whole, it was sober and poor, all placed so as to be useful and to allow the occupant of the place to react and provide shelter whatever happens.

It was the kind of place that Harry himself had arranged for the war.
He gave a little appreciative whistle before sitting down in front of the embers that were still warm, leaving his bag to fall to his right, out of reach of his host.

He did not ask why the man was living in a combat situation when the war would not start until the 1930s, he was not familiar enough with the fighting and the witch politics of that time to make a comment, and it was better not to give suspicion. Maybe he was an Auror on a mission. After all, even in his time, the Black Forest always was a strange and dangerous place - a dementor nest for what he knew. Well, the dementors came here after the destruction of Azkaban, a few years after Dumbledore’s death, but it said a lot about the place.

And of course, of every bloody forest in the entire world, he had to land here. Well, at least the climate wasn’t extreme, it could have been worse.

The man strode confidently towards the back of the cave and came back with a slightly rusty saucepan. He murmured something and in a wrist movement, the object was like new. He handed it to Harry.

Harry stomach gurgled at the simple idea of being able to eat something, which gave the unknown man a half smile. Harry pulled one of the tin cans out of his bag and emptied it into the saucepan, stirring the red beans with some of the herbs he'd taken with him that had no other use than to make the food better.

A sweet smell began to rise from his little preparation and the man finally sat on the other side of the fire. He sniffed and emitted what Harry interpreted as a satisfied grunt.

“What are you doing here?” The man asked with a thick accent.

Harry shrugged. “I got lost. You?”

The man gave him a calculating glare, not quite frowning. Harry noticed a little scar on his chin, cutting his beard. “I’m looking for a wand.”

“Shouldn’t you go to a wandmaker instead of a forest, then?”
“Shouldn’t you use a map instead of getting lost in a magical forest?”

They looked at each other for a moment before chuckling. Just as Harry thought, a conversation wasn’t going to lead them anywhere. There was a reason if the man hadn’t even thought about asking his name.

“How did you know I was English?”

The man tilted his head to the side. “The scar on your back. It’s an English word.”

Harry paled a little at that, but he didn’t lower his gaze.

“Muggles?”

The young man nodded. “Stuff happens.” He said quietly. “Oh, but the food’s ready.”

Harry hadn’t missed the glint of anger in the man’s eyes or the way he had coerced Harry into giving him information. He wasn’t sure if he was comfortable with that, but there was no getting out of this once he had seen the scar. But to Harry’s surprise, he wasn’t surprised. He didn’t ask how a wizard could have been hurt by muggles that way.

He just accepted it.

With precise gestures, Harry pulled the saucepan out of the fire and filled two bowls that the other had handed him. The beans actually smelled very good, and he once again congratulated himself on his cooking-with-nothing skills.

When he handed the bowl full of steaming food to the hungry man, he saw his eyes put one second too much on Harry’s ring before quickly landing elsewhere. Harry pursed his lips.

There was technically no reason to worry, the fact that a vagabond wearing a ring so rich was to attract curiosity. But the Hallows did not agree. They tended to ... protect themselves. They wanted to stay together in a strange way, like a wand and its owner.
Like the Horcruxes.

Harry withdrew his hand as much as possible without suspicion, pushing the little voice in the back of his head that told him to kill, *destroy, annihilate* the stranger on the spot. He kept his hand away from the wand. Well, not too far away.

He still couldn’t replace the man.

“So, where do you want to go?”

Harry looked up from his bowl to discover that the other had already finished his. He will never understand how people can eat so much and so fast.

"I don’t really know. Get out of the forest and get to the nearest town in the hope of having a roof over my head, probably."

“Don’t you want to join your master?”

Harry’s heart skipped a beat.

“My master?” He asked, suddenly aware of everything around him.

His mind is racing. He couldn’t make mistakes, he really didn’t want to resort to violence to escape if necessary.

The man must have felt him tense because he raised his hands as a sign of appeasement.

“I would have thought you would be more open about it, considering that you’re wearing his mark on your ring.” He said with some sort of deceptive calmness.

*Wearing his...*
And suddenly, everything clicked into place in Harry’s mind.

Of course, in this time, the symbol was known as Grindelwald’s. And…

_Oh, fucking Hell._

A Blond man hiding in the Black Forest looking for a Wand…

He was staring at him intently.

… Hating muggles, vain, with a scar on his chin like in the pictures…

If Harry was not so shocked that chance had obviously made him fall on a Dark Lord among all the people he might have met, and the fact that he had just cooked for that person, he would surely have panicked slightly.

If Grindelwald was looking for the wand, he was in danger.

He had to play along. He had to play along until he found his way back to England because he was pretty sure that otherwise Grindelwald would kill him right there and now, or try to and either way he didn’t like the idea.

But he couldn’t let the man think that he was the bowing type.

“I have no master.” He answered stiffly.

Like that, he didn’t quite say yes or no. He wasn’t supposed to know who the man was anyway.

A silence echoed in the cave. The fire, which had come to life again thanks to the young man's care, painted darting shadows on the stone walls and created a sharp contrast on the angular face of the dark sorcerer. His face was not legible and he was looking at Harry with a new intent. The coldness of the floor was passing through the fabric of his pants and Harry suddenly felt very uncomfortable. He focused all his concentration to place occlumency shields in his mind - nothing very powerful but
at least it would prevent the man from getting unwanted information without engaging in a direct attack.

“Is that so…?”

The man actually looked *pleased*.

Young Harry would have slapped his face and try to run away. But now, he actually could determine when he had no chance to escape.

The temptation of hitting the man stayed anyway. If he killed him right there and now, he might stop a war, and save hundreds of innocents… or not. He didn’t know Grindelwald like he knew Voldemort. He didn’t know if the man was a symbol or an actual all powerful leader. if his death would turn this project to nothing or allow him to be turned into a martyr. He could create more bad than good on this one.

The morning sunbeams entered the cave almost horizontally and projected white light flags in the line of the entrance.

“So are you one of Grindelwald’s men?”

Harry didn’t answer. “I see.”

He didn’t know what the other man had seen, but he hoped that it would be enough for him to just leave him alone.

“I’ll let you have some tin cans and I’ll leave you to your research.” He tried.

His hand was now tense on his wand, the other ready to catch his things at the slightest sign of danger. The only problem was the Dark lord was between him and the exit.

Which was a problem that tended to repeat itself in Harry’s life.
But at least Voldemort was looking at him with hatred, sometimes simple disinterest or frustration. Not like… like that.

Under other circumstances, he would have thought that maybe he could change the man. But not with Grindelwald, he had fooled Dumbledore. Harry cringed at the thought of his old headmaster. He had in front of him the man who had ruined his life and destroyed his family...

A cry pulled him from his thoughts and made him jump. In a fraction of a second, his wand was in his hand, ready to serve, his bag clinging to his shoulder, his back slightly curved to be a smaller target.

Another, even more, pitiful scream echoed through the cave. He glanced at Grindelwald, who had risen in the same way, and without waiting, rushed outside. Shouts echoed throughout the forest, deformed by layers of ageless magic, creating valleys and craters. They ran along the rivers until they became senseless sounds, and damn it sounded like a child.

Harry stopped thinking. He didn’t care about Dark Lords or Hallows, he only cared about the fact that there was a wounded kid alone in the fucking forest, crying his lungs out.

But it was impossible to locate the source. The reliefs of the massif only allowed him to give a general direction. Without even thinking that he could get lost in the middle of the forest, Harry kept going, almost running. He made sure to always climb to have a better view of the whole area, but it was still impossible to know where the desperate cries came from.

Frustrated and knowing they were running out of time, Harry climbed into the branches of a tree. Maybe from up there he could ...

He saw it. A black spot, in the distance, motionless, in the middle of a valley.

Harry rushed to the place so fast it looked like he was flying above the ground. As he approached, he could better and better shape.

A thestral?

The animal was lying, one of its diaphragm wings extended in front of it. The creature was breathing rapidly, its protruding ribs almost poking its skin. Its milky eyes were half-open and his nostrils were quivering.
Harry slowed down more and more. Was that what made the scream? He had no problem treating a thestral, he loved them, but it sounded so human …

Wait.

A small, white hand was sticking out from under the creature’s wing.

When the creature awakened awkwardly to move away, Harry knelt down. It was a child. He could not really tell if it was a girl or a boy, about ten years old. Their brown hair was scattered around his head. They did not move.

Immediately, Harry took their pulse. It was weak but present.

“The child needs a healer.” He said to the man behind him.

Grindelwald was only a few meters behind him. He hadn’t bothered to run, contenting himself on following the boy from afar. He stood against the light, his big khaki coat flapping in the wind, his face dark. His face contained absolutely no emotion that Harry could decipher (had he ever been able to).

He didn’t make any sign to move.

Harry was busy around the child, looking for an injury or cause for his fainting, but there was nothing. Not even something to say his name or where he came from or what he could do alone in the forest. Nothing. The young man's hands were firm and secure, but his breath was shaking slightly in panic.

He couldn’t let another child die. He didn’t know many healing spells, he didn’t know what was wrong, but he couldn’t let it happen. He had come here to stop it, stop it, stop it.

Grindelwald still hadn’t moved.
“Are you really letting a magical child die because you’re looking after a wand? He needs a healer!” exploded Harry.

He turned to the child just in time to miss the smirk on the man’s lips.

“Very well. I know a place, we should find a healer there.” He said softly.

Harry turned around. The Dark Lord was presenting his hand to take him to some unknown location, but right now he couldn’t care less.

He had to save the child.

And without another though, he grabbed the child and accepted the hand. Then disappeared.

Chapter End Notes

That's it! (Yes I love suspense, sorry)
Thank you for reading and please review (well if you want if you don't... don't...?)
Numengard

Chapter Notes

Hy! So this is a new chapter!
As always, thanks to my beta :)

I laugh so much while writing this ^^ I'm sorry for the delay but I was busy at school
and writing some one shots!
I hope you will like it, and if yes, don't forget to leave a comment!

Harry landed heavily on the ground. He had wrapped himself by instinct around the child and did
everything he could to smooth his landing with his own body. It took him a few seconds to gather
himself.

He was still holding Grindelwald’s hand. He snatched his hand away, turning his head to pointedly
avoid the man’s smirk, cursing under his breath.

He looked up at a fortress. A large, dark, crushing stone wall cast its shadow across the plain.
Disproportionate doors of raw wood were open and let in and out dozens of people who were busy
like ants, swarming with people. Wizards cried to each other across the moor, their spells darting into
the blue sky, with the response of light trails projected from the forest surrounding the fort. There
were children of all ages, children running everywhere shouting, women and men busy in various
tasks, looking diligent, their military attire impeccable. The old men leaning against the walls or near
the carts, they look worried and amused. Two large black banners were falling from the battlements
on either side of the doors, with the symbol of the relics, in a bold white, in the center. Patrols passed
up and down the ramparts, wand in hand, synchronized stride hitting the ground with pride, giving
rhythm to all the life that had developed around the fortress. In some places, tents were set up, with
some strings on which clothes had been hanged, sometimes replaced with pieces of meat that were
being dried to make rations.

The smells. Saffron fragrances, delicate and spicy, accompanied by the comforting warmth of the
wood fire whose smoke stings the throat, cooked meat, the promise of a good meal, soap that the
villagers used to wash themselves inside magically enlarged tents. The smells of sweat, effort, sap,
human odors that rose with the joyous notes of the instruments of fortune that could be heard in the
distance. And the smell of salt, the spray of the sea, carried by the wind to the heart of the island,
probably into the heart of the fortress dug into the rich loam itself.

This chaos reminded him of the Quidditch world cup.
Harry had seen a lot of things in his life. A lot of things that would make people puke, or drop their jaws. He had broken out of Gringotts on a dragon’s back, he had defied a Dark Lord many times, he had gathered the hollows, brought down the greatest army of inferus ever known, but this. This was glorious.

He rose his eye to watch Grindelwald. The man was standing proudly, arms crossed on his chest, facing his creation, a big wolfish smile illuminating his face far more effectively than the rays of the sun.

Now, Harry could see the power radiating from the man. The raw magic surrounding him.

“Welcome to Numengard.” He said dramatically.

Harry would have been caught in the moment if the weight of the child in his arms hadn’t brought him back to reality. Numengard would become one of the worst political prisons, Grindelwald would die in it, and the man was probably one of the worst snakes crawling on this earth. This was all a gigantic stage of Grindelwald’s power - like Hogwarts had been for Voldemort at some point. It was made to provoke awe, with, to Harry’s shame, a great efficacity.

Right now, it didn’t matter. He would not wait until the man stopped to show off.

Harry had a child to save.

“We need a healer.” He said with determination.

This statement made the future Dark lord frown in frustration. A little mark between his eyes for a second, and it was gone, replaced by an expression of worry and importance.

Harry didn’t take time to really notice it and concentrated himself on taking the child in his arms. God, he was far too small and light. Harry could almost feel his bones under his shirt. He got back on his feet, ready to bolt to the first healer in sight.

Grindelwald waved to him to follow and parted through the crowd that stood before him like the Red Sea before Moses. Harry ignored the worried and curious looks of the different people they met and clenched his teeth at those who lowered their eyes and bowed. He kept all his attention on the child, checking if he was still breathing.
It was very odd for Harry to go through the big doors, and see Numengard like that. The only memory he had of the place was a jail, like Azkaban, and Voldemort had come in through the window ... He reflexively glanced up, but he could not see the piece that one day would become Grindelwald’s last home.

As soon as they passed the doors, Grindelwald barked something in German and Harry was caught in a whirlwind of white coats. A man with neat hair and a pinched air took the child from Harry's arms and laid him on the floor for an emergency examination. He placed his hands experimentally on the child's forehead and belly, then murmured some spells. He looked up and whispered something to Grindelwald, who nodded gravely. The doctor signaled to the people that Harry mentally considered his assistants, for a lack of a better word.

They unfolded a makeshift stretcher and placed the child on it. Harry approached the child. He was pale, and the young man could clearly identify signs of malnutrition. The child looked angelic, with his brown hair slipping from his forehead to the pillow and his hands still small and chubby. He was probably going to die…

Harry put his own hand, skinny, callous, and scarified, on the boy's forehead. Slowly, letting his magic run through his veins, he approached. He felt the stone on his finger vibrate slightly, whispering that it would be so easy to bring back his loved ones, no matter the time, that it was enough to take it in his hand and activate it ... He ignored it, and whispered in the child's ear:

“Blessing, good heart, from beyond the veil.”

The doctor sent him a quizzical look before driving him to what was to be the hospital of the fortress.

Harry felt Grindelwald’s burning stare on his neck, but when he turned to look at him with all the defiance he could muster, but the man had the nerve not to comment any further.

“I guess you’re not going to let me go, now?” He asked dejectedly.

“No indeed.” The man said lightly, raising an eyebrow as if daring Harry to try to run away.

The young man sighed dejectedly. He knew what was at stake. He knew that if he left, the child would be hurt. Most probably, he would have to make a violent exit, and he really didn’t want to hurt too many people. If the place was only full of death-Eater-like bloodthirsty mindless and faceless
soldiers, maybe he would have. But there were children here, for Merlin’s sake!

The man was infuriating, but his thinking was rational. Harry wouldn’t have let himself leave either. He sighed dejectedly. “Can I at least have some tea?”

---

The Dark Lord was leading him through a maze of corridors, greeting with a stiff movement of his head some people they passed. The place was strict, the organization clearly military, but Harry could see camps, facilities of fortune everywhere. Really, the base looked almost like the Come-and-Go room during the Carrow rule on Hogwarts. Except that these facilities weren’t intended to help some students rebel against authority.

At least he wasn’t officially a prisoner. For now…

They ended up entering a room big enough. The place was luxurious, but not pompous, and decorated with a sober and practical taste. The walls were dark varnished wood, as was the office in the center of the room. The floor was of light wood, and with the high windows, it lighten the room and avoided the crushing feeling such place should have had. Behind the desk was a comfortable but imposing armchair, and every place that was not covered by a map on which lines had been drawn and marked, there were shelves full of old books and esoteric objects, which were horribly reminiscent of Dumbledore's office - though without the cheerful side. Books were stacked neatly on the desk, and an ashtray full of cigarette butts stalled one of them, which had remained open. Everything was ready to be useful and accessible as soon as possible, and especially to impose respect and give a precise idea to those who entered this office.

Grindelwald sat on the armchair, without taking his eyes off Harry. The young man might have thought he was relaxed, with his wand held limply and his gestures wide, but the way he gritted his teeth betrayed him.

Of course, there was no place to sit for Harry. He almost rolled his eyes at the man’s antics and transfigured one of the books into a chair. It wasn’t the most comfortable thing in the world, but he didn’t intend to take his time.

Grindelwald looked at him up and down, taking a pack of cigarettes from his inside pocket and lit one. He breathed out a long silvery cloud of smoke, which writhed in spirals above his head, dimming the window light.
“You’re quite a curious individual, Harry.” He said, his thick accent adding some sort of mystery to it.

Harry cocked his head, not knowing how to answer to that. He wondered for a moment if he couldn’t just pass Grindelwald and jump out of the window, but he had nowhere to apparate to except the forest, and he wasn’t even sure if it was close enough.

“You’re from England, right? So you studied at Hogwarts…”

Harry didn’t know many things about the situation he was currently in. He certainly knew he didn’t like where this conversation was going. Sure he wasn’t going to scream that Dumbledore was the greatest wizard alive (really, how temperamental he had been to throw a tantrum in front of Riddle of all people - must have been some side effect of the chamber), but he didn’t know if he could stand to see his old mentor being insulted by… him.

“Are you going to ask me something, or are you just going to state the facts all day?”

There’s a beat, and Grindelwald burst out laughing. “You do have some cheek, boy.”

“I do but I’m not a boy. Or shall I call you old man?”

Grindelwald smiled at him softly, but there was something wild in his eyes. He put one of his locks back in place. “However…”

His smile fell “However if you disrespect me again, it will lead to some… unpleasant consequences.” He said coolly.

Harry had a hard time not to rise from his seat and punch the man in the face, muggle style.

“Respect must be earned, or it has no value.” He said a bit more harshly that he would have wanted, gritting his teeth to control the waves of his magic begging for him to use the wand.

But he knew better than to use the elder wand in front of Gellert Grindelwald. A close call, maybe, but still.
Grindelwald narrow his eyes, but kept smoking his cigaret calmly. He exhaled a new cloud of gray smoke that spread lazily in the air around him. However, his eyes were telling a different story.

He reminded Harry of the dragon, smoking to contain the jet of fire ready at any moment to carbonize his prey.

Well, he wouldn’t be the first to try to burn Harry at the stake, so the young man wasn’t worried. Uneasy, would be more of the word.

The silence was becoming more and more tense, and Harry was really starting to ponder the righteousness at ending Grindelwald’s life there and now, if only to make things less cringy (and really aware that Grindelwald was very probably thinking along the same lines), when a sudden knock at the door cut them both from their musing.

“Sir?” a timid voice called from the other side of the door.

“Come in, Nastya, Come in!”

A woman in her thirties entered in silence. She had quite short auburn hair, and large pale blue, almost pastel eyes, which gave her an eternal childish air. She was tall enough, and stood as well as any of the aristocrats Harry had encountered in his life, but her long pants were covered with dirt and mud, some of which had somehow managed to land on her cheek.

“I’m sorry, Sir.” She looked curiously at Harry.

“It’s ok. This is Harry, he is going to stay with us for a while.”

She looked at him up and down, mirth written all over her face.

“What is it, Nastya?”

She jolted out of her little trance. “Oh, yes, of course. The generals want to throw a little party to
celebrate your return. Do you have any objection?”

“By all means let them have their fun. They would drink even if I forbid it, wouldn’t they?”

“Well, maybe, but you wouldn’t know, Sir, thus you wouldn’t be bothered by it.” She answered with a smirk.

“Wouldn’t I, now?”

Her smile fell off her face immediately. “I’m sorry, that’s not what…”

“I know perfectly what you meant, Anastasia.” It was strange how a common name could sound like a threat, but once again, it was said by a (future?) Dark Lord.

“Of, course, Sir.” She said, forcing a bow. It was so graceful and yet completely unnatural that Harry really felt bad for her.

Harry turned his gaze to Grindelwald, who totally ignored the girl and stared at him, her face hard. Damn he was doing this to make an example. Harry didn’t know what he expected, really. The man was a Dark Lord, or would be, and had already killed more than his share of people. No matter if he had a bad temper, misplaced pride or overindulgent megalomania.

He thought that he was starting to see a pattern, here...

“I’m not angry with you, child.” He said more softly. “Tell them they can have their fun, in the limits of what’s reasonable, of course. Oh, and ask a room to be prepared for our new guest. Warded, of course. You can leave, now.”

“Thank you, Sir.” She whispered before rushing out like her life depended on it.

Grindelwald took a last toke on his cigarette before crushing it among its peers. “Well, Harry, I hope that you are as good at social meetings than you are at cooking tin cans.”
Harry glared at him. *Now*, he was a prisoner.

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Anastasia came back a few minutes later to bring him into his new rooms, conveniently very close to the prison area of the place.

She was a very energetic young woman, greeting all the people they met in different languages, hopping with the few children who were hanging out here and there. Harry decided he liked the young woman.

She brought him into a room that was a large room, about the size of Dudley’s had been in their childhood. The room was empty and impersonal, but comfortable enough, with one small window, warded but without bars, and most importantly, it had a bed, a real one, with a mattress and blankets, and even *pillows*.

“My God, there’s a fucking bed!” He whispered with enthusiasm. Anastasia looked at him for a second a giggled, her hand on her mouth.

Harry threw himself on the piece of furniture, most likely sent by a deity who had taken pity on him and his aching back, and sighed with pleasure as he felt the soft mattress against him. “Yeah, that’s a bed. This bed is my new friend. Hello, bed!”

He grinned as the woman seemed to cheer up a bit. “Well, I’ll see you later, Mr…”

“Harry. Just Harry.”

She nodded and with a flashing smile, got out of the room.

Harry, on the other hand, had other things to do. He got up and went around the room. The technology of the 1920s was much less advanced than that of his time; and the spells were likely to suffer the same distortion, which did not prevent someone as ingenious as, by chance, Grindelwald, to find a way to spy the room. Harry was sure that the only reason he was not in the cell and had no guard outside his door, was that the dark wizard had made sure to keep him quiet for a while.
Harry knew that Grindelwald was at least curious and suspicious about him, and more likely, trying to get him to join his cause with or against his will. Nobody lets a stranger, with his wand, walk in one’s fortress, especially when the said fortress is full of civilians unable to defend themselves, contains your food and incidentally your own person.

Harry was surprised and relieved that the man hadn’t tried to use legilimency on him. Not only his occlumency shields were mediocre at best, but he was pretty sure that he would have disturbed something inside. Having to control the hollows was hard enough, he really didn’t need a weakened mind.

Ah! There it was. Tracking spell, not very elaborate, but efficient, hidden under the pillow to activate at night. Smart.

Harry continued to put his fingertips under the furniture, on the ledges, against the fringes and hem of the curtains but found nothing but a little dust. He doubted that spy microphones had already been invented, but one is never too cautious. Moreover, he did not know the magical evolutions of that time. He inspected more closely the shields that had been placed on his door. They were, like the other spell, powerful but unrefined. Their only purpose was the deterrence and the alarm. Grindelwald, rather than actually preventing his ... guests from going out, seemed inclined to make them believe they could escape. Maybe he wanted their trust, maybe it was a trap, who knew.

Harry sighed. He would only have to remain discreet for a while. Learn the political climate, see what he could do, who was against whom and who wanted what. At least he had not fallen in the middle of a war, but in the preparation of one of them. He hoped that he would be able to escape without shedding blood, and even if possible in a peaceful manner, whatever with the state of the child he had brought, and the pressure that Grindelwald would not fail to exert on him, he really doubted it.

He sat on the bed and sighed. He had hoped to see Hogwarts. He missed the old castle, its gardens, its atmosphere, the thestrals flying around, the lake, and the Giant Squid. Hogwarts without Dumbledore had been a hell, Hogwarts without his students had made him want to stop everything. But now he could go back there. With a few complications, of course, but he could go back to the castle because the castle was still there. He could go back to his old mentor because his mentor was still there.

“We have protected him because it has been essential to teach him, raise him, to let him try his strength. Meanwhile, the connection between them grows ever stronger, a parasitic growth... Sometimes I have thought he suspects it himself.”
A soft pang in his chest made him wince. He didn’t know if it was joy or sadness, maybe a bit of the two. Maybe he didn’t want to see the castle again because it would bring too many things back.

He wasn’t sure if he could forgive Dumbledore now that he had the occasion. Now that the man was actually alive somewhere. Maybe he would be angry… He had never taken the time to be angry at Dumbledore.

He must have fallen asleep because when he opened his eyes again it was dark outside. Harry straightened, and as much as he wanted to avoid using his wand, his cast a *Scourify* on himself to avoid being noticed for miles around because of his smell. He did hope that suitable showers were around, but considering the general population he had seen, it might be complicated to access one.

Oh, Merlin Hogwarts had the *Prefect’s Baths* …

Someone knocked on the door. "Come in!"

The young woman from early went in hopping, a bundle of clothes in her arms. She gave him a big smile and pushed back one of her locks that fell negligently in front of her eyes.

“Grindelwald asked me to find you some good clothing for the party. It’s true that what you are wearing isn’t quite fetching, dear.” She posed the pile on the little table under the window. “We will have a lot of fun, tonight, I believe. Aren’t you excited?” She asked, clasping her hands, and started dancing around quite gratefully. “Oh, there will be a great singer I heard! And all these officers will be in uniform - really it is something to behold.”

Her smile widened. “I hope you’ll enjoy the fête in Numengard!”

It was very strange how young she looked, and carefree, considering. She reminded him a bit a Luna, but she clearly had her head on her shoulders. Well, more than Luna, which wasn’t quite complicated. He noticed that she still had a bit of dirt - or maybe grass? on her face still.

“I do hope so indeed.” He replied, trying his best to be polite.

“Oh, you will!” She giggled a bit and jumped to the door. “Make yourself beautiful, dear!”
And she was gone, leaving a quite taken-aback Harry alone again.

He passed his hand in his hair in a nervous gesture and went to see what kind of clothes he was supposed to wear. It was a quite nice set of robes, totally impractical in case of fighting, not really luxurious, but beautiful.

Of course, Harry had no intention to wear what Grindelwald wanted him to wear. Civil disobedience, they called that. CONSTANT VIGILANCE, would have screamed Moody, preferably right next to his ears.

With a mischievous grin, he set himself to work.

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Anastasia led him lightly to where the party was to be held. The music echoed against the stone walls, covered with paints, linens, curtains, boxes and a whole lot of other things that Harry could not identify.

The corridors were dark, in the inner face of the building. If Harry had spotted the place, Numengard was built in the shape of a hollow triangle, his room and Grindelwald's office being on the facade facing the sea, opposite the large doors, which they overlooked on the island.

Wait… A hollow triangle.

Harry rolled his eyes. Of course, it would be a hollow triangle because why not? The man would have given a new meaning to the word of obsession if he hadn’t known Tom before. Maybe it was a Dark Lord thing, like a maniacal cackle and monologues without end.

He prayed that Grindelwald didn’t cackle. He wasn’t sure if he could put up with more cackling than he already heard in his life.

Anastasia stopped in front of two large, slightly carved wooden doors, raised with wrought iron that stretched in spirals and gave a glimpse of the interior. Harry could hear the music a little louder, smothered by the walls, as well as bursts of laughter and rattling glasses.
At least Grindelwald seemed to have a better taste for the festivities than Voldemort. Harry had almost expected a muggle massacre in a public place.

Anastasia turns to him, puts one or two locks of hair back in place and gives him a small embarrassed smile. "I do not look too much ...?"

"No." he answers without really having any idea of what she has just asked. And he just noticed that he couldn’t really place her accent. She was still dressed in her casual working clothes and hadn’t bothered to change them.

"Oh! Good." And with that, she turned her heels and pushed the doors very dramatically.

He was suddenly drowned in a flood of lights, sounds, and smells. As she stepped into the room, the heat enveloped her, bringing with her the smells of cigars, alcohols, coffee, cologne, perfume, sweat, and that discreet party scent that lasted too long and with too little restriction.

Rococo candlesticks bore small globes of light that spread golden rays across the room and sparkled jewels, medals, and crystal glasses. It was obvious that everyone had put on their best clothes, and that the guests had been sorted before entering.

The room wasn’t big, and clearly not created for that, which led to an impression of clandestine that added to the thrill of the party in itself.

The generals, or the military, it did not really matter, all wore impeccably held outfits, with a big button-down jacket whose arms touched their calves, a belt at the waist, and tight trousers which, if they were well built looked handsome, but if they were not, they made them look like penguins stuck in a pipe. In sum, the guests' outfits were a strange crossover of the traditional witches' dresses - with their obvious variations of what Harry was used to because of the weather but also the country, and the muggle clothes that gave him the impression of having fallen into a gangster movie, and which, objectively, were very classy. The hats slightly to the side, falling on the eye in an elegant and mysterious way, especially, added to the style. Not that Harry is an expert, but the situation shouted the social event, the appearances, almost propaganda. All of them were talking in little groups, chatting over a drink, on a sofa, sometimes with someone on their laps laughing stupidly, a cigar in their hand.

It was all very, very strange for Harry. Too many people in a confined place, too much noise. He just wanted to take his cape and hide, but he knew it was impossible. Anastasia had already danced across the room somehow like she was born for this, and he had lost sight of her. It was all very awkward. Like being invited to a Malfoy party. Where the first task of the night would be to avoid the host at all cost.
Suddenly, a young man jumped on an improvised stage, and, using his wand as a microphone, shouted:

“And now the very famous singer, she comes to us from the United States to play her song: HELEN KANE!”

Harry stood in one of the corners of the room, where he could have the door and the windows in sight, his back against a wall, arms crossed on his chest to avoid letting them be free and do stupid stuff like grabbing a drink.

All the light went down, and a beautiful girl, about twenty, with short curly dark hair fixed close to her skull with a very elegant design, got on stage. She was wearing a velvety dress in a dark-red toned and looked like the Betty Boop’s cartoon came to life.

She took a ludacris pose, winked at one of the men in the public, releasing a wave of excited whistles, and then the music started.

There are certain things that keep me guessing,
Though I try real hard to find them out,
Well, I don’t understand, so I’m confessing,
That I don’t know just what it’s all about.
See, I don’t know the bad things from the good,
Because my mother never told me all she should.

Harry found himself grinning. The music was good, soft, happy and almost naive. The little dance the singer was performing added to the general warm and festive ambiance. However, his happiness got stuck in his throat when he caught the sight of a famous blond hair at the other side of the room. He tried to disappear into the wall behind him, hoping that his infamous luck would do the trick.

A man showed me a l’avaliere,
He says "It's yours if you kiss me, dear,"
Oh, tell me, was there anything wrong in that?

“Oh, there you are!”

Shit.
Grindelwald was coming towards him, a satisfied smile on his face, surrounded by two men, probably high-ranking in view of the general contempt with which he looked at others.

“Gentlemen, may I present you…”


He really didn’t want to say his name, but he knew that any lies would probably be detected immediately. He would just have to make sure that the Potters were safe when he would head back home.

And better that than any of his others names.

“Potter, right.” Nodded Grindelwald, giving him an odd look.

The first man took his hand and shook it. Somehow, Harry felt a bit dirty. “Potter, uh? Like the pureblood family in England?”

“Only by distant marriage, Mr..?”

“Karkaroff. Konstatin Karkaroff, Sir.”

Harry bit back a snort. He could see the resemblance now indeed. Maybe the eyes warily looking around, or the sneer so out-of-place.

“Well, hello Mr. Karkaroff. Does everybody speak English around here? I’m quite astonished to be able to hold a conversation, if I may be honest.”

The man nodded gravely. “In fact, only the… what’s the word? Ha! the upper-classes will be able to speak English. Most of the people here came from Russia. After the revolution, the Statute of Secrecy was… shattered up there. Anyway, most of the wizards are from the aristocracy. They do not mingle well with communists. These people speak English, French, and Latin at the very least, as
it is required for someone so dignified.”

Oh yes, he really saw the Karkaroff he knew in that one. Same puch-me-please face. Like a Malfoy, but without the class. Merlin...

“We indeed had to manage a high number of refugees here, hence the… disorganization of the place. After the Russians came the Polish, and other eastern countries.” Explained Grindelwald politely. “Of course, we offered shelter, we couldn’t leave our kind in the hands of these… muggles. The place is turning into quite some Babel Tower, don’t you agree Nicholov?”

Said man, who had stood silently until then, only nodded his face blank. “Don’t mind him, Harry. The poor man just returned from Siberia, it will I believe take him quite some time before being social once again.” Mocked the Dark Lord, raising an eyebrow.

“As it would be for any of us, under such harsh conditions. I’m not sure I could quite put up with all that luxury knowing exactly what it was like out there.” Spat Harry. “It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Nicholov.” he ended more softly, shaking hands with the man.

He pointedly avoided looking at Grindelwald, whose lips were so tightly crushed together that they almost disappeared

Oh, tell me, was there anything wrong in that? Continued the young woman.

“You, on the other hand, made quite the effort, didn’t you?”

And it was partly true. Not only did he refused to wear anything Grindelwald would give him, but he refused to wear anything he couldn’t fight in. The result was that he had transfigured the clothes into his usual fighting uniform, which was indeed quite… impressive. The stand collar (to avoid having one throat slit open) gave his neck quite a stature, and the double breasted tunic, with a left over right closure (the better protection against the cold, weak spells, bullets, and that could hide his metal plate as an armor) was strictly and elegantly martial, and the tight sleeves that went in a triangle over the back of his hand (to hide a knife or a second wand, avoid deep cuts around the artery and kept the ring secure by being attached to it) but that were quite loose above the elbow (for a better movement), gave his frame an impression of power, a perfect mix between a muggles and traditional wizarding clothes. His cape was hidden as a bundle in his hood, unseen to anyone.

Well, not that Harry had any idea of that. He liked the practicality of it, never being one to worry
about his looks.

“I, however, find the first outfit I found you in much more… appreciable.” Continued the man with a smirk.

Harry just looked at him, not having the slightest idea of where this was going to. “... is that so?” He answered, trying very hard not to make a fool of himself. He wasn’t succeeding, considering that Karkaroff was bright red and Nicholov was five shades paler. He really wished he had someone with a bit of common sense to explain what was all that about because it was damn odd.

Grindelwald seemed to notice his obliviousness, because his eyes narrowed with disbelief, which turned his -admittedly charismatic- face into something quite… comical. He was about to answer when a young girl ran to him and start speaking very fast in a language Harry didn’t understand.

Grindelwald made a simple dismissal gesture to the kid and turned towards his guests, hands behind his back. “My apologies, my dears, but I must abandon you to the party. It happens that my dear friend Mr. Graves just arrived from America, and I’m sure he will be overjoyed to see me.” He said.

There was a little glint in his eyes that said that the poor Mr. Graves wouldn’t be overjoyed at all.

*Oh, tell me, was there anything wrong in that?*

All the audience clapped.
Harry was laying on his bed, arms crossed on his chest, staring at the ceiling. Nobody had seen Grindelwald leaving the party, but Harry knew.

So this place was already a prison. He doubted that the Dark Lord would leave his own welcoming party in order to simply scowl at one of his subordinates. Harry would have like to ignore it, but the knowledge that someone was in one of the man’s cells was almost physically burning.

He needed to know who was this Mister Graves and how to get out of here. But, for that, he needed to be sure that the kid was alright. Which meant to know exactly where the kid was, where the cells were and in a more general matter, where all of them were, because his only clues were: the cold, the fact that they were still in Europe and the bloody sea.

He was obviously going to do something incredibly brave and frighteningly stupid. Maybe the man knew how to get out of here, without apparition, or knew a place to apparate close enough of here…

He had escaped from Azkaban, he could escape from here. He just hoped that he wouldn’t have to blow the place up in the process. Actually, he wouldn’t try to get out if it was a risk. It appeared to
him that the civilians were here as much as refugees as a shield against attacks. Who would bomb a place full of children?

A lot of people, provided his mind, but he ignored it. He sat under the window and closed his eyes. He had to keep himself focused. He started counting. One, two three…

A breath.

Four, five, six…

Slow, slow rising of the chest.

Seven, eight, nine…

…

…

“I didn’t know the floor was that comfortable.”

Harry opened his eyes to find Grindelwald watching him from the door.

“You’d be surprised.” He answered sarcastically. “Do you often invite yourself in your guest’s room?”

“Only when the guest is interesting,” Grindelwald answered, making Harry cringe internally. He hoped the man had misinterpreted his reaction, but there was no way he could know. He wished he would have studied a bit more the figure of Grindelwald. All he really knew was ‘dangerous manipulative Hitler-like’, to quote Ron in one of his finest days. But the young man clearly wasn’t the most objective of the lot, even if he had all the information at hand. The thought of his friend sent a pang in his chest.

All he knew was that the man who looked like to be in his forties had the body language of a
teenager, a cocky one at that. It was quite.. unsettling.

It was the early morning, and some music could still be heard, even if it was clearly more iffy than anything. Harry hadn’t stayed long at the party, just enough to grab something to eat, disgusted by the knowledge of where he was. He had been relieved when Anastasia had asked him to escort her to the living area (he suspected that it was the polite way to do the other way around). He wasn’t surprised that the young woman seemed to feel quite safe in the place, as far as what he had seen, any ungentlemanly behaviour wasn’t taken lightly. He figured that having so many desperate people in the same place lead to some strict ruling, that Grindelwald was only too keen to provide.

The golden sun rays were illuminating his room, and the smell of the sea was soothing. The more Harry stayed in the place, the harder it was to imagine that it would be the epicenter of a war in the next few years.

Grindelwald held a hand out to help Harry to his feet, and as much as Harry didn’t want to take it, he strengthened his will to go along and let the man help him. Harry had to play along as if he was one of his followers. It was a huge blow for his pride, but safer for everyone. As far as Harry knew, there were two people plus himself to get out of here, he couldn’t act as if he was the only one in line. His own life wasn’t what mattered anymore.

However, he tensed when he felt very distinctly Grindelwald’s fingers on the ring. He took a great care not to look down at his hand, but Harry couldn’t refrain the other one to go for his wand, even without getting it out. He wondered if the man would try to steal it - if he had a guess as to what it really was. Not that it would do Grindelwald much good, but still...

Grindelwald quickly let go of his hand and turned around, motioning for Harry to follow him.

“I assume that you are, or were a soldier?” Grindelwald asked while leading his guest with large commanding steps that could have rivaled Snape’s.

“What gave me away, is it the outfit or the general everything?”

The man chuckled, passing a hand through his blond locks to get it out of his sight. His curls were well-shaped and his hair looked like silk - but it was impossible to say if it was out of vainess or completely natural. Harry didn’t stop to think about from where these questions were coming from.

“I’d say the general everything. But you’re too young to have been able to participate in the Great
War.”

Harry did a quick calculation in his head. He would have been ten at the end of the first world war - if that was indeed what Grindelwald was referring to. There was no point in pretending that he wasn’t a veteran, but he could avoid precise questions on fronts and battalions by going along with this. After a few seconds of silence, he answered.

“I’ve fought many wars, but I’m not old enough for this one indeed.”

The man hummed leading him deeper and deeper into the stronghold. The windows were starting to be rarer, and the lack of natural luminosity was compensated by some pale wizarding lighting which made Harry think of the hospital's neons. The doors too were more modern than what he had seen until then, in plain metal. The corridors were covered with white tiles, giving the whole section an air of abandoned asylum that Harry really didn’t like. He felt trapped, but mostly wondered why he was here, and what was happening in this - obviously restricted- section of the place. He hadn’t given Grindelwald much reason to trust him and he wasn’t naive enough to think that the man would show him anything dangerous or too illegal and gruesome thing without any proof of loyalty. He mostly made his bet on the fact that Grindelwald wouldn’t have the same way to test loyalties than Voldemort. If he had to choose between impersonating one of the man’s followers and crucioing some random bloke, he would have to beat a second time the record of Dark-Lord-ass-kicking in record time.

With a little luck, he could prevent the second Dark Lord from becoming a Dark Lord. But that would mean getting quickly out of here. Preventing Riddle’s very existence was after all one of the reasons he came back this far - even if apparently Hermione had miscalculated a few years. So, he wasn’t here to beat this Dark Lord, but it would do, wouldn’t it?

Grindelwald seemed to feel his discomfort, and patted his shoulder in a friendly way, unconsciously worsening the young man’s state of mind. “This is the hospital wing. I figured you would want to see the child?”

Ah, he was being thoughtful. Figures. Harry nodded and kept following the host, keeping his mind as far as possible to the idea that they may be under water. Because even if he was under the sea level, he wasn’t technically underwater. He wasn’t. Nope.

He continued to follow Grindelwald through the corridors until he stopped in front of one of the white doors. “Why do you help me?” asked Harry, concealing his suspicion the best he could.

Grindelwald sighed and tilted his head to the left. “You’re… a mystery. And I like to solve
mysteries.”

Harry felt the alien force at the front of his thoughts, probing delicately, trying to pass undetected. Harry wasn’t a good enough occlumens to make him get out, just enough to avoid any sensitive information to pass.

“Good luck with that! It was quite rude by the way.”

“It isn’t rude to assure oneself that it is safe to allow a stranger to enter in a place full of unarmed and defenseless people.” Shot back the man, straightening his back. Harry hadn’t noticed how much taller than him Grindelwald was until now. The Dark Lord managed to look casual and threatening at the same time, and entered into Harry’s personal space without care; but the young man refused to back off. However, he avoided looking him in the eyes, knowing quite well that his poor abilities at occlumency wouldn’t keep a wizard that powerful at bay for long.

“If that was your goal, you would have used a truth serum, not legilimency.” He answered cheekily.

Grindelwald absentmindedly opened the door. He didn’t ask where Harry had learned about legilimency- a rare branche of the Dark Art and an even rarer gift, or how he was so sure about the procedure of interrogation of a potentially dangerous stranger, but Harry could almost see his mind at work trying to complete his damn puzzle. Maybe, if he hadn’t known Riddle, he wouldn’t have noticed the twitch of the eyelid, the simmering in the corner of the mouth. It was actually fascinating to see such a mind at work. It was frightening to know where it was actually going.

The hospital wing was a long and large room with about twenty bed aligned on each wall and a separate room on the back. Some of the bad had their curtains closed, to show that they were occupied. Harry could hear whispers and painful moans, hushed by muffling spells. The room wasn’t calming in anyway, like the hospital wing at Hogwarts, nor perfectly clean like St Mungo’s, but it had obviously been made for practicality and in a rush, like everything else in the fortress. The lack of windows didn’t help.

Nurses passed by pushing small trolleys full of utensils that Harry did not want to imagine the job; if he remembered correctly, muggle medicine was still pretty barbaric in the 1930s, and he suspected that magic care would not be much more evolved.

Harry followed Grindelwald to one of the beds. The kid was there, lying still sound asleep, his dark hair spread around his head like a halo on the white pillow.
They only had to wait a few seconds before a man came to them. Harry almost didn’t recognize Nicholov with his white blouse and hair neatly pulled back. He shook his hand with Grindelwald, whispering a “my Lord” before turning towards Harry.

The young man was quite surprised. It was the first time he had heard anyone calling Grindelwald “My Lord”, and it had been done with discretion, like a secret. However, considering the smug smile Grindelwald was holding, this modesty wouldn’t last long.

“You’re the one that found the child?” Harry nodded in silence, observing the small hand laying motionless on the sheets.

A pitch a pink hair was buried under the sheet, a single hand out, still, so small, oh so small…

We did everything we could, I'm sorry Harry…

Grindelwald’s voice seemed hollow “... in a clearing of the Black Forest, hidden under a thestral…”

... silver bullets… listen, Harry…

“Harry?”

Pushing everything at the back of his mind and burying it in the Darkest pit of his memories, Harry snapped out of his trance. “Yes?”

“You did a first inspection on the kid?” asked Nikolov, frowning.

“Yes, I did. I could detect no external wound, no bleeding. My first thought was a bullet, but I found nothing. I checked for broken bones in the most exposed area and concussion, but he was clean. However, the presence of the thestral and the depleting of his core suggested a fatal injury, or at least something life threatening.” He exposited.

The healer seemed pleased by his method and nodded in approval. “Did you have a healer formation?”
“I learned on the field, Sir.”

If Harry wasn’t sure he had Nicolov’s respect before, he did now. “You did well. We had to make you wait to check on the most common virus, but the child is clear there too, so-”

“Well, gentlemen.” Cut Grindelwald. “It’s not that all of this isn’t utterly fascinating, but I must get going. Nicholov, if you need me I’ll be down there.” He gave them a smile to rival with Gilderoy Lockhart’s and went out quickly, his long coat flying around him.

“Don’t worry, he’s always like that,” growled Nicholov, obviously quite put out by that behaviour. “So… oh yes. We don’t really know what caused the coma, but I’m going for a trauma related sleep.”

“You mean that it’s psychological?”

“Something like that. These theories on the childhood trauma and the way these little minds work are quite new, I know, but it’s the best explanation I have from what we know. Some arse hurt the kiddo, which put himself in some sort of healing stage.”

Harry nodded. “Yes, I’ve seen that type of thing before. It’s not that unusual…”

“Considering that he is a *magicheskiy rebenok*… mhm… a child of magic?”

“A magical child.” Corrected Harry helpfully.

“Yes, well we might imagine that he was wounded in his flesh but that his core depleted with the effort he had to make to heal.”

“So you’re telling me that it’s internal or external trauma.” Harry sighed as the man nodded. “There must be something we can do!”

“Wait for him to wake up.”

Harry closed his eyes in denial, but he knew the healer was right. He cursed under his breath. It was
only when he looked up that he noticed the look Nicholov was giving him.

“What?”

“*Parsel’taun!*” He whispered in fear - or awe, Harry couldn’t quite tell. He didn’t understand the language - was it Russian?- but he knew the Parselmouth word when he heard it. It took all of his control not to swear again, and more soundly at that.

He had one day wondered if his… ability provoked the same reaction out of England, he now had his answer.

He looked warily at Nicholov, his hand slowly lowering towards his wand, just in case. he knew he had only one move to make for the cape to fall from its hiding place. Nicholov rose his hand in the universal sign of ‘I mean no harm’. Harry didn’t let his guard down anyway.

“It is… an honor to meet a descendant of Slytherin in person. Be assured that I will not hurt you upon your gift.” He said uncharacteristically polite.

Harry nodded, taking the truce for what it was. “I’m afraid not everybody will react like that. Can you keep it for yourself, please?”

“*Da*. But you’ll have to avoid using it in front of people if you don’t want to be found out.” He said, almost smiling.

Harry chuckled, but his mind was concentrated on where Grindelwald had gone. He wanted to find Mr. Graves, if only by sheer curiosity, and check out of the place was as clean as it looked. He didn’t know who he was kidding, it was obvious that horrible things were happening here, but he had to know what, why, and mostly, how to get out. He needed a plan, and then, not to follow it.

Nicholov kept eying him for a bit, his dark eyes witnessing more than he let on.

“You may want to be careful.”

Harry rose a questioning eyebrow. An infinity of possible troubles passed through his mind - from
another Troll to the hallows, passing by the fall of his hair due to stress.

“Grindelwald put his eyes on you. You’re lucky it’s not the hands yet.”

“Wha-”

“You’re a handsome powerful young man. I know it’s… wrong, but he can’t help it. You know how they are! Don’t think that he’s healing the child for free. Just… be careful, uh?”

Harry swallowed audibly. He hadn’t foreseen that. He was so shaken by what the man was implying that he didn’t notice the venom in his voice or the strange choice of words.

He wished Nicholov was just kidding, but out of many things, the healer didn’t look like one to joke about anything. Now he really didn’t know what to do with himself. Maybe the healer was wrong? Yes, he surely was, because Harry wasn’t appealing nor anything and he didn’t see what a Dark Lord would have wanted to do with him, except to kill him sooner than later anyway. He had only been there two days! He must have misinterpreted things, that’s it.

As Harry was digging deeper into denial, Nicholov decided to check up on the kid, and none of them saw Grindelwald come back from whatever he had been doing until said man coughed loudly, startling both of them.

“Don’t be so tense my friends! Come on, it’s time for lunch.” He said with a mocking smile.

And on that, he put his large calloused hand on Harry’s shoulder to lead him to the dining hall. As he passed, Nicholov rose an eyebrow as if to say ‘told you!’

The dining hall was even more of a mess than everything else. As he entered, Harry was almost hit by a completely naked, happily running toddler, followed by his panicked mom. He couldn’t help but to chuckle when Grindelwald caught the child and tossed it back into his mother’s arms with evident ease. The poor woman flushed and thanked him profusely, bowing repetitively, her hair falling everywhere over her shoulders and in front of her face.

Harry’s smile fell immediately. He could have hit himself. Instead, he turned his back on the scene, as Grindelwald was speaking to the woman like he owned her, to look at the place. It wasn’t different from any dining place that had to feed a massive amount of mouths, especially with the
number of children. Many long tables were aligned, with only a few smaller ones for the High-ranked... could they already be called Snatchers? Apparently, the place was divided into sections, to avoid complete chaos. Dishes and plates were being levitated from the kitchens to the room, to land softly in front the people. The place was probably used for something else originally, as the high arches were landing on the floor into heavy plain pillars of dark stone, without a care for comfort or beauty. People had made with what they had under their hands to cheer the place up. Banderoles, colorful flags were pinned on the wall, the Hallow’s mark (Harry refused to call it Grindelwald’s mark) painted above them. Some slogans were written in many languages, most of them Harry couldn’t even fathom. Drawings, pictures and little notes were pinned in a separate place, where people were searching for their loved one, sending messages of comfort, of thanks, selling things, checking the latest quidditch matches.

Once again, Harry wondered how this place had passed from a refuge to a political prison. The answer was probably in the man that was reprimanding the poor woman behind him.

“It’s not that messy usually. At first, there were only doctors and soldiers here, but with Saimahan, more and more family are coming for the ritual.” explained Nicholov.

“KARKAROV NO LEVITATING THE CHILDREN!” shouted Anastasia, running past them to stop said man. Indeed, joyful kids were now into the food’s tray, to the greatest displeasure of their parents.

“I do wish it back like it was before...” wished the healer, eyeing the display with disdain. “But what must be done... must be done.”

“Don’t mind him, Harry. If he wasn’t a healer, he would have been a priest!” exclaimed Grindelwald, motioning them towards an empty table. “Killjoy,” he muttered with a wink to the young man.

It was really weird. Harry could feel many eyes on him, and it disturbed him more than it should have. He was used to the public’s attention, but at least before he knew why.

As he was walking in the room, silence spread among the guests, in such a way that the sound of the chair against the floor echoed across the room. Harry sat between two men he didn’t know, generals, considering the number of medals pinned on their impeccable brown uniforms. They were talking to each other in a language Harry hadn’t an idea about, and he was very tempted to speak Parcel to show them how it felt.

After a few minutes, Grindelwald rose again and every head turned towards him. He was literally
and figuratively the center of the room. He rose his arms at each of his sides, as if to embarrass each and every person around him.

“My friends!” he exclaimed, his accent making the ‘r’ rolling beautifully, and Harry already had a weight in his stomach telling him that he wouldn’t like what was about to be said. If there wasn’t so many kids in the room, he would have tried to out all of the generals and their master, but for now, his hands were tied. “As you may see, I came back from my most recent travel. I know my absence was noticed, but I assure you, it was necessary. Now, I’m here to prepare Saiman with you!”

He paused a few seconds to allow his public to clap with enthusiasm.

“Now, I must tell you that I found a skilled warrior during my little trip…” he added with a hand move towards Harry. The young man was screaming internally that he had nothing to do with the Dark Lord, but it may not have been taken well up here; but he wasn’t sure that his patient would last very long. He had never been the one to control himself. The praise and the lack of reaction on his part to said praise earned him dark looks from his tablemates. “But I have also found some frightening news from the muggle world.”

With these words, he let his arms drop dramatically and lowered his voice, which still sounded across the room. Harry was sure that if they weren’t hung on his every word, the guest would have gasped. “Indeed, my friends, indeed. In Russia, despite my warnings, Durmstrang’s board of governors refuse to act against the illegitimate government that is destroying our kind in the most horrendous way! In Germany, the missed putsch of the squib Hitler, tension is rising like never before. Our kind, our owns brothers are being hunted across Europe, and what do they do? NOTHING! Our children are being murdered and sent to Siberia for the crime of existing, and what does the M.A.C.U.S.A do? NOTHING! and why?”

Grindelwald made a pose, where he took time to judge his audience, turning himself to capture each and every look. “To protect the status of secrecy, a law passed centuries ago!” He made a violent move of his hand as if to throw said law behind him. “I say, it isn’t time for politics anymore! I say it’s time for action!” His voice was rising again, booming now against the stone walls.

The room busted out in applause, and Harry was now holding the Elder Wand for dear life. Grindelwald's magic was slowly spreading, exciting the crowd even more. The mother he had met before was holding her child on her lap, his little hand in hers, making the obnoxious toddler clap to her master’s words. “We know what the muggles are capable of! We know how violent they are, killing us, slaughtering each other for the few resources they have access to in their handicap! They’re animals! Who do we want to protect, us? or them? I ask you, my friends, Who do we want to protect?”

“WIZARDS!” exclaimed the crowd, adoring.
Grindelwald was almost swimming in his self-contentedness. He passed his hand through his golden curls, making them shine and looking utterly smug. “AND WHAT WILL WE DO, MY FRIENDS?”

Harry was asking himself the very same question, but he was fairly sure that the answer wouldn’t please Grindelwald.

“FIGHT! FIGHT!” answered the crowd. Harry was scowling like never before, his knuckles turning white against the table.

“It’s time for us to stop hiding! It’s time for us to rise! There will be death, oh yes my friends. Some of us will fall. But it is a sacrifice that I’m willing to make, FOR THE GREATER GOOD!”

“FOR THE GREATER GOOD!”

Harry stood immobile in his chair as everybody around him rose, stunned. A sacrifice that he was willing to make? Were they all insane? How could they buy this shit?

This all was making him sick to his stomach. Grindelwald sat back after a few handshakes and congratulations from his men, and gesture for everyone to eat. He crossed Harry’s look and his smug smile faded somewhat.

Harry put his fingers to his scar by reflex before he chastised himself for it. He cast a discreet wandless spell to check his food and passed the rest of the dinner with his nose in his plate, doing everything he could for his anger not to show on his face, failing miserably.

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“You know, there’s a lot of rumors about you.” Said Anastasia with mirth in her eyes.

Harry had decided to help in the hospital wing during the afternoon to keep an eye on the child and to check if any strange wounds appeared. Kitchen and hospitals were the best place to really know what was going on somewhere, muggle and wizard alike. And indeed, under the clean appearances, Harry had seen a few person pass after being crusioed, before they were quickly ushered into another
room. “too much stress” diagnosed Nicholov, with a pointed look. Harry was pretty sure he wasn’t talking about the victims here. It seemed that Grindelwald wasn’t as proficient in his curses as Voldemort had been, and only used them on ‘unimportant’ people, probably caring to keep his reputation in place. Actually, Harry wouldn’t have noticed them if he wasn’t on a constant watch.

Of course, his first reaction had been to go to Grindelwald in order to put his fist in the man’s head, but he knew better. After a few minutes of deep, calming breath, he had put himself to work again. A little voice which suspiciously sounded like Snape helped him to keep his cool, no matter how much he wanted to use the Elder Wand more with each minute that passed.

Harry also noticed a few containment rooms next to the hospital wing, which actually made sense considering that the Dragonpot hadn’t been neutralized yet. The place was quite calm, as Nicholov was mostly working on long-term treatments. Harry was grateful to avoid emergencies, he really wasn’t sure how he would react to an emergency situation right now.

He had met Anastasia on his way back to his room, allowing the woman that had been following him more or less discreetly all day to take a rest. He was just relieved not having heard Grindelwald. They had taken a sandwich in the hall and headed back towards the living quarters. They were now sitting in his rooms, quietly sipping tea that Anastasia had brought. Harry had been quite not-so-surprised by the rationing that had been put in place in the fortress, considering. He was just glad for a cup of tea.

“Oh, and what do they say?” He asked almost casually.

“Half of the citadel think that you’re a new general. I heard that you killed hundreds of muggles and saved Grindelwald in the process.” She tried to hide her grin behind her cup of tea, but he could still see it in her eyes.

“And the other half?”

“Depends. Some think that you’re a spy, other that you’re a new super trained doctor…some of them are betting on a vampire ambassador, but the tone of the skin doesn’t quite match.”

“I truly don’t know which theory is my favorite. But I’ll put my bet on the vampire thing. Don’t judge a book by his cover, y’know?”

“Well, you did attract the Lord’s attention. He wouldn’t have brought you here otherwise. I wonder
what’s so special about you?” She said to herself, her eyes lost in the void.

“Earth to Anastasia! we have a message!”

“What?”

“You were lost for a moment.”

“Yes, yes, but what did you say? It’s a strange expression you used! I never heard it before.” She looked at him with curiosity.

“It’s hum… an expression used a lot in England.”

“I’ve been in England many times, and I never heard it.” She said, tilting her head and narrowing her eyes. She wouldn’t be fooled so quickly, apparently.

“You seemed to have traveled a lot. How’s that?”

Her smile disappeared immediately. He felt a bit guilty to use an obviously touchy subject to change the conversation, but she was far too smart for her own good. He just couldn’t let it happen.

“My… my family was quite wealthy…” she whispered, looking at her feet. “I… I have to go!” And on that, she ran out of the room, forgetting to lock it.

If Harry didn’t feel so bad at the tears he had seen in her eyes, he would have thanked every god for that oversight. He rose quickly and went to close the door, checking that nobody had seen the mistake.

He waited a few hours for the night to fall, and hide himself under the cape. He was starting to see a pattern in his life.

He felt the cape slip on his skin, as if, ignoring his clothes, it caressed his back in a protective embrace. For a moment, he pressed it against him, taking advantage of the calm it gave him. He
could not be safer than under it.

Silent as a shadow, he slipped out of his room - or rather from his half-time cell. He crept through the corridors, leaning against the smurfs to let the soldiers off guard or civilians still awake. To his surprise, there was no curfew, but after all, it was counterproductive to send doctors to bed at a fixed time when they could be allowed to work all night. Harry knew he had to go down. The prisons were very often in the basement, and Grindelwald had hinted that the place where he worked was also there, which could not be a coincidence. Harry remembered that he had been fired from Durmstrang for having experimented too much with the Dark Arts, and this citadel was clearly the perfect place to continue such small projects. Harry shivered. He hoped to be wrong, really.

He had no idea what this man was capable of, but he had a really, really bad feeling about this.

For the first time since he had arrived in this time, he took the Elder Wand in his hand and kept it there. The artifact was almost singing in joy, buzzing in his hand.

He went down the first flight of stairs, passed the hall in the canteen, and went down again. After some false starts, he finally arrived on the floor of the infirmary.

The room was dark, only lit by emergency lights. All the patients were sleeping or were sedated. Harry passed the beds to go to the room at the back. He hoped that a plan of the place - if only in an emergency - would be there. The door was half-opened, and the yellowish light of the infirmary did not enter inside.

He stopped immediately, hearing whispers.

"If you think I'll betray my master for your little shenanigans, Karkarov, let me tell you that ..."

"You do not have a choice, doc, unless you want all your patients to know about your habit, mhm At best, they would throw you out, at worst they would lynch you on the spot. Tell me, dear, when was your last mistake on a patient? "

"Shut up, you little shit! Do you think you're better than me? You have no idea of a third of what I lived!"

"And so as not to lie to you I do not care, he's losing his mind! Close your eyes at Saiman's night,
little mudblood, and everything will be fine."

"Fuck you!"

"Well, we'll give you the time to think ... Be quick, Saiman is only in four days ... you never know what can happen in between."

Harry crashed against the wall just in time to not be hit by Karkarov when he came out, followed by two other henchman, one of whom was sitting next to Harry in Grindelwald's speech.

Harry remembered very well seeing him applaud enthusiastically.

Always on the alert, Harry suddenly heard a crash inside. He glanced over to see Nikolov hitting a medicine cabinet again and again, until his knuckles bleed and leave marks on the white piece of furniture, insulting all the gods of the earth in all the languages that he knew. Exhausted, he fell down on the chair of his desk, hands shaking. He gazed at them for a second before covering his face and bursting into stifled sobs, his grizzled locks falling in front of his face like a curtain to protect him from the world. When his tremors had calmed down, he wiped his eyes with a shameful sleeve lapel, snorting mockingly. Then he pulled up his sleeve so that he could access the vein of his forearm, opened a drawer with his other hand, and took out a small bottle and a needle.

Harry watched with a morbid fascination as the needle moved into the upright, absorbing the shining liquid slowly until it filled the receptacle with a small, clear sound.

The doctor's eyes dilated and a bitter smile caught his lips as he pulled the needle out of the bottle into a little 'pop'. Nikolov pulled out a piece of cotton with which he would disfigure the place where you could see the blue vein through his skin, then he grabbed a piece of rubber that he attached to his arm in order to cut off the circulation and bring out the vein a little more. His right hand tramped, but he succeeded after a few failed attempts to plant the needle in his arm.

And he pressed until no more than a drop remained in the syringe.

With a quick gesture, he removed the tourniquet before letting himself go into his chair with a satisfied sigh. His eyes went out, staring at the wall in front of him without realizing it, and the muscles in his face relaxed in abject satisfaction.
Harry was flabbergasted. He should have seen the signs - he had worked with this man all afternoon! he was supposed to see this stuff. But no.

He had learned too much in a single minute so he could worry about everything at the same time, but one thing was clear! he had to get out very quickly. First of all because in four days the place would be in real chaos.

And then because in four days it was the day of the dead.

Harry took advantage of the doctor's ... contemplative state to break into the room and look for a map of the place. Unfortunately, he came out empty-handed and decided to explore on his own until he found the prison. Left the door open to escape, as much to allow a maximum of prisoners to do the same.

His heart missed a beat when he passed back in the hospital's wing.

The child’s bed was empty.
He had finally found a map of the place. And, just as he had guessed, it was a maze. Made to hold a state of siege for a month, and to trick enemies once inside.

Or maybe, made to avoid people from going out.

Either way, it didn’t bode well with Harry’s soon-to-be plans.

He couldn’t wander too long down there, and it was already one in the morning. But there was no way he would just let the child vanish without moving a finger. He had to ponder his options. If he found the child, what could he do? To escape right now was out of the question, there wasn’t enough room for three under the cape, considering if Mr. Graves was the only prisoner here, which was really unlikely. And even if Harry himself stayed behind to save time, Graves and the child were probably hurt; they wouldn’t avoid or defeat all the guards alone. Especially as Graves didn’t have a wand.

That was something else he would need to find.

His to-do list was starting to grow a bit too much for his tastes. He had to refrain from blowing the
place up and made a spectacular way out, but once again to kill a hundred to save three wasn’t worth it.

If only he had found a snake somewhere to spy for him, but no, the place was as clean as Petunia’s kitchen. Maniacs, the lot of them. He sighed. Merlin, he hoped Nikolov would hold his tongue about that. He didn’t want to imagine how people would react to his… gift around here, and even less when he’ll join England.

Even with a map, he couldn’t find the child. Hours passed, and a heavy ball grew in the pit of his stomach. He had to go back to his room and get some sleep. Maybe tomorrow, in the daylight, he would be able to disappear with enough time to find the kid.

He hit a wall with his fist. He should have acted before. He should have run as soon as he knew the child was stabilized. Why hadn’t he? Once again, trying to save everyone, he had caused death.

But, maybe not, not yet. He couldn’t be sure yet.

Defeated, Harry went back to his bed. He hugged himself tightly and cast a spell to fend off an imaginary chill. Slowly, but surely, he fell asleep.

----

Gellert was standing in the room. He shouldn’t be here, but it never stopped him before. He couldn’t quite help himself. Or more like: he could stop himself, but he didn’t really want to.

A few steps away, so close and yet so far away, was the strange boy. Barely twenty, from what Gellert could gather in the day, with defined muscles, gathered in effort and fight. Gathered in war. In the day, the boy was the most mysterious thing in the old citadel. Not once had he mentioned his past life clearly, but the signs were there when you knew where to look. The way he walked, the way he looked at people. The rise in his eyes, saying “I learned on the field”. Secret, almost despite himself, a puzzle to solve. But in the night, oh! in the night…

Gellert shouldn’t be here.

But there he laid, the powerful boy. The rays of the moon colored his face in pristine white, making it stand out ever so strongly under his black locks scattered around his face. Innocent. It was the first
thing that came to mind.

Yet, Harry was still guarded, even in sleep. He slept with his armor, with his weapons, like they were a part of his skin, a part of him. His right hand under his pillow, where his wand surely was. Gellert wondered what his wand looked like; he had never seen it… quite unusual, as most wizards exclusively relied on their wands.

Gellert knew that if he made one more step, the boy would shoot to kill before without even having to open his eyes. The idea made him shiver.

Gellert was standing in the corner of the room. Blood was dripping from his hands - not his, of course. He simply had forgotten to go wash himself after the evening’s activities when he had felt the wards around the room break.

Where did the boy go?

And that boy, that mysterious, deadly boy was wearing his mark. It made him proud, somehow. He could see it, on his left hand that laid on his stomach, the ring. The black stone, and his symbol, his mark, **him**.

It was fascinating.

To have control without even asking for it. To be standing, tall and awake, in front of someone so helpless. He could feel the magic, the power dripping from him. The beating of the heart, echoing the radiant, blossoming life.

A weapon. A brand new and mysterious weapon. A naïve, powerful, blazing weapon.

It was like staring at the shining blade reflecting the moonlight.

The boy would go where Gellert wanted him to. He had done what was needed for that. To test him. Pushed the notorious homophobic Nikolov to talk to him, to discover if the boy had any relationship out of here. To throw the pretty Anastasia in his arms to know if he had any wish to go. To make him meet Karkarov to know if he would betray. The woman would do the trick. Always best to mix truth with lies, isn’t it?
He had put him in the middle of a mundane society to see what he had in him. And the boy had answered prettily. He was almost holding his heart on a sleeve, so much honesty, it made the Dark Lord think about the old times.

Oh, the boy was having a nightmare. Thrashing in his sheets, whispering, muttering in despair. Delicious. Who was Hermione? A lover, a sister maybe? Something terrible was happening to her in the boy’s mind. Gellert wanted to see.

But he had nothing. No pressure on the boy, except that damn kid. No flaws passed through his armor, except the ones he choose to wear proudly at the face of the world. Sometimes, Gellert caught Harry looking at him, cold and determined, like he was going to tear him to shreds. He liked those looks. It was side glances, details, but Gellert was good at reading people.

He thought himself quite poetic that night.

Gellert had plans for that boy. Probably the most useful of the lot - and that was saying something. He had dream of his. He had dream of the thunder and the lightning bolt. Of the power and the anger, or the dark drooling force coming from the sky. When he had woke up, his wand - the Elder Wand that he had stolen from Gregorovich so many years before - was gone. He had thought he was going to die. He had thought that the gods were warning him of the coming of his greatest fear, and stripped him of the only way to fight back.

But no, that couldn’t be. For fate favored the Dark Lord. That was certain.

Yes, it was.

And if the boy tried to betray him, well. Pretty things were still pretty once broken.

----

Harry woke with a start. He knew someone had entered his room. He didn’t know who or why, but he knew. Something dark, and threatening. An ill intent.

He should have woken up.
Whomever, it was the traces of the bitter presence sent a creepy shiver down his back. It was an eerie feeling, that didn’t quite go away, but quickly overthrown by the day’s preoccupations.

He was doing his morning routine - a cleaning spell for he refused to try the common bathroom, a minute the bread his hair and an extensive check of all his weapons and personals objects, when Anastasia simply stormed into the room, tousled and panic clearly written on her face. Harry only had the time to hide his wand under his pillow to avoid trouble.

“You have to help me!” She cried. She put her hands on her knees, panting.

Harry took his glasses that were resting on the bed table and looked at her with concern. “What’s happening?”

She didn’t look hurt, he had heard no commotion in the hallway, no scream outside… he mentally made a list of anything that could go wrong in Nurmengard before dropping the idea considering the headache that was threatening the edge of his mind.

“Nanny’s here!”

Harry let the information sink in for a moment before bursting out laughing. “And who’s Nanny?”

“Grindelwald’s mom.”

Oh.

“Oh.”

“You have no idea, dear, no idea.”

No, he hadn’t, but he could imagine. In his mind “Nanny” was a strange mix between Bellatrix and Petunia, which made, he could confess it, not a very bright image. Terrifying, quite frankly. What kind of woman could have raised... him?
“And how can I help you?”

“Hide me. I know Grindelwald must probably have disappeared the second she put a foot in here, but if she’s not on his back, she will find someone to torture, and I’d like it not to be me.”

“Well, I’d like to help, but I don’t know the place as much as you do, so I can’t see how…”

“No, but at least she won’t try to convince you to marry her son!” The young woman pouted, arranging her clothes. “Please, just distract her in time for me to escape somewhere. Pretend we’re together or something!”

Ah… that was another matter altogether. Harry willed himself not to blush at the number of questions that popped into his mind. What did people do when they were… with someone?

He smiled awkwardly “Well I don’t know if…”

“Oh thank you, dear! I don’t think she’ll notice the age difference. She’s just here for a few hours anyway…” She said with a bright smile.

Had she even listened to him? With a sigh, he dismissed the matter altogether. I didn’t really matter, and it might allow him to escape vigilance and find the kid.

“It’s alright, it’s alright.” Suddenly, a pang reminded him of something. “Have you seen Nikolov this morning?”

“I don’t think so. But he’s not a morning person, you know. Might as well wait midday to see him pointing his big nose out of the hospital wing.”

*Not a morning person my ass.*

“Ow… ok then.” He said tightly.

She looked at him sharply before heading out of the room, letting him have time to change and wash.
It was going to be a long day.

They almost slithered into the hall to get some breakfast - not much considering the rationnement, before going to hide in the hospital wing. Harry watched all he could, from the looks people were sending him to the occurrence of Grindelwald’s propaganda in their daily routine. He looked to see if any child had traces of mistreatment, operations, or too much accidental magic to be healthy, but in the short minutes it took them the go down the hospital wing, he didn’t notice something amiss. It was utterly frustrating.

At least, with Voldemort, if you wanted to find a prisoner, you just had to follow the screams, he thought darkly. But this particular bastard was… tricky.

Apparently, they weren’t the only ones to have found shelter in the Hospital wing, as Grindelwald himself was here, seemingly talking to the wounded and the ill in the great leader persona he had, but very obviously hiding from his mom.

Harry turned around to check the room.

And he was there. The child. He was in the bed, hair spread around his face, like nobody had moved him at all.

He was there.

What the actual fuck.

Harry’s jaw dropped. He turned towards Grindelwald.

“A few sparkles of genius, and a chance of doom!” He laughed when one of them asked him how he had managed to become so powerful.

Harry almost added ‘murder’ and ‘betrayal’ to that joyful list, but he bit his tongue. “Didn’t your dear mom have something to do with that?” he asked instead.
Grindelwald hushed him with a gesture of his hand and, after shaking hands with a bewildered convalescent, motioned Harry and Anastasia into Nikolov’s office. Harry tensed at the idea of what he might see in there - Nikolov had been if not nice, at least benevolent towards him, and Harry didn’t want him to get into trouble, knowing what trouble meant.

But - thanks, Merlin- the room was empty. Now that he thought about it, Harry was fairly sure that he had seen a pair of boots that strangely looked like the doc’s in one of the beds.

His half smile fell when Grindelwald’s wand pointed at his throat. Harry didn’t even flinch. He looked expectantly at the other man. The Dark Lord was looking at him like he could see through his skull and was intensely interested by the wall behind it. Not only was it unsettling, but the fear that Grindelwald would use legilimency on him crept in his mind. What would he see anyway?

They glared at each other for what seemed like an eternity, none of them wanting to submit by lowering their eyes. Grindelwald was far too close for Harry’s comfort, but he forced himself to stand still. He would not back off because of any Dark Lord. Merlin, he hadn’t in front of a dragon, and as far as he knew, Grindelwald didn’t breathe fire.

He didn’t, did he?

“ever try to humiliate me in front of my men again!” He hissed. His grey eyes had the wild glint Harry had seen sometimes when he forgot himself, and his hand was firm and steady on his wand.

“Or what?” Whispered Harry calmly.

The Elder wand was almost singing against his wrist. Harry knew that if it came to that, he had the advantage, and simply stayed put.

“I might advise you, Mr. Potter, to talk to me with due respect.” Grindelwald’s voice had lowered so much Harry was sure he was the only one that could hear it. Not that it mattered as the only other person in here was Anastasia, hands clasped on her mouth, still as a statue and clearly not going to do anything about the situation. She reminded Harry a bit of Draco Malfoy: Never quite wishing to be there, never quite doing anything to get out. On the whole, not quite doing anything at all.

His face was plastered with a very unpleasant smile.
“Respect must be earned.”

Harry was saved from the probably nasty curse Grindelwald was about to send to him by a little cough behind them. They both turned towards the sound with a start.

There, in front of the door, was a tiny old lady. A frightening tiny old lady. The kind of tiny old lady that trained her cats to murder and walked around with a metal plate in her handbag to knock out ‘disgusting young people’.

And that would be Grindelwald’s mother.

She was about a hundred years old, maybe more, maybe less, maybe she was fucking immortal or the crossbreeding between a human and an old parchment, Harry wasn’t sure. She had long white hair and vivid steel eyes. Her hand were folded in front of her in the stance of someone used to having a cane, and she wore more jewels than Harry had seen in his lifetime. Her face strangely looked like her son’s, even the strong jaw, giving the impression that she was always gritting her teeth, which might actually be the truth.

“Don’t worry, my son, I’ll soon go and let you to your little… games. “ Many things passed in his mind, that could be summed up by ‘god fucking no, not again!’ and he hadn’t even noticed that Grindelwald had let go of his grip on his shirt. “In the meantime, I’m hoping for tea. And bring Anastasia along, I do not wish to be alone with you. ” She said with a disapproving look towards Harry, then Grindelwald, then probably the whole world as the glint seemed to never quit her eye.

Grindelwald threw a punch in the nearest wall. The sick crack indicated that he had broken one or two of his fingers in the process. Anastasia drew her wand out and immediately cast a spell to heal the bleeding and, and another one to erase any trace of the blood. Grindelwald didn’t even seem to notice her. She kept her eyes down as if doing something forbidden.

Harry sighed.

“You’re coming with us.” declared Anastasia.

That was why ten minutes later Harry found himself in front of a pot of tea spiked with the strongest calming Draught he had ever seen with Grindelwald, Anastasia, and Nanny. How he found himself in these situations he would never know.

He was pretty sure that if he rose his hand he could touch the tension. Everything in his mind was
screaming that he had absolutely nothing to do here, especially with Nanny. But Anastasia’s pleading look made him stay reluctantly.

He was in Numengard for a week and he was sipping tea with Grindelwald’s mom. Why was he still surprised by life he would never know.

Everyone was sending nasty looks at everyone else, and the conversation was nonexistent. Grindelwald was now aggressively turning his spoon against the bottom of his tea cup, a small twitch under his eye.

Nanny turned towards Harry. “You only speak English, don’t you?”

“Yes, Ma’am.” He answered politely.

“Call me Nanny, Child.” She answered coldly. Harry didn’t know how to add up the cute ‘Nanny’ nickname to that woman, but he nodded. He noticed Grindelwald’s lips thinning significantly.

“So, Gellert, when will you stop fooling around and give me a grandson?”

Straight to the point then.

Grindelwald eye twitched in annoyance.

“I don’t see how it is of your concern, or of the one of anyone in this room.” He said, his voice cold as steel.

“How but it is, son. It is the duty of any pureblood to produce an heir and perpetuate one’s name. And I think Miss Romanov here would be a good wife for you.” She said as if Anastasia wasn’t here.

Wait.

Romanov?
Anastasia was actually *the* Anastasia? And a witch?

The young woman had actually turned quite pale, and Harry shot her a look of sympathy. Now he knew why she was staying here. That also explained the secret and a lot of her reactions.

“She’s quite pretty,” continued the old woman with a dismissive move of the hand, “she has a name and hips large enough for pregnancy. Granted she’s not very powerful, but it would have to do.”

Harry actually choked on his tea. That was very savage.

“Once again, mother, I don’t see how the imposition of your person in my personal space would change that.”

“Well, maybe if you had completed your education instead of going your wicked way you would have become man enough to produce a fitting heir, not some sort of useless muggle. It’s quite a luck that you finally resolved yourself to -”

That comment was apparently the breaking point for Grindelwald. He threw himself at the old woman without a warning.

Harry’s muscle worked before his brain and he caught Grindelwald before his fist touched the old woman’s face. He bent all of his strength to stop the man, and without the binding spell Anastasia threw onto him, Harry was pretty sure he wouldn’t have been able to stop him.

Nanny shrieked and jumped back. With a huff and a glare, she cast a spell to clean her spilling tea and left the room. But Harry didn’t notice her. His attention was solely focused on the Dark Lord thrashing in his arms. He was pretty sure that he would have bruises later on, but at least in his fury, the man hadn’t thought to draw his wand.

It had taken Grindelwald about ten seconds to break Anastasia’s curse.

Luckily, Harry knew how to fight with his bare hands - unlike Grindelwald. Sure, the man had strength, but he clearly wasn’t used to fighting the muggle-way. Harry had years of practice in this domain. Grindelwald was cursing in German, allowing Harry to grow his short but imaginative
vocabulary of insults.

But what was worrying Harry was his expression. Harry wasn’t the sharpest man around, but he could add two and two. It wasn’t uncommon in the pure-blood culture, even before Voldemort.

To kill the squib son.

Harry made a sigh in his head, asking Anastasia to leave. He didn’t want her in the crossfire if it came to that. She seemed a bit reluctant, but after the window blew open under a hit of raw magic, she ran out of the room too.

Harry’s arms started to ache, but after a few moments, Grindelwald’s breathing evened and he seemed to collect himself. He passed a shaky hand through his hair.

Suddenly, Harry found himself trapped between the floor and an angry Dark Lord. The shock cut his breath and he let out a gasp. Grindelwald’s wand was under his chin before he even had the time to think about drawing out his. He tried to struggle, but there was no way now. Grindelwald’s eyes kept fixed on him.

“Never forget who is above you.” The man whispered. Harry considered everything. He wasn’t in danger. If Grindelwald had wanted to kill him, he would have done so already. He felt his finger caress the stone. If he had wanted to cause pain, he would have too. He just had to push it a little bit on the left. But Harry had seen him weak. It would be so easy to kill Grindelwald right now. He could always call for help.

A cold drooling sensation spread along his spine.

Children’s laughter passed behind the closed door.

But the man was in pain. It just wasn’t in Harry to do that.

So Harry simply smiled. This seemed to take the other man by surprise. Grindelwald stood up, and stuffed his wand into his sleeve. “Get out.” He croaked.
Harry waited for his heart to even a bit and did so. He would get out of the country right now if he could. Actually, it might not be such a bad idea.

Instinctively, his hand grabbed the Elder Wand.

----

Harry was back in his room, sitting at the window. Discreetly, he had used his wand to vanish any trace of their earlier… struggle. He was looking outside, his bright green eyes following the walk of the guards like an owl would watch over her pray. He was counting.

Grindelwald had said goodbye to Nanny with a rude gesture through the window. Now, everything was… quieter.

Three minutes between the first and the second guard, Five between the second and the third. A fourth arrived hazardly, breaking the pattern.

It must have been intentional.

It was a grey afternoon. Only two days and three night left until Samhan. The floor outside was damp and wizards were using charms to avoid having mud on their robes and boots. The camps seemed to grow bigger everyday, and Harry wondered if one day they would touch the edge of the golden forest that was spreading a few miles away. If one they, they would take down the forest- there wasn’t any in his memory- and hit the end of the island. He wondered when the war would break out. And what will he do? Will he fight again? He was born and raised for that, but… Maybe, it could be avoided?

Harry felt at lost. He shouldn’t let his thoughts wander like that.

Guard number one again. Distracted by a pretty woman, overstepped by guard number two. They argued, and number one was sent to the post, inside the citadel. Number four took his place. Quite coordinated.

Guard number one came back, but he was caught up by Karkarov. It was… interesting. How many people did the man have in his little rebellion? How was it that he wasn’t more discreet? Anyone could see him from the front wall if looking carefully enough, and Harry had already spotted four
child-spies around the scene.

Really, something didn’t add up. It was almost as if…

Almost as if Grindelwald was letting him plot on purpose. Oh dear.

When the bell rang, he went to dinner. He sat in a corner, noting that everyone was looking at him not so discreetly. He decided that he had enough after only a few minutes and went back into his rooms, napping and waiting for the night to come.

---

Harry’s heart was pounding in his chest. The corridors were becoming colder and colder, but he kept going. At some point, he stopped crossing people, but it didn’t bring any sense of safety. He kept the cloak firmly around his shoulders.

The silence was oppressing.

Harry would prick up his ear, waiting to hear a footstep, a voice, and therefore imagining it. Was it the echo of a sound or just the effect of his imagination? He didn’t always know, but it didn’t matter for he had to keep going.

I’m sorry Harry…

He shook his head to erase the bad memories. He had to focus on the task at hand. He vaguely wondered if the fortress could keep going deeper. The walls were now covered in naked grey stones as if the time’s modernity hadn’t come so far. Actually, he was pretty sure that Grindelwald had done it on purpose, to say to the intruders that they shouldn’t have come so far. Not that it deterred Harry, whose specialty was specifically to trespass those sort of rules.

He had hoped to find some animal down there, but the place was completely sterile. It reminded him painfully of the horrible thing under Dumbledore’s bench.

Steps echoed, coming in his direction. Harry threw himself against a wall and waited. Patience had
never been his forte, and each and every step the guard - he could now see him- made was more stressful than the other. The woman opened the door that was the closest to Harry, and the young man held his breath and stilled.

She entered and closed the door behind her, but Harry didn’t hear any lock.

Ah, a door. Soundproof, by the look of it. Somehow, Harry knew he had reached his destination. The question was: will he push the door himself or should he wait for someone to do it and sneak through, even if the possibility of someone else coming in this corridor was very unlikely?

The tick-tock of his internal clock told him that he didn’t have the time to wait. The more time he passed in the creepy corridor, the more chances he had to be discovered up there. Considering the instability of the whole… citadelle, he didn’t want to be used as a scapegoat. His plan was: find the child, find Mr.. Graves, find a way out.

He put his hand on the cold metal, taking care to be far lower than the place he would naturally put it - and thus avoiding an eventual local curse, and pushed. With a soft sound, the mead door opened, revealing what looked like a hub of padded rooms, where dangerous and insane people were locked up away from the public eyes. Most of the doors were closed, and if he listened enough, he could hear soft sounds inside. Chairs were put between each door, indicating the guards weren’t far away.

He was in the prison. Now, he could perfectly imagine what the entire place would become one day.

Certainly, Grindelwald didn’t have the medieval-like lifestyle Voldemort had. He seemed to bet on technology and science for his decoration - and somehow it was even scarier. Well, not for the general public, but here, under the ground, in this white place with a strong smell of detergent, it made a shiver run down Harry’s back.

Slowly, he looked through the round glasse that was on every room’s door. To his relief, most of them were empty. They had the prisoner's names written on a small white paper, and Harry made sure to remember each and everyone of them.

The state of the people in the one that wasn’t empty bothered him to his very core. If he had any sympathy towards Grindelwald before, which he sincerely doubted, it was now gone and buried. He knew perfectly at that point that he wouldn’t be able to save most of them -they were simply too far gone. Not that it would deter him to try.
He stopped in his tracks when once again a voice echoed through the place. Grindelwald was walking among the cells, softly talking in... Polish? with the woman, Harry had seen earlier. He had his hand on her forearm, but there was nothing friendly in the gesture. His face was grave - more so than Harry had ever seen since his arrival. Harry wondered if he knew what his generals were preparing. He took a key in his pocket and opened one of the doors. The woman simply continued to walk, passed the place Harry was hiding in and got out of the area.

“What the hell did I do to you?” pleaded a scratching voice inside.

The door was ajar. This time Harry slowly entered the room. Grindelwald was casually sitting on a chair, looking intently at a man laying pitifully on the floor. The man’s hair was black, with two large white locks on each of the sides of his head. He was quite handsome in some sort of authoritarian way. Or would be, if he wasn’t covered in dirt and blood. His only article of clothing was an old piece of fabric that probably used to be a pair of pants. His hair was in less order that Harry’s which was saying something, and his beard was betraying the time he had passed in captivity. His brows were furrowed in pain, and his eyes were closed, but he kept his back straight against the wall in a last-ditch attempt of dignity.

That would be Mr.. Graves.

“It’s not to me that you have done something, dear.” Both the prisoner and the time-traveler winced at the pet name. “But you offended a friend of mine. A muggle, mind you, but someone like you should know that business is business. Maybe you shouldn’t have been such an efficient auror. Maybe you should have accepted one or to bribes... but no. Ah, an incorruptible.” He laughs softly. “Capone sends his regards.”

At that statement, the man’s eyes shot open and he made an attempt to throw himself at the Dark Lord. “You fucki-”

“Crucio.”

The curse was spoken like Grindelwald had announced the presence of a teapot in the room, but it was nonetheless powerful. actually, probably one of the more powerful Harry had ever seen. A piercing cry shot from Mr. Grave’s mouth as he started shaking on the floor.

There was a sick wildness in Grindelwald’s eyes as he observed his victim and cut the spell.
Slowly, Harry crawled toward the man. He didn’t know how many times he was put under the cruciatus, but he was pretty sure that if he could avoid more torture, it would do much much good.

“I wonder why you keep disrespecting me, Graves. You know the rules, don’t you? Oh!” he exclaimed with emphasis as if he remembered something. “Is it because of the Obscurial? What was his name again?” He pats his lower lips with his finger. “Credence, right? Oh yes, you were so attached to this boy…”

Grindelwald smiled as Mr. Graves tucked his knees between his arms, in an involuntary gesture of self protection. “Yes… tell, me, Graves, how did it feel? That no one noticed that you weren’t there? That your dear… Credence… died hating you?” He taunted, punctuating each word with a cutting spell that tears at the man’s legs and forearms.

Harry used the commotion's sound to get closer, and he was only a few centimeters away from Mr. Graves.

He couldn’t heal the man or make any curse rebound without being caught, but he might manage to help him avoid most of the pain. He had to keep his magic wordless, which was even more difficult for such a delicate operation… and avoid any of the blood the touching him, or he would blow his cover.

Grindelwald tuted, as if grounding a misbehaving child. “Mr. Graves… I only ask you one thing… I can pass the affront you committed towards Capone, really. Tell me where Flamel lives, and you will be free…”

Harry wondered about the doubtful sense of this promise of liberation, but held his tongue. He gritted his teeth, forcing himself to immobility. He couldn’t act now, but sweet Merlin he wanted to. Grindelwald’s childish attitude, which used to make him laugh in a normal situation gave the scene an even more horrible overtone, and Harry really, really didn’t like it. Mr. Graves kept silent, stubbornly staring at his tormentor as if only a look could make him disappear into the deepest pits of hell.

“Well, Mr. Graves, it’s quite late. I must go, you understand I’m sure. I give you two more days to be useful to me.” With one last look at the man, Grindelwald stood up and got out, softly closing the door behind him.

At the exact moment the door closed, Mr. Graves seemed to crumple on himself and laid in the fetal position, not even crying, not even trying to attend to his wounds. He was still shaking from the cruciatus after effect.
Slowly, so as not to startle the man, Harry got out of the cape of invisibility. It clearly wasn’t enough as Graves crawled back against the wall, looking at him with fright and suspicion. Good, at least he wasn’t apathetic yet.

They stayed immobile a moment, judging each other with a look. “You’re real?” Croaked the man.

“I do hope so,” answered Harry with a grin. “I’m a friend.” Harry would have like to comfort him but the man didn’t seemed to be the type to take to well to being comforted.

“I’m pretty sure I know all my friends, and I certainly don’t know you.” shot back Graves, but his eyes were haunted and his posture tense.

“Well, I’m a new friend then.”

Harry wondered if he was channeling Dumbledore right now. Too cryptical for his tastes. “Listen, I’m sort of a prisoner too here. I’ll escape soon. Do you want to go with me?”

The man looked at him with disbelief. “What sort question is that?”

Harry rose an eyebrow. He seemed to him that the question was very clear. He took his wand and waved it against the man cuts, cleaning them and healing them in two sift movements of his wrist. “Do you have any other injuries?” he asked softly.

Graves looked at his forearms skeptically. “Who the hell are you?”

“Harry.”

That simple answer, which wasn’t an answer at all, didn’t appease the man whatsoever. Harry sighed. It wasn’t like he could tell him anything. Slowly, he moved his hand into his pocket and took out a piece of bread he had stolen during dinner. He held it out for the man, Graves hunger seemed to overthow his suspicion and he took the offered bread and ate it with enthusiasm. Harry observed him and took the opportunity to unmade his braid, passing his finger in his hair in a doomed attempt to make it better, and started braiding it back. Of course, he could have done it somewhere else, in a more fitting time, but the casualness of the gesture, the intimacy of it diffused and soothed the
prisoner. After a few mouthfuls, Mr. Graves nodded a thanks towards Harry.

“There’s a child I must find. I’ll try to steal some food too, just in case. We can’t apparate from here. If we get out of the wards, can you apparate us somewhere safe?”

“How will you get us out of the wards?”

Apparently, Mr. Graves had returned to what surely was his official auror mode, asking precise and practical questions without looking for elaborate answers. Harry shrugged.

“I managed to get down there, I’ll manage to get us out. So... Can you or can you not apparate?”

“I can.” Whispered Graves, passing a shaky hand through his disheveled hair, taming it somewhat. Harry was about to answer, but he cut himself off when he heard the guard coming back. He covered himself in his cape just in time to avoid being seen by the guard, who was checking through the little window. He waited next to Mr. Graves until the man was far enough away for them to whisper again without fearing being overheard. He put his head out of the cape, which must have given him a very strange look.

“Are you a seer?” asked Graves, frowning.

“Not really. Maybe... I guess in a way.” Answered Harry, grinning. “Does the answer to that question influence your decision of escaping?”

“Or lack of answer, thereof. But no. If I can escape, I will.” He said with determination.

“Good. I’ll be back as soon as I can. I need to find a child. He’s hurt, probably unconscious. He disappeared from the hospital wing; I think someone took him. D’you have an idea of where he could be?”

The man’s look darkened. “I don’t know but... considering his antecedents, you might want to try the labs or something like that. Tell me…”

He looked quite scared to talk now. Harry frowned, and motioned him to continue.
“The kid you’re looking for… His not an obscurial, is he?”

Harry felt himself pale, triggering the same reaction in his interlocutor. Of course. Why hadn’t he see it before? The kid was the perfect opportunity, and the chances were high.

Harry only had a few contacts with obscurials before, and he really didn’t want to repeat the experience.

Mr. Graves seemed to be really distressed, so Harry decided to put his own angst aside. “It’s possible.” he said, “But I don’t think so. He was already unconscious when I found him. Let’s hope he still is. Tomorrow is Samhain, we’ll take advantage of the chaos to escape. Like that, they won’t be on our asses immediately.”

Harry rose to get up, case an alohomora to open the door and, remembering something, turned back towards the man. “Oh, and if you hear an explosion, get ready to run for it.”

Without giving the poor man the time to answer, he put back his cloak and closed the door behind him.

----

In the morning, Harry had a plan. He had passed a few hours listening around, pretending to be occupied in diverse tasks that he had no idea about. And it appeared that his hunt had been quite fruitful.

Apparently, the generals would have a good collation in the hall, while the… people would do a more traditional feast outside. At midnight, Grindelwald would come for the sacrifice and the conjuration, before heading to his most trusted for the end of the night.

Oh, and the cousin of Mathilde - a good girl- was about to marry a pretty boy from Durmstrang! What a story. Well, for the kitchen’s woman it apparently was.

He had also found the potion’s lab.
With a lot of ingredients. Which was good because Harry needed a lot of Draught of the Living Dead.

The alarm rang. It was clearly the ‘we are being bombed’ kind of alarm, and in an instant, Harry was on his feet and ready to fight.

He walked quickly through the corridors, following the soldier’s movement’s to see where, and what, was the threat. Luckily, the rumors of him being a general had spread in the Snatchers ranks, and no one tried to stop him. It had to be said that his general demeanor didn’t help to think otherwise. Not that they really cared; all the civilians were being evacuated, and the rest were moving in what looked like a giant well-prepared ballet in metallic boots. No move was useless, except for the youngest who were sometimes colliding against each-others in the precipitation.

Harry didn’t know if he was satisfied or scared by the efficiency.

Considering the number of innocent people in here, the satisfaction won for this time.

He finally arrived in a big room where the high-ranked seemed to have reunited, far from the chaos of hundreds of men, women, children and sometimes animals being moved from one place to another.

Grindelwald was leaning over a table where maps were spread out, surrounded by grave-looking people. They were talking quietly, translating quickly from one language to the other, pointing to different places on the maps. Even if no clothing, throne or crown was used to show the hierarchy, it was very clear who made the decisions.

But the clean exterior couldn’t erase the look Grindelwald had had while using the cruciatus curse.

Gritting his teeth, Harry closed in. He slithered between the different persons, not really bothering not to hit one or two shoulders on his way. Grindelwald caught his eyes a second and, after raising an eyebrow, motioned him to come closer.

The place ushered Harry in place as the newcomer was stepping out the circle.

Harry squared his shoulders. As small and thin as he was, he knew how to hold himself to force respect. It was a necessity when your voice had to spread through the battlefield. He thought he had
been probably one of the most normal of teens a long time ago, blending in easily if not for his famous scar, but dying could do things like make someone stand out. Especially when he had his I-have-the-situation-under-control-and-it-better-stay-that-way-or-else expression.

Not that he really wanted to stand out here, or anywhere, really. After a few seconds, the hushed discussions started again, and Harry stood around the table to consider the map.

“We’re attacked.” Grindelwald not-really-explained between two sentences in two different languages - one of them being French, which would have surprise Harry if he wasn’t in such a panic state.

“I’d say that the alarm gave that away indeed.” Harry coolly answered, making Grindelwald smirk.

“We’ve been attacked by dementors.”

The hated word seemed even more sinister with Grindelwald’s accent. A chill passed on Harry’s back. Of course. Dementors. What did he expect? His luck wouldn’t allow anything less than his greatest fear attacking his current greatest enemy - and his own - living place, because why not.

But wait.

“What are dementors doing here?”

“That’s the century’s question. We’re far from England, even the road they seem to have taken is strange.”

Harry looked at the map more intently. He knew where he was, now. Well. “They’re attracted by despair and blooshed. We’re in the direct line between Azkaban and Russia.” He said matter-of-factly, drawing an imaginary line on the map with his fingertip, trying desperately to refrain the urge to laugh nervously at the idea that yes, he is helping a Dark Lord to save himself, and yes, his position is morally defensible. This was the time of brain-breaking idea that Hermione would solve easily, but Harry, alone, felt quite lost.

“You seemed very aware of the dementors.”
“More like they’re very aware of me.” Muttered Harry. He ignored the strange looks his comments provoked and asked “Is everyone evacuated?”

“Everyone that could be, yes.”

Harry’s eyes shot back. “What do you mean?”

But it was obvious. Realisation slipped into his very bones as he understood what was happening. Only the people in the citadel had been hidden, the others, poor, politically unimportant, living in the camp around Numengard, had been left behind. And Grindelwald was here, calmly explaining that hundreds of people had to die because he couldn’t sacrifice soldiers for them because it was too dangerous. He kept talking, listening to himself, here in an underground bunker where he couldn’t even hear the screams. But the man’s voice passed above Harry. “We’ve put the prisoners in the front line, in hope that they would delay the dementors for a while, and-”

He couldn’t let this happen.

Without evening thinking about it, he rose his hand. The slapping sound echoed in the deafening silence.

“If you leave your own people behind, you’re not worth leading them.” He spat with a glare. The You’re not worth anything was left unsaid.

Without another word, the he cut through the shock of the crowd. They didn’t even think about stopping him, behavior which he was very ok with. His mind was in turmoil. The consequences of having slapped the Dark Lord in front of his sort-of inner circle didn’t even break through the roar of his magic in his ears. He was going to use it, Yes!

Some small voice at the back of his mind told him that he was acting before thinking, but he made it shut up.

No one should be left to the dementors. The image of the dead-eyed Crouch Jr. was still printed in his mind.

He wasn’t sure how he had found his way to the outside, but he certainly had. The air was colder, and growing colder each second that passed. The rain was like thousands of little stabbing knives
against his face. The wind, salty from the sea, was screaming in his ears, unforgiving.

He could see them, a dozen, in line, shivering and almost naked at the edge of the forest. Chained by dark curses. Whimpering, screaming. And between them and Numengard, the camps. Some wizard had decided to go out to fight, but the Patronus was quite unknown and most of them had never even seen a dementor from afar.

It was, after all, an English creation.

He felt the curse arrive in his back and casted a Protego before it touched him. An enormous bluish shield rose between him and his aggressor Grindelwald was at the door, looking at him furiously, a blue bruise slowly forming in his cheek, his hair uncharacteristically messed up. Harry had hit hard indeed.

The young man barely gave him a glance before ignoring him superbly. He had not the time for cowards and narcissistic idiots. Especially those that he should have been killed on sight a long time ago. But, oh well, it wasn’t him to do such things in cold blood.

A second later, the cloak was spread over his shoulders, his wand in his hand, his ring warming by the flood of magic coming through it. It felt like going in the Chamber of Secrets at twelve. As a wise old man told him one day, “Harry, if you have to walk into shit, be prepared to swim in it.” But maybe it isn’t wise to take advice from someone that passed a year being held hostage at the bottom of his own trunk.

Harry shook his head as the cold started to creep into his bones. The dementors are still quite far away, unseen, but they always affected Harry more than anyone.

Harry hadn’t stopped walking at a quick pace and manage to come in front of the prisoners before the dementors even show their ugly nose. Graves is among them, but a bit set back, probably too important to be outright sacrificed.

Their eyes met for a second. They were only a few feet away. Harry muttered something that suspiciously sounded like “I didn’t die for this shit” before freeing the other man with a quick wand movement.

But Harry focuses back on the task at hand. He hears the heavy door of Numengard close behind him. No one will come help now, and the damn wards are still up; Harry can feel them above his head. No way to go in, and a suicidal one to go out.
Not that death was a really frightening prospect…

Suddenly, fear cut his thoughts. Images started to shot behind his eyelid - when had he close his eyes again?

He didn’t have to be afraid. The wand in his hand was soft, it was. It was the mighty word of war, the sweet lullaby of obliteration, dancing in his ears, in his blood, digging in his skin like the thousand worms on the corpses, and the idiotic voice of the blind and the idiot, of what was always waisted. The sick excitement of the child tearing apart an insect. The foreign need of chaos. His strange determination to live when he should be unborn.

That was all he could do for them.

Slowly, as the dark mist rose, Harry rose the Elder Wand.
Hy! A new chapter, a bit early because I'm that type of good writer (no). I may have a hard time to publish the next one as quickly: My exams are coming and trust me, they are as terrifying as winter.

I'm quite proud of this chapter, and I hope you will like it! Enjoy!

Thanks for all the comments (I don't answer to them all, but I read everything I assure you) and all the kudos! Also, thanks to my beta, Adlertywriter, for the amazing job. Without it, my poor grammar would burn all of your brains out ^^

Warning!: One of the scenes in this chapter contain an undertone rape threat. It isn't explicit but may incommode/ creep some of you

Gellert was observing from the citadel’s battlements. Actually, most of his soldiers were looking. Grindelwald was angry. No, he was in a raging fury, his hands trembling with the need to just take out his frustration on someone.

But at least his men were around him, ready to protect the citadel. Of course, they would defend everyone they could. Who did Harry think he was? But he couldn’t evacuate the camps- because it would cause a panic, and the crowd that it would create would kill more people than the dementors. It would weaken their defences. Some must be sacrificed - for the Greater Good. It was common sense.

Around him, his Snatchers were looking at Harry’s frame expectantly. The man that had dared defied their master would be kissed tonight - a fate worse than death surely. But he was doing it to defend them, not because Grindelwald had sent him there. They didn’t know if they had to cheer for him or to boo him, so they just watched, wand at the ready.

Then, Harr- Potter cut the prisoner’s ties. All the prisoners. With one single spell. It was a stunning display of careless power. He saw the tiny frame of the young man bow down to collect Graves, and talk to him. Why did he want to talk in this situation? Did he know Graves?

Was he a spy after all?
But then he simply dismissed these thoughts. The boy was going to die for his foolishness anyway. Nobody could hold down an army of Death Eaters alone. So much wasted potential. Maybe, it was what truly angered Grindelwald.

He hadn’t even thought about erasing the bruise that was slowly forming on his cheek. His hair was beaten by the frozen and sick wind, sticking to his skull. His clothes clung to his skin as they were soggy. But Grindelwald did not move. He had to protect the citadel. He had to protect wizards at all costs. But it was the realization that made him stay.

Harry was dangerous. More so than he had expected. Gellert could almost see his green eyes flashing from where he was.

Suddenly, he was hit by a wave. He actually had to hold on the wall to avoid falling backward. At first, he thought of an explosion.

It was magic.

Pure, raw and untamed - too much power to be controlled.

It saturated the air.

All the prisoners had fallen on their knees. The rain slid on the force’s waves, twirling, absorbing the dementor’s fog and Numengard became a lighthouse in the middle of the sea.

Grindelwald rose his hand and cast the most powerful protective spell he knew. Slowly, a translucent shield fell from the sky around the citadel. Its light cut through the fog, flowing on an invisible bubble. Many rose their wands to add their spells to his. Rays of light rose from everywhere in the citadel, and even outside. They were silent.

A flash of lightning tore the air slowly as a crack extending over the ice

And then everything went white.

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Percival Graves had thought he would die in his cell. Nobody got captured twice by Gellert Grindelwald and lived to tell the tale - surviving once was already a miracle. Then, a guard had come to take him, and he had thought that he would die at last in the fresh air, kissed by a dementor of all things. He hadn’t screamed nor kicked all the way from the jails to where they had been attached, alike some of his co-prisoners. No, he had walked with false poise.

He hadn’t revealed anything.

When the magic chains - similar to those he himself used to capture black mages - had wrapped around his wrists, he had to hold back tears. His heart had gone up in his throat. God, he did not feel like dying. Not now. He was scared, so scared. His breathing quickened dangerously, and he felt the cold freeze his limbs. The dementors arrived. He was going to die the same way as the worst criminals, while the criminals were hiding behind the ramparts.

Irony.

Chuckles pierced through his sobs, and he didn’t even bothered to ask himself at what point he had started to sob. He couldn’t even feel his tears in the middle of the rain. His cheeks were numb with the cold.

But he kept repeating it in his mind. He hadn’t said a word.

Suddenly he saw the boy. He was standing in front of him, and crouched to put himself at his level. He was calm, oddly calm. His eyes were bright and he smiled warmly at Perceval.

What an odd kid.

The man’s breath caught in his throat. The kid had put his hand on his shoulder, and it was like he was force-feeding him with hope.

For a second, Perceval felt like he was back in the security of his New York office. No suffering, just duty, and work. Piles of files on his desk, and the shy smiles of Miss Goldstein, with whom he had developed some sort of strange polite friendship made of small attentions and half-finished sentences. His worries about the Barebone boy that he had crossed in the street many times in front of the ministry, with his hateful flyers and frightful looks. A blink later, his chains fell around him. The boy was still looking at him with that warm smile, anchoring him to the here and now.
Then, the boy - or was he a man? rose onto his feet. He had an odd shaped wand in his hand, but it wasn’t surprising. He was an odd-shaped boy after all.

He waved his hand in the air as if commending an invisible orchestra and a force knocked Percival to the ground. Drops of mud splashed across his face.

He saw them, gliding above the ground. Looming always closer. He heard the screams behind him losing themselves in the wind. There was an exploding sound, and everything went white.

----

It was too much magic. Many men had wanted to become master of Death before him, but none knew what it really entailed. Because the power didn’t come with the knowledge, and Harry had never been the one to control himself. His magic was raging in his veins, waiting to be unleashed, calling for him, calling for the dead and the living and it was utterly frightening. He felt like he would explode.

The pressure was unsustainable, but he had to hold until all the dementors were in front of him. He was alone, and he couldn’t fight on two fronts at the same time.

Despair crashed on him. Memories flashed before his eyes. Things he didn’t want to remember. Luna, rising from the dead as an inferi. No… The look on Ginny’s face when they took her. No…

He felt the shield rose behind him. The now familiar and wild (warm) magic of Grindelwald was circling the citadel.

He had to find a good memory. Was he even still able to produce a Patronus? Doubt crashed on him. What if he wasn’t able to do it? What if he was kissed while being the master of death? Fear. He hadn’t felt that kind of fear for many years. There was a reason he had destroyed Azkaban in his own time.

He closed his eyes. A good memory. An untainted memory.

A lightning bolt exploded next to him. There was screaming. He had to find it!
A little toddler laughing while Harry was making him fly, his hair, black from worry a few minutes before, turning bring yellow with excitement. Something warm spread in his chest and his lips curved in a smile. He opened his eyes to stare at the abominations that were now only a few meters away from him.

“Expecto patronum!”

A silvery stag appeared. Harry blinked. It was the first time he used that spell after his… first death. It was far brighter and bigger than before. It was fascinating. He could actually feel the waves of happiness coming from the beautiful creature. The stag was different, other than in its sensation, from the one the young man had produced before. Its branches were larger and numerous, forming tiers of white lines that seemed to want to melt into the stars, its neck was wider and majestic, its legs slenderer. In short, he looked more … adult.

Celestial would be the word, but Harry didn’t want to think about that.

“Protect us.” Harry whispered, stretching his hand towards the apparition. Before he could touch it, the stag ran. The sound of his hooves clacking like the roll of thunder against the tempestuous air.

Harry waved his wand and the spell made a half circle around the citadel. The earth was vibrating under his feet. His breath quickened. The dementors were being pushed away, pushing and making disgusting shrills as they were thrown back in the woods. But Harry was tired. He was so, so tired. His legs were painful under the aftershock of the spell, and his own magic was so warm and comfortable. His hair was flying around his face under the raw magic’s push, tickling him slightly.

It took all his will not to let the spell slip. Keep thinking about the memory, occluding every bad feeling it may convey.

He heard shouts behind him, but he couldn’t turn his head. How many dementors were here?

Too many was the only answer he could provide.

He felt a dozen of silvery forms pass next to him. He didn’t know when his wand had become so heavy in his hand. He concentrated on keeping his feet on the ground, his arm steady.
But his own mind wasn’t doing the trick. It was flying in places it shouldn’t be. There had been so much mud too, the last time. The bombs flying over his head. The screams, the horrendous sound that the buildings made when they fell, when the metallic structure bent. The ashes gluing themselves into his lungs.

Harry took a deep shaking breath. No. He had to hold on, to stop it from happening again -or at all. His presence was luring the dementors his way, at least they wouldn’t scatter around. A dozen of other Patronuses were running around, keeping them in the same area and pushing them always further back.

Harry gave a final push, and the dementors were gone. The wind was whispering among the trees, and the rain fell softly on the ground.

Harry was trembling all over. What was this? What was this coldness?

_Run Lily, run_!

The horror grew in him, but this time somehow mixed with a pang of guilt. They died for him, they all died and yet he was here, saving a Dark Lord’s army, oh but what if he failed, how many innocents would die today because of him?

_Please spare him!_

_Please!_

He felt a pair of arms catching him as he fell.

----

“They can’t burn!”

The mob was screaming, like an informal mass of anger and hatred directed at them. A poor woman was screaming in pain in the middle, but nobody cared, really.
“They can’t burn!”

Harry couldn’t really see anything, everyone was moving too fast. But he knew what it meant and the dread was shutting his mind blank, as the crowd screamed “They can’t burn! Witches! They can’t burn!”

----

The sheets were warm around him. Soft on his skin. He could stay here forever, couldn’t he? It was ok.

But he was incomplete. Something was missing, something, something was-

Harry opened his eyes. above him, the ceiling was white and sterile and -

Oh.

Well, that was bound to happen. So much for staying low, good one Harry.

Harry sighed and tried to find his glasses. Apparently being the master of death didn’t give you the right to see three feet in front of you. Of course, he could use a spell on his eyes - with the Elder Wand it would be permanent, but he didn’t know such a spell.

Someone finally put his glasses on his nose. Ah! not to be blind! Harry muttered a ‘thanks’.

He was in a cell. A pretty cell, apparently, less cold the the one of Mr. Graves, and with a bed (that now seemed to be much less comfortable), but still a cell.

The locks on the door may have given it away.

He was dressed in a simple brown shirt and pants. The ring was still on his finger, luckily, and he
could see the cape had fallen from his clothes next to the door - still invisible to all but him, except for one corner that was touching another part of the fabric.

But the Wand wasn’t here.

Of course, the wand wasn’t there.

Grindelwald was sitting legs crossed at the end of the bed. He was eating the end of a chocolate frog, and smiling at him. His smile was just a little too sharp. Harry couldn’t help but stop to wonder if he had smiled at people like that while killing them.

Who was he kidding, of course, he had.

Harry didn’t know why but the situation felt particularly wrong. It made all his body tense and cringe with the only need to kick the man on the floor. Unconsciously, he looked for his wand. He felt naked and weak without it. Even if he was still it's master, he hated, hated hated for it to be away from them. Without the wand, it was harder to ignore the longing of the stone. It was harder not to hide himself constantly under the cloak.

As if reading his mind, Grindelwald chuckled.

“You do look adorable when you’re lost! Want some?” He taunted, waving the last bits of chocolate frog.

Harry shot him a very unimpressed look. The cute word seemed insulting and condescending in his mouth. He mustn't play Grindelwald’s game. Suddenly, Nikolov’s warning came back in his mind and he felt sick. Grindelwald was just so disgustingly patronizing, it made Harry’s skin crawl.

“How long was I out?” He asked with only a small tremor in his voice.

Grindelwald smiled at the young man’s stubbornness and ate the last chocolate’s leg, shrugging. “An entire day. Dare I say that you were quite tired. But that’s quite natural after such a magical miracle. They are all impressed with you, my boy.”
Harry’s glare deepened, and if he didn’t know better he would be certain that Grindelwald had stilled by reflex.

There was no sound in here. No way for Harry to know where exactly he was. And now he could feel it. The dark aura around Grindelwald. He could smell the blood, feel the screams. He was probably doing one of his famous experiments. Now his playful and friendly behaviour became cruel and deceiving. The man just reeked the Dark Arts.

It wasn’t good. He just hoped he wasn’t underwater.

“I would probably award you if some complications hadn’t happened.”

Ah, there it was. Harry knew perfectly where this was going, and he really needed to escape before something bad happened, and something bad was about to happen, clearly.

The day he would get rid of the ‘saving everyone’ thing, his life would be so much easier…

Discreetly, in a move that could look like a nervous gesture, he turned the stone on the metallic structure of the ring. He cut his thumb on one of the sharpened edges, and let the artifact drink the drop of blood.

“You see, not only did you hit me - a disrespect I could eventually put on the account of your youth and fiery temper - but you were also in possession of something that was mine… Oh no, don’t look for it, it’s hidden somewhere safe. Now, boy, I wonder…”

Harry was half listening to whatever Grindelwald could say with a barely masked anger about how he was the owner of the wand. A shadow was growing behind the man, completely obvious to what was really happening.

The night had risen and was moving towards them on two feet.

“...How did you steal it from me? Did you enter here by breaking in? You’re certainly very powerful, but I doubt that you would be able to break in to that type a fortress. It’s very ancient, you see.”
Harry scoffed. “I wouldn’t bet on that Sir. I broke into Gringotts. Twice.” He said absentmindedly, before realizing his mistake and shutting his mouth shut.

Grindelwald slid closer on the bed faster than Harry thought it possible. Harry wanted to keep his attention away from the dead he was more or less summoning behind his back. It needed time to grow and stabilize.

“How is it that I can’t See you?” The Dark Lord whispered, and Harry knew he wasn’t talking about normal seeing. That was… interesting. Well, Harry would have thought that if he wasn’t internally panicking. Grindelwald was simply far too close, the glint in his eyes far too wild and the whole situation really atrocious.

He rose his hand and brushed a single fingertip against Harry’s cheekbone. He was pinning the young man with his gaze as if trying to solve a puzzle.

“You are really a surprising boy, Harry.” Growled the Dark Lord. He pressed his hand on Harry’s neck in a firm grip. Possessive. Harry felt himself pale. He needed to escape. “I wonder why you would want to go?”

_You’re lucky it’s not the hands yet…_

Harry clenched his teeth.

“Don’t worry, boy, you’re a hero now. Shame that you were… hurt during the attack, you will not be able to attend Samhain tonight - in a few hours actually. Don’t worry, I’m sure that your hospital bed will be covered in flowers in no time. I must confess however that you might never see these flower, not if you keep that attitude anyway.” Grindelwald all but purred while gripping his hand around the young man’s neck. His grip was firm and bruises would probably form themselves where the fingertips touched the delicate skin of his neck.

It was too much. The man was too close. Harry felt himself tense against his will and his heart beat quicker from the adrenaline rush. He could feel the tug of subtle legilimency surrounding him, and Grindelwald’s breath on his skin. He wanted to scream.

“Schuh, child, it’s ok. I can understand the lure, after all, I did steal the wand myself. I think that everyone that dabbles in the dark arts should court death, at least once.
“The hallows don’t belong to you.” Harry hissed, barely stopping himself from slipping into parcel. “You don’t know anything about death.”

*How my dear, but what do you know about the Dark Arts?*

Apparently, the Grindelwald he had seen with Voldemort’s eyes had made a good use of all his years in prison. Pity he wasn’t wiser right now.

Harry stared at him and Grindelwald quickly withdrew his hand. Being stared at by an angry Harry was like being held at wand point. His eyes had lost all of their humble warmth. They were cold, merciless.

They were the eyes of someone that had seen far too much.

“Who’s Voldemort? Who- Who are you?” He breathed, pulling back and reaching for his - no Harry’s - wand.

One step back.

Another.

There he was, stepping on the disfigured half-ghost that had risen behind him. Its cold bluish hands went to touch Grindelwald, who bolted back to avoid the threat.

Of course, a simple ghost couldn’t cause much harm, but the distraction was enough for Harry to jump and hit Grindelwald in the throat. He put his hand on his bruised neck and started coughing - Harry was right to think that Grindelwald would be unprepared for a muggle type of attack. They all were, in the end. Lazy wizards.

“I’m Peverell.” Whispered the Master of Death, half hoping Grindelwald would hear him, before grabbing the other man’s head and knocking him out on the bed table. A satisfying ‘crack’ assured him that the tyrant would be out for a while, but Harry knew that the wound wasn’t life threatening.

He didn’t know why he was so reluctant at the idea of killing Grindelwald - albeit his disgust with
the idea of killing in general. Maybe it was because he knew how the man had died in his time
before really knowing of his crimes. Maybe because he had seen it like he had done it himself and
felt strangely guilty about it.

A few months after the final battle, he still had had to repeat to himself that he wasn’t Voldemort -
that he was his own person. But the eerily creeping feeling that it wasn’t really the truth kept grinning
at the back of his mind and kept him awake at night.

He knew it would bite him in the back afterwards, but right now, he simply couldn’t. He couldn’t
finish off an unconscious man.

Quickly, Harry got out of his bed, thanked the ghost and allowed it to wander around for the rest of
the night, and went for the cloak. Complete. All was fine, now.

Well, not quite.

Harry covered himself with the cloak and let the familiar weight on his shoulder calm him. He cut his
mind from its terrified rambling. Nothing had almost happened, and for sure, nothing had happened.
He didn’t have to feel dirty. Nothing, really...

Nothing.

----

The drums are beating the rhythm of his heart.

Samhain.

Samhain has started. Harry ran silently in the corridor. The wand is almost too light and hot and
beautiful in his hand and all he wants is to use it - but he can’t, he knew it. Using the ring earlier was
already far too risky.

He can feel the adrenalin make his hands move faster and his legs stronger. Pure, raw power fueled
his every move.
In the woofers, Grindelwald’s voice was speaking German with passion. They must have recorded it. It gave him the impression to be in one of these WW2 movies - and it struck him suddenly that he will live through the second world war at one point.

He finally arrived at the prison part of the citadel. Four guards were sitting on the chairs regularly put between the cells. Harry’s first reflex was to hide, but then he remembered. They didn’t know he had been arrested. The last time anyone but Grindelwald had seen him was when he had cast the enormous patronus outside to protect the citadel.

So Harry put his shoulders back, elongated his neck and looked right in front of him. He smiled at the guards. When he entered the room, they looked at him with admiration. Playing his part, he wanted to shake each and every hand with a little bow of his head. He really didn’t like that type of consideration, but he wasn’t here to do what he liked. His newfound popularity could make them all get out of here, so be it.

“Does one of you speak English?” He asked with a big smile.

One of the men stepped forward. “Yes, Sir!” He said with a big German accent.

“Very well. Gellert,” He suppressed a shiver at the idea of calling Grindelwald by his first name “sent me to keep an eye on the prisoners for an hour or two. You’re all allowed upstairs and have fun! Just don’t let me rot in here, will you?” He winked at the man.

The soldier translated with excitement and after a big cheer, the four men ran upstairs to stuff themselves with whatever delicious food they might find.

Harry’s smile dropped as soon as the men were out of sight. He would free the prisoners, but first, he had to find the wands of the wizards. Like every detention place, it had an administrative room, where the prisoners’s belongings were safely kept, along with files and such. He didn’t know the details - he was more used to escaping prisons than to studying their internal operations.

He finally found said room and the back of the corridor.

After casting an alarming number of spells to detect and disarm any traps around the door, room, and the box in which the wands were hidden, he transfigured a chair into a bag and doubled back his tracks. He may have blown off the door, but it didn’t really matter.
He put himself in the middle of the corridor and consciously cast an Alohomora on each lock. The sweet sound of metal against metal when the doors unlocked was very satisfying.

Of course, Mr. Graves was the first one to get out. Harry handed him a proper and clean prisoner’s uniform. He knew fairly well how unclean he must feel.

The older wizard seemed tired but ready.

“How many people are there?” asked Harry.

“About ten are able to walk.” Whispered the head-auror. “How much time do we have?”

Harry quickly cast a Tempus, and a clock of every time zone appeared (he really had to train to control this power). “It’s eleven. At midnight, Grindelwald will have to do a speech outside, so I’d say an hour before they notice that he’s missing.”

Graves looked at him like he had grown another head. “He’s... missing?”

“He had an accident. He might be out for an hour or two. More if I hit well.” Simply explained the green-eyed boy with a little smirk.

Graves merely shook his head before helping the other to change. Harry waved the questions away before everyone was more or less able to listen.

“Ok people! I hope everyone understands English, and that if not you’ll be able to follow the move. It’s...11. 15 pm, so we have about forty-five minutes to get our asses out of here. Does anybody have any military experience here? Auror or something?” One or two people raised their hands, plus Mr. Graves. “Ok, so you’re in charge. One or two civilians for each auror, I’d say. We will walk quietly until the hospital wing. If necessary, let me do the talking. This…” He waved the wand-full box “are your wands, take them and keep them at the ready, but do not shout unless it is the last resort. Always follow me and try to act as if everything was normal. No matter what’s to happen, stay calm. If we get separated, try to get out of the wards and go into the trees. Do be careful, it’s Samhain, the place is stuck with Dark objects and Merlin knows what may happen in the woods.”
“Who are you?” asked a little woman - one of the aurors- with short dark hair and a strangely very straight nose. She had a soft if not really pretty face, but something sharp in her eyes indicated quick smarts.

“I’m Harry. You?”

She tilted her head to the side at the lack of information but answered nonetheless. “Eleanor Krum. I’m from Bulgaria, head auror there.” She said.

“It’s a pleasure, even if I would hope to meet you in other circumstances.” He politely answered to avoid the idea that he knew this woman - and how she would die. His eyes must have let on something (they always did somehow) because Graves got closer and asked “Is something the matter?”

Harry shook his head. “A… thought, nothing more.” He answered.

He should be more careful with cryptical answers or he’ll start to give people lemon drops. However, Graves would have none of that and he motioned Harry to follow him a bit further in the corridor.

“So you’re a Seer, aren’t you? You saw something?” he asked professionally.

Even if he really didn’t want to answer, Harry understood the man’s worries. Graves epitomized self-confidence and authority. He was clearly used to leading, and thus not to be left in the dark, and certainly not by someone younger than him.

But Harry didn’t like to obey authority.

“We don’t have time for this.”

“We do, especially if the information might save lives.” The man answered sternly.

Harry sighed, but there was no short cut out of this.
“Er...It’s not that simple.” He explained hesitantly. “There’s too many possibilities, otherwise I’d let you know, but... She’s in more danger than us I think. Keep an eye on her.”

That half-explanation seemed to satisfied Graves who only nodded and went to help organize the escape. The wounded were healed at best as they could on the spot - enough to be able to walk (they hoped).

After a minute or so, Harry motioned for the group to follow him. The way to the hospital wing was clear. Harry had sent all the guards to eat the kitchen’s food, so they’ll be out for a while. If Harry had done everything right, a very long while.

They entered the Hospital wing at last. A few patients were still laying on the beds, softly snoring, most of them placed on that horrendous Sleeping Draught that seemed to have more the effect of a brick on the head than the one of a normal sleeping pill. Quickly, while the others had a look in the potion’s stocks, Harry went to the kid’s bed.

He had a bad feeling.

The kid was there, sleeping peacefully like always, but Harry wasn’t fooled. Somehow, he already knew, so when he put his hand on the child’s wrist and the glamour that was around it faded a bit he wasn’t surprised.

The skin was cold, the body was still and the kid was dead.

Since a very long time, probably since they arrived here considering that Harry couldn’t even feel the last traces of his little soul on him. Harry just felt utterly sad. He should have checked, he should have found another way. There wasn’t, of course, but still. It had been his responsibility, and he had failed.

He wasn’t sad because of death anymore, and he couldn’t mourn someone he hadn’t known. He just felt empty and frustrated.

He turned his heels and went to get out of there, quickly followed by the others. “The kid?” asked Graves lowly.

“Dead.” Answered the young man without any trace of emotion in his voice
His eyes, as always, were telling another story.

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They were moving quite fast, the rhythm of the drums giving them the tempo. It was exhilarating, but also a bit maddening. Even when they stopped to give the wounded a bit of a reprieve, the drums kept on their steady beating, effectively deafening them from any footsteps sounds that might actually save them.

They actually met with one or two suspicious people, but after a look at Harry’s scar (apparently his only physical trait that had spread along with his newfound legend), they let him pass with a smile, a handshake, or simply another suspicious glance.

None of the prisoners understood how the young man that had freed them wasn’t more scared about the whole situation. The finally stopped in front of the big hall’s doors. Harry cast a tempus.

It was 11.35 pm.

Good.

“So, the big door is right ahead of us. We just have to pass the big hall full of the intelligentsia.” He said with mirth.

“Are you insane?” Shot Krum. “Or do you actually have a plan?”

“My plans tends to go to hell, so I’d say that you’ll just find out.” Answered the boy before putting both of his palms against each part of the door and pushing.

Gasps.

The room was decorated grandiose. Six large tables were aligned between the towering pillars of stone, raw and unsculpted, decorated with great red and black banderoles in Grindelwald’s honor,
and painted with the traditional red runes for the Samhain blessing. The atmosphere didn’t look like the muggle-inspired Halloween at Hogwarts, but some sort of violent pagan party. Golden and delicately painted dishes were deposited in front of each chair. All of them were overfilled with delicious - now cold - food, and the plates in the center offered promises of the best meat, vegetables or fishes one may have ever eaten. Harry sneered at the hypocrisies of eating meat during Samhain, of eating such luxurious plates when all the citadel was working on rations, of wearing the finest clothes when you pretended not to have a pyramidal organization. And indeed, each and every general was wearing silk and satin robes with fine details and embroidery.

And all these beautiful people were snoring contently with their heads on their plates.

“Holy fuck!” whispered Graves, quickly imitated (even if with less flourish) by the others.

“Yes, I must say I rather outdid myself on this one.” Proudly announced the young man, hand on his hips as he contemplated his very well done potion (fuck you now-unborn-Snape!).

“Remind me not to mess with you, later on, young man!” Said Krump with an appreciative smile.

“Are… are they dead?” asked someone.

“No, merely asleep. Some might have drowned in their mash, though. Thus, I disassociate myself with any potato-related murder.” answered Harry, fighting hard to keep a straight face as the others gaped at him.

He walked quickly to the place where Nikolov, like his comrades, had fallen asleep in his plate. A wave of anger crash on him. The man had surely helped Grindelwald to keep him here! He was part of it, of all that thing. Maybe he had killed the child?

Harry was about to at least leave him here, knowing perfectly well that he might not survive this. But did he knew? Did he knew for sure that the man was guilty? What if he wasn’t? What did it make of Harry if he wasn’t and he left him to survive here?

He lifted the man gently and cleaned it with a simple Scourify. It was strange to see him like that. He had almost the same expression as when shooting himself with morphine. The always-ready doctor looked vulnerable.
“Why are you helping him?” shouted Graves from the other side of the room, where he was checking a few names among the dozing people.

“He helped me. I pay my debts.” Answered Harry with a serene smile. “Now, let’s go.”

Graves made an approving noise and they gathered again to pass the door. They could hear the laugh, the tapping, the drums like the citadel had grown an enormous heart for the night. And the song, sang in many languages but coming together with the same power, the same melody, the same intent. Letters and syllables merging with other word’s, creating a new language of pure magic. It was foreign to any human ear, misplaced in any human mouth.

“Ok, now the key here is to act like we belong here. In Rome act like a roman, and stuff.” Harry declared with his usual eloquence.

“What’s happening here?”

So this was the moment where his plan went to hell.

He quickly turned on his heels. “I can explain, Anastasia, it’s ju-”

He was cut by a very nasty hex that sends him flying around the room before he had the time to react. He barely managed to land on his feet thanks to a table which was amiable enough to stop his fall. He barely had the time to cast a shield that sent the next curse crashing into the wall behind Anastasia.

He was angry. At Anastasia for attacking him in the back, at himself for having been weak enough to let it happen.

“I knew it! I told Grindelwald to give you veritaserum! I knew it!” She screamed throwing curse after curse. Harry kept his shield up, trying to avoid a catastrophe. These things had to happen to him, of course. But he wasn’t weak, he had the Wand.

“Don’t use your wands!” he shouted to the others “We don’t need an explosion or mixed spells in here!”
The young woman was starting to cast frantically spell after spell, not even bothering to do them wordless, and giving Harry a clear advantage.

*Do it do it do it*

“Calm down!” he shouted, “I don’t want to hurt you!”

It wasn’t quite the truth, but close enough.

She only answered with a spell that he barely dodged. He didn’t have any choice, he had to get out before-

*Do it*

He finally sent a *Stupefy* that the young woman dodged before casting a *Crucio*. That was Harry’s limit. He cut the spell with a move of his hand and started casting a flourish of little useful spells to put Anastasia where he wanted her. He cast a *Serpent Sortia*, careful not to put too much magic in the wand (he really didn’t want in invoke a basilisk). The little snake made the woman shriek and stumble a bit.

*Now.*

He sent a single but powerful *Expelliarmus*. The frail woman flew in the air and crashed with a sick sound against the back wall. Her unconscious body slid down the stone and left a trail of blood behind it.

The silence lingered for a moment, only the sound of the celebration passing the wooden doors echoing through the hall. Without a second glance, Harry passed all the prisoners that were looking at him strangely and opened the doors.

It was midnight, and he had done his sacrifice to the dead.

“Here goes nothing,” he whispered to himself.
Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry! I just love cliffhangers and suspenses. Can't stop myself

Don't hesitate to comment! I just love to see your ideas and points on my stories! Also, you can follow me on Tumbr at LadyBraken (For everything that's in progress- or asking stuff if you want, it's easier to debate there than here) and Deviantart at Ladyzombiedraws (I post a lot of fanarts, even if it's just a hobby)

Bye!
The night of the deads

Chapter Notes

Hyy! I know I said I wouldn't publish for a while due to work, but you see, I'm that type of bad student... well anyway. It's snowing here in Paris and the Seine if flooding everywhere, so I'm just going to enjoy hot coco and write fics, because apparently my city is under some sort of bad curse and it's not good to tempt the devil ^^

I'm really happy to al of your review - albeit the homophobic ones, of course, which only made me want to hit people :)
Anyway, thanks a lot to you guys! I really enjoy writing this fic and I have SO MUCH ideas! I hope you will like it!

Thanks to my beta, adlertypewriter!

He had never seen so many people enjoying a wizarding party before. Before the war, muggle holidays and celebrations prevailed. And even after the end of the Second Wizarding War, they had tried to unite under their ancestral rites, but it had been bittersweet: too many dead, too many mourning for it to be really joyful.

What Grindelwald had created here was different.

Everybody was outside, dancing to the rhythm of the drums, eating pumpkin, juicy meat, laughing in small groups. Fireworks were thrown into the air and colorful candles lightened the area joyfully. People were running in all directions and dancing around large wooden fires to the rhythm of the drums while others - the oldest, the most drunk or the ones who were visiting the buffets that had been made available here and there, struck their hands to accentuate the cadence. The air was saturated with spray, magic, sweat, and grease, and it seemed as if the floor itself were vibrating under the blows as if the whole camp had begun to live to the sound of one and the same beat.

So, that was the famous inalienable right to party. Harry had trouble holding on to participating with others; it seemed to him that his magic pulsed in his veins, he has too much energy in him. He had to use it for something. He had to jump on the spot, to fly, to do anything to quench the pressure that rose in his legs, in his arms, and against his chest.

The drive.

It was the night of the dead, yes, but also the night of the wizards.
Harry decided not to dwell on the significance of this peculiar fact.

Pursing his lips, Harry passed an arm around Grave’s waist to steady him, and quickly look around to assure himself that everybody was ready to move. Graves throw him a weary look, but Harry couldn’t blame him for that. Not everybody was able to kill someone with an overpowered *Expelliarmus*. Harry was actually pretty sure that his magic was flowing around him like oppressive waves, but he didn’t have the time or the strength to do something about it.

As quickly as he dared, Harry started to cross the crowd. At first, nobody noticed him, or the others. On a first look, they look like drunkards that maybe had a fight too many. Most of the guards were drunk themselves, or on other substances - the wizarding drugs tended to be quite effective, or sometimes just too preoccupied to avoid an accident and joking with their friends.

But then, someone noticed him. It wasn’t hard; he had been an object of curiosity for weeks, often seen with Grindelwald himself in a very casual manner, and the legend of his monstrous Patronus had apparently run in Nurenguard with the same facility as it would have done in Hogwarts.

Harry wondered if it was the wizards, the number of them concentrated together or the fortress in which they did that provoked such phenomena.

In any case, it took about ten minutes for someone to throw themselves at Harry.

It was a little group of wizards, they exclaimed things in what Harry recognized as German, and he thought to himself that he would really have to learn that language at one point.

However, he felt Graves tense against his side when one of the men finally decided to come closer, shaking his hand and bowing a little, repeatedly. The others too. They stopped behind them, and he could feel their stare on his neck. But that type of attention, he was used to.

He didn’t know when Grindelwald would wake up, but he had to be quick.

“I only speak English… I have to go,” he said urgently. The man seemed to understand the problem, nodded and let go, leaving his place to other people.
He smiled, nodded, shook hands and made a sign that he had to move on. Luckily, people here were more… educated. Maybe more aware of personal space and privacy, which didn’t surprise him considering that they were living with Grindelwald.

Harry felt a shiver running down his back and straightened his posture.

“Harry, on the right...” whispered Graves, and Harry nodded.

“I saw him,” Harry confirmed.

The guards were apparently another business. Some of them had started to look at the small troupe funnily, brow furrowed, hand on their wands. They were three, but they were quite far. Another one, more threatening, was slowly coming closer. He stayed relaxed and passed the civilians as if only patrolling, but his gaze stayed fixed on the soon-to-be-ex-prisoners.

Harry pondered his choices, continuing to greet random people. He concentrated.

“Let’s walk, slowly. I’m taking care of him. Nobody saw him.” He said as casually as he could. He felt Graves tense again, but this time to put himself in a position where he could actually draw out his wand.

As they moved forward, Harry kept his attention fixed on the man looming closer. With a smooth move of his finger, a pile of boxes fell in front of the man just in time for the crowd to close in front of him and hide Harry and the others from his view for a few seconds.

Taking the cue, Graves and Krum pushed the others to move quicker, but the commotion had attracted the eyes of other guards behind them.

Some started to follow them from afar, but one or two quick wandless spells made them trip, fall, and become confused. It was actually quite fun to see and stole a few chuckles from his new teammates. Not from Graves, of course, but after all the torture Harry knew it would take him a lot of time to laugh again- if ever.

Harry knew not to use a direct spell unless he wanted to cause more death. He could feel the power,
the wand just begging to be used, and he had to keep control.

They hustled a bit but mostly managed to get to the other side of the camp without much trouble.

But it wasn’t the camp the had worried Harry. Grindelwald wouldn’t start a duel in the camp itself if only to keep his men’s loyalty. Grindelwald wasn’t a good man by any mean, but for all his flaws, he wouldn’t attack his own people. He wouldn’t hurt the very magical children he was trying to protect.

Of that, Harry was sure.

No, it was when there would be no civilians around that the real danger would appear. When there would be no witness, no casualties to handle.

But Grindelwald was powerful - very powerful. The memory of the raw power he had felt on the wards he had risen during the dementor attack made him shiver. He didn’t want to imagine what the man was capable of with the Elder Wand.

He had no idea how Dumbledore had won the duel the first time around - considering. If he hadn’t known Grindelwald, he could have imagined that the Dark Lord had let his ex-lover win for whatever reason, but no. It would have been too disgraceful for someone as proud as Gellert.

On the whole, he was in big trouble and would be quite lucky to get out without injuries.

But it was Halloween. The night of the dead, of the fable, the legend, and the story. Harry didn’t care about the masks and tales. He was the bloody tale.

He felt Graves stumble and strengthened his hold on the man’s waist - it would probably bruise, but he couldn’t let go. The older man pinched his lips and frowned painfully, but nodded in wordless thanks.

The area was darker now that they had passed the camps, and Harry could feel the buzzing of the timeless wards a few meters away from them. The wards magic was strengthened by the night, and they were shining softly.
“Here we are,” Harry whispered, breathless. They all stopped a few meters in front of the wards-passing them would mean triggering every alarm in the fortress. They had to be careful, quick, and successful. Everything Harry was not.

He let Graves go and the man sat on the bare ground, wincing slightly.

“So, do we apparate?” he asked to no one, in particular, looking around to check that no guards had managed to follow them.

“No. I have a portkey, but it doesn’t work inside the wards. Damn strong wards they are.” said Graves, his hand in front of his eyes as if trying to stop a headache.

“Good. Less dangerous, quicker, harder to trace.” He agreed, earning himself a approving look from the Aurors around him.

He sighed. He hadn’t thought about the fact that he would have to prove himself now. As much as he hated the persona of “The-Boy-Who-Lived”, at least he had influence, and nobody dared to question him after Voldemort’s death.

Well, maybe this time around he would manage to live quietly, even if he sincerely doubted so.

There was something in the corner of his eye.

A flash of lightning and then he felt a sharp pain as his back hit a tree. His breath caught in his throat. He head pounded and his ears whistled. He heard shouts, and in a moment he was back on his feet, ignoring the ache on his back. Harry quickly pressed a hand where the pain was burning. When he looked at it, it was red.

Covered in blood.

He swore and tightened his grip on his wand.

“Are you ok?”
Krum looked at him, then at his bloody wand worriedly, while the other had their wands out and pointed towards the threat. Graves could barely stand on his legs, but his wand arm was steady and his gaze determined.

Harry followed his gaze. On the valley, between the camps and them, Grindelwald was walking towards them like the Lord he was, each step claiming back the land that had been soiled by the feet of his enemies.

Screams, shouts, and laughter were echoing behind him in the night, barely faded under the deep pulsation of the drums that cadenced his steps…

...Or was it the beat of Harry’s heart sinking to the beat of the citadel-- the power rushing in his body, tightening around his mind, enticing his hand, his wand…?

Grindelwald’s deep red cloak was billowing behind him, and Harry could feel his anger. In the way, his fist was clenched around his wand, in the way his shoulders were squared.

Gellert’s - and when had Harry started to call the man Gellert he didn’t know- wild blond lock were disheveled, flowing around his head and stuck to the blood that was flowing on his right temple, and cheek, drawing the shape of his jaw and smearing his shirt. He was walking quickly, projecting droplets of blood that were banished even before touching the ground around him.

His eyes, clear, and cold, were fixed on Harry.

But he didn’t cast any other curse.

Harry ignored the pain in his back and walked back to Graves. “I do hope your portkey can be used like, right now.” He whispered low and urgent, even if there was no need for discretion.

“Yes.” Whispered back the Auror without leaving Grindelwald out of his sight, “But we can’t turn our backs to him…”

Harry nodded, frowning. The Dark Lord was coming closer and they didn’t have much time left. Adrenaline was running through his mind, blowing away any possibilities for strategy.
“Pass the wards.” He ordered, “Activate the portkey, I’ll hold him back.”

“You can’t fight him alone!” protested Graves. He was about to add something else, but Harry’s glare shut him up.

“I can.”

“Don’t be ridiculous-”

“Go. Call me when the portkey is ready. I’ll slow him for a while; but... don’t be too long, ok? I don’t want a bloodbath.”

Harry was bluffing—of course, he was. Unhurt and well, alone even, he could—almost easily—take on Grindelwald on his own, but he was still drained from the Dementors attack and the curse he had taken earlier. His shirt was soaked in blood and started to stick painfully to his back. He ignored it.

It was his duty.

The others—no matter how gifted—didn’t stand a chance. No matter what it was in this timeline; in Harry’s original life, Grindelwald had possessed the Elder Wand for something like twenty years. Which meant that he had remained undefeated and deserving of it for all these years. The Wand wasn’t known to choose weak masters.

Harry placed himself in battle stance, completely ignoring the other’s protestations, but watching their moves carefully from the corner of his eye. He had to focus on the very, very angry Grindelwald marching towards him.

Well, his robes didn’t quite billow as threateningly as Snape’s.

Harry heard the others pass the wards and the alarms started to ring in the citadel, screaming in the night, barely covering the ritual’s music.

Grindelwald wordlessly cast the first spell. A white light surged towards Harry, who dodged it by stepping aside. They were still too far for a single blow to surprise its target. The ground Harry had
been on a second before exploded.

Harry winced at the mental image of what that spell could have done to his body.

He didn’t, however, stop staring at Grindelwald.

He blocked the second spell with a powerful shield that sent it back to its owner. For the first time, Grindelwald had to step out of his course to avoid the blow.

“Harry, Three minutes!” shouted Krum behind him, trying to cover with her voice the roar of the unresting sea.

Unfortunately, Grindelwald heard her too. They lock gazes for a second, and Grindelwald attacked. A flash of red light, quickly followed by a blue one. Harry blocked them with a movement of his wand so quick that his arm seemed to disappear. Lights flashed around them, cutting, blowing, whistling. They fought as people who knew every step, every surprising change of the hand holding the wand, twirling, dancing almost. Harry’s first spell had made Grindelwald stumble under the blow, but he quickly caught on by overpowering his own shields.

Harry lifted his arm, catching the sparks of a burning curse and annihilating its energy with a metallic clank, while shamming a move for his next shield.

Harry never attacked really; his only goal was to attract the attention on him to allow the others to activate to portkey and to retreat - no, not retreat it was a strategic move to get out of here, nuance. He still had some pride to save. But the fight was starting to take its toll on him and he was panting.

Harry saw guards and Reapers appeared next to their master, but he made the sign for them not to attack.

Some were, however, too enthusiastic to obey and Harry began having to block spells from several places at the same time. Passing his shield onto his left hand, wandlessly blocking as best as he could, he raised his wand and hissed. The moist air mingled with the spray and the sea to form a tremendous snake made of furious water that opened his mouth, threatening to swallow the wizards.

Grindelwald jumped behind a towering dolmen, immediately casting a spell to reinforce the protective rock. Runes lit up along the megalithic stone as the Dark Lord tightened his hold on his
want, trying in vain to cast spells to protect his men.

The rumbling water column rushed over the wizards, sweeping a dozen of them in one swoop. Their cries were swallowed by the black water as the curtain of water fell again, and again, beating the earth furiously.

Grindelwald jumped onto his feet as soon as the wave passed him to go against the men on the other side, wand already raised and fury written across his face. His usually beautifully ordained hair was falling across his face, slightly trembling against his heavy breathing as if itself trembling with fury.

60s.

A cutting curse directed at his right arm distracted Harry and he didn’t see the next blow. The Cruciatus hit him directly in the chest and made him fly over a few meters.

50s.

All his nerves burst into flames as he trashed on the ground. His muscles spasmed under the pain shock and the air was knocked out of his lungs. He clenched his teeth painfully, refusing to scream, to give Grindelwald this pleasure. His hand compulsively gripped the grass around him in an unconscious attempt to ease off the pain, and all his body clamped…

40s

The curse was lifted and Harry immediately - if shakily- raised his wand. He had to protect the others, for f-

“Expelliarmus!”

Harry turned his head to see that Krum had passed the wards and was standing, wand in hand. Her spell didn’t even make Grindelwald’s wand twitch. Harry didn’t have to look to know it; the magical impulse had been quite weak and she was barely standing as it was. Everything seemed to slow down.
He wanted to shout at her to get down as he felt the magical rush behind his back…

“AVADA-”

To tell her that she shouldn’t have pressed the ward back, putting herself in a target position, that it was useful, that he could have taken down Grindelwald but they needed time …

“KEDAVRA!”

The disgusting syllable fell heavily from Grindelwald’s lips, cracking and twisting their foreign music into the land of the living. Green colored the ground around him, lightening the night with its horrid glow, and then Krum’s face as it got closer, already tainting her body before even ripping her soul away.

30s

Harry tore his eyes away and didn’t wait to hear the sick sound of Krum’s lifeless body falling on the ground to raise his wand.

“Sectumsepra!” he shouted.

The spell flew and broke Grindelwald’s wards like they were only paper. The shock sent the Dark Lord a few meters back.

Silence.

Long lacerations appeared on his throat, across his clavicle and chest, spraying blood everywhere. The man put his hand at his wound with a gasp, his face twisted with blinding pain and panic. Blood splashed out of his wound, tainting the blue cloak and falling on the soft grass.

But the Wand didn’t want to stop there. It had felt dark magic.

And oh - it was happy.
Grindelwald fell to his knees, searching for air, but Harry didn’t linger; as every Reaper present ran towards their master, he stood and sent the strongest stunner he had.

20s

Concentrating everything he had to keep his magic in check, Harry blindly threw a bunch of stunners behind him, pretty sure that the heavy sounds he was hearing behind him was Grindelwald’s men flying around under the blow of his spells.

Harry had lost the time count but he knew he didn’t have the time for the subtlety of mercy. His vision was starting to blur, but his body was acting on instinct and adrenaline. His legs were moving on their own.

The urgency of it all hit him and gave his body the strength of despair - they had to go, they had to- They had to go to avoid a battle they weren’t ready to fight.

Harry felt the wards wash over him like a curtain of thick rain. He brushed the feeling off and continued to go forward to the others. The Aurors had had the reflex to hide the civilians behind the tree line, to avoid getting caught in the crossfire and give them a better chance to run if things went south- well more south than they already were. Harry didn’t fool himself; he knew that without the portkey, only one or two - who didn’t have heavy wounds and had been caught later on- could run for their lives.

The portkey was shining and activating.

Graves sent him a panicked look, but the man couldn’t do anything but hold the portkey - what Harry could recognize as a big tooth or something alike- in one hand and a heavily wounded woman under the other arm.

Harry’s seeker reflexes kicked in and he jumped on the portkey.

He felt the familiar tug in his stomach before his body was compressed into a tube. He held as tight as he could.
He felt brutally on the ground, air once again kicked out of his lungs. He took a few seconds to catch his breath, staring at the sky.

Dawn was softly rising in the pale blue sky, painting the puffy clouds in pale pink, gold, and purple. The air was cold, but still warmer than Nurmengard, even if that wasn’t really difficult. Young rays of light warmed the damp skin of Harry’s cheeks and arms, drying the still fresh blood and helping him to control his own erratic breathing. The hints of salt and spray and spume had disappeared, replaced by concrete, oil, burning wood, air that peculiar scent of the fresh morning wind before a sunny day. He could hear the distant echoes of human activities, of engines and the frenetic construction of new buildings.

A city, Harry’s mind provided.

And a big one at that, if the cacophony was any indication.

“Are you ok?” asked Graves, kneeling beside him.

He wasn’t. The sticky feeling of the killing curse still lingered on his skin -

(a woman scream piercing the night and the soul ripped apart and it hurt so bad) -

- his back was probably a mess, he really didn’t want to see the damages, his ears were ringing from after shock and exhaustion-

(Dementors, towering over him and fear, so much fear in him)-

but more, so much more, his guilt was eating him alive because he should have done something to save Krum -

(She had to look at him and he had seen the last light of her soul) -

because her death was on him, and he shouldn’t have used a dark spell and hurt someone with it ( 
Draco, bleeding on the floor, so, so much blood) even Grindelwald, and -

“Yup. Don’t worry about me. I’ll just er… just sleep here a little and come back to reality later, ok? Yeah, good idea that.” Harry answered fatigued, his eyelids closing against his will. He was just very, very tired right now, and maybe if he could just stay here, sunbathing for a while…

… When he opened his eyes, he was surrounded by Aurors.

Harry may have swore a bit, but he didn’t move a finger. He was far too familiar with the shout-before-questions Aurors could use and was particularly wary as he didn’t know where he was. It seemed to be sort some of pattern since he had arrived here.

“Sir? Do you understand English?”

Ah- an English-speaking country, then. America, maybe? Well, he hoped for England but, well, everything but Australia and Nurmengard would be good. There were an equal number of beings actively trying to murder Harry in those two places.

A healer knelt beside him. He looked very professional and wore a cuirass at the level of the torso that indicated he was specialized in violent situations - euphemism for the battlefields. Harry shook his head in assent and then tilt it to the side curiously.

“We are going to transfer you to a hospital.” declared the Auror cautiously.

“Are you asking or telling me, Sir?” asked Harry with a small grin. He really didn’t like the healer’s attitude; if anything, his associations with the authorities pointed that Harry would be in trouble at some point.

But again, when was he not in trouble?

“I am telling you, Sir. Are you capable of walking?”

“I indeed acquired this competence around my second birthday.” cheekily answered Harry, earning himself a huff from the healer. He probed his own ribs to assess if he was indeed, able to sit up and
His hand returned red and sticky.

Ah. He *may* have slightly underestimated the state he was in.

Badly holding in a wince, he leaned on his elbows to get up. His back was itching like hell, but he ignored it in order to rise in the most dignified way possible. It didn’t work, but a few seconds later, he was on his feet and didn’t lurch that badly.

Perfectly fine.

The healer gave him a dubious look but made no move to try to approach him. Harry noticed that most of the survivors had already been taken to the hospital - or some other place.

In front of him, in the distance, he could finally see the high buildings that darted upward - not yet quite like his time, but with the same ambition, the same hubris. The golden light of dawn was deposited on the metal and concrete pits, piercing the gray fog of pollution and smoke stagnating in the slums of the city. An American city then - probably New York.

Harry had never seen New York, but he decided that he quite liked the 1926’s version - aesthetically of course.

He still remembered the name of Al Capone being spoken - and had thus a fair idea of what may be hidden behind the majestic constructions.

He was interrupted in his musing by an Auror, getting his wand out of his sleeve. More by reflex than anything, Harry drew his wand as well, forcing his body into a position suitable for a fight. He may have hissed under his breath, but if he did, the Auror didn’t notice.

For a second, he wondered where was Graves - but he must have gone a long time ago to the hospital.

Harry didn’t want to fight but he wasn’t quite in the mood for ministry- bullshit right now. He has managed to avoid Azkaban in his first life, it wouldn’t do to start this one in jail.
Surprised, the Auror raised both hands in the air as a sign of peace, eyes narrowed. Gently, Harry lowered his wand, whose call was much sweeter since jet lag had prematurely ended the night of the dead.

Thank Merlin for small mercies.

“I do not wish harm, Sir. But I need a wand to apparate us to the hospital.” He said professionally. Although his tone was reassuring, Harry did not fail to notice that the other Aurors around him had their hands on their wands, with more or less success in their attempt to be discreet.

Sighing, Harry lowered his wand.

“You ought to warn a man before raising you wand, dear. That could provoke some undesirable accident, you know!” he taunted with a pleasant smile.

The Auror - a woman in her thirties- smiled tightly. “I apologize,” she said, “please take my arm and we will arrive at the hospital, Sir.”

Harry nodded, and slide took her arm without hesitation. “I must warn you that I often get sick after apparition.” He taunted a second before feeling the usual tug in his navel.

When his feet met the ground once again, and to the Auror greatest dismay, he was indeed sick
After having profusely apologized to the auror for the mess he had done on his shoes, Harry was lead to the American Wizarding Hospital. It quite reminded him of St. Mungos, but less clean and a bit more barbaric. Well, of course, healing had evolved a lot in the meantime, but really, Harry found he had the same uneasiness here that he had in Numengard’s hospital wing.

Well, at least there wasn’t any actual tools in sight for the moment. The idea of those sharp surgeon tools of copper… things made him shudder.

His nervousness must have shown on his face because the Auror that was holding his right arm - to impede his movement or to steady him he didn’t know - shot him a curious look.

He was led - dragged really, he didn’t have the strength to walk anymore- into a small room, only occupied by a small bed with white sheets, a bed table, and two chairs - for visitors, probably. Luckily, the place was well-lit by the early rays of the sun, and warm. It was so different from the still lingering cold of Nurmengard that Harry almost felt at ease.

The feeling of near comfort came from the Auror that was keeping him at wand point and the immediate threat of doctors.

Not daring to rest, Harry only sat on the white bed for a few moments before a healer entered the room.

The healer fell into the room, followed by two nurses who immediately began to prepare… whatever they would need.
Harry stared at them placidly, fatigue falling on him all in one swoop. Without really paying attention to what the healer said to the Auror, he dropped adjacent to the wall at the end of the bed.

His eyelids were very, very heavy… He was so tired, and the pool of sunlight on the bed made him warm… comfortable, really. Moving from here would be a felony act against whatever god was in charge of good and comfy stuff…

He must have fallen asleep, because the next time he opened his eyes, the room was far lighter, and he wasn’t in his prisoner-patient uniform. Which, upon thought, was slightly disturbing. Harry tried not to dwell on that, and only check that all of the hallows were in hands-reach. The doctors had indeed folded his cape on the chair next to him, his wand was on the bed table and his ring still at his finger.

With a little sigh of relief, Harry let himself fall back on the soft mattress.

He shouldn’t have fallen asleep.

"I’m sorry for the wait, sir, but we’re overwhelmed with the Dragonpox pandemic. Half of the city is in quarantine!" He said, casting a few diagnostics spells. “Officer, I think your presence isn’t required here. Please, wait outside of the room.”

The Auror sneered, but still professionally silent, obeyed. Once the door clicked closed, the Healer looked at the result of his spells.

The resulting frown was very much like Poppy’s.

“Ok, Mister…?”

“Harry.” Answered the young man, praying that the doc would just let it go.

Well, he didn’t have that much luck.
The healer rose an eyebrow. “Don’t you have a last name?” he asked incredulously.

“None that would be safe to say out loud, I’m afraid, Sir.”

The healer sent him a no-nonsense look that strongly reminded Harry of McGonagall on her bad days and clicked his tongue. “We need to know your full name in order to check the medical records of your family, detect recessive illness and register you in the hospital’s files—”

Somehow, Harry suspected that the last reason was the real one…

“Potter.” He blurted

The healer looked up, half surprised, half annoyed, and wrote his name on the file. Harry sighed. He was already tired, and a painful tremor was growing in his belly.

Unfortunately, he knew the lasting effects of a Cruciatus far too much.

“Very well, Mr. Potter. Do you know what day it is?”

“I’d say …the 1st of November?”

“Indeed, Mr. Potter. Now, during your sleep, we treated as many wounds as we could. However, I need to know which curses were used on you to check for more damages that may have escaped our notice.”

Harry frowned a moment. The diagnostics spells must have been really under-developed at that time not to be able to get all the magical traces of his body. It occurred to him that, even without the help of the Hallows, he would surely be considered a magical genius at this time - by his knowledge only. He sure should be careful about that.

“A Cutting curse, on the back. It was wordless, so I’m not sure if there wasn’t a darker touch to it - but I doubt it. The biggest damage was the blood loss and the concussion that must have happened when I fell. Other than that, a Cruciatus … Oh, and I’ve been exposed to a Dementor in the last forty-eight hours.” He said.
This time, the healer looked at him in shock. Harry’s tone was professional - almost clinical. It was the tone of someone that had clearly passed too much time in hospital or had seen too many people in the hospital. Something like that.

“Are you familiar with our procedure, Mr. Potter?”

Harry shrugged. “‘Been there, done that. Life, y’know?”

The healer looked like he certainly didn’t know, but didn’t answer right away.

Well, it wasn’t like Harry could explain all of his story now, could he?

---

Harry wasn’t trying to sleep. He just wanted to close his eyes and ignore the twitches in his left hand, and the throbbing pain against his ribs.

At least his nerves hadn’t been irremediably touched. A few potions to regenerate the destroyed tissues, and in a few months, he wouldn’t have any more physical damage.

And it was a relief. Finding himself unable to walk normally earlier had panicked him for a while. No matter what he could do, the image of the drooling Longbottoms giving a small paper to their son in St. Mungo’s was carved in his memory. The idea the Grindelwald had wanted to do that to him, well…

It didn’t bode well for his peace of mind.

It wasn’t that it was Grindelwald, really. It was that unlike Tom, Bellatrix or even Barty, the man was sane. He hadn’t spent years in Azkaban, he wasn’t under the influence of a sociopath, he wasn’t born under Amortentia… No, he had done this with a perfect idea of the morals implications of the spell, of how wrong it was.
And he had done it all the same.

It was disheartening really. In Harry’s mind, it was like all he had done had only been in one big war, never stopping. How could it? The madness seem to keep on and on no matter what.

No. He couldn’t let himself fall into that. Or everything would be in vain.

Hope was his only weapon, after all.

Harry took a deep breath to try to ease the pain. Hope. Go back to England. Find Dumbledore, find baby tom. And Abelforth. Good old Abelforth, he would help too. In a few years, he might even meet baby McGonagall. And give her the strange look she had given him in another life, laughing alone to himself the irony of all of that. Oh god, and Slughorn! He was still alive too! Harry had never liked him but hey, when in Rome and all that.

And now, with a faint smile, Harry was trying to imagine all the people he could meet. His grandfather, surely- if his calculations were right, he had been in Riddle’s year.

Said Riddle who was probably causing havoc at the orphanage - Merlin, he really needed to go back to England as soon as possible. Before the Muggles start to starve him. Before they broke his hands before they call him the Devil. Before they suffocate him, forcing him to grow gnarled and crooked to win a drop of the sun. Before he killed the rabbit, before he tortured children, before he learned far too soon what the world was like. Before he loses all chance to trust - if not to love.

Tom was sick, and he needed help. Or he would make the world as sick as he was.

Harry’s train of thought stopped as a piercing pain shot back in his guts. Yeah, maybe being able to walk straight before doing anything else.

*Get yourself together, Harry!*

The harsh voice in his head sounded suspiciously like his old potion master, and he hoped he wasn’t haunted by Snape. Of all things, that would be hell. But Snape had never called him ‘Harry’, only Potter, and said with as much distaste as possible.
Damn the man, no matter how unborn he was now.

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“Mr. Graves.”

The President Picquery was standing in front of his bed, her arms crossed in front of her chest. She was wearing a casual white shirt, a black jacket and high-waisted pants - decidedly masculine and utterly muggle. Her platinum blonde hair was wrapped in a deep blue turban, beautifully contrasting with her tan skin - two sculpted curls framing her face, as always, a picture of eloquence and modernity.

“Mrs. President.” Graves saluted with a slight bow of the head.

The president fumbled in her pocket and took out a long cigarette. She put it in her mouth, pursed her lips and snapped her fingers at its extremity. A small flame appeared and in a sizzle, the end ignited and became only a red dot.

The healer that had introduced her in the room fidgeted. The President took a deep whiff.

“Ma-madam, we’re in a hospital, you can’t-”

Picquery shut him up with a dark glare, and blew a long cloud of grey smoke, her cigarette graciously held between two of her finger. She held the man’s eyes while doing so, seemingly bored to death.

“Oh- hum- I… I’ll… yes -”

The little man hurried out of the room under President Picquery's glare - Graves was very happy that it wasn’t directed towards him. His happiness only lasted a few seconds til the woman turned towards him. Her face softened somewhat - but with her, one was never really sure.

“You’re back,” she said.
“I am, Madam.”

Graves gulped at the witch’s heavy gaze on him. He suddenly felt like a little boy again. He hated when she was doing that- even if it was bringing him a bit of comfort.

It was like *home*.

Picquery sighed. “The healers said that you would be able to get out in a few days - but with assistance.”

“I know, Madame.”

“You will not be able to return to the field.”

A pause. Graves rose his eyes to meet Picquery’s. “I -” He took a shaky breath and tightened his jaw, “I know, Madame.”

She nodded in acknowledgment and took another whiff. The prickly smell of tobacco irritated Grave’s nose, but he didn’t even flinch.

“As you asked, Goldstein is going to replace you; you may have a word to say on the new cases.”

That made Graves smile - well, more a small quirk of the lips, but it was there nonetheless, and Picquery had seen it.

“Now, the Aurors are going to ask you how you escaped.” She said, her voice still even.

“You want to control what will be in the files.” He retorted softly.

She didn’t need to answer.
Graves knew how these things worked. He had done it for years- except that he usually was at the other side of the rope. He had been there before Picquery. He had supported her during her campaign - the first woman president of the M.A.C.U.S.A, the first indigenous descendent in the high administration. He had guaranteed her the support of the aurors, of the old guard.

He knew how quick things could degenerate - how every little thing could help Grindelwald. He knew there were a dozen of moles in the ministry- at the very least - and even more rats ready to help to sink the boat.

He took his left hand in his right one to hide the tremor that was agitating it.

No, he wouldn’t return to the field, he thought bitterly.

“How long did I disappear?” He asked. He was proud that his voice didn’t even shake a little.

“A month.”

A month.

A whole fucking month.

“Well, at least it was a bit shorter this time.” At least, this time you noticed wasn’t said.

She crushed her cigarette and sat slowly at the end of the bed, her attention solely fixed on him. The locked gaze a moment through the languid mist of grey smoke. She let her hand slide on the white sheets until it reached Graves. She waited for permission, and after an imperceptible nod of the wizard, she took his hand in her’s.

Her hand was soft and supple, comforting, with only the recognizable callousness made by years of using a wand.

He closed his eyes, letting his old friend comfort him, even for a moment.
“Indeed,” she whispered, and he heard the apology she had never really said when they had found him, dirty and battered, in a dark corner of the ministry.

“Once… Once they captured me- and before you ask, no, I don’t know who it was-, it was a long time before we arrived to Gr- to him. About one or two weeks I’d say, but I can’t be sure. I was mostly dosed.”

Merlin, he still had the lingering taste of Dreamless Sleep on his tongue.

Picquery didn’t press him to continue.

“They… they took me to Him. He wanted to know where was Flamel. I didn’t say a thing, I swear!”

His outburst only made her purse her lips, and squeeze his hand. Internally, he cringed at his own lack of control. He hated it, but his nerves were thin and he couldn’t help himself.

It was so pathetic.

“Then, one day, this- this boy appeared.”

“The one that arrived with you.” She said more than asked.

He nodded. “A strange fellow. I don’t know how he entered in the cells - nor where he came from. He told me he was going to get all of us out of here during Saiman, and then, just disappeared. He barely told me his name…”

He turned his head, unable to bear the pity he could see in Picquery’s eyes. Being saved by a boy.

“He said he had a kid in the hospital wing…”

Outside, the sun was high. He could see the long shadows of the buildings on the walls and covering
the busy streets. It was a beautiful day. Graves had never noted before how much the very sun was a blessing.

“Two days before Saiman, they got us out of our cells. Rogue dementors were attacking, and they forced us to sit outside to make a diversion…”

His palms were sweaty and he tried to pull them out of her hands self-consciously, but she only held him with a stronger grip, her gaze unwavering.

“I thought I was going to die.”

And maybe, it would have been for the best. Captured twice by the same man, what a pity. What a shame. Maybe, it would have been easier - to stop the pain. To be safe, for once.

“You didn’t.”

“I didn’t. He arrived, alone, from the fortress. It was indescribable.” He looked back at her. “So much power…” he whispered with- she couldn’t determine if it was awe or fear in his mind - but truly, he couldn’t either. Her back tensed and she squared her shoulders.

“He cut our chains. I think he wanted us to run, but he didn’t really talk much. There were hundreds and hundreds of dementors coming for us, you see? He made them all run off like some fucking frightened kids.”

He closed his eyes and let his head rest on the wall. “The kid fainted. But then, Gr- He came. Got out of his fortress all alone and carried the boy inside himself.”

“This is quite…”

“Out of character? I know. But he did it - I saw it myself. Didn’t even look at us - if his generals hadn’t followed him, I could have run away for all he cared. At Saiman, I thought the boy had lied- that… He had sent him to taunt me… but no. Harry came. He opened all the doors and got us out. We passed by the hospital wing but the- the kid was already dead.”
“The kid?”

“The one he had talked about earlier. Harry said that he may have been an obscurial…”

His gaze was lost now - staring at the wall somewhere behind her shoulder. She noticed even more how tired he looked, how his usually neat face was already showing the shadow of a beard.

“When we arrived in the hall, all the intelligentsia … they were asleep -or dead for all I know. Damn, ‘Phina, I think the boy poisoned them all!”

She let the name slip pass. She couldn’t really ask him to bother with things such as manners in his state. He could use her old nickname all he wanted if only he could just stop having this shadow in his eyes. He was putting on a brave face - but Grindelwald was known for his devastating Cruciatus and twisted imagination.

Numb, Graves described to her the rush to the gates, the fight with Grindelwald, the portkey. When it was over, he was exhausted. They both were.

“So this… Harry. Do you think he is with Grindelwald?”

Picquery was standing, back turned towards Graves, who had let himself go against the pillows, sitting more comfortably. He looked weak, and Merlin, he felt weak.

Turned as she was, she couldn’t see him flinch at the name.

“I don’t know. I… I think he’s a seer, Madame.”

He was proud to have regained a bit of self control. His voice almost had the same polite coolness he usually had at work.

She turned her head and raised a perfectly trimmed eyebrow.

“When we got out of the sells, he told me to be careful of Krum. To keep an eye on her.”
“Krum, as the Bulgarian Head Auror?”

He mutely nodded. “She died barely an hour later. I think… I think he knew it was going to happen. I think that’s why Grindelwald wanted him close.”

“I see.”

Graves observed silently the road stretching out from the building. He was very aware of all the implications of such a power. Of how much the boy was going to be considered as a weapon - to be used or destroyed, who knew?

He ignored the pang in his stomach at the thought. Ruling a country was rarely moral. Winning a war, even less.

Picquery finally turned towards him. “There is a certain young Auror that was dying to see you, Graves,” she said. Her face didn’t move an inch, but he could hear a smile in her voice.

She opened the door and let in a very obviously overwhelmed Tina Goldstein. She was clutching her little blue hat in shaking hands and her eyes were shining with unshed tears. Her hair was a bit longer than the last time he had seen her, but she really hadn’t changed a bit.

“Mr. Graves…” She whispered.

Picquery gave him a indulgent smile and silently went out of the room.

“Mr. Graves… I-I…”

Percival smiled at his protégé. He knew perfectly well what was passing in that little head of hers. He smiled, his first real smile since he had escaped, and opened his arms. She hesitated only a second before throwing herself in his embrace, holding onto him for dear life.

“Hush, child, hush. I’m ok, now.” He tried not to wince at the contact -it wouldn’t do to worry her
more than she already was.

“I-” She straightened up and looked for something in his eyes. “I thought this time he- he had killed you and- and-”

He smiled again - indulgently. After all, it was Tina Goldstein who had the determination to look for him the first time - even after his case was closed. It was her who had finally found him in the ministry - her who had single handedly dragged him to the hospital. Her who had taken upon herself to explain to him everything that had happened, that had given him the latest files - knowing pretty well that his work was his life and he needed it.

“And I’m alive, Miss Goldstein. Come on, you know that they would need much more than that to kill me.”

They both knew that he was bluffing, but didn’t act on it. There was no need to remind themselves how close Graves had passed from actually dying.

He winced as her grip grew stronger. “Oh, mhm, sorry,” she said, looking away again. It was a bad habit of hers - but he couldn't blame her. It was in her temper, that was all. At first, he had thought her weak. She was a woman - frail and hesitating, shy to a fault.

Then, he had seen her fight and learnt that he was an idiot. And then, he had seen how protective she was of her sister, very obviously harassed by Abernathy, and he had learned that his idiocy may have had greater consequences than what he first thought.

And now, she would be head Auror. A deep feeling of warm pride spread in his stomach, covering the guilt and the bitterness- melancholy that his time was passed and that he had to leave the place to the younger, brighter, ones.

Yes, that girl would go far.

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“What are you doing, young man? Get back in your bed!”
Harry turned his head abruptly from where he was contemplating New York. It was a really beautiful city - if you liked all the activity and the chaos. And it had been a long time since Harry could relax, if only a little.

“I’m just looking at the window, M’am. I couldn’t do it from my bed.”

She crossed her arms in front of her chest and strummed the ground with her feet. “Alright, alright, I’m going to bed.”

No matter what he said, five minutes later, after the nurse was out of the room, he took all of his belongings - he knew perfectly well that the Aurors would want to examine them at some point and it was out of the question, and was quietly trying and escape.

Well, not an escape, per se, more like an escapade. He was just too restless to sit in his bed - and despite the obvious tremor induced by the nerve damage, he felt physically quite well. He buried down the little voice that was screaming bullshit, and continued to walk along the corridors.

He'd check up on Graves too, if he found his room.

Harry was worried. After receiving the end of Grindelwald’s Cruciatus, he only could imagine what Graves had been through. Actually, he had a very good idea of what Graves had been through.

As discreet as a shadow, well, technically, as discreet as death, he wandered across the hospital, observing how everything was done here. It was strange, the difference with Numengard. He almost missed the quiet order of Nicolov’s Hospital Wing.

Here, it was some sort of joyous chaos that was cheering him up and giving him a headache. When he was sure he was far enough from his room, he got out of his cape and stretched. Yes, he really needed a little walk, he decided.

“I’m here to see Mister Graves.”

Harry turned to where the voice came from. A woman was standing in front of the counter, talking to an employee. She had a long blue cloak hand squeezed her own hands as if not knowing what to do with them.
“Are you family?” The employee asked suspiciously.

“College. I’m the new-”

“Madame the President!” Interrupted the employee, eyes as wide as a galleon.

Harry turned toward the place the employee was so shamelessly staring at to find himself next to an imposing and eloquent woman. She was taller than him by at least two head, and was holding herself as if she owned the place - which apparently wasn’t so far from the truth. The turban on her head looked like a crown, and gosh Harry didn’t want to anger that very regal woman.

Some strange long-buried sense of self-preservation or something. The four very-impressive Aurors around her clearly didn’t help.

“Goldstein, I remember telling you to wait before making a visit.” She said sternly, but one could find some sort of fondness in her voice.

The woman named Goldstein blushed and lowered her head in apparent shame. “I- I know, Madame, but-”

The President - and gosh Harry couldn’t believe that he was in front of the fucking president of the fucking United-States (and that she looked so much more capable than any minister of magic he had ever seen in his first lifetime), held up a hand to cut off Goldstein’s rumbling.

“I needed to talk to you about your post anyway. I will talk first to Graves, you can see him afterwards.” she said.

Goldstein held up her head and smiled brightly. “Thank you, Madame President.”

Harry walked to a pillar and hid again under his cloak. He had apparently found his ticket to Graves’s room.
And Gosh he was going to sneak up on the President.

He may have giggled a bit.
Hy guys!

First of all, thanks everybody for the kudos and kind comments. I'm so, so please that you enjoy this story! I'm currently drawing a few fanarts, that will be posted on my tumblr and my deviantart page (respectively Ladybraken and LadyZombiedraws). However, as my entrance exams are coming up, I might not be able to post much things for a while. If you have any question, I'll answer them here and on my tumblr account :)

I'll probably finish Regulus and post a new chapter of Black Waves in the next month, but it might be hard to work on this particular story (as it need a lot of research on the era, time-related clothing, music, behaviour and such).

I hope you will like this chapter! don't hesitate to comment :) 

A big thanks to my beta, adlertyperighter!

~LadyBraken

Chapter 9:

Harry didn’t know if spying on the President had been a curse or a blessing. A blessing, of course, one must always be prepared for what’s to come, and it did no wrong to know that the M.A.C.U.S.A wasn’t less shitty than the ministry of magic, and the president less manipulative than any politician - but also a curse, really a curse. To know that he still wasn’t safe.

That they still would try to use him.

Strangely, he didn’t feel angry. More like a vindictive sadness.

Because the man he had saved had given him up on a silver platter to what Graves knew was hell, and he knew it, Harry could see it written all over his face. He didn’t know what he had expected, really. Harry would have done the same in similar circumstances. Once upon a time, of course, and certainly not in favor of any ministry.

Still, he was disappointed.
He almost didn’t feel a pang of guilt when he interrupted the (very cute) hug Graves was giving to… Goldstein, was that it? Of course, almost being the key word here.

“Hey!” he said.

Immediately, Goldstein turned around, her hand on her wand. Well on where her wand was supposed to be as Harry currently was waving it in his left hand.

As if he would really surprise an armed Auror.

Her face became red with panic and anger. She rose and put herself in front of Graves, shielding him.

“Who are you?” She asked almost threateningly. He didn’t know if she was very brave or very desperate to threaten without a wand.

He looked at her curiously. She really didn’t look like much, small and thin with some sort of nervous tremor in all of her gestures, as if always ready to bolt away.

“Hi... I’m Harry!”

A loud sigh interrupted whatever Goldstein was about to say. “Do you do that to all the new people you meet?”

“Well, not quite. Only when I have to sneak out on powerful people to do so.” Harry answered. He straightened his back and completely got out of the cape.

“Goldstein.”

Graves looked much more tired than the last time Harry had seen him - probably the stress backlash. “This is the man that saved us. The one that helped us escape.”

Her eyes widened almost comically and her posture relaxed a little. Harry smiled.
“Since when are you here, Harry?” asked Graves faintly.

“Long enough.”

“Ah.”

There was an awkward silence. Harry knew and Graves knew he knew - at least the man had the decency to blush, if only slightly. Goldstein cleared her throat and made a few steps to hold her hand out to Harry.

“Tina Goldstein.” she said with a new confidence, “Auror.”

He shook her hand - her grip was quite firm. “Harry. Jobless,” he said with a smile.

She nodded, making her hair jump around her cheeks. “I- thank you. for saving Mr. Graves, and the others. Truly, we had … we had lost hope that they would come back.”

Harry nodded, he knew the feeling very well. Dark Lord doesn’t tend to capture people and let them go in one piece. He wanted to say that anyone would have done that, that she didn’t need to thank him, but he knew she wouldn’t accept it.

“You’re welcome,” he said softly.

“Mr, Graves!”

A young woman, all in bright joy and exuberance, entered the room. She quite looked like Miss Goldstein, except for her blond wavy hair and the general relaxed and colorful air she drew with her. She might have been a bit taller too, but it was quite hard to tell as she was leaning forward to plant a kiss on Mr. Grave’s cheek. This was immensely unsettling the poor man by doing so. She was wearing a big pink cloak, delicately styled, and a small hat of the same color.

Harry saw her blue eyes light up as she cooed over Mr. Graves like he was a five year old in her care and smirked at the definite blush that was spreading on the man’s cheeks.
“Don’t you worry, dear.” She said lightly, “No one will judge a small blush here!”

Mr. Graves grumbled something about the respect of authority and a proper attitude towards the opposite gender as the woman patted his hand, her smile unwavering.

Harry almost made a comment before he remembered. Of course, in the 20’s, people interacted differently… Did women even have the right to vote? He was fairly sure that black and indigenous people didn’t, he had learnt it at school when he was a child (it felt like another life - and, well, it had been). Surely he would give himself away if he tried to act differently right now.

He knew he still wasn’t trusted.

The blond woman turned towards him a looked at him strangely. It was only at this moment that he felt…

“You are quite a progressivist, Sir!” she noted.

He lowered his eyes immediately and rose his poor occlumency shields. “Don’t look into my mind, please, Miss.”

He had avoided being legilimensized by Grindelwald, it wouldn’t do to let anyone else enter into his head.

“Oh, I’m so sorry!” she cried, shaking her head, “I’m a natural. Sometimes, I just can’t stop it…”

A natural Legilimens? Harry’s curiosity was definitely pricked. He had, in his life, only met one, and Riddle surely hadn’t made the best use of his gift. It was quite rare, almost as much as his old Parselmouth, with the exception that it was even harder to trace, as the gift could declare itself at random. Quite peculiar that two of them would live in the same time-period…

But it was also very, very dangerous.
Harry rose his hand, determined to assume the best and prepare for the worse. “It’s ok,” he said, “just...try not to do it again.”

She nodded. “I’m Harry, by the way,” he said, holding out his hand.”

She looked at him like he had grown a second head, but finally took his hand and shook it. “Queenie. I’m Tina’s sister.” She said, nodding towards the other woman.

Harry heard a snort as he withdrew his hand. He sent an interrogating look towards Graves. “Do you often shake hands with women?” the Auror asked derisively.

It took a moment for Harry to put his finger on what he had done wrong. Well, he understood that he apparently shouldn’t have shaken Queenie’s hand, but why and what was the proper thing to do, he had no idea.

“Well, she’s not made of ice to break under a hand shake, Mr Graves.” He said, hoping that it would be enough to cover his slip. Graves still looked incredulous, but he could see Tina puffing her chest in pride and agreement.

Oh, well.

“Well, this is... Harry. The man that sa- brought us back, Mr. Graves.”

Her smile brightened, even if Harry wasn’t sure that it was possible. Did the woman ever stop smiling?

Well, he wasn’t going to complain, really. The world was dark enough not to spit on a genuine happiness, no matter how strange it was. Harry self-consciously passed his hand through his hair, messing it up, even more, and offering an awkward grin to the woman.

He did notice, however, how Tina hadn’t pronounced the word ‘saved’.

But there was more... pressing matters at hand.
“I’m sorry to disrupt your meeting with Miss Goldstein, I was wondering how you were?” he asked Mr Graves.

“As well as one can be in these circumstances, Harry.”

The young man nodded, recognizing the answer for the dismissal it was. He was used to it: most people that had gotten through such torture would or wallow in self-pity, or in guilt, but in both cases completely refuse to talk about it.

As much as he wanted to shake the man. To accuse the victim of withholding their reaction to their own trauma was not only counterproductive, but wholly outrageous and downright cruel.

“Well, I think I’ll—"

The door burst open. Before even thinking about it, Harry’s wand was in his hand, pointed towards the threat.

Two Aurors had entered the room, heavily panting, wands drawn and eyes panicked. They were young—about Harry’s age, maybe a bit older. Rookies. Harry knew that the legal age to enter into the Auror’s academy had lowered after each war. After Voldemort, people were accepted at fifteen…not that they had much chance to survive long enough to become full-trained Aurors.

But no war had happened in the wizarding world in at least two centuries, and none of them were as traumatizing as the ones Harry had lived through. Thus, the two Aurors, around twenty five, were completely panicked and probably in front of the first task they had to achieve.

“We’re sorry, Sir, but the wizard escaped!” bellowed on of them.

Immediately assessing the situation, Graves held up a hand. “Calm down. Speak clearly. Which wizard?”

“The- tha one from Numengard! He wasn’t in his rooms! I heard he is very powerful, Sir, we came to warn you!”
Harry had to bite his lower lip not to burst out laughing. Graves threw him a no-nonsense look.

“I’m afraid you’re mistaken, MacGreen.” said Graves. The Auror followed his gaze and his eyes became round like galleons. Harry waved his hand and smiled innocently, watching with unrestrained amusement as the Aurors didn’t know if they should raise their wand at him or not.

But Harry’s amusement faded as he noticed the room was getting crowded, and all the exits blocked. His breathing accelerated - and he only listened distractedly as Graves told the Aurors to calm down once again, to lower their wands (for Merlin’s sake!). He concentrated on the panic slowly rising in him trying to crush it at the back of his mind. He fought in himself to ignore the pang in his chest and the urging to open the window, to hide under his cape, to flee.

It had been a long time since he had felt like this. Harry reassured himself it was probably his nerves reacting to the aftermath of all the Grindelwald’s thing.

Trying to distract himself, he accidentally caught Queenie’s eyes. Her face paled slightly, and she turned toward the Aurors, who were still arguing with Graves and Tina about Harry. They were explaining that their orders were to send him into custody for interrogation as soon as he was well enough to be able to get out of the hospital.

Queenie whispered something in her sister’s ears, and, after a worried look towards him, Tina crossed her arms over her chest. “I am the Head Auror, by the President Pickety’s orders.” she said, looking more sure of herself when it was about work, and almost unconsciously adopting Grave’s tone, “You will obey me if you wish one day to be promoted to something more interesting than broom-regulation.”

The threat seemed to have its effect, as the two men - boys, really, hurried out of the room, even if Harry knew it was to report to their superior about his whereabouts. It meant that he didn’t have much time left before being sent to the ministry - and frankly he was considering making an escape before that.

He really, really hated the ministries stuff. In general. He had been put on trial twice, attacked at least five times and generally dragged in the mud by this type of institution; and he had good reasons to think that things weren’t better a century earlier.

He wondered if the US had a Azkaban-like jail, and thinking about it, they very certainly did. He remembered seeing a movie on this - people escaping from an prison on an island, somewhere in the United-States. Well, he had only seen half of the movie, and even, only a part of the screen, hidden in his cupboard and peering shyly through the half-closed door. But it was a muggle thing, wasn’t it?
He should have done more research.

That particular thought sounded like Hermione, and a pang of sadness spread in his chest.

*It’s our last chance, Harry.*

He pinched his lips and concentrated to throw back and crush the wave of painful memories that was threatening to overthrow him.

“I’m glad you’re well, Mr. Graves.” Harry said finally, a bit awkwardly.

He couldn’t really feel happy about it, after all, three people had died for this, and it was his fault… Graves seemed to have caught something on his face because, after a moment, he said: “Krum was a good fighter and an honourable woman. She had worked all her life against Dark Wizards, and half of it against Grindelwald. She would have hated herself not to die on her two feet, in battle, to help an innocent.” His voice was firm, probably more so than his beliefs. “Don’t beat yourself over her death. Honour her by continuing your own fight.”

Harry smiled bitterly. “There is no way to honour the dead, Sir. Only to help the living.”

For some reason, the three others looked quite gobsmacked, but he didn’t have much time to wonder about it as the Aurors returned in force to the room, earning themselves a menacing grunt from Graves.

“I’m sorry, but President Piketty asked for him to be taken to the M.A.C.U.S.A. They want to ask him questions.”

“And are the docs ok with this?” asked Tina.

The two men looked at each other, then at Goldstein. Harry sighed: it was very clear that he couldn’t avoid it without making an out-law of himself, and considering why he was here, it clearly wasn’t a good idea.
It wasn’t like Harry had ever listened to whatever the doctors, nurses, healers of every sort told him.

“I’m fine, Miss Goldstein. I’ll go.” He turned to the Aurors with a raised eyebrow “Would you be so kind to find me proper clothes? I don’t think your president really wants to see me in pajamas.”

The Aurors had the decency to blush and hurry outside to find him proper clothing.

After a last glance towards Graves, who looked like quite put out by the situation, Harry followed the Aurors out of the hospital room.

They didn’t let Harry return to his room, but allowed him to go to the bathroom to change. Harry would have chuckled at their poor attempts to keep him captive - he had had at least three opening to escape between Grave’s rooms and the bathrooms alone- if he hadn’t been wincing at his new and not so new wounds.

His back was burning, and he really didn’t want to see the wound. At least the healers had made a good bandaging on it, as far as he could tell. It was more than he usually asked for.

He would go to the M.A.C.U.S.A. He had information on the organization that would one day become one of the most dangerous political movement in the wizarding world; he couldn’t really keep it all for himself.

Saving people and whatnot.

When Harry arrived at the hospital’s entrance, he was surrounded by the two Aurors. Harry was then joined by the two Miss Goldstein's. Tina was wearing a big blue coat with a high collar that gave her a more intimidating posture than before. Her eyes scrutinized him.

“I’ve signed the papers to get you out of here. We’ll come with you,” Tina said. She held a bottle of a too familiar red potion. “For the nerves, if you still have tremors.” She indicated, maybe a bit deflated.

Maybe being cursed with the Cruciatus wasn’t usual in this time?
Apparently not, as everybody around him had paled slightly. Harry had to remind himself that they hadn’t passed through three wizarding wars like he had (even if the first one had been quite short for him).

Harry nodded thankfully and took the flask. He sniffed it and passed his hand above the lip, checking for poisons or curses, ignoring the shocked look of everyone around him (constant vigilance, of course). He gulped part of the potion and winced. Ah, yes, this recipe hadn’t been improved by Voldemort, and later Snape. Truly, the taste was atrocious, and he had a fair idea that the results would be limited.

As long as he could run and hold his wand, he would be fine.

Harry sealed the potion wandlessly and put it in his pocket. He scoffed awkwardly at the way everyone was staring at him. “Shall we go?” he asked softly, but his voice was firm and commanding.

Tina was startled out of her thoughts and nodded, but her sister was frowning. Harry really hoped that Queenie wouldn’t go into his head and see things that she shouldn’t. It could be dangerous for her, for everyone, and even for Harry.

He didn’t have the time to ponder too much on this as everything about New York’s streets assaulted his senses. People walking all around with Bowlers, Derbies and Fedoras hats and long cloaks. Shining cars that looked far more beautiful than the ones Harry knew, but more dangerous as well, spitting black smoke and encompassing the street with the smell of gasoline. The shattered bright light reflecting on the windows made the greyish streets come to life, but set Harry’s nerves on edge.

“Can we apparate?” He asked, unsure that he could manage to walk in the open in the city without an accident.

“We will, as soon as we get out of the wards. We had to put them in for the President’s visit,” explained Tina while conducting them towards a dark alley - away from sight.

“Don’t worry, muggles don’t bite!” whispered Queenie conspiratorially.

Harry couldn’t help but to look at her like she had grown another head. She frowned but didn’t add anything.
Weren’t people supposed to hate muggles at this time? Of course, Harry knew that Dumbledore was pro-muggle, and with him a certain part of his friends and students, but he had read that the U.S practiced muggle segregation with as much enthusiasm than Muggles did with black people at the same time.

Maybe Queenie had deduced that his ‘progressiv’ ideas on women meant that he would think the same about muggles. Maybe she was part of the ‘Happy Few’ that were already all for a weakening of the Status of Secrecy but without Grindelwald’s extremism. Those who really liked muggles as fellow humans.

It was startling to see that this type of thinking still had the chance to exist - and if everything went well, would do so for many, many years. No one would have to worry about guns, bombs and witch hunts.

Tina grabbed his arm, preparing to apparate. “I must warn you I can get quite sick,” said Harry, feeling like the previous shocks of the last few days would do nothing to soften his landing.

She didn’t have the time to answer before there was the familiar tugging in his navel, sending him into a compressing tube until he landed, back against the ground, at his destination.

And it was *grandiose*.

Harry hated it on sight.

It wasn’t the chaos of Numengard -full of life- where everything had been done by the people, with enthusiasm and ingenuity. Where everything had a meaning, where colorful clothes had been left to float on the wind to amuse the children.

No. The place was cold and business-like. The floor was made in dark-grey stones, lightened only by the gigantic windows with golden panels. The stairs were made more to impose than to be useful: high and large, they led to a central platform where the elevators were situated.

Old house-elves were serving the wizards like… slaves, really, cleaning their shoes and such. Harry pinched his lips, reminding himself that the S.P.E.W laws weren’t even imagined yet. At least, they didn’t look like they were beaten or abused - if anything, the wizards tended to ignore them, even if they were right in front of them.
Harry heard a big tic and lifted his eyes to the ceiling. What he had a first thought being a simple clock was actually an enormous golden magical clock, each of the five faces indicating many things; such as the weather, the hour, the number of people inside (a very reckless information to give; what if someone attacked the ministry?), or the well-being of the Status of Secrecy.

Harry didn’t have the time to further his scrutiny as Tina grabbed his forearm and lead him onto the platform.

Many witches and wizards were walking like they had no time for the rest of the world all around them, nose up and hands full of papers. A real little army of Percy Weasley. Harry noticed with a start that none of them were wearing traditional wizard robes. Their clothes were following the muggle fashion of the time, with only a few modifications here and there, but genuinely the same.

Everyone was looking at him, or was it, Tina? oddly, but Harry had become a master at ignoring looks and whispers in the corridors. Considering how the young woman was flushed, she wasn’t as good at it as he was.

They passed a black statue of a young girl holding her arms towards a circle of other women. Her expression was happy, peaceful. It was a strange sight, this statue in the middle of all the metallic refinement of the hall, completely black as if made of carbon, in the middle of the business-like wizards.

“It’s in commemoration of Salem,” explained one of the Aurors, following Harry’s gaze, “It’s very important, around here.”

“I can imagine,” said Harry in the most neutral tone he could.

They had stopped making statues, in his time. They had destroyed the old ones too, useless reminders of a glory that once was.

Harry was almost dragged to one of the elevators.

A gobelin was waiting in the elevator. He took a good look at them and activated his lever without ever asking a question. Harry felt the small tug as the elevator started to go down far, far too quickly. A small smile graced his face, but it was gone as soon as the doors opened the underground Auror office.
Harry would have recognized it immediately, even without the goblin's announcement. It just reeked of Aurors, from the spartan-but-chaotic setting, the urgent notes accumulating on the desks in piles, turning into figures and fighting each other to death to decide which would be read first. To the blazed faces of the poor blokes doomed to paperwork when they were made for the field. The friendly smiles and leery eyes.

His cape florating behind him in a silvery glint of what appeared to only be a casual, if old, pattern, his wand safely hidden against his wrist, his ring warmly tight around his finger, Harry walked passed the Aurors with assurance.

He didn’t think himself graceful by any means nor was his stature imposing. But his back was straight, his chin held not with pride, but with assurance, his hands safely folded like he had no care about where he was.

Queenie took off into one of the closed offices, with a big smile and a flourish of her pink coat.

“It was a pleasure to meet you, Harry.” She said politely, before kissing her sister’s cheek.

“Your wand, please.” Demanded one of the Aurors, holding his palm open expectantly. Harry didn’t make a move, but his back tensed and his mind unconsciously started to register every way out of the place. He held the man’s gaze, assessing him.

He was rescued by Tina, who held up her hand in a peaceful gesture. “He isn’t accused of anything yet. We have no right to take his wand.”

Harry breathed in with relief. After the Grindelwald’s episode, he really wasn’t comfortable with the idea of giving up the Elder Wand to anyone. The man probably had spies in the ministry.

Harry was taken to a room which, although everything had been done to keep him from running away, was obviously a question room. Harry did not struggle and sat quietly on the chair that was indicated to him. He had the feeling that it was going to be very, very long session.

Miss Goldstein sat in front of him, eying him strangely.

Tina waved her wand and a long golden quill shot up above a parchment, not unlike the one Rita Skeeter used during her interviews. She opened a small file with, surely, all the information they had
“I am Porpentina Goldstein, head Auror, and this is Mr. Ravier, Unspeakable. This interview takes place the third of November 1928.” She said formally, nodding towards the light haired man behind her. Really, what was that name, Porpentina? No wonder she was called ‘Tina’ by everyone! Apparently, American had even a worse taste in names than English.

Then, he remembered that his home was called Hogwarts, and all traces of mockery faded. He nodded politely towards the unspeakable for good measure.

“And you are…?”

“Harry,” answered Harry.

“Any last name?”

Harry thought for a moment, but there was no way he could escape the last name part inside the ministry. “Potter.”

“Any link to the pureblood family?”

“Probably.” he shrugged.

He could feel she was starting to tense to his elusive answers, but really, he didn’t have much more to say. He threw her an apologetic look, but her glare didn’t lighten.

“Did you help the fifteen prisoners to escape Nurmengard on the night of Samhain?”

“Fourteen.”

She look up from her file expectantly. “Mrs. Krum died on the way,” Harry said.

He could feel the guilt wash over him again, but he ignored it. He knew it would be returning to him
in his sleep with a vengeance, but he couldn’t let himself be distracted right now. Tina nodded, lips pinched, and went back to her file.

“How old are you?”

Harry pressed his hand at the back of his head, thinking. How old was he indeed? Even without talking about the time-travel problem, he really, really wasn’t sure. He hadn’t kept a calendar during the last war, and Dark Magic tended to mess with the climate, making it impossible to recognize one season from the other with certainty.

“I’d say around twenty…”

Her eyes shot up, widening slightly.

He felt like a bad student again, not being able to explain what was a bezoar. Who cared how old he was? He was clearly of age, so no legal problem.

“You’re… not sure. Of your age.”

“No.”

“You don’t look above seventeen…”

“Nah, I’m twenty- something. I’m sure of that.”

This was very embarrassing. Tina looked at him, obviously searching for any trace of a lie, and then returned to the file with a frown.

“Your knowledge about yourself is quite… lacking, Mr. Potter. Can I guess that you don’t know where you are from either?”

Harry grinned to hide his concern. Could he say that he was from England? Surely it would be more difficult to come up with a good origin story, as the English ministry probably had informations on
every wizard being born on its land - even more during the schooling.

His silence was apparently all she needed. With a wave of her hand, the quill scratched something on the parchment. The unspeakable gaze, however, became quite unnerving.

Harry was sure there was no way for someone to find out about when he came from - this type of time-travel had been invented by his friends. From what he remembered, even the hourglasses and time-turner had only been invented somewhere between the end of the First Wizarding War and the beginning of the Second ( Why was Grindelwald’s war not called the First Wizarding War he had never understood, but his dates were right, he was sure of it).

So, theoretically speaking, he was safe.

“What were you doing at Nurmengard, Mister Potter?” She asked finally.

And that was the true question. The one they all been asking themselves, even Harry. He could see in Tina's eyes that she was still unconvinced that he wasn’t a threat- no matter her earlier peace offering.

“That’s a pretty long story, Ma’am.” He said with a grin.

“I have all the time in the world.” She said sternly.

And Harry knew there was no way to get out of this.
Hy!!

I am finally able to post a new chapter. I am sorry for the delays, but I had a lots of exams this past month and wasn't able to write. I have a few things to say:
1) I have finally finished the whole plot, including the paring. I'd like to thank you all for your suggestions!
2) I want to thanks everyone who commented. I didn't have the time to reply, unfortunatly, but do not fear, I will! Just know that I read them all and that I am very please that so many people like that story! also thanks to all the bookmarks/ kudos :)

Warning for this chapter: PTSD

I think that's it! Thanks to my beta, adlertypwriter as usual :)

~LadyBraken

He stayed silent for a long moment, assessing his possibilities. What could he say? He really had no official reason to stay in Numengrad - but ‘ I was just looking around’ didn’t sound like a good excuse to be in a proto-dictatorial possibly genocidal fortress.

Well, he had never been good at lying.

Harry took a deep breath. “I met Grindelwald by pure chance, in the Black Forest.” He started. “Well, pure chance may not be exactly true. He told me that he had Seen something here he was looking for since a long time. I, for one, was completely lost.”

Harry stopped. The woman was making such an expression. That didn’t bode well for the credulity she should have had about his story. Well, it was the truth . So, Harry continued, changing and censoring only a few parts of his story, with the casual detachment he had learned while making war reports in his previous life.

And wasn’t it odd to think about his previous life .

He saw her raise an eyebrow once or twice when a too modern expression slipped - but he could easily pass it on a bad translation of another, more used, language.
Or another proof of his weirdness, he didn’t really know.

But if the woman slowly opened her mouth in disbelief, the man behind her stayed still as stone. Harry’s bad feeling was lingering. The man was too cold about it all - as if he already had heard at least a part of the story. A vein had appeared on his forehead when Harry had talked about that time he had hit Grindelwald, and his fist had closed slightly squeezing and bulging his forearm.

Grindelwald’s men weren’t Death Eaters, but some behaviour didn’t lie. If not a sworn oath towards the Dark Lords, the man at least sympathized with his ideas, that was pretty clear. Harry would ask himself how nobody had noticed this before - but he knew how hard it could be to see the betrayal right under one’s nose, especially in a bureaucracy as heavy and important as a ministry.

From the outside, of course, it was always a bit ridiculous.

“So, you're telling me that you stayed almost three weeks in Nurmengard by… chance?”

Really, Miss Goldstein was giving some very McGonagall vibes right now.

“I don’t really believe in… chance, Ma’am. But it was completely unintentional, that’s for sure.”

She pinched her lips.

----

Harry was sitting on his prison bench. Figure the first thing they would do was to lock him up. They couldn’t really trust him - but hell, he had made it possible for most of Numengard’s prisoners to escape (the ones that were important, apparently), they could at least have give him a pillow to sleep on. Or given him shackles that were a little less tight.

Harry sighed, rubbing his neck. The chain linked to the magical cuffs that held him back made a small metallic sound. He could still feel the after effect of Grindelwald’s Cruciatus. It hadn’t been as powerful as Voldemort’s used to (will?) be, but of all the Unforgivables, Harry had always been more sensitive to the Cruciatus. Obviously.
He was forced to notice that the prisons of the American’s ministry were far more comfortable than any other in which he had had the displeasure to reside. He wasn’t worried. He could escape from here too, after all, and quite easily. Probably.

He just really didn’t want to have an entire ministry on his back.

Said back that was killing him right now.

He groaned.

But his eyelids were heavy, and he was tired.

_She was laying there, on the dirt, on the floor. Naked, her skin so white it shone…_

He didn’t want to fall asleep. Harry knew what was waiting for him in his dream.

_Untouched, perfect, if not for the small, cut on her side, from where was dripping blood, if not for the blue marks on her wrists, if not for the complete stillness, the whiteness of her stare._

He fought in vain, fear choking him as his heart beat slower, tiredness forcing him into sleep.

_She didn’t move, nothing moved. And then, a crack. A sickening crack as her limbs shuddered on the floor. Her ribs broke and crumbled under her skin, creating shapes and unnatural angles. Her spine twisted; the noise grew stronger._

_Something was growing inside, pushing against the bones, stretching the skin to its limit until it tear the flesh. It grew in her wound, it spurted in her mouth, distending her jaw, cracking it with a sickening noise, until the stem broke in half, revealing it’s internal silkyness._

_A petal, two, then a flower would spread and bloom, and another, and another…_
Portions of pulpits would have fallen to the ground with humming noise, abandoned by the body that was transforming itself. They would have revealed a white grumbling that was spreading as the body lost its natural color - its human color. He was becoming less, more and more. He would become nothing.

Pretty… Pretty, yes? Would say the voice.

No.

He wanted to scream, to shout that it wasn’t pretty, that it had to stop, please. But there was no use. Some things couldn’t be stopped.

“Hello, Sir.”

Harry’s eyes snapped open.

Ravier. Of course, he would come now. The man may have been an Unspeakable, but it didn’t make him a good spy. He had been too angry, already in the interrogation room.

Harry did his best not to move despite the chill, despite the ice he could still feel in his bones.

“Hello, there. Revier, is that it?”

The man smiled crookedly - well, he tried to. He mostly looked like he was constipated. The man pointed his wand at Harry - 10 inches, light wood, probably hornbeam, he noted distractedly - his hand steady, but his wrist too tense for proper use in a fight.

The man snarled. “Ravier, actually. Not that someone like you would remember the name of someone like me.”

Good. Play for time. Hopefully, an Auror would come soon enough.

“I don’t really know what you’re talking about, Sir.”
The beauty of it was that he really didn’t know. The man clearly had made an assumption on him based on whatever information Grindelwald’s people - or the M.A.C.U.S.A. - had lent to him. Which meant that it was at best probably wrong, at worst clearly dangerous.

But at least it allowed Harry to stall for a while.

The man had let the door open.

“As if you didn’t know!” he sneered.

_He really didn’t._

“As if you weren’t one of those snobbish pureblood, thinking your above everyone else! As if-”

Harry threw himself against the man, knocking the air out of his lungs with a _woof_. He would have managed to get out of the room if the shackles hadn’t suddenly held him back. They both fell onto the ground.

Harry winced as he tried to get back on his feet. He saw that Ravier’s wand was still tightly held in his hand.

_“Accio Elder Wand.”_ He grumbled when he had managed to get on his knees.

He could clearly feel the pull, but his wand didn’t come. The idiots must have locked it somewhere. Unfortunately for him, Ravier was back on his feet, his face red in anger, and a very present wand pointed at Harry’s face.

He should have went for that wand instead.

Harry raised his eyes to meet his aggressor’s, glaring like there was no tomorrow. Adrenalin was coursing through his veins, but he remained steady, pondering on his possibilities. There was many ways for Harry to get out of this situation, but he didn’t want to go as far as most of them needed him
He had seen worse, really.

He got up to his feet, ready to jump again if need be. Ravier seemed very pissed off, an angry red flaming his neck and his cheeks. He shouted a *Stupefy* that Harry dodged easily. The spell crashed against the wall behind him - the aim was slightly off, and the spell in itself not really powerful.

Ravier was probably more counting on the fact that Harry was chained than on his own power.

Harry saw something move at the corner of his eye and stilled.

“Not only are you a coward to attack someone trapped, but you apparently can’t even do that properly!” Harry taunted, hoping that the man would be too angry to notice whomever was tip-toeing behind him.

Ravier sputtered and held his wand higher. He opened his mouth, but no sound came out. His face locked in surprise, he fell on his knees, before landing completely on the ground in a ridiculous position, face first and bum in the air.

Behind the fallen Ravier was standing a man that would have been tall if his back wasn’t so bent, with soft light brown curls, almost copper, and a long blue coat. The man barely met Harry’s eyes, before stubbornly looking at the ground, half hidden behind the small curls of his hair, his face slightly tilted, as if to compensate his lack of vision by paying greater attention to what he heard.

His wand had disappeared in his sleeve as quickly as it had appeared. Harry had barely the time to see a flash of soft green- a leaf?

Curious.

“Harry!”

Harry was shocked out in his observation, and into the heavy feeling of awkwardness as no one talked, by a limping Mr. Graves. The ex-Auror was now well-groomed, and cleanly shaven Heavy
black circles were obvious under his eyes. He walked with purpose - the stance of a man used to command and even managed to reduce his limping to something dignified.

Almost.

“What are you doing here?” asked Harry, a bit a lost with the situation, and a bit weary.

Not that he was complaining. It’s not every day that complete strangers came to rescue you; but in Harry's experience, these strangers tended to ask something from you afterwards.

“We’re getting you out of here.” Graves walked until he was close enough to be heard while whispering, and leaned on the wall. He pointed at the other man with a small tilt of his head, “This is Newton Scamander. He’s a Magicoozoologist, but tends to break into places once in a while.”

Harry looked at the man for a second. “Are you comfortable with hand-shaking?” He asked. Scamander rose his eyes in surprise for about a second, before lowering them again.

‘I would prefer not to, Sir.” He said, with a small smile gracing his lips.

“It’s quite alright, and call me Harry.”

“Call me Newt, then.”

His accent - English! Harry didn’t think he would ever had felt so content to find a compatriot, but after Germany and the U.S, the sound of proper English almost made him swoon.

“That’s all very well and good, but we really need to get out of here.”

There was noise of a small explosion, and a second later, the Wand was in Harry’s hand. He grinned at the wide eyes the two other threw at him. “She’s a bit capricious. You’ll get used to it.” He said, twirling his wand in his hand. How better he felt when She was there, where She belonged, in his hand… “Well, no time like the present. Shall we go?”
“We need to put a desillusionate charm on you before… see I would, but, my case has extension
charms and I would carry you out but unfortunately, my case doesn’t work anymore around here.”

“Oh, there’s no need, don’t worry.” Assured Harry.

He covered himself with his Cloak and disappeared entirely from their sight.

He ignored their shocked looks and started moving. "I'll stay behind Graves here, so no one will
notice."

Graves nodded, muttering something about obvious madness. Newt only grinned and took his place.
"You seem to be prepared for everything," he whispered.

"Not everything I'm afraid, or I wouldn't be in this situation."

Newt grunted noncommittally as they ascended the first stairs.

Harry had to use all of his stealth talents not to get noticed. He had to follow Graves's step, which, he
understood now, wasn't that much of a good idea considering that the man was *limping*.

But he couldn't follow Newt; not only because he didn't know the man and thus didn't trust him
much on principle, but also because the poor man had so little presence that people kept bumping
him in the corridors, or brushing his shoulders as they passed. So Harry was doomed to observed
Graves's leg and count in his head to follow the limping pattern.

Harry was so focused concentrated on Graves that he almost missed how lost he was here. Not only
in these times the style and ways of casting were different, but even the *magic* had changed,
surprisingly. The spells pronunciation was different, and most of them seemed weaker. They were
too complex for the results they were supposed to have. Not only that, but the Americans seemed to
have adopted a Muggle- like sense of fashion. As far as Harry had seen, the only difference was that
wizards still favoured longer clothes to billow around them dramatically and lighter choices of colors.
At some point, Harry even wondered if these people still had a Status of Secrecy considering how
close of a muggle-like style and behaviour they were showing.

Then, remembering his teachers always in traditional wizarding robes at Hogwarts, he thought it
might just be an American thing.
Which was, thinking about it, even stranger.

Suddenly, a lot of things he knew about the future U.S.A made a lot more sense to him. Only wizards could have invented Monster Trucks.

It was almost too easy.

They passed a few people who had the bad idea to congratulate a very tense and moody Graves for his remission. All of it was really awkward, especially for those who obviously knew about the real causes of his ‘retirement’.

In fact, it was made even easier when most of the Aurors were called away, something about a problem in the obliviation system between the blocks seven and ten. This followed by the most Americans slurs Harry had ever heard and a lot of strong young people running towards the exit.

Harry awed at the ingenuity the M.A.C.U.S.A had shown at length; to the contrary of the English Auror’s Office, the American one was placed in such a way that the only way to go out of the cells was to pass in front of them, and yet when the Aurors needed to get out quickly, they could avoid any other office. The corridors were almost exclusively for them. To beat it all, the similarities between the wizards and muggle fashion allowed the Aurors to get out without getting changed and immediately blend in with the crowd of the city.

Harry grinned. In England, he had had to wait for the Status War for the ministry to start using officially these methods, and only thanks to the DA’s constant influence.

In the whole escape, all they had to do was to break a few series of wards, to go around those that couldn’t be safely put down and to act like nothing was wrong. Graves was unsurprisingly good at that; after all, Harry had seen first hand how Aurors tended to turn into criminal masterminds in order to prevail the Healers or their superiors restrictions.

They finally had to pass through the main entrance. Graves wasn’t accredited to apparate out of the ministry like the Aurors were, and if he toyed even slightly with the law considering his previous position as head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, doing so would be suspect.

And Harry had the distinct impression that Graves wasn’t the type of person to enjoy breaking the law, no matter the situation.
The House elf sent a suspicious look at Graves and Newt but closed the elevator’ door diligently.

Harry crouched to put himself at the elf’s eye level and pulled down his cloak, revealing his face.

“Hello there, good Sir.” He said, ignoring the noise of distress Newt made, and the way Graves was looking at him like he was pondering on the good of murder in this particular case.

The elf answered after a moment, obviously not used to being addressed in such a way. He looked at Harry with weariness, narrowing his globulous eyes at the wizard.

“I am no Sir, Sir. I’m but a house elf.”

It was really strange how the little creature was managing to snarl and look self-deprecating at the same time. He was also a bit taller than the elves Harry was used to- and properly dressed. American elves were as strange as Americans.

“True, you’re an elf,” his said conspiratorially, “A wizard’ slave. But, see, muggles consider Black People as slaves, in this very country. Yet here, a black woman is President of the M.A.C.U.S.A. You’ll find that what people deem worthy of being human differ grandly depending on the point of view.”

“You are a strange Wizard, Sir.”

“I am, but wizards are often stupid.”

The elf snorted but kept his eyes on the elevator's door. Harry had the distinct impression that the elevator was moving more slowly than it ought.

“Hey, friend, wanna help us?” Harry asked lightly, “There is a man following us. I think we took him out, but one can never be too careful. He’s one of Grindelwald’s… a traitor, you see?”

Harry stubbornly ignored the stares that he felt on his neck, and concentrated only on the elf.
“I’m not asking you to put yourself in danger, of course. But...Will you slow him? Make him do little
tours of that pretty elevator of yours.”

The elf didn’t look at him. He gave a little nod at the wall.

“Thank you.” whispered Harry before going back under his cloak.

The elevator finally stopped after a sharp ring. The doors opened on the Hall, where the sun shone
through the immense windows and freedom was only a few meters away.

“Give them hell, Sir,” said the elf.

As they stepped out, Harry wondered about the eventual success of the S.A.L.E in America. He
wondered too when exactly would Graves burst. He was very clearly boiling with questions, poor
man.

Harry felt a pang of guilt - Graves shouldn’t have had to put everything at risk like that. It wasn’t
worth it - he wasn’t worth it. He wished he could have stopped the Director - but he knew fairly well
what was pushing the man to such length. He was a soldier - he had made the War (The World War
One, considering the time). He was acting like a soldier - doing everything to get a teammate out of
trouble. Because, when Harry had freed him, Graves had immediately put the young man in the ‘his
people’ part of his mind.

Harry understood. He had done the same, and would probably do it again.

Graves was the head of the MLE. He couldn’t afford to lose control; yet, Grindelwald had stripped
him of it.

He was tacking the control back.

“Director Graves!”
Isolt, as it turned out, was a man who was larger than he was tall, with short greyish hair cut very neatly, in a suit that was probably worth more than any house Harry ever possessed in his life.

“It is good to see you!” exclaimed the small man.

“I was on my way out.” Graves deadpanned.

It turned out too that Graves really didn’t like Isolt.

“Oh yes, yes of course. And who is your young friend?”

Newt made a little painful noise when it was obvious that he had been noticed. Graves frowned in a way that was suggesting an impending headache caused by the little man.

“This is Newton Scamander—”

“Scamander? The one that fought Grindelwald?”

Newt turned an interesting shade of red and - oh, Harry hadn’t noticed the freckles. His eyes were stubbornly fixed on the ground, and his shoulder stooping. Harry knew this position very well; he was trying to make himself small.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you!” Exclaimed the man, holding his hand out to shake.

Scamander held his hand for a half shake, before withdrawing it just as quickly. He inclined his head as a salute.

“Tituba’s bones why isn’t this bloody elevator working?” Someone grumbled behind them.
Harry’s head snapped in the direction of the elevator, which was, for all intent and purposes, blocked. It could only mean one thing.

He caught Graves sleeve and pulled it. He had to warn them. They had to be quick or else. Harry wasn’t sure what his legal status was here and now, but he was pretty certain that if it was his word against an Unspeakable, he wouldn’t win.

There were no words needed. Graves felt his sleeve being pulled, looked at the still-closed elevator and narrowed his eyes. The smallest tilt of his head indicated to Harry that he had understood. “We really have to go, Isolt,” Graves said sharply, making the small man wince.

“Of course, of course, I understand.” It was said in such a tone that was saying Isolt clearly didn’t understand and took it as a great offense. Graves’ face, however, indicated that he didn’t give a rat’s tail about what Isolt considered or not as a great offense. An opinion on which Harry immediately agreed.

They strode rapidly into the lobby, sneaked the more they went down the stairs, nodding vaguely at all those who were greeting them (they were quite few in number, and here most of the staff just dropped their eyes when they perceived Graves). Harry struggled to keep pace and keep the Cape tight on his shoulders. He knew that since his First Death, the Cape seemed to fit his needs, and never one of his spies had been seen beneath the hem of the legendary fabric, but school habits were very much anchored.

Graves finally pushed the door open, is long coat billowing imperiously behind him, and the building immediately changed to what it looked like for muggles. The effect was a little disorienting, but they did not have the time to linger.

The noise of the street assaulted him. Harry took note of not lingering in the big cities more than necessary. All these people passing by, the cars that were backfiring, was hard on the nerves.

He knew enough about himself to know that being so stressed was not good at all.

A bright red car stopped right in front of the Ministry steps with a tire squeal. The bodywork was sparkling and white - a kind of strange mixture of style and ostentation. It looked like the cars Harry had seen in Gangster movies, with it’s convertible roof and leather seats. Harry realized that he had seen only half of many movies, hidden behind the cupboard door under the stairs.
Harry also realized that he was now living in said gangster’s times.

In the car, Harry saw a big purple hat, under which was shoulder-length curvy hair, a shade redder than copper.

His heart stopped in his chest.

_Severus, please…_

_Bound, unable to act, unable to scream._

The car’s door emitted a click and opened on its own, revealing a man in ample blue and silver robes. Harry got the glint of a hand, smooth, with long, elegant fingers sprinkled with rings, a bracelet, and jewels.

_Falling falling falling and -_

_Like a puppet without string, at the feet of the astronomy tower, a leg in the wrong direction, eyes unblinking, staring at the newly-cleared sky-

_Laughing at the funerals because - oh God - because death is but the next great adventure isn’t it?_

“Professor!” exclaimed Newt, beaming.

_Like a lamb to slaughter-

_and then, all white, all white, and the bittersweet taste of forgiveness somewhere in his throat._

_and the years, the long years of longing, missing, alone, in shoes he wasn’t ready to wear-

Twinkling blue eyes caught his over small round sunglasses. His eyebrows shot up in amusement, a
grin appearing in his braided beard. He leaned in the passenger seat to get closer to the men that were still in shock.

“Going somewhere, my boys?” asked Albus Dumbledore innocently.

---

Gellert was looking around him, watching over the repairs.

Smoke was coming out of the camps, too black, too thick to be the one that usually rose from ovens and campfires. Stretchers were passed here and there, sometimes empty, sometimes full of wounded wailing.

20, 21...

There were very few casualties on Halloween night. Only a few soldiers had been able to attack the civilian population of the camps, the others had to stay inside the fortress while Gellert had gone outside. Without orders from their leaders, they had not dared to act.

Their actions did not matter. Gellert knew who they were.

And Gellert knew, well, and despite himself, that if Harry had not drugged all the generals, he would have suffered a real coup. He knew that if Harry had not left the door of his cell open, despite everything, despite his other actions, there would have been hundreds of deaths; as it was traditional to proceed in these cases.

So, while the smoke stung his nose and the pain of his own wounds made him want to strangle the young man with green eyes himself, to put him on his dissection table to finally see what was in this strange being, to eliminate the threat once and for all, yet Gellert found himself grateful.

He had passed very close to death on Halloween night.

Yes, Gellert had strong feelings for the boy. Very strong. He just hadn’t decided yet if they leaned more towards murder or something else. Curiosity. Excitement, maybe, with some grumpy
admiration.

It didn’t really matter. The outcome would be the same- for the Greater Good.

25, 26...

Harry had had something strange about him, even the first time Gellert had seen him. An aura of power, something of a promise in his moves. A raw delicious rumbling of danger, of power in the very way he breathed - like he didn’t even need to. Gellert had wanted - something. Maybe to try what he had failed with Albus - after all, the young man didn’t have any family to hold petty anger with.

The girl was weak and suffering, it was mercy what happened.

It wasn’t even his fault.

Wasted, wasted-

Maybe to keep him as a general, maybe to make him reproduce with a woman of trust - Anny had very clearly set her eyes on him, even if the young man hadn’t noticed.

He wouldn’t notice someone’s interest if they were naked in his bed.

He doesn’t think about flesh.

Warrior - … Child. Too young to have known, to have tasted-

The child would have been powerful - and Grindelwald’s to raise.

Maybe he had wanted to prove that he could have what Albus refused to give him.
Everything.

Not a replacement of course.

*Because Albus was more, Albus was the Everything, and Gellert wanted, wanted, wanted so much it hurt day and night and -*

*A lock a splendid red hair, like a flame, like a phoenix. His. Only His.*

*But -*

*All of it for a stupid child - so much power, wasted, wasted wasted-*

But now… Now he wanted to rip the child- for he was barely a man, wasn’t it? - alive. To skin him, to crush him and to look deep, so deep that he would find the origin of his power. The origin of that *something* .

Was it possible that Harry was truly a Peverell? Had Gellert fought teeth on teeth with a true possessor of a Hollow?

He remembered the cold - the shadow he had seen in Harry’s cell.

*The stone.*

Never before had Gellert imagined that the stone could be used offensively. No, he had thought about it, but nothing more than inference.

It hadn’t been an inference in the cell.

*Black cold - some sort of plasma? More real than a ghost, less than a living person. Couldn’t touch any object. Intention clearly hostile.*
The possibilities made his head spin and his heart jump in excitement.

He had sent a man to the young man. An unspeakable. A spy - not very gifted, but there was no need of much gift one you were in the M.A.C.U.S.A. when you were one of the ‘lower’ people.

Of course, he knew that the man couldn’t win - if survive. Gellert was a vain man, but he had reasons to. His power - if not unprecedented (Albus had always played too close during their duels), was extraordinary. He had joined it with his other talents - and a sharp mind and, of course, the Sight. If Harry had managed to beat him, no matter how close to a draw it had been, a poor little Unspeakable couldn’t succeed. He didn’t needed to See it to know it would happen.

No, the man would lose, and Gellert wouldn’t even remember his name. But the important thing was: how would Harry win?

The answer to this precise question was very important.

Because even considering the Hollows… even considering the power, the knowledge Harry had, there was one thing that made Grindelwald shiver in anxiety, with this peculiar vertigo one felt while looking in a starless sky, while considering the Abysses, while acknowledging his Own End.

Grindelwald couldn’t See Harry.

Yet he remembered Seeing himself tall and proud and the Wand in the hand - but the child had the Wand -

*The vision was formed before Harry had come. He never had a vision of Harry. None of his predictions, none of the webs of the future had Harry in them.*

*None.*

He closed his eyes and concentrated. He needed to See, to taste the possibilities. He needed-

*Albus at his side, immortals, the phoenix between them*
A building falling, and screams, screams-

He was in the great M.A.C.U.S.A tribunal, standing proud-

A strange bald man- barely a man, pointing his wand at him, the eyes burning like Hell-

None.

“Sir, we found her.”

27.

On the ground, in front of him laid the young woman. She was still pretty, even in death. The only civilian victim dead by Harry’s hand.

He wondered if the young man felt guilt for it. He hoped he did. He hoped he felt pain and cried for what he had done to Gellert.

They had put her on a barrow. Her eyes had already turned white, barely human. Too much humidity in the air. Her hair was stuck on her cold forehead.

The last of the Romanovs.

Gellert caressed her skin almost tenderly. She had been so fierce. So angry, and naïve. He had hoped to make a general out of her. Maybe a spy- she was - had been- pretty enough to seduce men to gain information, and strong enough not to let it destroy her.

She had always obeyed him. From when she had come looking for help after Rasputin's worst… woes. He had talked, she had listened. From her royal decree to nothing more than his servant, he had destroyed everything and built her back up, and all of that for nothing.
What a waste.

“What shall we do with her, Sir?”

Gellert looked at the soldier, who was staring nervously somewhere above his right shoulder.

He wished he could give her a proper burial, but-

_The Stone._

“Throw her corpse in the sea.”
Hello! Finally the first interactions between the principal characters! It took me a long time to write this, but it's so hot in Paris that I couldn't even think about getting close to my computer for a few days. Thanks to all of you for the kudos and nice comments!

Thank you to my beta: Adletypewriter, for their support and good work.

You can follow my on tumblr at : LadyBraken.

Harry saw Newt move towards the car eagerly. He stood frozen. His mind turned blank, empty. It kept buzzing dully somewhere behind his eyes.

Why why why why why-

He wasn’t sure if he wanted to run away or run into the professor’s arms. The heavy hand of knowledge was weighing on him. No matter what he did, No matter what he said-

Dumbledore wouldn’t recognize him.

The choice - if there was one- was taken from him as Graves walked towards the car. Somewhere in the depth of his mind, Harry couldn’t help but to admire the poise of the man, walking with an escaped prisoner like nothing was more normal for him, his face blanc, his step purposeful. But Harry’s mind was taken by the interaction in front of the car.

Newt was smiling at Dumbledore, his eyes still somewhere else, only going back on the professor for a second, before darting away just as quickly. A curious little creature was standing to look at the professor on Newt's hand - if Harry didn’t know better, he would have taken it for a simple twig. Dumbledore leaned and said a few words in a low voice to his student- for Newt must have been his student at one point, for the way they interacted.

Newt sat in the front seat, his case on his knees when Graves reached the car.

“Director Graves.”
A pause.

“Professor.”

The air seemed immediately colder after these greetings. Dumbledore’s eyes narrowed slightly, his finger still on the steering wheel. Graves’s jaw was clenched and Harry was pretty sure his hand was on his wand.

Graves opened the door and took care to slide in the opposite seat to give Harry enough room.

“Is everyone on board?” Lightly asked Dumbledore.

Taking the hint, Harry sat straighter and pulled slightly on Graves’s sleeve to indicate that he was ready. Graves nodded, and with a flick of Dumbledore’s wand, all the doors slammed shut. The car roared and jumped forward on the streets of New York.

In other circumstances, Harry would have loved to admire the streets of the 30’s New York, but right now it was simply too much. The streets, the colors, the big sounds the car made - like explosions, rumbling in his ears -

The wind blew as the car raced through the streets - and a small part at the back of Harry’s brain screamed at the lack of any security, limitation or belt.

A patch of red caught his eyes. It was hard to swallow, the realization that this man in front of him, driving the car, was his old mentor. That Albus Dumbledore was still alive, that these hands were made of flesh and blood, none darkened by a curse caused out of heartache and desperation. They were young too, so strange and different from what Harry had known. It was vertiginous to find something- someone he knew so well and yet was so different…

A stranger.

Alive.
He didn’t know if he was more happy or sad, but… It hurt, god it fucking hurt… He had to school himself. He turned his face towards the changing landscape, and let the cool wind calm his boiling mind and dry his unshed tears.

This was why he had come back. He would hold on - he had to.

The buildings were passed and turned into trees, open fields, and little country houses. Harry didn’t know since they were traveling, but the chill had fallen on the land as soon as they had gotten away from the city.

The car finally stopped in a squeak of tires in front of a big house that rose above an ordered and fenced garden. Columns marked the porch, and all the outer walls were painted white, in a style typical of old American homes- the ‘Victorian style’, if Harry remembered well. The ‘tall and gothic surely-haunted-by-vindictive-ghosts style anyway.

Tall windows pierced the walls, the roof was covered with the gray tiles in the form of scales, which surrounded the highest windows, and was surmounted by small metal fences, which were scattered with various instruments of magic detection. Harry narrowed his eyes as he stepped out of the car - his legs still a little weak. He could distinguish anchors for wars, magic detectors, a kind of archaic form of muggle repellent, and finally, the traditional weather vane.

It took a moment for Harry to remember that the ‘archaïc device was probably the newest technology right now.

He turned his head to find Graves smirking at him. “Welcome to the Grave’s household, Harry”, he said.

Harry smiled a bit awkwardly. He had no idea who the Graves were - very probably some sort of American aristocracy.

And he had no idea what polite thing he was supposed to say to the man. Luckily, Graves gestured for him to enter inside the house without further ado.

Harry did his best to avoid Dumbledore's stare on his back.

Graves ushered them inside. The house - was it a manor?- was quite spartan. Of course, Harry could
see the traces of the enormous fortune that he didn't question the Graves to have; but from the blades on the walls to the armchairs in the corners of the room, everything screamed 'Aurors'.

If the enormous stylised eagle, the emblem of the M.A.C.U.S.A painted above the fireplace wasn't enough.

Harry almost rolled his eyes. He caught Newt's eyes for an instant - he looked as amused as Harry was. He shook his head a little to let his hair fall in front of his eyes and hide part of his face.

Graves silently waved his hand towards the table in the middle of the dining room. Taking his cue, Harry sat.

His legs still hurt from the Crucius- and everything, really.

The four of them sat for a moment in silence. Harry knew they would have to have had a less than pleasant conversation.

"Does any of you wish some tea? Whiskey?"

"Tea, please." calmly answered Dumbledore.

His eyes never left Harry, assessing.

To tell the truth, Harry was trying very much not to look at Dumbledore - probably very obviously so. The pain was still here, of course, at the back of his mind, but it was more...

Disorientation.

Because he didn't find the care and the tenderness in Dumbledore's eyes like he had in his previous life - even in the last moments, even in the end. Even after death.

No, this Dumbledore was looking at him coolly, as if trying to pierce his very soul with a stare only. His hands were laced in front of his chin hiding his mouth, and his hair was ruffled by the wind
during the travel.

Harry had done nothing wrong.

He rose his eyes and met Dumbledore's, his chin up. It put a fucking lump in his throat to know what the man was probably thinking, to see him acting so distant, but he did it all the same.

Something flickered in Dumbledore's eyes. Surprise, maybe, and approbation.

Harry refused to feel proud.

Graves came back with the tea. None of the teacups matched and everything was poised on the plate in a dangerous equilibrium.

It was very clear that Graves didn't usually take his tea in company.

He poured some tea and passed the cups around the table. Even the cups were painted with the M.A.C.U.S.A' eagle. Harry bit back a scoff.

It was never good to trust an institution that much. It was never good to trust any institution at all.

He nodded in thanks and passed his hand above the cup to detect any magical poison.

It wasn't quite a political gesture, maybe. Surely. He didn't care much. He sipped the tea - Chamomile, for calmness. Smart.

“So. Harry is it? Director Graves didn’t give me any surname for you.”

Harry nodded. “Harry’s fine, really.”

Dumbledore looked at him strangely, but thankfully, he didn’t push it.
Harry could almost taste the bloody tension in the air. He sighed, and put down his tea cup. "Why am I here?" He asked. It came out a bit more harshly then he would have liked.

It was very hard to keep himself together when Dumbledore was in the room.

"Falling falling falling -"

"You are here because Director Graves thought you were worthy of trust - to some extent."

"He saved my life - and many others, Dumbledore."

They both glared at each other coolly. Harry was very unimpressed.

"Well, thank you anyway. I don't want to be impolite, but you sure have moles in your ministry."

The joke poorly concealed how bad he felt about this entire situation, but at least it distracted the attention to him.

"A mole?"

"A man named Ravier - if I remember correctly. Tall, brown hair and eyes, 3 o'clock shadow. He attacked me in the cell, and was very clearly and explicitly one of Grindelwald’s men. He tried to use Dark Magic, but clearly wasn’t an expert in them nor in dueling, or any kind of attack. He probably counted on the fact that I would be cornered and wandless."

Silence fell over the room.

This, Harry suddenly noticed, this was easy. This was what he knew, what he had been trained for. War.

War… Wasn’t good. But it was emotionless, clinical.
He would do with that. He could more easily dismiss the little things that hurt so much - how familiar was the hands crossed in front of the chest, of the twinkling blue eyes, the colorful robes, the taste of magic.

“The easiness with which he found my cell and was able to find it alone means that he had accomplices or that he already did it before. I’d vouch for the first option, considering the importance of the M.A.C.U.S.A.”

Newt blinked at him slowly. Harry still had no idea of what the man was doing here, but it wasn’t quite his place to ask.

“As much as I would like to believe your words, it is obvious that considering the circumstances, we cannot,” answered Dumbledore coolly - And God did it hurt.

Harry straightened his back. “If you didn’t think that you could trust me to some extent, I wouldn’t be here. If you didn’t think that me - or the information I have- could be useful I wouldn’t be here,” he answered.

He was only stating the obvious and they both knew it. He sighed. “What do you want to know?”

Of course, Dumbledore wouldn’t trust him in these circumstances. Merlin knows he wouldn’t trust himself.

“ It would be good to start about how you found yourself in Numenguard.”

Harry sipped his tea. At least, Dumbledore didn’t call him ‘my boy’.

“Would you trust me if I told you I arrived there by chance?”

Dumbledore frowned. He was listening with his hand on his mouth like he had done - will do, - all his life. "I might."

Ah. So he had been told about the seer thing.
It wasn't such a bad idea. It would allow him to explain a lot of things without going into time-travel, which he really didn't want to talk about anytime soon. He could also obviously contain some information with this but...

But he knew very well what was done to powerful seers. Abducted, used, if not killed... He wasn't sure it was worth the risk in the long run.

Dumbledore must have been following an alike path of thought as he held his hand in a sign of peace. "I will ask you to explain what you can, and nothing more," he said simply.

It was a temporary thing, and they all knew it.

"Gellert found me in the Black Forest, in Germany. He, er, apparently had a dream. I found this wounded child - a magical one - soon after and he took us both - well, the three of us - to Numengard."

Newt’s eyebrows went up. “I would have thought that there was more… implication needed to enter the citadel.”

Harry shrugged. “Not really. After the events of Russia, it was opened to many civilians. It had to.”

It wasn’t really a lie. Harry hoped it would be enough.

“I never took Grindelwald for a humanitarian.” Spat Graves. He drank his tea in a way that suggested that he would have liked something stronger instead.

Harry snorted. “Hardly.”

He wished somehow he could defend - well, if not Grindelwald, at least his citadel. That he could say without lying that it was all done to help the people that desperately needed it.
He wasn’t so naïve, unfortunately.

“Indeed. I have no doubt that such a decision from Grindelwald would be politic - especially considering the circumstances.”

Harry simply nodded. Without even knowing Gellert, it was an easy enough deduction. A revolution, a War - chaos in general- was a haven ground for any recruitment and fanaticism. Desperate people will not have the means and time to think logically - if they even had the will in the first place.

“I stayed… about three weeks in the citadel. I mostly helped the hospital wing - sometimes the kitchen or did a bit of management. Nothing much.”

He could almost feel Graves raise his eyebrows at that.

“Harry.” The director looked at him with barely masked disbelief. His hand was flat on the table, his shoulders casually straight. He looked at Harry in the eyes and held his gaze. “When the dementors attacked, Grindelwald himself was the one to take you back to the citadel. He carried you in his arms.”

There was a sharp intake of breath - Harry didn’t know if it was his or Dumbledore’s. “I can’t say - I passed out for a long time after chasing the dementors. But I can assure you that I am not one of Grindelwald’s men. We’re not friends, either.”

He almost shivered at the idea. It had been far too close.

“Grindelwald is fascinated by power. He was interested in my power.” He said, his voice firmer.

He hated it. He hated having to justify - if only he had listened to Nicolov.

It didn’t matter.

“Harry.”
Harry rose an eyebrow in question. Newt hadn’t talked much until now. It was logical - for all Harry knew, he was the least concerned by this discussion, and Grindelwald in general.

“Your hands are shaking…”

Fuck. They were.

He put down his cup slowly. “Sorry.”

Graves looked at him with disbelief. “You got Crucioed, what in Merlin are you apologizing for?”

Harry frowned and shook his head. “I usually can hold much more of the Cruciatus” His voice was quite mild. “I must be tired, that’s all.”

“Oh yes, of course, Harry. I’m sure that Mr. Graves will allow you to take one of his bedrooms - it’s quite late anyway. We should all go to sleep.”

“Am I a fugitive?” The question was too blunt, but he needed to know. The security measures he would take in the future would be greatly different. Dumbledore’s position would be too - and it hit him. What the hell was Dumbledore doing in America?

Graves rose from his seat, his face carefully blank. “You weren’t officially imprisoned, so no. That’s why we got you out.” Harry didn’t dare say that by all means, he had gotten himself out.

Because he understood far too well what could have happened to him in these circumstances. No war had been yet declared with Grindelwald- Harry was almost certain that the man was still considered as a terrorist and not a dictator. He wasn’t yet recognised as a politician for the M.A.C.U.S.A, which meant that any allegiance would be a felony.

Human rights tended to only be privileges for the traitors. Well, for anyone, really, if the M.A.C.U.S.A was anything like the English Ministry Harry had known.

“Do you want anything to eat?” asked Dumbledore. It was rude for Graves, but Harry simply shook his head ‘no’ and didn’t comment. Knowing Dumbledore, he was probably being rude on purpose.
Graves noded for Harry to follow him.

They ascended some wooden stairs to the floor. The corridor was spacious and light, with four windows - too high to jump from without injury, but not enough to cause death. Harry noticed that he hadn’t seen a single portrait since he had come here. Maybe it was an American thing - not to worry so much about ones’ ancestors. Maybe it was a Graves’ thing.

Graves finally stopped in front of a door and opened it. The room was spacious - certainly more than any he ever had until today, and modernly decorated by the era’s standards.

“So, this will be your room. I think that Newt and Professor Dumbledore will stay at least for the night, and we’ll sort out… well, everything tomorrow.”

Harry grinned. “Tomorrow is good.”

He would have a night to deal with his ghosts. It wasn’t enough, it couldn’t be. He would have to make do with that.

Graves gave him a small smile back and - well, it was something. Graves didn’t look like a man with an easy smile and - from what Harry had seen - he had reasons to.

“The bathroom is just next door, and towels and necessaries are in this closet, the kitchens are just the floor above, next to the garden door - but I’d prefer you not to go out before we’re awake.”

Harry nodded. He didn’t have any intention to get out by himself anyway.

“Thank you. You, er- you didn’t have to.” Harry said, awkwardly gesturing everything.

Graves titled his head “It’s the least I can do. You saved me after all, I owe you a lot.”

“You owe me nothing.”
Graves looked like Harry had slapped him, and the younger man felt bad for it. But as far as he knew, Graves was a pureblood - and pureblood held Life Debt to their full extent. He simply couldn’t let the man take risks for him.

He shouldn’t even be there in the first place.

“You came and got me out of that hellhole-”

“You don’t know that. You shouldn't trust so easily.”

Graves frowned and his posture changed, his right foot back. Ah, defensive now. Good.

Maybe Grindelwald didn’t use the same tricks as Voldemort. Maybe they didn’t yet have to become paranoid to survive - but the sooner the better. Harry didn’t have the strength now to allow anything else.

“Are you saying that I shouldn’t trust you?”

A pause. “Yes. You shouldn’t trust anyone.”

Something very sad passed in Grave’s eyes, but in a second it was gone. Occlumency. Of course. One couldn’t be director of the MLE and walk around with an open mind.

It wasn’t a gift. It must have hurt even more when Grindelwald had tried to get in.

Graves sighed. “My room is the first door next to the stairs if you need anything.” He said and Harry nodded absently. “Good night.”

“‘Night.”

The second the man left, Harry got his wand out. He knelt near the door and brushed the wood with his fingertips - Elm, a wood for purebloods indeed. At least not a repellent for darker magic - but he would have to be careful. He didn’t want the Elder Wand to trigger anything.
Slowly, carefully, he traced a few innocent runes on the door frame. Nothing for protection - it wasn’t really useful considering the house and the disposition of the rooms- but more for an alert.

Exhausted beyond measure, he kicked off his boots and let himself drop on the bed. He hadn’t even checked the bed. Oh, well.

Harry would have to carefully erase the runes on the morrow. He wasn’t sure of their evolution at this time-period, and questions could arise quite soon from such small details. It was strange and nerve racking to imagine all the things that had yet to come to pass. All the grotesques, atrocious things he had read distractedly in his history books... Fuck, the World War Two hadn’t even happened yet.

Could he stop it? Could he stop the genocide or- do something about it, really? He didn’t know much about how, or when it all started. He barely knew a few names, a few battles, a few places. Not enough. Not enough for what was about to happen in what - ten years? Barely more.

And what if he did something, and the consequences were disastrous? He could try to stop it all, and in the end, allow Germany to win the war… What could a single man do, really?

He sighed.

It wasn’t a moral dilemma he could resolve tonight.

----

Harry was laying awake, twisting the stone around his finger.

He couldn’t sleep.

Thoughts were going on and on in his head, and the fact that he was in an unknown room, in an unknown house, in an unknown damn country didn’t help.
It wasn't the problem.

The problem was that it was monstrous to be here, only a few feet away from Dumbledore, with at his finger the object, the obsession that would cause his downfall. To have the answers- and not being able to tell them. The problem was that Tom was there, somewhere, and Harry still hadn't saved him, the problem was that now, right now, if anything went wrong, it would be his fault.

The problem was that he was tired beyond his years - and restless.

Harry pursed his lips as if to scold the dark thought, and got up off his bed. Graves had told him - authorized him, really- that he could wander in the house, but not out. It made at least a little sense, and Harry intended to use his privilege fully.

His night walks were, after all, legendary at Hogwarts.

Silent as a shadow, he padded his way downstairs, wondering at the absence of house elves in such a household.

He finally made his way to the kitchens - they were unsurprisingly enormous and well-stuffed.

"Lumos," he whispered and was proud of himself when his wand didn't create a small sun. He put some water on to boil to make some coffee. He would not sleep anymore tonight anyway.

As the water warmed slowly, Harry started to open the cupboard. He grabbed a few cans, wondering if he could hide them. He should really make himself a bag like he had done at the last war - even the lack of its weight was troubling.

Someone coughed behind him. He jumped, his wand landing directly against the other's throat, and found himself eye to eye with Albus Dumbledore.

A blink.

Harry stepped back. "Sorry." He whispered, unsettled.
Dumbledore seemed to assess him for a moment. "It's quite alright, young man. One cannot control one's reflexes, can he?" He said kindly.

Harry had to give him respect if only for self-control. He flushed bright red because god he had raised his wand against Dumbledore. "I, er, alright. Sir." He mumbled, scolding himself for his own lack of expression. Harry passed his hand through his hair nervously and forced himself to calm down. He would have to deal with all that at one point or another, anyway.

At least, in the dim light of the Lumos, Dumbledore surely couldn't read him as easily as he could have otherwise.

The coffee machine whistled, cutting off his thought. He jumped to put it out of the fire.

"You couldn't sleep?" Dumbledore asked in his back. Harry shook his head and held the coffee in silent question. "Yes, thank you. I don't think I will be able to sleep either.

It was true that Harry had often seen Dumbledore walking in the corridors at night - almost more than Snape did.

"Insomnia?"

"I'm afraid so. Le mal du siècle, I'm afraid."

Harry didn't answer, pouring coffee in two mugs he had found. "It means that it happens to a lot of people in these unfortunates times." Definite Dumbledore and Harry snorted because of course, Dumbledore would teach him something absolutely necessary.

"I see." Harry Gave the cup to Dumbledore - it would have been quite rude to just make it fly to the man.

"Thank you."
They drank in silence for a while. It wasn’t really a comfortable one, but the languor of the night gave Harry a strange light-headedness. Or maybe it was the coffee—god, this thing was strong.

He couldn’t wait until they diluted it.

Harry saw the dark form of Dumbledore open the backyard door and sit on the steps. He didn’t really know what compelled him to sit next to the professor. It was quite cold. Harry wrapped his arms around his middle his hand carefully enveloping his warm mug. A click, a flame, and Dumbledore lighted a cigarette.

He took a puff, and the spark illuminated his face with a warm glow. He blew the smoke slowly, hiding behind its screen.

Even the cigarettes smell different.

“So, are you a Seer?”

The question was blunt, but Harry was very aware of how easy it was to lose Dumbledore’s trust—and to lose it forever. It was a small miracle that the man accepted to talk to him still—after what Graves said about Gellert.

Maybe it was the reason he was talking to Harry. He hoped not.

“I wouldn’t say that. I… I know some things. I don’t have dreams, like Gellert, but…” It was definitely the best way to avoid questions on the things that will slip—because things would slip at one point or another.

“Gellert.”

Harry would have jumped, but he had heard his own mistake. Dumbledore took the cigarette out of his mouth, and the little orange dot danced in the air. “I noticed you called him by his first name earlier too.”

“I did. I do.” Harry sighed. “We’re not close, he and I. But we called each other by our firsts.
names… Well, I don’t really have a last name. It would be weird to call him *Grindelwald*. Like he was above me or something."

He took a moment to ponder what to say next, and Dumbledore seemed to respect his reflection. “I have… worth. He was interested in my worth. I didn’t want him to be.”

It was, probably, the best way he could describe that weird relation they had. The word still left some sort of dissatisfaction in his mouth.

Dumbledore only hummed and took the cigarette to his mouth.

“You shouldn’t smoke that, you know?”

“What?”

Harry stifled a laugh because Dumbledore had really sounded surprised. He had, actually, surprised Albus bloody Dumbledore. What was this world he was living in? “The cigarette. It’ll destroy your lungs.”

Dumbledore rose the cigarette at eye-level as if to contemplate it. “There hasn’t been anything to prove it.” He pointed with a side-glance above his half-moon classes.

“No? Well, there will be.”

“Ah. Can I trust you to taunt me about how you told me so in a few years?”

It was said lightly, but it meant the world. It meant that, as things were, Dumbledore believed they would be on good terms in a few years. That they were now, somehow. There was still something wary in the man’s posture - an implicit lack of trust, but Harry would take what he could. That glimmer of hope - it was something he had missed for a long, long time.

He smiled. “Yeah. You can count on me.”
The street of Paris were not like he had dreamt. They weren’t like that at all.

No, they were not the large streets covered of pavement, full of high trees and fancy people. They were damp, narrow, shaped like a snake as if the devil himself wanted to slither on its floor. No fancy people laughing either - not so deep in the night. Only the cast-out, the poor, the famished, not even bothering to beg anymore. Many of them bore the traces of the war that had ravaged the frontier only a few years before.

Maybe, during the day, Paris was beautiful - full of life, sounds, smells like he had never knew before, but as the sun hid, so did all of these pretty things. The bars were already closed, and even the drunkards couldn’t be seen anymore - well, not awake at the very least.

Sometimes, if one passed in the good places, where people had money and were using it with a vengeance, one could see and hear the extravagant luxury of the time. Showers of gold and pearls, music so loud nobody could sleep, the finest alcohol wasted on the floors because they could, and so they would.

It was like the city had two souls, and both of them were killing themselves in opposite ways.

He didn’t like either option, truth to tell.

With a shaky breath, he knocked on an old wooden door, noticeable among the others and this lost and small street of the capital.

A man opened the door. he looked old, but not weak, and definitely wizard. The boy could hear the bubbling of the potions behind the man, who was staring at him with sharp eyes - far too sharp for his age.

The boy lowered his gaze.

“Hello, Sir. Are you Nicolas Flamel?”
The man stared at him for a long time, and the boy forced himself not to flinch under the scrutiny. “Who asks?” He said finally.

“My name is Credence Barebone. Dumbledore sent me, he said you could help me.”

The man stared at him for a moment more, and then, ushered him inside.
In the morning, Harry felt a bit less tired. Not that he had had a good night - he had not experienced one for many, many years. But maybe the most tranquil since he had traveled to the past.

He looked at the ceiling, still laying on the bed, and let the golden warmth of the sun’s rays that filtered across the window caress his skin. For the first time in many years, he had not slept in his fighting clothes.

His wand was still under his pillow, and the invisibility cloak twisted up at his side, but… But it felt well, a little bit safer.

It was something.

He heard footsteps in the corridor and gripped his wand, his head still half hidden in the pillow. His breath controlled, he checked with one eye that his runes were still actives and hadn’t been tampered with during the night- but no, they were still glowing faintly around the door. The footsteps stopped just in front of his door- he could see their shadow under it;

Someone knocked.

“Mr- Harry?”
Scamander’s hesitant voice made Harry sigh. He got up to open the door, finding the man quite disheveled on his doorstep. “I’m sorry, but have you seen my Niffler?”

“Your…?”

“Niffler. He’s about this tall,” He said in one breath, raising his hands about twenty centimeters from each other, “got black fur. Tricky little beast likes to steal shiny things.”

Harry couldn’t say if the man was worried or absolutely excited by the creature’s little escape. Newt suddenly stopped talking and looked resolutely somewhere on the wall at Harry’s right.

“I apologize, I hadn’t realised that you weren’t- I mean that--” sputtered Scamander.

It took a moment for Harry to understand Newt’s mumbling. He looked down at himself and blushed. “Oh, hem, yes, sorry. I’ll-” he stammered and quickly pushed the door closed and went back into the room to put a shirt on his back.

It had been such a long time for him that anyone would have been troubled in any way to see a half-naked body… War didn’t leave such luxuries as intimacy, especially for him. He had to remind himself that the people of this time clearly weren’t in the same mindset.

He turned around and looked at the runes. Should he get rid of them? He didn’t know if anyone would think about checking the room - but he didn’t know if he would come back to sleep in the room either. But to take more time to erase them may raise some suspicion…

He decided to leave them for the moment, just in case.

He got out of his room to find Scamander talking to what looked like a small green twig on his finger.

“Did you find your creature?” Harry asked, his eyes still on the little thing on the man’s finger. It moved. Newt startled a bit, and the little twig- it was definitely not a twig -ran on his sleeve to hide on his shoulders.
“I looked everywhere except in the bedrooms, no trace of it.”

“And I gather that the others are still sleeping.”

Scamander shook his head. “Mr. Graves went out early this morning - he had files to fill to legalize your status at the M.A.C.U.S.A.”

Harry’s heart missed a beat.

“Do you mean… that he literally went into the institution I escaped from to tell them everything about this?”

Newt nodded, eyes still searching for his creature. Harry sighed. There was nothing he could do about it right now, even if it was one of the more stupid decisions he had ever heard of.

“I thought the Niffler would be with you - it tends to collect gold, you know. And jewels, and everything precious…”

Harry hid his right hand behind him - almost by instinct. “We should ask He- Professor Dumbledore, then.”

Newt threw him a strange look but nodded nonetheless and immediately knocked on the wooden door. There was no answer, they knocked once, twice more, with the same result.

“We should go and see if he’s downstairs.” Proposed Harry, already walking towards the stairs. “Do you know the house?”

“A bit - I was there once, before.”

“Good, then you can tell me where we should, or shouldn’t go.”

Harry’s voice sounded too commanding, even to his ears. He smiled apologetically, but Newt was already kneeling, looking under the couch. The man got up and went to look behind a vase.
Abandoning the idea of any kind of constructed plan, Harry went into another room, trying to find whatever was a Niffler. He was careful to push the door slowly in case there was something behind it that he wasn’t supposed to see, or worse, if there was any ward to trigger.

The room was warmly lit by the first rays of the sun, passing through a (too large) opened window.

Here, sitting on a chair, Dumbledore was knitting. His long auburn hair was falling softly in front of his face, in profile turned towards Harry. The young man could only glimpse at the tip of Dumbledore's broken nose, the reflexion of the sun in his half-moon glasses and the tip of a smile on his lips. The ball of purple wool lay at his feet. The thread went up along his robes, red with golden filaments that twisted on the edge of the linings until they were included in what was to be a scarf in the making.

The professor's hands moved, light and rhythmic, reproducing without thought the mechanical movements with only a small clatter of metal.

Half hidden under the hem of his robes, visibly trying to get to the numerous rings shining on the professor’s hands, was what Harry guessed to be the infamous Niffler.

And Merlin wasn’t it cute.

Harry didn’t dare move as the little furry thing tried to climb Dumbledore’s leg and fell on its butt when the professor softly elbowed it down.

Hearing the small creature squeak made him turned his head - surely to check that it hadn’t harmed itself. His eyes met Harry’s. He startled.

“Oh, Harry, I didn’t hear you!”

“Sorry, professor,” said Harry with an apologetic smile.

Dumbledore made a soothing gesture with he free hand. “I didn’t realise you were this silent,” he
said simply, his eyes twinkling slightly.

Harry recognised it. Dumbledore wanted him to talk.

He didn’t answer.

He kept his eyes on the Niffler, who seemed very happy to continue to try to steal Dumbledore’s jewels, and almost didn’t see the man’s small frown. Some things never changed.

“Here you are!”

Newt almost ran into the room, arms stretched, and knelt near the little creature. “Oh, don’t look at me like that. You know what you did wrong.” He said, pointing a thin finger at the little thing.

Harry looked over to Dumbledore, but the man seemed undisturbed.

He wondered if Mr. Scamander knew Hagrid. Surely, Hagrid was already born-- or he would be soon. As Newt took the Niffler by his feet to shake it head down (a few golden galleons fell for his belly for some reason), Harry thought that that would be the meeting of the century.

“Where does it comes from? I don’t remember having seen anything like this when we arrived yesterday.”Noticed Harry with a frown.

Scamander looked suddenly very, very guilty.

“Tell, Newt…”

Dumbledore had crossed his hands over his middle and looked at the young man over his glasses. Newt reddened, and Harry almost busted out of laughter. “Did you take with you the very thing Director Graves strictly forbid you to, as it is not only illegal in this country, but also highly dangerous in a heavily habited environment?”

Scamander had the decency to look put out. “They’re not dangerous, professor, and you know it,” he mumbled, his eyes downcast.
“What isn’t dangerous?” God damn it, the man was apparently far more alike Hagrid than Harry had imagined. Did he take a dragon with him or something?

“My creatures.”

Harry put his hand on his brow and took a deep breath to stave off his nervous laughter.

“Creatures, plural?”

“Hum.”

Sliding a glance at Dumbledore, Harry saw the man was hiding his laughter behind his sleeve, but the little tremors of his back gave it away.

“They’re in my suitcase.” Mumbled Scamander. Harry didn’t even answer that. No shit Graves would be pissed. And with the apparent easiness the man had run to the M.A.C.U.S.A, Harry didn’t even want to imagine the consequences for Scamander.

Harry also wanted very much to see that suitcase.

“Let’s just do things for Mr. Graves not to find out about it. Again.”

Scamander nodded eagerly, the Niffler pressed in his arms protectively. He turned towards Harry who had to restrain himself not to pet the Niffler. “Do you want to see the suitcase?” he asked.

Harry didn’t need to be asked twice.

Scamander took him to his rooms, and Dumbledore followed them with a look of content amusement.

Newt took the Niffler under one of his arms and put a brown suitcase on the top of his bed. He
unlocked it and put it directly on the floor. The case opened, and without saying anything, Scamander put one of his feet inside. Then another one. Then he went lower and lower as if he was descending a large ladder.

Harry stayed there, not quite knowing what to do.

“Well, aren’t you coming?” came the muffled voice of Scamander from inside the case.

“Well, after you,” chuckled Dumbledore, waving his hand for Harry to enter the case. The young man wasn’t sure he was ok with the idea of being sucked in a case but went for it all the same.

The was indeed wooden steps under his feet.

Harry finally landed in what looked like a cabin, or a small house. He held his hand to help Dumbledore to go down the stairs, forgetting too late that this Dumbledore wasn’t certainly as old as the one he had known.

The man arched an eyebrow in amusement but took Harry’s hand in his right one. Harry almost startled at feeling it warm and alive. He couldn’t help but to double check, but no, no black, no burnt-like skin.

Dumbledore nodded his thanks and Harry smiled tightly.

The room they were in was quite small, with wooden walls crowded by shelves full of over-used books, dried leaves, and other oddities. Heaps of papers were scattered on what looked like a small improvised desk, darkened by small words. The place smelled of sap, tea, the scent of old paper squeezed into a book. A few rays of the sun were passing through it into the eerie atmosphere of the cabin, as if they were outside on a late summer afternoon.

It is strangely soothing.

The only door of the place is open, letting Harry glimpse at what looked like a vast plain and a few trees. A few trees. How in the world had Newt done such a refined work at expending charms all alone?
Harry turned towards Dumbledore, who was looking around with a small twinkle in his eyes.

Well, probably not alone.

He heard shuffling on the other side of the door and without any hesitation, went through it.

Newt was rolling a kind of wheelbarrow filled with meat, his sleeves rolled up, a bucket hanging on his forearm. There was a furrow of deep concentration on his brow, as if his task was the most important in the world.

When Harry saw the creature Newt was feeding, he thought that, maybe, it was.

The place was huge. From the hut, you could see a paleness that seemed to expand as far as the eye could see. In the distance, creatures galloped, lifting dust from their hooves. When he looked to the right, Harry came across what appeared to be a tropical garden through which Newt was walking fast, pushing his wheelbarrow in front of him. Troops of small animals followed him, or circled him, drawing his attention.

Harry didn’t seem to be able to close his mouth.

He heard a chuckle behind him. “It took quite a while for Newt to create this suitcase. It is divided into different sorts of climates- to accommodate all of the creatures.” Dumbledore said with a hint of pride. He patted Harry’s shoulder and went to talk to Newt.

Harry was surprised he didn’t wince at the contact. Maybe it was the awe of everything around him…

“Huuungry!”

Harry startled. His wand shot up in his hand, magic already at its tip. He turned around, trying to locate the origin of the voice. Dumbledore was talking along with Newt, helping him to feed some sort of little… blob.

Hadn’t they heard that?
“You’re always hungry. Try to hunt for once!”

“Huuungry!”

“Where is the little ugly thing with the food? Why is it always so late?”

“Huuuuungry!”

Harry walked towards the voice, and it was only after a moment he noticed the pleas were in Parselmouth. Had a snake lost its way in there? Maybe a snake was one of the beasts Newt had adopted.

He walked until his feet met stones, and found himself in a cave. A gigantic, highly ominous cave. Harry immediately hated it.

“Huuuuungry!”

From the puddle of shadows at the bottom of the cave, something appeared, slowly. First, they were peaks, then a mouth covered with scales. Bright eyes shone in the shadows until the entire head came out, fixed on Harry’s silhouette. Then, as if moved in the same movement, a second head lasciviously came out. Then a third.

Runespoor.

The young man suddenly felt tiny.

“Hello there!”

The snake stopped. The three heads looked at him with what was probably the snake equivalent of stupor. Then, one head, the one on the right, cocked its head slightly.

“Can we still eat it?” the head whispered.
“I’d prefer if you did not.”

He was about to add something along the lines of not being comestible (which was strictly true), when footsteps echoed at the entrance on the cave.

“What are you?” The left’s head asked.

Harry would have liked to answer, but Newt - and with him, Dumbledore, was coming closer.

What should he do? He had used parselmagic in front of Grindelwald - and some of his men knew. Even counting the number of dead they had left in their wake, Harry was pretty sure that the information would spread at one point or another. It would be a proof of lack of trust for Dumbledore. It would create dissension if the man learnt about it from any other mouth than Harry’s.

But the young man couldn’t help but to remember the cold horror in Dumbledore’s eyes - not much older than what he was now - when a child confessed to him this gift. Of course, he knew that other factors had triggered Dumbledore’s reaction, but…

He was scared.

Something shifted in his mind. He shouldn’t be scared. Not of what he was, never, and especially not because of Albus Dumbledore of all people. If he found Tom, Parselmouth would become something of everyday life - would he have to teach the child to hide too?

The very idea left a bitter taste in his mouth.

What to do?

“I’m so hungry!”

Harry turned towards the gigantic snake - it was almost as tall as the Basilisk. But its scales were pale, and its movements slow. He could see a few places where the scales had fallen off.
He frowned.

“Oh, I see you found the Runespoor!” said Newt kindly when he arrived near to Harry, “It’s rare for him to show himself to strangers.”

“Oh,” mumbled Harry, not knowing what to say. “Are you going to feed him?”

Newt looked at him curiously. “No, his feeding schedule is tomorrow morning, I’m afraid.”

Harry frowned. “But he’s hungry!” he blurted.

“What are the little ugly things talking about now? Why aren’t they talking to us? We’re hungry!”

“But his feeding-”

Newt cut himself off and widened his eyes. Harry saw a movement in Dumbledore’s left sleeve and the tip of his wand could suddenly be seen in his hand.

Something bumped Harry’s back.

He almost fell off and laughed.

“Hey! Careful there!” He said, patting the offending head in its snoot.

The look both his companions gave him shut him up immediately. So much for being careful with Parsel…

He tensed.

“You… you speak to snakes?” Said Newt, his whole face lighting up in excitement. His hands were moving and twisting around each other like two over excited spiders. “I heard of this gift - very
rare!”

“Very rare indeed.”

Dumbledore was visibly warry - once again. His hand hidden in his large golden sleeves, his shoulders straighter, his gaze unwavering. Of course he was worried. It shouldn’t hurt that much - but even when Voldemort was tugging in Harry’s mind, Dumbledore had never looked at him like that.

Well, he hadn’t look at him at all.

“Is that how you know he is hungry?”

Harry decided to turn his attention on Newt - who looked like a child at Christmas. “Yes, the right head kept complaining about it.” He said softly.

Newt looked at him like he had just put the moon at his feet before turning his attention on the gigantic snake. “Can you tell him something for me?”

“Yes of course.”

“Tell him he’ll be safe. Please.”

Harry wondered where that came from, but did it all the same. The three heads seemed to look at Newt for a moment, before the middle one lowered itself and bumped into Newt in the same way it had Harry.

“Nice little ugly thing. Of course, we are.”

Harry translated, and Newt’s smile could have lit the entire room.

Dumbledore’s eyes still bored holes in his back.
The whispers seemed to follow him everywhere. He had tried to ignore them, but fear, deeply rooted in him, prevented it. He had to listen - he had to know. He sat in a corner. He did not take up much space - not the shortest of his age, surely, but he had that ability to blend into the shadows.

“Evil…”

They were always the same, the muffled whispers behind the closed door. Frightening. Ushered voices of panicked women, as if talking out loud would invoke the ill they were so afraid of.

He hated them. He hated that they made him feel scared.

“Surely there’s something to be done before the child is too old…”

“He’s too far gone! Born from the Devil, this one!” harshly cut a second voice, older.

He didn’t want to be here. It was 11am, and normally, he should be in the kitchen, finishing peel the carrots - for it was Thursday, and Thursday was carrot day. Then, he would have washed his hands, and the staircase, then went into his room. Ten minutes and twenty seconds later, the bell would have rung and Mrs. Cole would have appeared at his door step - like everyday- and she would have taken him and the younger children to lunch - same as every other day.

But none of this could happen because Miss MacErsen, an old woman that was very important around here for some reason - had came an hour ago, and since, had taken over the kitchen.

It made him want to take the peeler and stab Miss MacErsen in the eye with it. See if she was as easy as a carrot.

He pursed his lips.

He plunged his hand into his pocket and clenched the pin he had taken off the old woman’s coat.
He liked this brooch a lot - it was a pretty blue and shone in the sunlight. Surely something precious.

Now, it was his, and his alone.

He took his hand out of his pocket and smelled it. Oh, it was smelling all wrong now!

He was about to get up to wash his hands, before he remembered that he couldn’t, because the damn old woman was still in the kitchen.

“These things are the mark of the Devil, my dear! You should call a priest before it takes root in all the innocents souls in this place!”

The outburst was received in silence.

He looked at the clock. Ten past eleven - what was he supposed to do? Idiots, the lots of them, didn’t they think before disturbing the schedule like that?

“Maybe there’s a way to get it out of him. A doctor first, I think - there’s no need to be overly superstitious. It might only be a case of a troubled mind… I heard they did wonders with the new German treatments.”

He froze. He wished he could have ignored that the women were talking about him, but he couldn’t. He had seen what happened to the kids they sent to the doctor - when they thought them crazy. He had seen.

He stood up. He had to do something.

Anything.

The door opened, and his eyes met Miss MacErsen.
He opened his eyes.

He was still feeling it. Since Halloween night - like a heavy cloud of disgusting smoke rolling in waves over the place.

Dark magic.

“There’s nothing to be done.” He said, and felt more than saw his subordinates wince. “But this is no failure. This is a new beginning.” His voice was sure, steely. It conveyed hope and confidence - far more than what he had felt since Harry had left his fortress in a trail of blood.

So much power.

“What are we to do, M’Lord?”

Grindelwald smiled.

It wasn’t a good smile.

“Take note,” he said, and immediately, all of them rushed to grab papers and pens. “I want the place evacuated in the month. Tell the people where to spread out. Gave the good word, but be careful. Discretion is what matters most. Tell them to wait for orders - they should come quite quickly.”

No one sane should stay here more than strictly necessary. Blood had soaked the walls, the floor. Something rotten had taken root here, and he could feel it in the air. Something sour, that made him want to spit and to cover his nose. It was devouring the place - or the people in this place. It was more than obvious.

Who the fuck was this Harry?

*I need the wand, it’s mine. I have to have it! I found it, fought for it. Only I knew! Only-*
Only he wasn’t the only one, only he wasn’t the one possessing the wand.

The boy should already be dead.

“And for those who don’t have the means to travel?”

Grindelwald turned to the fortress, looking thoughtful. His first instinct would have been to leave the weak behind - it was the law of nature after all.

He could not afford that. Not anymore.

No, he had dreamed of it. War would come soon, sooner than he had expected. It was good, but it meant a change of ways. So many, many possibilities…

“Tell them to move in groups. Find a muggle building, put repellents around, and occupy it. Then, they must send their location to the Office via the usual way - in case of trouble. Muggle repellent charms will be distributed in the week.”

He turned towards the fortress once again. They took it for the dismissal that it was and ran to distribute the mission orders.

“What is going to happen to this place?”

He didn’t move at the voice. Nikolov had been shaken by Saiman’s night. Or maybe he was a traitor, and simply afraid for the other shoe to drop.

So many possibilities.

“A prison,” Grindelwald said. “A camp to interne all our enemies. All the ones that betrayed their race by helping the muggles to enslave us, my friend.”
His words only met silence. As they should.
Helloooo!!! I'm sorry I was so long to write this chapter- life was a mess for a while. So, I made an extra long chapter! I hope you will enjoy it.

As Crimes of Grindelwald got out in the meantime, I wanted to precise that I 1) didn't like the movie, 2) found many plot choices ridiculous, 3) will thus not use any of it in this fic. The canon for this fic is the first fantastic beasts (exept for johnny depp, gosh). I hope it will not disappoint anyone, but hey! that's my decision :)

Thanks to every comment that I didn't have the time to answer to unfortunatly, I'll try to be more present from now on. Thanks for the editing to adlertypewriter!

Glass bottles smoked and boiled all over the room.

The first thing Credence thought was that it was probably extremely dangerous. The second thing was that there was no way he wouldn’t mess something up with his usual clumsiness or his-

It was better not to think about that.

Even if Credence had only been able to think about it since… ever, really.

The wizard named Flamel had gone somewhere at the back of his house, leaving Credence alone to explore the room on his own. The poor boy didn’t know what to do with himself and contented himself to look around with bright, wide eyes without moving an inch from the place he was.

The place was incredible. Shelves cluttered each side of the wall, separated only by one or two small lattice windows that overlooked the narrow street that ran alongside the building. It was very clear that the room had been a vestibule at some point, but objects and furniture had found its way here by some sort of necessity. The shelves had clearly been hooked on the walls without any thought given to organisation or any kind of decoration, sometimes anchored strangely or holding precariously on some other object. Books and papers were scattered everywhere, and cumulated on the floor in big unstable piles.

And on these piles, somehow, someone had decided that it was a good idea to put bottles, cruets and other surely quite precious objects.
A tall woman opened the door in front of him, startling the young man. She stopped and stared at him, a frown on her face. She looked quite old- as far as Credence could tell-. Then, her face cleared in a big smile as if Credence was a late Christmas present. She opened her arms in welcome but didn’t actually move to embrace him.

“You must be Credence! Has he left you here by yourself?”

Credence flushed, not daring to answer. He shifted in his feet, his eyes downcast - but it apparently was answer enough. The woman sighed.

“That man, I swear!” she exclaimed, raising her hands in the air. “Come, come child! we’ll settle you in.” She took Credence’s bag despite the boy’s shy protests and led him through the house. “Did you have any trouble in the way?”

“No, ma'am. Professor Dumbledore did everything so I could travel safely,” he answered absently. The house was… he couldn't’ put words on it. He had never seen something like that. There was little treasures everywhere, unknown trinkets, small gargoyles, books that had probably seen the birth of writing. It was humbling. Credence had been told how old the Flamels were, of course. It had taken a few weeks to come to terms with it, but to see it himself was something else entirely.

It filled him with a strange mix of unease and awe. Everything he knew went against what he saw.

Mrs. Flamel led him through three flights of stairs into a small bedroom in the attic.

“You will sleep in there, child. I’m sorry, we don’t have any other room to give you - Nicholas’s experiments tend to take space, you know,” she said apologetically. “It’s been a very, very long time since we had a young apprentice like you.”

Credence didn’t answer - he couldn’t believe his eyes. The room was small, yes, but sunny. A window pierced the sloping roof and let in golden rays of sunlight while dust particles danced lazily. The biggest wall was occupied by a small bed covered in what looked like a homemade blanket. Next to it was a wardrobe. On the wall in front of the door was a desk.

A desk! He never had a desk before - the work of the mind was a work against God, said Ma. He only needed to read the Holy Writings and to pray.
It felt… homey.

“I do hope it is to your liking?”

Credence turned around, noticing that he had walked to the middle of the room. He cast his eyes downwards, but smiled shyly. “It’s perfect,” he said softly.

Mrs. Flamel beamed.

He heard something tumbling down stairs.

“Merde mais il est où le- PERN!”

Mrs. Famel gave Credence an indulgent smile. “We should go down before Nicholas starts to look for you under the couch. You can let your bags here.”

Credence stifled a laugh. He carefully laid his bag at the foot of the small bed and followed the tall woman out of the room.

Nicholas Flamel, six time centennial wizard if Credence’s count was right, alchemist and apparently one of the most powerful wizards alive was on all fours on the floor, indeed checking under what had probably been a couch before an entire library’s worth of books and papers had been put on it.

Credence had to remind himself that he had met the Professor Dumbledore, and that after that, wizards shouldn’t shock him too much.

Well.

Surely these powerful beings had reasons. It wasn't his place to judge.

“Ah, there he is!” exclaimed Mr. Flamel as soon as he spots them, raising his hands near his head for emphasis. “I was starting to worry.”
Credence opened his mouth to apologize when Mrs Flamel cut him off: “And what do you think you were doing, leaving the poor young man to himself in the middle of the entryway?”

Said young man lowered his head, knowing when he was to blend into the background. It was strange how Mrs Flamel’s French accent was stronger when she was pissed. Some words of other languages - was it German?- slipped in here and there. Mr. Flamel looked properly chastised.

For the first time, Credence took the time to properly observe Nicholas Flamel. He was a small man overall - strangely so- but his stature gave him some sort of aura and made him somehow bigger than what he was. He held his head high and straight, even in contrition. There was something… something strange concerning his body. As if he had - a long time ago- been much, much stronger. His dark hair stopped somewhere below his shoulder blades and fell in long locks in front of his face.

His face was something in itself. On a first look, it was normal. Sharp features, aquiline nose, high cheekbones, and dark eyes. But Credence had started to see , truly see the things that the wizards hid. Tendrils of magic were running all over the right part of his face and disappeared into his collar, like shiny roots of something deeper.

Wariness crept in the boy’s heart. Why was the man hiding his face? What else was he hiding? Professor Dumbledore had promised he could be trusted, but Credence didn’t really know the Professor. And even if Dumbledore had been sincere, it could be like last time-

No, no, no,

*It could be a trap, deception, the pain in the middle of the chest, in the middle of the CORE, and screams, everywhere, and it hurts,*

*FREAK, ABOMINATION-*

(Please stop, please)

*it hurts,*

(I’m begging you, my Lord)
Harry didn’t want to get out of the suitcase. It felt so good, as if nothing bad could ever disturb the fragile artificial ecosystem. Even knowing he was inside something, in a closed space, Harry felt free. He wondered if he could reach the horizon if he walked long enough.

Dumbledore had been distant since the snake incident. Harry didn’t know what to do with this- he didn’t know this Dumbledore. Not really.

It bothered him. Not the reaction - he had expected it, no. It was the fact the Dumbledore didn’t remember him - couldn’t remember him. That he couldn’t explain, and probably never would, and was condemned to wariness from the other man.

Yes, Harry wanted to stay here forever. Never to have to go back to his duty, to the world, to the war. He sighed as he climbed up the ladder, followed by Dumbledore and Newt.

Mr. Graves still wasn’t there, and Harry didn’t know if he was glad or not.

The three of them stood there, in Newt’s room. The silence stretched uncomfortably.

“Does anyone want tea?” finally asked Newt, looking somewhere around Harry’s left shoulder.

“That would be lovely, thank you.”

No, he definitely wasn’t glad of Graves’s absence.
He and Dumbledore settled in the kitchen, precisely opposite on each side of the table. Harry wasn’t sure if they could be more childish than that. It almost made him laugh - if there wasn’t - and hadn’t been - so much at stake.

Because if Dumbledore’s wariness annoyed him - not hurt, not hurt he couldn’t be hurt right now- Harry knew precisely what effect it would have on a little boy.

Newt came back, the teacups floating behind him in a way that reminded Harry of some Disney movie he had seen from the rift on the side of his cupboard.

Was Disney even created in 1928? If his memory was correct, Snow White was released around the 30’s, or something like that....

But he had changed the timeline - his very presence changed it. Maybe, with the butterfly effect, his presence would stop Disney from being created. The idea almost made him laugh - he would be responsible for the non-existence of Snow White!

“Two sugars, as always, Professor.”

Ah. So, Newt had indeed been one of Dumbledore’s students. Probably an outcast, and a little favourite.

Some things never changed.

Some did. Harry was very, very accustomed to the cold gaze Dumbledore sent him over his tea-cup. As if he was a bomb that could explode at any moment.

“Parselmouth is an inherited trait, you know? It passes from parents to children. I was born with it.” Harry said softly. It was a little lie - not so far off the mark. From parent to child, from maker to creature, what was the difference?

Surprised flashed on Dumbledore’s face. He probably hadn’t expected an outright confrontation.

Newt had stilled, his eyes somewhere on the table, his head tilted in attention.
“I never said otherwise.”

“You didn’t have to.”

Silence. Harry sipped his tea, calmly. He knew Dumbledore had his reasons. Harry came from Grindelwald’s lair, was apparently a seer, refused to say his last name, had escaped one of the most fortified places in the world and talked the language commonly known as the one of snakes, dark magic and traitors. Harry was a physical representation of everything that had destroyed Dumbledore’s family - and yet.

He simply couldn’t let this pass. It was far too important.

Finally, Dumbledore nodded, maybe to himself, maybe to Harry. It was enough for now.

The silence returned, less tense.

The tick tock of the clock was echoing through the house.

It was like something was building.

Harry couldn’t shake the strange feeling out of himself. Something was wrong - very wrong. “Shouldn’t Mr. Graves be here already?” he asked absentmindedly. He eyes darted from one corner of the room to another.

“Is there something wrong, Harry?”

Newt’s question was lost to them as Dumbledore’s hand reached for his wand. Harry wondered what kind of wand the headmaster - not yet, not yet- originally had. But he had no time to spare on such thoughts.

The crack of apparition rang and Harry sprang into motion.

Ten meters outside the wards, there was a body, slightly twitching. Harry ran to the wards limit and
stopped net. He held his arm to catch Dumbledore before he passed the shields. They stumbled a bit but managed to stop before it was too late.

“What are you doing?”

“With all due respect, Sir, it might be a trap,” Harry whispered, already moving his wand.

This Dumbledore, this flamboyant, genius of a man was still young, and inexperienced. He had seen no war. How strange. The man frowned and stopped moving. He inspected the area, his blue eyes sharp, his shoulders tense.

Harry wondered if Grindelwald had already made an attempt on the man’s life.

Harry slowly passed his wand through the thin membrane of magic. It shone at the contact of the wood, like the calm ripples of a lake. Once almost all the wand had passed the barrier, he whispered “Accio Percival Graves!”

The magic was dampened by the wards, but Mr Grace’s body slid on the ground. Dumbledore didn’t wait to grab him and pull him inside the wards.

Mr. Graves was passed out, his lips pursed in pain. He sported a big bruise on his cheek and one of his eyes was swollen. He was heavily bleeding, two bullet wounds from what Harry could see. The young man pressed one of his hands against Mr. Graves's chest in a vain attempt to contain the bleeding.

He could feel Graves’s life spilling with his blood.

Dumbledore reached to help, imitating Harry's movements with ease.

“Don’t move him too much, I have to check if his spine’s hurt.” Harry said. He did the quickest scan he knew before casting a mobilicorpus.

Harry put his hand on Graves’s chest as he levitated in the air and led him inside the house as fast as he could without running.
“Newt!”

The magicozoologist didn’t have the time to get out of the house when Graves appeared. Then Harry had thrown away everything that was on the kitchen’s table with a swipe of his forearm and laid Graves on the naked wood.

“Ok, I need blood replenisher, at least two vials, a sterilized clamp, sterilized blades - the smallest you can find, and towels,” Harry said in a breath. “Mr. Graves? Percival, can you hear me?”

Not looking to see how his orders had been followed, Harry grabbed a pair of scissors and cut Graves’s shirt, pushing the fabric out of his chest to have a clear view of the wounds. Mr. Graves had been shot under his left shoulder and just next to his bellybutton. Both were heavily bleeding. Muggle weapons.

But the edges of the wounds were blackened and almost pulsing. Shite. Shite shite shite. Silver bullets.

Dumbledore put a bowl next to him with the tool Harry had asked for. He nodded his thanks.

“Alright, I need you to hold him. He was touched with silver bullets, any use of magic on his wounds may hurt his magical core.”

Harry had seen wounds like that, fuck, he had had wounds like that. But they were almost a century away from now! He took a deep breath to crush his mounting panic and waited for Dumbledore to put his hands on Graves’s shoulders.

“Alright. I’m going to take the bullets out. They probably touched arteries, this one especially is near the Aorta. It’s going to bleed a lot. Just -don’t panic.”

Harry really didn’t have any experience about battle healing with bloody civilians as his only help, but he’ll have to make do and hope that Dumbledore won’t faint in the middle of it. “If you start feeling faint, you sit immediately.”

Dumbledore nodded, his face blank and his eyes focused. It reminds Harry of the cave and- no. He has no time for that. He smiled tightly to the other man in a vain attempt at comfort. Something passed through Dumbledore’s eyes, and his shoulders seemed to relax slightly. Well, that was that.
Newt came back into the room - when had he got out? - his arms full of potions. He mumbled something, but Harry didn’t listen as he took the clamp in a firm hand.

This could kill Graves. He knew it, from the pit of his stomach. The man that was laying on the table under him was between the two realms.

He took a towel and folded it. He pressed in on the wound on the belly, and fixed it with Grave’s own belt. With some hope, it’ll slow the bleeding.

Harry cleaned up a bit of the oozing blood with a towel to be able to actually see what he was doing. He held the metallic object near the wound on the shoulder. “Ok. One, two, three!”

He plunged the metallic forceps into the wound and spread it slightly to allow the tool to enter the hole.

He gritted his teeth when Graves moaned in pain. The man tried thrashing around, but Dumbledore held him firm. Harry pushed it, trying hard not to touch the bone of the shoulder blade. Without magic he had to go blind, and Harry hoped not to touch too many important veins in the process.

Finally, Harry felt it under the tool. The bullet had been stopped by the higher part of the scapula, but luckily hadn’t gone through it. The bone might have been broken, but it was nothing that couldn’t be fixed afterwards.

“Ok, ok I got it. You’re doing very well.” He said, not quite knowing to whom he was talking. Newt came next to him to wipe up the blood as Harry started to dislodge the bullet. It went quite easily, the liquid easing the passage. “Good, good. It’s all gonna be ok, now.” He whispered absentmindedly. “Ok, I need one of you to apply some pressure on the wound while I take out the other bullet. Once it’s done, cast a freezing charm to slow the hemorrhage.”

“I’ll do it.”

Harry rose his eyes in surprise. Dumbledore was staring at him unblinking, if clearly pale. “You’ll have to apply a strong pressure and not let go until I say it’s clear.” He said finally.
“Alright, I’ll do it.”

Harry nodded, and gave the bullet the final slow pull.

He threw it in the bowl before immediately going to the other one. This one was worrisome, close to many organs and one of the biggest artery of the body…

He didn't have time to hesitate.

He took a deep breath.

This time, Graves woke up from the pain. His eyes shot up in fear and confusion, his mouth opening and closing, barely able to mumble a few sounds. His hands shot on his sides despite the pain it must have cost him, probing…

His wand. He was looking for his wand.

“Mr. Graves? Mr. Graves, can you hear me? You are safe, we are healing you right now. I need you to stay calm for a bit.” He said as Newt was already pinning the man’s hands to his sides.

The man only moaned louder, frowning and shaking. He was probably going into shock.

Harry knew he had to be quick. He wasn’t sure about what Graves had lived previously - obviously some form of torture. His heart might not take so easily another shock.

Wizards were very strong creatures, when it came to their body, but the mind… the mind was something else. Maybe it was the fact that most wounds couldn’t leave any scars, maybe it was that they implicitly knew they were a hunted minority, maybe it was the simple countershock of being able to produce so many beautiful things with their magic…

Harry had never been able to really put his finger on it. He had seen many people come back from what would have killed a muggle, only to die a few days later because of the shock the attack had caused on their psyche.
Finally, finally, he felt the slight resistance of the bullet under the clamp.

He pulled it out and threw it in the basin. It didn’t have the time to clink Dumbledore’s magic moved so quickly to wash over Graves.

“Ok, ok. The worse is passed.”

“Will he survive?”

Dumbledore’s voice was faint, but his hands still held firm.

“Normally, yes, but he’ll be weak for a while.” He took his wand and made it dance above the other man’s body. “Tergeo. Ferula. Brackium Emendo.”

Graves shoulder creaked disgustingly as the bone welded and healed. More blood gushed out despite the freezing charm. Graves was white as a sheet, and Harry started to worry that the man had lost too much blood.

He had to heal the wound. Now.

Harry took a deep breath and began chanting. “Vulnera sanentur, vulnera sanentur, vulnera sanentur…”

Slowly, too slowly, the blood began to come back inside the veins, and the wounds started to heal.

He breathed.

Harry sighed and sat back in the first chair he found. Immediately, Newt took things in hand and quickly bandaged Mr. Graves’s shoulder and abdomen.

“He needs blood replenisher and dreamless sleep.” He said. He was surprised by how cold his voice
Newt opened a vial and put it at Graves lips. He massaged the man’s throat to help him swallow. “We’re lucky you had that on hand.”

“They’re Mr. Graves. He made them himself, after the first time he got captured.”

Harry didn’t answer. He got up and went to check on the window. He had a clear view of the road that led to the house - but not much more. The place was surrounded by trees, as per the wizarding tradition. Not enough to be called a forest, but stupidly enough to allow any intruder to hide a few meters away from the wards.

He didn’t see anything, but…

“The security of this place is compromised. We have to go.”

“This was made by muggle weapons. Even if they managed to corner Graves, they cannot have followed him, and even less cast the wards.”

Harry’s jaw set in anger. He turned around to glare at Newt. “If you think muggles really don’t know about us, if you think they cannot follow us, if you think they have no way of passing by our magic, then you’re stupid, or naïve. Both will get you killed.” He spat.

He felt a twinge of regret when he saw Newt take a step back and lower his eyes to the floor. He took a deep breath and held his hand, palm out, in apology. “We have to go. Somewhere safe.”

“I have a safehouse near Chicago,” said Dumbledore suddenly.

Harry looked at him, and it was enough. His voice, his neatly groomed beard and flamboyant hair - like a lion’s mane, falling on his shoulders -, his eyes, still twinkling behind his half-moon glasses - it was his childhood, his trust. This, this was the man he had followed to death, in every way. The man the had been part of the best moments of his childhood - and the worst. Harry had conflicted feelings, but at least this was familiar. This man was like an anchor in this unknown world he had found himself in.
Harry knew perfectly well that this feeling was ephemeral, probably emphasised by the bleak situation. He was making an object of Dumbledore. This man wasn’t the Dumbledore he had known, and the Dumbledore he had known wasn’t the real man either. But right now, it was what he needed.

“Good. We go there, at least the time Graves recover enough to be on his feet. Go and take your things -- we’re out in five minutes.”

Newt immediately ran towards his rooms, without even discussing the order. Had he been to war? If Harry’s calculus were correct, he was of age for the WW1, but he had been told that only a very few wizards had participated. Yet, there was something - in the way he held himself…

Harry went back to check on Graves vitals.

“You are a healer?”

Harry nodded, his fingers still on Graves’s pulse. “I learnt in the field. I helped…” He met the piercing blue eyes, “I helped at Numengard too. Healing section.”

Dumbledore opened his mouth, but Newt came back into the room before he had time to say anything.

Harry cast a lightning charm and passed an arm behind Graves’s back, careful not to touch the injured shoulder.

“How do we go to your place?”

“Floo should be enough. The password is ‘ladybird’. Chicago, Safehouse 68!” the man said, throwing a handful of powder in the fire.

Harry only hoped the floo wasn’t monitored.
“Do you know why Mrs. Cole is locking your door, Tom?”

The child glared at the doctor. He hated everything, from the too-clean clothes (they never had clothes like this around here!) to the round glasses, and the kind look on his face. As if the man was kind. As if he meant well.

Tom knew he didn't. He had heard of what they did, in these asylums. What they did to people they didn’t like. What they did to people they didn’t understand. What they would do to him.

They’ll lock him somewhere, in the dark, alone. They’ll drug him, and if he resisted, they’ll put a metallic bar in his eye and hit it with a hammer, until there was nothing left of him.

“Tom, I spoke to you. Do you know why Mrs. Cole is locking your door every night?”

“She locked it in the day too.”

The doctor didn’t even have the decency to flinch at Tom’s words. He looked at him with amusement, as if to say ‘I have seen many things, you are not frightening me, child’. Tom hated it, hated him, hated his stupid eyes that didn’t want to dilate in fear.

“And why do you think she locks it the day too?”

“Because she’s afraid.”

Tom immediately regretted his words. He could see that he had answered exactly the way the doctor wanted him to. It was obvious - his shoulder had relaxed, and he had leaned forwards, to examine him further.

“She’s afraid? And why do you think she is afraid, Tom?”

They both knew the answer to that. They both knew Mrs. Cole had talked to the doctor before he had come in Tom’s room, heavy with alcohol, whining about the demon child.
Tom didn’t answer. He raised his chin, refusing to look away. Refusing to show weakness. The doctor sighed and took his chin in his hand as if Tom had disappointed him. “Do you think I should be afraid too, Tom?”

The child only stared at him. He didn’t even look quite hateful. Simply… empty.

“You’re a proud kid,” said the doctor. He palpated one of his pockets and got a cigarette out. He lighted it and put the lighter back in his pocket. When he took a deep whiff, making the tip shine in the darkness of the room. The sun disappeared early these days - and of course Tom didn’t have the right to any more light than strictly necessary. “A smart one too - it’s quite easy to see.”

Tom tilted his head. Of course, he was smart. Smarter than the other kids, smarter than the doctor, even.

“Yes, yes, you know how smart you are, don’t you Tom? Surely, my question must annoy you. But I am doing, my job, as everyone should.”

The kind look had disappeared from the man’s face - and Tom preferred it that way. Maybe he wasn’t as stupid as Tom thought he was. “A smart kid like you won’t be locked up, if that is what you fear.”

Silence.

“Tell me, Tom, if one of the other children went to be hurt, would you be sad?”

“No, why would I?” asked Tom, genuinely confused.

“If you went and hurt an animal, would you feel guilty?”

“I don’t see why…”

“And if you hurt another child?”
Tom stared. Why was the doctor asking him the question, if he didn’t even listen to the answer?

“How do you feel, right now?”

“How should I feel?”

The doctor smiled indulgently. Tom narrowed his eyes.

“That will be all, Tom. Good afternoon.”

The doctor rose and tipped his hat at the child. He got out of the room, locking it behind him. He heard the child move in the room, probably checking on the trophies he had hidden just before the doctor had come in. He walked down the poor excuse of a staircase, to the office of Mrs. Cole. She was just as he had left her, except that the drink she was nursing definitely wasn’t the same. The poor woman was probably hysteric - as many unwed members of the cursed sex. He hadn’t seen a single Man in the area - no surprise this place was going to the dogs. While focusing on the necessity for women to raise children - as per the natural order of things - many forgot that these women needed a firm masculine hand to keep them - and the children- in line.

“How did it go?”

“We would need more tests, for something so important. But from what I saw - and what you told me - I can say that the child suffers from constitutional psychopathic inferiority. He has manias, and shows some very heavy antisocial disorders, moral deficiency, criminal traits… Considering the care he takes of his appearance, he might also show some mental deviances, such as homosexuality.”

The woman gasped, her hand on her mouth in shock.

“But- What can we do, doctor?”

“My advice would be to intern the child for a while. We would treat him with insulin coma therapy - it is widely known as a very effective procedure to calm the most violent patients. You told me he had hurt some of the other children, yes?”
“Yes! Oh, there was no proof, of course, and the other kids are too frightened to speak. But it was him, there no doubt on that, no Sir!”

The doctor nodded patiently.

Definitely hysterical.

“Well, this should solve your problems. However, internment - especially for children- can become quite expensive. I would recommend to do the treatment here - he will not be able to put much fuss anyway. I will come back in a week to start it, if that agreeable to you?”

“Yes, yes, of course, doctor. We don’t have much money here, you know, and I’d prefer to spend it on our children before... that.”

“It is perfectly natural, Mrs. Cole. Perfectly natural. Well, if this is all, I’ll take my leave. Good day, Madam.”

---

Grindelwald was sitting in his office, his back straight, his eyes fixed on the wall in front of him.

He could feel it coming.

The solution, the answer -- It was there, just out of sight. Just, just there. He could brush the tip of his finger against it and yet didn’t feel it’s texture, yet he was almost there-

“Sir?”

His eyes snapped on the man that had dared interrupt him. The young man - child, really, didn’t even step back. He had at least the decency to lower his eyes.

Such trust.
Grindelwald knew what he was avoiding. The terrible, terrible eye. The one that wasn’t grey. The one that shone with unspoken power, the one that saw through the membrane of time and men. The one he had stolen, a long time ago.

“I’m sorry Sir -- I knocked. Your speech is in five minutes.” He said in weak German.

It was amusing, really. The boy - child really- was so well groomed. What was he, sixteen? yet, he came here with all the trust in the world, ready to face whatever would fall upon him, to do his duty.

It was...exciting.

“Come here, child.”

The kid looked up in surprise and obeyed.

“Closer. I don’t bite.” Gellert said softly. He let the boy walk until their knees almost touched.

“What is your name, child?”

“Jean, Sir.”

“Jean? Are you French?”

“My mother is, Sir. My father is Russian.”

“A beautiful association indeed…”

The boy flushed prettily. It was so easy.
“Tell me, Jean, have you ever been kissed?”

This time, the boy looked up in surprise, all protocol forgotten. “N-no Sir.”

Gellert rose his hand and brushed the still round cheek, softly. “Would you like to be?”

“I- I don’t know, Sir, I-” he said, eyes wide.

Gellert rose an expecting eyebrow. The boy flushed even harder, his skin quickly becoming as red as his hair.

Flamboyant, indeed. Like an everlasting flame…

“It… It would be an honor, Sir.”

“Good. Very good, child.”

Geller took the boy’s head in his hand - he was still small enough that he could do it without sitting up and guided him down until his mouth was a breath away. Gellert attacked the boy’s mouth, pressing his tongue everywhere he could, feeling the warmth, the sweet taste of innocence.

It wasn’t enough. Something was missing

Just as abruptly as he had started, Gellert stopped the kiss, and pushed the kid away. “You may go,” he said coolly, already turning his attention to the papers on his desk. He heard the kid scramble out and close the door.

He snorted. Cute.

Five minutes later, Gellert Grindelwald entered The Great Hall of Numengard. His name echoed faintly through the door, in rhythm with the clapping. He closed his eyes, concentrating; He pushed the double door and entered. Step, step, step. A bench had been installed to allow most of the population to sit.
He was alone, in the middle.

“Grindelwald! Grindelwald!”

The drums played, punctuating each scream of the crowd. It was glorious, régal. It made thrills ran on his back, and his heart beat faster.

“Grindelwald! Grindelwald!”

He walked, his face blank, to the estrade. He crossed his arms on his chest.

A silence fell over the room.

He waited, and let it stretch. He turned on himself, giving the impression that he was meeting each and every eye. On the first rank, soldiers were sitting straight, posture perfectly identical, hands on their wand, eyes on him.

“My friends! My friends.”

A breath. “A terrible thing happened during our most sacred celebration. Many of ours died while they should have been eating, dancing… teaching our ways to their children. Many strong soldiers, valuable scientists, innocents… And why? why, may you ask?”

There was a rumble, as many shifted on their seat. “People came in this place. Wizards! People, just like us. Of course, we opened our arms to them. “Thy shall never turn your back on your kin and your kin will never turn their back on you”, as said Merlin himself.” He rose his arms, pointing at the whole room around him. “We are all kin! All wizards! And yet…”

He let his arm fall. The magical globes cast a strong, reddish light on the room. “Yet there is a shameful thorn in our side. Ashamed, yes! that’s what I am! Ashamed that I opened my arms to our kin, and that these people betrayed us! Ashamed that wizards turned their wands against wizards!”

A whisper, this time, but no one spoke. “These people betrayed us, and for what? To help muggles! Who knows if they aren’t selling us out as we speak?”
He stopped and turned. They were captivated, he knew. Angry, afraid. Ready for him. It was like they had lost their minds, and become one under his. Only his.

“That is why we must go, my friends. We must be ready for the fight! We must be ready for our fate! Go on the roads, my friends! spread your words! Spread hope! And freedom! It is what I want for you. Many places are being prepared as we speak for all of you. Take your children, and go! Do not stop until we have won. Do not stop for anything! Teach the wizarding world how to seek its freedom. For it is what you are, each and every one of you. Soldiers of Freedom!”

It was an explosion. They all rose on their feet, clapping, jumping, raising their hands in the air. Raising their hands in the air, palm down, arm straight, slashing an imaginary enemy in front of them. Screaming his name, in every language they knew. Screaming for freedom.

And Gellert… he could feel the magic. Crackling around them like the bells of destiny, swinging, heating, making them all even more angry, even more powerful. It was their beating heart, echoing in their chests.

It was beautiful. Magic… magic was beautiful.

He rose in hand and joined them. He called for freedom. He called for domination.

He called for war.

---

They stumbled into the safehouse.

Harry saw the ground coming closer until someone caught him. He found himself surrounded by warm arms and colorful fabric.

He tried to get up, but his leg gave out under him with a painful throb.
Newt lifted Mr. Graves from his hold as Dumbledore held him upright. “Are you quite alright my boy?”

Harry could have cried. Almost against himself, he held the man back. “Sorry. It’s the cruciatus,” he whispered.

Dumbledore held him tighter. Harry knew he knew who had cast the spell. “Alright, alright. Let’s lay you down. You need to rest.”

Harry nodded. Dumbledore passed his arm above his shoulder and helped him to the couch. The young man couldn’t shake the coldness out of him. The dampness. The last time he had held Dumbledore in such a way-

“Harry?”

“I’m alright.” The young man let himself be lowered on the couch. “I’m alright.”

Dumbledore looked at him dubiously above his glasses. Like a student who hadn’t told quite the truth.

It was too much. Harry laughed, despite the pain in his ribs. The older man cracked a smile, if a worried one.

“Truly, Professor. I’ve lived worse than a little cruciatus, especially a half-hearted one.”

“You seem to have lived a lot of things indeed.”

Harry smiled weakly, his arms held against his chest. The other man put a comforting hand on his shoulder and walked away.

Harry slowly laid down. He was asleep when his head touched the pillow.

It was dark when he awoke. It took him some time to remember where he was.
Harry sat, testing the steadiness of his feet. Dumbledore had fallen asleep in the armchair next to him, a book on his lap. Harry looked at his figure, traced by the moonlight in the dark. It was something else to see him asleep. Trusting, helpless, human. His glasses askew, his lips parted, his hair falling in his face.

As if feeling he was observed, Dumbledore opened his eyes.

“You’re awake.”

Harry rose an eyebrow. “So are you.”

Dumbledore snorted and passed a hand on the crook of his neck and in his hair, messing it even more. “Percival is asleep in the only bed we have, I’m afraid. This place was only made for one person.”

Harry nodded. He knew how the safehouse system worked. The houses were prepared for a singular purpose, and put at the disposal by the military force of the country only for a certain amount of time. After that, every enchantment was broken, and the address changed.

Safety measures.

“Why did you need a place here? We’re in the middle of the school year - aren’t you a professor in England?”

Dumbledore let his head fall on the back of the armchair. “I was called here. Grindelwald’s second was put to trial, and I was asked to help.”

“When did that happen?”

“About a week ago.”

A week ago. It was strange. One would think that if Grindelwald had lost his second, Harry would
have seen or heard something during his stay at the citadel.

“What you said about the muggles…”

Harry passed his hand in his hair. What could he say? “The place I lived, before- before Numengard. It was a Wizarding community.”

The silence stretched as he struggled to find the words.

“We thought we were safe. But we made too much noise, and they found us. Once we were recognized, there was nothing to be done.”

Dumbledore sighed. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry I asked.” There was a sadness in his voice Harry had never heard before. Of course, of course… Ariana.

“I do not agree with Grindelwald.” Harry blurted. “If we went out in front of the muggles, we would be slaughtered. Only a fool - or a spoiled wizard - would not see that. And even then…”

Dumbledore tilted his head, encouraging him to speak. “Even then, genocide is never the solution. It is the problem, but never, never, never the solution.” Harry said. “No one deserves to die in such a way only because they were born,” he added in a whisper.

“At least you survived,” said Dumbledore. There was something in his tone, as if he was forcing himself to hope for the best, but didn’t really believe it himself.

Harry held his eyes. “I was the only one.”
Hello everyone! This is an extra long chapter because I just love to write this. I want to thank you all for the motivating comments - and my beta, adlertypewriter, who edited this faster than a lightning strike. I've been told that I forgot to warn a couple of you about the potential for trigger warnings in the last chapter. I hope all of you are ok, and I'll try not to do this mistake again. Thanks to the comment (I can't quite remember who it was) for letting me know. If any of you feel like I didn't tag/warn sufficiently for any trigger warning, please let me know. It is for me a priority that my readers feel safe and at ease with the story!

The next chapter is already on the way and I hope you will like this one. It is quite the last "calm" chapter for a long while, so that's that.

Tw trauma-induced anxiety and child abuse (nothing violent)

Dumbledore seemed at loss for words. It was strangely satisfying.

Harry hadn’t really wanted to say this. He hadn’t wanted to burden this Dumbledore with things that had yet to happen.

He had left the tie behind- he should leave the grief there as well. “I shouldn’t have said that. I’m sorry, Professor.”

He would have liked to get up and go, somewhere, anywhere, just to cool off, to be alone, to be away from his own mistake. This Dumbledore had nothing to do with what had - will- happen, yet, yet-

A hand squeezed his shoulder.

Harry looked up and fell in Dumbledore’s eyes. The man gave him a small smile. “You may call me Albus, you know? You are not a student of mine.”

It was a peace offering, the young man knew it. Not an apology, not a change, but a step forward.
You're not a student of mine.

No, he guessed he wasn't anymore. If he had ever been.

A tear rolled on Harry’s cheek. “Alright.”

“I'll go and make some coffee. We both need it, I believe.” Dumbledore said with a wink.

Harry smiled. “Ah, yeah. Thank you.”

He passed his hand on his face, quickly drying the tears as soon as Dumbledore was away. It had been years since he hadn’t teared up like that, unchecked, in front of someone. Somehow, he didn’t feel ashamed, but relieved. As if something had been unlocked. Some part of him, the more human part of him, maybe.

Maybe.

The thing was… he could still taste the blood in his mouth.

Dumbledore came back with the steaming cup and a tablet. “Chocolate. The best medicine against sadness, in my humble opinion.”

Harry took it gratefully. He hadn’t eaten chocolate since Teddy -

He carefully unwrapped it and took a bite. He let the sugary texture melt on his tongue, expiring so the taste invaded all his mouth. It was a more bitter than what he remembered, than the first time he had tasted it, in the Hogwarts Express, with Ron and Scabbers. But it was better too. More suited to the situation. To him.

He opened his eyes, not knowing when he had closed them. “What time is it?”

“I’d say about three in the morning. You slept quite some time.”
Harry blushed. “Er… yeah. I always sleep a lot after a Cruciatas.”

Dumbledore nodded. “It is quite a common after effect, I’m afraid.”

He fumbled into the pocket of his robes and took out a little box, thinly engraved with what Harry assumed were forest animals.

“Lemon drop?”

Harry's smile was blinding.

“Depends, have they been tampered with?”

Dumbledore laughed, tossing his head slightly backward. “Ah, but a gentleman never tells his secrets.”

“Well then, I guess I'll just have to trust you…”

The professor looked at him for a few seconds. “Yes”, he finally said, “I guess you'll have to.”

They passed some time in what Harry would have called a comfortable silence if his back and legs weren’t hurting him so much.

---

The sun was barely rising when a moan startled him. Dumbledore didn’t even have the time to open his eyes and Harry had already bolted in front of the table.

Albus couldn’t help but notice that the boy had put himself between him and the noise. Harry stayed there a second, wand in hand, and- nothing. He stood taller and walked calmly towards the noise.
Mr. Graves was thrashing in his bed. His brow was covered with sweat and his skin clammy. Albus stayed at the doorway as Harry walked to the wounded man and sat beside Mr. Graves on the bed.

Graves really was in bad shape. The sheets were damp with sweat and his usually styled hair stuck to his forehead. He was less pale than he had been when they had found him- it was something, Albus supposed.

Harry inspected the wounds, his eyes sharp in concentration. His hands moved over his patient with the sharpness of a blade, yet there was something extremely soft everytime Harry moved him. Maybe kind was a better word.

“What’s wrong with him?”

Albus acknowledged Newts presence in the room with a small smile. The young man seemed ruffled, his hair falling in front of his eyes a bit more unruly than usual. It was longer too, not unlike the way Newt wore it at school. Dumbledore opened his mouth to answer - but Harry was quicker.

“Graves body is rejecting the last traces of silver.” Harry said, frowning, “He’s lucky the bullets didn’t break inside him.”

He was talking so blankly, so unlike the way, Albus had heard him before…

“They didn’t?”

“Sliver cut through magic. The magic… congregated around the bullet. If someone is powerful enough, then the magic will keep it from imploding inside the wound.”

Harry considered the wound for a moment, waving his wand above Graves, before leaning back. “He’ll be fine. I’m more worried about the shoulder wound - do you know if it is his wand arm?”

When no one could answer him, Harry grumbled something under his breath, and concentrated on his patient.
Albus sighed softly and considered the young man.

When he had seen Harry standing, wand in hand, he had expected the man’s magic to lash out, to twirl defensively, to shine at the tip of his strangely-shaped wand, but no. It was like the man had forgotten he had magic; it was like he was a *void* of magic.

It felt powerful but powerful in absence.

Albus had always been a very astute man - and he knew it. A curious one at that. Yet, he couldn’t figure out Harry. Fucking Merlin, he didn’t even know the man’s last name.

And yet, Harry was there, focused on Graves’s injuries as if the director’s health was the most important thing in the world. He was muttering, passing his hand to one point on to the next-

This was actually… No, Albus had never seen something like this, but he had read about it. It was advanced healing; something one wouldn’t learn out of a high school - and even if the man had been in such a magical school (if he had, surely Albus would have at the very least known his name) he was clearly too young to have finished any high level courses of studies. His reflexes were fast and so like an Auror - a quite experienced one- when the hell did Harry have the time to learn such things?

Maybe, his gift as a seer helped in the area…

A seer. *A parselmouth seer*. With enough power and slyness to get out of one of the most guarded places in the world while dueling Gellert.

That was a mystery if he knew one.

Albus was already feeling a headache coming.

---

Harry had a hard time feeling Graves’s energy. Of course, Dumbledore had to burn a hole in his back while he was working.
He clenched his jaw, reminding himself that it was normal that a man in such a position didn’t trust him after knowing him for only a few days. God knows he wouldn’t trust himself.

Don’t do anything harsh. The secret was to not do anything harsh.

Which was, ironically, one of Harry’s weak spots.

He focused even more on Graves and tried to throw away the urge to shake Dumbledore into senses he couldn’t have. Graves had been badly hurt - that was for sure. Silver tended to leave marks and to stop magic from operating in the areas it touches - this was why it had been used at such length against wizards and magical creatures.

But silver was also rare and expensive - especially turned into a weapon. As far as Harry knew, there was no magical or muggle researches on its effect on wizards - nothing modern at the very least. There were only two solutions: someone was running around with a silver loaded gun for the panache of it, or someone reading far too old texts and hunting wizards purposefully. At the very least knowing how to hurt one the most efficiently.

Suffice to say that Harry really, really didn’t like the second solution.

It was putting him on edge. The not knowing. The knowledge of the abyss on the horizon already, without actually knowing where it was.

Harry pulled the blanket back once he was sure Graves was stabilised.

He met two blurry eyes. Graves opened his mouth to talk, but Harry didn’t leave him the time to utter a word. He cast a spell to slowly and smoothly sit the man against the thick cushions, and presented him with a glass of water, holding it so Graves was forced to drink at least some of it.

The Auror made a small groan at the back of his throat.

“Slowly, slowly. You’ve been out of it quite some time, Mr. Graves.”
A groan again.

“You know, I think it’s the first time I met someone with the same luck as mine. A week between two severe injuries, it’s a record’s worth, really.

“Fuck you,” rasped the Auror.

Harry snorted.

“Well, if he’s insulting people it shows that he’s getting better,” said Dumbledore lightly, clasping his hands. Graves glared hard, but well, he couldn’t do anything else.

Harry sighed. “You scared us bad, man. Two shots, silver bullets. You’re out of trouble, but the field is forbidden for quite some time I’m afraid.”

If possible, Graves looked grimmer at that.

“Told ministry?”

Harry frowned. He almost instinctively traded a glance with Dumbledore. The professor did seem just as put out, if not as surprised, by the Auror’s request. “Told ministry?” insisted Graves.

“Is that what you did? You went to the M.A.C.U.S.A to tell them everything, as usual?”

Dumbledore’s voice was deceptively soft - Harry had rarely heard him speak like that. The man had his wand clasped in his hands, almost savagely put it on his lap. Well in sight, ready to use. Harry almost felt Graves tense, his hand gripping the sheets like a lifeline.

“Calm down. Mr. Graves, we won’t do anything until we know who hurt you and how.”

Graves didn’t answer, and stiff as a wooden board. Then, he finally relented. “Kovski,” he said with finality.
Dumbledore swore under his breath and quickly left the room.

What the hell did that mean?

Harry shot up on his feet and followed the professor. Dumbledore had retreated to the front of a small library in the main room. Harry hadn’t noticed it before. Dumbledore lit a cigarette and leaned over a big book that was full of flying pages; he was itching to ask how all that was holding together.

The young man carefully coughed in his hand.

“Kovski?” he asked.

Dumbledore blew out some smoke.

“A man of dubious morals.” was the only answer he got before the professor dived back into his book.

“Professor, I need to know what we are jumping into.”

Dumbledore glanced at him thoughtfully. “You can go if you wish. Nobody will judge you.”

“I’m sorry?”

“You can go. You left Numengard for a reason, didn’t you? Saving Graves and the others was only the cherry on the top. It is perfectly normal that you don’t want to take risks for strangers.”

Harry opened and closed his mouth. Surely, Dumbledore wasn’t saying what Harry thought he was saying. He felt the rush of anger and took a deep breath. “I never said...” He stopped than inclined his head to the side, his hands clasped in front of him. “Do you want me to go, professor?”

The professor simply looked at him, his eyes twinkling. He smiled softly. “The matter isn’t what I
nor you want, Harry.”

“Then what is it?”

Dumbledore’s eyes flicked to his ring. He drew another whiff.

“Ah.” He sighed. “I can’t… I’m not one of his. I had this ring a long time ago. One day…” Harry made a point to look at the professor in the eyes, “One day I will tell you. But not now.”

There was a silence. “Kovski is the interface between the muggle illegal organisations and the wizarding world.”

Harry frowned, and passed his hand in his hair. There wasn’t, to his knowledge, such post in his ministry’s time. But once again, the English ministry was much less removed from the English muggle’s powers; and two Dark Lords - with their different legislations- had passed.

But -

“At Capone. He is allied with Grindelwald.”

Professor Dumbledore raised an eyebrow, his eyes suddenly sharp and interested.

“I heard him talking about it. Capone was the one to give him Graves.”

Dumbledore nodded and put the book on the small table. It was a map - of the city, Harry would have guessed. “Capone is especially powerful here. We’re literally in the center of his territory,” Dumbledore said, tapping on the map. “He is the reason I am here, instead of teaching in England.”

Harry studied the plans. “The International Tribunal of Magic is here - it’s a new thing, opened just after the War. Kovski was put in trial for association with an escaped criminal of Rank 1, treason, non respect of the federal laws and bribery.”

The ITM, then. That, Harry, knew. The most ruthless tribunal there was and it wasn’t directed by a
Dark Lord. The type of military force you didn’t want to be nearby; and you certainly didn’t want to upset. The ITM didn’t deal with the muggle problem. It was a wizard structure, held by wizards, to judge other wizards. And, generally speaking, execute them shortly after.

After a discreet audience, of course.

Something struck Harry. “Why you? You aren’t a lawyer, nor an Auror, as far as I know. Why would the ITM need a transfiguration professor?”

“Mr. Graves recommended me.” was the only answer, but it was more than enough for Harry. He fought so his eyes didn’t widen at the implications - all the implications. How much did Graves actually know of Dumbledore’s life? The answer to that question would answer many, many more.

“This is a muggle place, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“And one of the men that did the liaison between muggles and wizards is one of Grindelwald’s allies,” Said Harry, realising how actually screwed they were. “A man that you personally helped to put in the cold.”

Dumbledore didn’t even answer.

“How long until the wards here reset?”

“Tomorrow, at 1pm exactly.”

Graves was so not in any state to move tomorrow.

“Ok,” whispered Harry, “Ok, ok, cool cool cool cool cool. We’re fine, we’ll be fine.”

Dumbledore was staring at him in utter amusement, clearly barely stopping short of chuckling. Harry couldn’t help but feel that he was the subject of the joke. He scowled.
“Of course we’ll be fine.” said Dumbledore merrily, “what’s life without a bit of a challenge?”

Harry made a noise in the back of his throat and Dumbledore had the gall to wink at him.

Harry huffed half heartedly and went back to Grave's bedside. No matter what they did, they would need him walking, or floating at the very least.

Newt had taken his place on the chair. The young man observed the magicozoologist coo after the stick-like creature he seemed to always have with him.

They would have to move all the creatures too.

“Have you feed the Runespoor?”

Newt looked up, startled “I'm sorry?”

Harry gazed at him. “The Runespoor. have you fed it?”

“Ah, hum, yes. Yes.”

“Good,” whispered Harry. “Good”.

“Do you … still, hear them? Now?”

He shook his head. “Not at this distance, no. But a snake left alone - even with three heads- without enough for it to grow… It’s bound to end badly.”

“I take very good care of my creatures.”
“I know,” Harry said, with such definitivity that Newt didn’t answer.

Harry folded his hands on his lap when he found himself scratching his scar. He wondered what Tom was doing at the moment.

---

Tom was actively trying to escape the orphanage.

After the doctor’s strange interrogation, Mrs. Cole had come in his rooms. She hadn’t talked, but the way she looked at him with shame and pity had said it all. Then, after considering him for a moment, her half-drunk bottle of wine forgotten in her left hand, she had gone out.

And locked the door.

Nobody had come to open it since. Not for his chores nor to give him food.

In any other circumstances, he would have waited it out. He had some food hidden under his bed and knew hunger. Despite his early age, he had always felt it less than his peers it seemed. Mrs. Cole said it was because he was starved in his mom’s belly already.

Tom had listened and sworn that one day he would lock Mrs. Cole in the cave under the orphanage. And let her starve under his feet.

However, the doctor’s visit had set a very clear alarm in his mind. He had passed in front of the asylum once. He had heard the screams, seen heads bang on the windows.

He remembered what Mrs Cole and her little friends had said. They wanted to call a priest. There was no way for any of it to end well for him.

Before he was out, he had a few problems to solve.

Tom was sitting perfectly still on the side of his bed. Usually, he opened a book in front of him. He
had noticed that it creeped people out less. It didn’t matter anymore.

No, he sat still. He let his mind work.

He was on the second floor. His window was locked. The door was locked. There was no fireplace to climb on. The only furniture in his room were his bed, a small desk, a wardrobe. He had twelve nuts and a bag of dried grapes, four dried tomatoes and a ration bar. He had bad quality sheets, wood. His clothes. No money, no bag.

The adults didn’t come near his room since it was locked. Unsafe. Whispers, shadows under the door, giggles. The children didn’t have such worries. He tilted his head and listened. Focus.

Tap tap. Exited whisper. answer. Whine, tap tap tap.

At least three. Maybe one more - he wasn’t sure. Klack was mute and discreet. And, as it happened, a snitch. Well, at least he couldn’t scream when hit.

His first reflex had been to climb out of the window. Make a rope with the sheets. But the sheets would tear under his weigh, and he didn’t have enough to land properly.

And he would pass behind Mrs. Cole’s window before he touched the floor.

No, it wasn’t an option.

Tap, tap, tap.

“Maybe he’s not here.”

“Maybe he ran away!”

If only.
His head shot up. Yes. *That.* That was how he was going to get out. Tom took out his shoes and put them on the mattress. He slid slowly on the floor and walked on tip toe on the second, fourth and seventh wooden slate. All the others creaked.

He got just behind the door.

Tom was deeply annoyed. “Help!” he cried in his smallest, most pitiful voice. “Help me please…”

It wasn’t really *credible,* but surely the door would choke the sounds enough to avoid any suspicion. He had never been good with *feelings* and especially not with pretending to have them.

“Hush, I hear something!”

“Help me!” he cried again, a bit louder.

“It’s Tom!”

Tom rolled his eyes. No, it was the queen of England, *obviously.*

“Of course it’s ‘im, you dummy! Tom, what’s wrong?”

This all was too slow, and it was getting on his nerves. But he could be patient. He *had to.*

“I’m bleeding! I’m bleeding a lot and I’m hungry, please…”

Silence. He waited.

“He’s lying. You know Tom’s a liar!”

“But what if he’s hurt? He’s a tiny one, someone gotta help him!”
A tiny one. So the girl outside was one of the older children— one of these girls that liked to coo after the younger children, that took upon themselves to pretend to be... what? A mother? A big sister? Something like that. Tom had never understood it, and the attention some of these girls had put on him had made him utterly uncomfortable. He wasn’t a stray dog for God’s sake.

“We can’t trust ‘im!” insisted the other voice.

“Can someone hear me? Help! They hurted my head and I’m bleeding and-”

He stopped and faked a fall on the floor. He heard shrieks on the other side of the door.

“Tom? Tom, are you alright?”

This time, he didn’t answer. “Tom?” Nothing. “Toooooom?”

He waited until he couldn’t hear the running steps anymore than got up. He knew the children wouldn’t go to Mrs. Cole - they would be too frightened for that. No, it would be the guardian. The man would come, open the door, and make a few steps into the room.

And Tom had to be ready for it.

Well, his bed did have metallic bars.

---

Credence opened his eyes.

He didn’t know the wooden ceiling that stared back at him. Neither the color, nor the pattern were familiar. The light too - it was different from everything he knew. He considered with a strange apathy that he must have been lost. The idea didn’t urge any sort of panic inside of him.
How strange.

“Hey, child. You did us quite a fright today.”

Mr. Flamel was leaning against the wall on the side of the bed. Credence’s bed. The young man suddenly remembered where he was. “What-?”

“What happened?”

Credence nodded warily.

“Nothing we hadn’t expected to - even if it was quite soon, I must say. You panicked, and the Obscurus got out.” He raised his hand when Credence’s eyes went wild, “Nothing was destroyed, no one was hurt. Do not fret child.”

Credence dearly wished to obey, he really did. But what if Flamel was angry at him. He said nothing was destroyed, it didn’t mean that nothing had been damaged. With all the fragile stuffs and the potions (wasn’t it how the wizards named their chemistry?) laying around, there was no way that-

“You’re thinking very loudly, do you know that?”

Credence startled. “Can you- can you read my mind?” He asked in horror.

“No, no I can’t. I don’t have to.” Flamel sat on the floor near the head of the bed, as if he hadn’t even thought about what a chair could be used for. “But I’m very old”, he continued”, “and I’ve seen my share of the world.”

His eyes were kind, but there was still… his face…

“Is it my face that frightened you so?”

Credence didn’t answer, but tensed. Flamel sighed. “What you are seeing is a glamour. It is a proof of a very high sensibility that you noticed it at all.”
Credence felt himself blush, but he didn’t lower his guard.

“As I said, I lived a very, very long life, child. The world is not what it used to be… When I was young, wars were still fought with swords and cannons, and plagues still decimated the world’s population. Oh, of course, they still do, but there is fewer traces… People don’t burn wizards anymore, too.”

Credence eyes widened.

“I am wearing a glamour because even if I don’t age, my face took the pain and wounds of five centuries of life. It is not something that can be shown to anyone.” He said, and his voice was strangely soft, as if he was talking to a small, frightened animal. “I will not stop to use the glamour to put you at ease, child. But, now that you know, I hope all will be better. Can I trust you on that?”

The young man nodded eagerly. Trust. He wasn’t sure he could give that, not now, maybe not ever. But he had promised himself that he would everything he could for things to get better. So he would.

Flamel smiled like Credence had promised a miracle. “Good!” he said, “you should still rest if you are feeling weak. There is food downstairs if you feel up to it - we will talk later.”

Credence opened his mouth - but Flamel was already out of the room. The young man dozed for a while, hoping he wasn’t too much of a burden. Professor Dumbledore had promised him that Flamel was the best to deal with his condition, as far as he knew, and that the old man would be delighted to have a new apprentice.

But Dumbledore felt like the kind of man to believe stubbornly in their fellows' goodwill.

Indeed, when Credence felt stable enough to brave the strange staircase, a delicious looking cake, along with a cup of tea somehow still warm were waiting for him on the living room table.

Mrs. Flamel was sitting on a wooden chair that looked like it had gone through centuries - which, as he thought about it, it probably did. She was reading some sort of journal. Her eyes met his, and she smiled softly. “Ah, you’re up! Come, come child, and take a cup of tea. There is nothing better than good food and warm tea to soften the woes of the soul, that I know.”
Credence nodded shyly and sat. He took a small piece of cake - he wasn’t sure he could swallow much anyway.

It was delicious.

He must have made a sound, because Mrs. Flamel badly stifled a laugh. “Oh, don’t worry!” she said when Credence blushed, “you should have seen Nicho’s face the first time he tasted one of my cake! The man returned the next day, and the next - I didn’t even have the time to cook all he wanted to eat!”

It took a few minutes, but Credence finished relaxing. Mrs. Flamel entertained him with small stories and gossip - he had slowly surely relaxed. The fumes that flew from the different bottles perfumed the air with something musky and warm. Credence didn’t talk much, but it didn’t seem to bother Mistress Flamel.

She seemed happy to have a new companion to talk to.

She sounded like quite a lonely person to Credence. But then again, who was he to judge.

It was only about two hours later that Mr. Flamel came back. He jumped above a pile of books with a surprising agility, threw his coat (was that a cape?) across some furniture Credence couldn’t really identify and kissed his wife on the cheek.

He looked thoughtfully at Credence. The boy fidgeted slightly under his gaze. Had he done something wrong?

“So, Credence. I believe a little talk wouldn’t be amiss, would it?”

Credence put the cup back on the table and politely folded his hands on his lap, his head bowed. “Yes, Sir,” he said.

“You see, Credence, you are not the first child to be sent to me. Along the years, I found out that a clear talk about things helped everyone along.”
“Don’t be frightened, child.” softly admonished Mrs. Flamel, “You’ve done nothing wrong - and if you had, trust us to simply tell you. You seem to me like a good boy, there’s no need to fear anything from either of us. We’re here to help you.”

Somehow, the words lifted some of the pressure that had been crushing the young man’s chest. He looked up to shyly meet their eyes; they were kind and soft. He nodded.

“Good, good. Now, you were sent here by Albus - the professor Dumbledore- to help to heal, among other things. I want you to know that as long as you are inside these walls, you are safe. I know it will probably take a long time for you to truly believe it, but it is true nonetheless. There is no obligation, here, but the one of respect of what is around you. You don’t have to stay, you don’t have to help. You do what you can, when you can. If you do something wrong, we will tell you, but I need you to know, child, that you will never, never be hit under this room, be it as a punishment or by cruelty.”

“You’ll have to be careful, however, some books tend to bite.”

She was joking. She must have been joking. Credence gazed at her, looking for any trace of humor, but there was none.

Oh .

“Breakfast is at eight, and dinner at nine. We will both do exercises in the morning, and we will use the afternoon to introduce you into the wizarding world - and into Paris. The evenings, after seven, are free, but I would prefer if you didn’t go out at first. Paris’s nights are another world, a dangerous one, may I say.”

Credence nodded eagerly - if felt like the only thing he could do today was to shake his head. He never had such leniency at Ma’s.

“I am myself a professor at the Magical University of Paris. You will come with me; you won’t have to do anything, don’t worry. I want you to learn what magical studies - and students are. Do not worry - we will do things slowly, and there will always be a … security net shall we say.”

“Alright, Sir.”
He really wasn’t sure he could… do any of what Flamel wanted him to do. But what if he said no? Would he just be thrown out, passed into others hands, deemed uninteresting? Or at least, interesting enough to be granted a room that he didn’t even pay…

He didn’t see the look Mr. and Mrs. Flamel exchanged.

“Good! Good. Well then, that’s settled. I think we should stay here for the rest of the day - to help you get settled. We’ll start everything on the morrow,” said the professor.

Credence had the idea that tomorrow would be a strange day.

---

Harry had been looking through the window all night. It was a strange thing to see a street and feel so unfamiliar, so displaced.

He felt like he was in a dream. He had caught himself several times today's scratching his own arm, checking without thought that it was true , he was here and now . He knew he had to get a grip - he had to find Tom as soon as possible, but it was a hard task when people in the street looked like a gangster movie.

He must say, Chicago was indeed a beautiful city. It was the strangest thing, for him. A sight he didn’t think to see again one day: a wizarding street with activity. He had forgotten how the wizards in their enthusiastic naivety had invented all these strange and wonderful little things that colored their life with magic.

But they had to get out. Yes, get out, return to England, nothing easier, right?

Harry had his gaze fixed on the map Dumbledore had laid on the table. The city was divided into several blocks, which were controlled by different families or institutions, all noted with colors on the map.

If he was truthful, it really felt like a feudal war. Except these fellows had guns.
A hand landed on his shoulder.

“Ha-”

Harry had jumped, his wand on their throat, his hand holding their scalp, his lips stretched in a snarl at their widening blue eyes-

Dumbledore.

His wand disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. “Shite! Sorry, sorry.” He patted Dumbledore’s hair back in place and moved back until his leg hit the table.

“Harry.”

Harry winced at the tone, the voice. He swallowed up the panic that had risen in his chest, reminding himself to breathe.

“It’s quite alright, Harry. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“Ok, ok.” Harry laughed faintly.” I didn’t hear you coming. Your not hurt, are you?” Harry didn’t dare touch Dumbledore again, but his eyes roamed over where his hand and wand had been. He couldn’t see any wound or bruise, but something may have been hidden by the copper hair-

“I’m alright.”

Harry sighed. Nothing, it was nothing. He was being ridiculous.“You should announce your presence, you know? I’m sure I’m not the only one who has bad reflexes from war.”

The professor looked immensely sad. “You’re so young…”

Harry shrugged. He didn’t know what to do with all his emotions, so he would pretend they were
not there. Everything was alright.

“I have prepared some coffee, if you wish.”

Harry nodded his assent and followed the headma- professor to the kitchenette. They took care not to make too much noise while passing in front of the bedroom, where Scamander and Graves were still sleeping. Newt had chosen to rest inside his own suitcase, so that Graves would have some privacy. Harry thought that it was as much for Graves as for himself. The last day, Scamander had fidgeted more and more - he didn’t seem like the type of person to stay in a room with other people for so long.

The coffee was warm and bitter - enough to dispel the sleepiness of his sleepless night.

Harry passed his hand in his hair, trying to smooth it a little.

“Do you need help with that?”

He looked, surprised, at the professor. “Er… ok.”

Dumbledore smiled slightly and walked behind the young man. Harry forced himself not to tense, but he wasn’t sure he was managing it alright. Long, warm finder passed through his locks, softly, as if afraid to hurt him.

“I noticed you had put tresses in it.”

“Yeah, I usually do. It’s easier to fight that way.”

The fingers stopped. “Do you want me to braid them?”

“Harry looked up, but he couldn’t quite see Dumbledore over his shoulder. “That would be nice, Sir. Thank you, I mean.”

The fingers started their movement again, and soon, Harry could feel his hair being held up and
moved around. Dumbledore wasn’t making some simple-every-day tresses, apparently.

It was actually… quite enjoyable. Nobody had ever placed their hands in his hair with such care. He had never had time for it, nor the occasion. Later, it had even felt frivolous, to allow himself such little, warm things...

“There, all set my boy!” Dumbledore said with obvious satisfaction.

Harry passed his hand on the hairstyle and grinned. He couldn’t quite guess what Dumbledore had done with it, but he didn’t really need to anyway.

“Thank you, Sir.”

“It’s quite alright. I used to do—”

He stopped, and Harry didn’t push. He didn’t ask to do Dumbledore’s either. It would feel strange to touch the headmaster’s hair…

Not headmaster, not headmaster.

Something ticked.

“We’ll have to go soon, I’m afraid. The wards are already thinning.”

“The best thing to do would be to put Director Graves inside Newt’s suitcase.”

Harry frowned “I’m not sure there is a safe way to transport him down the wooden ladder, professor.”

Dumbledore shrugged. “We’ll find a way.” he said merrily.
“You’re just making this shit up as you go, aren’t you?”

Dumbledore had the audacity to wink. “Wake up, children!” he shouted, entering the bedroom like a child at Christmas, “time to go!”

Harry heard grumbles and the faint sound of what he could have sworn was a pillow being thrown at a certain someone, and Dumbledore came back in the kitchen to finish his coffee.

It had taken all of Newt’s ingenuity to settle Graves in the suitcase despite the protestations of said man, but they had finally managed it. It was barely ten in the morning when they were in front of the door, ready to go.

Dumbledore passed a hand through his beard.

“Alright, alright. The building we must reach is the big, red tower just down the street. The problem, is that the street is very long and becomes muggle after a few blocks. We obviously don’t have my car anymore, and an apparition that near of an official building will leave traces behind. Any ideas?”

“I may have a plan…” said Harry with a grin.

“Oh dear.”
Hello!
First of all, a little announcement: I changed the format of the chapter to put a bit less space between the lines because some people made remarks on it. I don't know if it helps the reading or not, so if you prefer the old format, please let me know and I'll change it back! :) 
Thanks all of you for the support on this fic. I am actually in an exam period (I have to finish my mémoire this month) so I probably won't post for a while, but I'll be more free afterwards!
As a French and a Parisian myself, I put a lot of accurate information about the city in the fic. I wanted it to be different from the common Eiffel tower-cliché-travel on many fics, and I hope you'll like it! There is some French too ^^

Small trigger in this chapter for discussion of forced abortion and/or infanticide.

Hope you'll enjoy!

They got out of the building as discreetly as they could, considering that Dumbledore was still wearing bright blue robes-now- a suit. Harry had to say that, despite the colors, the man had quite a sense of fashion. The three piece suits looked quite smart on him, and the blue matched his twinkling eyes. Well, at least the blue wasn't twinkling too. It reminded Harry strongly of the Dumbledore in the memory of Tom's first introduction to magic. Thinking about it, it was strange how younger the man seemed - like a lifetime had passed in merely ten years.

Well, with Grindelwald on the run, the man certainly had excuses.

Then walked along a side-alley, until Harry found bins he deems fit for the task.

“Is that your solution? trash?”

“Well. The professor is a transfiguration teacher, is he not?”

Dumbledore bowed his head slightly in assent.

“Well, considering the map you showed me yesterday, the place we're going is downtown, and
we’re up. So we can get you bikes and just… slide until then.”

“Well, that sounds fun!” said Dumbledore while waving his wand. He indeed seemed delighted by the prospect. The bins were emptied and their shape changed until the three companions were standing in front two metallic bicycles.

Harry whistled. “Nice work.”

“Why, thank you, my boy.”

“But there’s only two, and we’re three,” pointed out Newt awkwardly. Harry tilted his head, wondering if it was chance or not.

“Well, I don’t really know how to use these things, so there’s that.”

Dumbledore threw a peculiar look in his direction, but thankfully he didn’t ask. “Well then,” Dumbledore said joyfully, and he straddled the bike. “I guess I’m taking you with me.”

“Oh, er, well.”

Nothing smarter would apparently fall from Harry’s mouth, so he straddled the bike behind Dumbledore, not really knowing what he was supposed to do. The professor came to his rescue: “Pass your arms around my waist, and keep your feet out of the weeds” Dumbledore said softly. “Hold tight.”

Harry fumbled to find the right position but managed it in less time and with less wounded pride than he had expected.

Dumbledore put his foot on the pedal. “Hey, professor, nice heels!” said Harry.

His shoes were indeed very pretty. Golden and purple, with intricate details and a snitch at the juncture of the laces. The curve was elegant, and even in this muggle shape, it was fantastically magical. Like this type of magic people used to - did- for fun. Just fun.
Dumbledore looked at him like he was searching for something on his face. He didn’t seem to find it, and then simply smiled happily.

“Why my boy, thank you. I bought them just before I left England - the latest style indeed.”

Harry made an appreciative face.

Dumbledore pushed the pedals and Harry tightened his arms around him. The bicycle started to move. The fabric of Dumbledore’s suit was soft. It felt warm. He smelled like - fire, metal, wood, old parchment, magic, lemon, sugar- like home. Hogwarts.

They went faster, turned from the back alley to the main street, and down. The slope was so steep that Dumbledore did not have to pedal anymore, just moving around to avoid people and cars. Adrenaline ran through Harry’s veins. He didn’t know if he was screaming or laughing - maybe both. He was pretty sure Dumbledore was doing it too. His copper hair was catching the warm rays of fall’s sunlight, setting it ablaze. It felt so alive. Left, right, they almost ran into a car but managed to turn at the last second.

Next, to them, Newt was riding more sedately - probably mindful of his precious suitcase. Under his jacket, Harry could see the little head of the Niffler poking out, it’s fur moving wildly in the wind.

The bike did a small jump, and the shocked ‘oh’ of a woman on the sidewalk made Harry burst out in laughter anew. He winced slightly at the landing - he would probably have bruises but really, he had too much fun right now to care about it.

It was all fun until the first bullet whistled near his ear.

Harry tightened his hold on the professor, half to offer a lesser target, half to protect the man’s back.

People on the street started screaming, and in an instant, it was like they had all vanished into nothing. All of them had immediately hidden inside the building, behinds the walls - they seemed pretty used to the type of situation to be perfectly honest.

Dumbledore braked and turned right so that they could hide behind a car to avoid the two other
projectiles. It was clearly luck because the man seemed at lost on what to do next. Newt had followed them, half laying on the top of his bike. The man was surprisingly calm - and Harry started to wonder what could rile him up. Probably something about his creatures, now that he thought about it.

He still smelt like fear.

“The street is full of muggles…” he groaned. He didn’t take the time to catch the look his two companions were sending him and Harry put his hand in his pocket. He unfolded the Invisibility Cloak.

“The three of us cannot hide under this.”

A bullet banged against the roof of the car they were hidden behind.

“I know. How far is our destination?”

Dumbledore pointed to a small door thirty meters away. Harry pushed his glasses back on his nose. “Ok, here’s what we’ll do. We’ll pass from behind a car to another, and everytime we’re not covered, we hide behind the cloak.”

“The three of us -”

“We’ll have to walk-kneel.” Harry continued, completely ignoring the interruption, “We go for the closest we can to the door. With some luck, they’ll not notice we moved and keep shooting here.”

“How do you know they won’t notice us?”

Bang bang bang bang

Dumbledore winced. Almost by reflex, Harry put his hand on the man’s shoulder and guided him lower to the ground. There, safer.
A bullet passed above them, and five others carved themselves in the car's door.

“Considering the aim and the ratio of the bullets, they’re muggles. Hitmen - not the best. They’re sent to do dirty work messily - and pass a message. They wouldn’t have attacked us in the middle of a street in broad fucking daylight otherwise. They probably don’t know about wizards. They won’t look for what they do not expect to see.” “There’s two large calibers at six and two revolvers at four and one at eight. They probably thought that they would take us by surprise on the doorstep.”

He didn’t allow them the time to protest and held the cloak like it was a shield between them and their assailants. Thinking about it, it was. The truth was, Harry hoped that no bullet could mortally wound one of them through the cloak. He wasn’t sure about it - and if it worked he certainly wouldn’t know how or why, but he had to take the chance. It was that or nothing.

Harry made them calmly walk from one stopped car to another. He tried to be in front of them as much as he could. He knew that Dumbledore had noticed it, but the man said nothing and kept his eyes alert to any threat.

He wished he could just summon one of the gun -- but using magic would mean being detected, and there wasn’t anyone close enough to be able to give him a weapon without putting themselves at risk of ending up like swiss cheese.

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Inside the building looked like the idea the Americans had of luxury. Which meant the there was far too much gold and almost as much grey smoke rising from the cigars. All was calm and collected; this building, if horrendous in taste, was occupied by the finest Englishmen of the land, after all.

Then, the doors opened in a crack, and three piles of clothing -- and a suitcase-- landed on the rich carpet of the entrance. The doors closed slowly, letting every person around hear the noises of firearms and the screams of civilians.

Then, the double door closed with an audible click, and the silence fell on the Embassy once more. Proverbial silence who was immediately interrupted by a round of colorful curses that most of the gentlemen here had never even heard of. Considering the tone, however, they were quite able to guess the meaning.

One of the three men was up before his peers and at the ready one might say. The ambassador’s
security officer, whom had risen during the commotion immediately stepped back warily. But before he had the time to take out his wand -- and thus probably provoke an undue reflex from his first guest-- the second man was on his feet. The thing in itself was quite surprising as said man was wearing the most colorful traditional robes one had seen in a lifetime. The man had hair to match, well, match maybe wasn’t the word, his clothes. He put his hand on the other man’s shoulder and took a step in front of him, or between him and the guard, it wasn’t clear.

“I am Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. Myself and my companions are seeking shelter in the embassy.”

---

Harry shouldn’t have been surprised at the authority Dumbledore could put in his voice. How it boomed through the air, how everyone around him immediately reacted. Yet, he was.

Dumbledore stood proud, looking far too kindly at whomever that was in front of him.

“You are the Albus Dumbledore,” slowly repeated the man.

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows and made a face that could only be described as immodest. “I don’t know anyone else under this name, indeed.”

The man looked at them dubiously but relented. He nodded towards the security office, where a house elf was waiting for them. Well, probably not waiting for them, but he was waiting alright. The poor creature looked bored out of his mind.

After a quick look the check that everybody was following him (Harry felt suddenly quite like he was in a school outing), Dumbledore walked toward it and coughed politely.

“Yes?” drawled the elf.

“I am Albus Dumbledore. Myself and my colleague are asking safe passage.”

“Did you have a travel reservation?”
“Yes, a week away. But we are asking safe passages to England under the close of protection of English citizen under the threat of an international wanted criminal.”

The elf slowly rose his eyes from the form he had neatly put on the desk and looked at them for a moment. “Care to state the individual in question?”

“Gellert Grindelwald.”

It was like the very name had stilled the entire room. If Harry had any doubt that everyone was listening to them, he didn't have any now.

“Excuse me?”

“We are in a hurry, so if you could make it quick?” politely enquired Dumbledore. He had his hands behind his back in a very professional posture, and Harry was sure that he would have them trimming his beard had it been long enough.

The elf immediately started to fill in his form quicker than one would have expected, filling every box methodically. Harry wasn’t paying him much attention, his eyes locked on the doorway, where the man -- some sort of security member -- that had welcomed them was checking on the wards. It was a good reflex, but considering what Harry knew of the state of infiltration of the American institutions, it wouldn’t be of much use.

The elf finally presented the form for Dumbledore to sign and told them to wait in a nearby room where the Aurors would receive them to check on their identity and allow the passage to England. Dumbledore promptly thanked him and, a hand on the shoulder of each young man, entered the waiting room.

The place was much, much more comfy than what Harry had expected. In his mind, it probably would be something like the extension of the English’s Department of Mystery, with cold black tiles on the floor, the wall, the ceiling until you weren't sure anymore on which one you were supposed to walk on. No, the room looked more like the idea Harry might have of a pureblood reception. Soft, red velvet was running on the walls, decorated by rich paintings of different English scenery, all figureless, maybe to let the guest have more privacy, or more probably to avoid the leak of any secrets of state.

Harry himself had taken the habit to hide or destroy any portrait that might have been dangerous in any circumstance, to the great dam of many wizards.

The room was well and comfortably furnished with beige armchairs and couches that surrounded a small glass table, painted with gold in the geometrical arabesque patterns that were so liked in … well, arithmancy. A few gentlemen were sitting around some of them, sipping what definitely looked like expensive wine. The only noises that could be heard were the soft automatic piano and the clinking of the glasses, sometimes accompanied with a muffled chuckle.
Dumbledore pushed them towards a table that was strategically placed in one of the room’s corner. He looked at Harry and, as the young man looked satisfied with the arrangement, sat. Immediately, an elf popped nearby.

The door opened and a tall, thin man entered. His eyes immediately fell on the trio and he walked towards them with the confidence of someone sure of himself.

“Can I’s be taking something for the wizards, Sirs?” quietly asked the elf.

“Three glasses, please. No alcohol,” answered Dumbledore, his cool eyes not leaving the newcomer.

“Make it four.” said the man. The elf jumped and squeaked, much to the man’s amusement.

“Yes Sirs, right away Sirs.”

“Well, do join us, Kovski. It, as always, is a pleasure to see you.”

The lack of “Mister” in front of Kovski’s name didn’t escape Harry’s notice. Neither had the hand Dumbledore ever so casually placed on his wand.

“Ah, Professor. What a coincidence to find each other in such a place!” answered the man affably, “Traveling, are we?”

“I was taken by the sudden need to return home. Some sort of sickness of the motherland, I think. My two friends here were kind enough to accompany me on my trip back.” He said as the man sat next to them, his back to the door.

“Oh yes, I heard these things tended to happen to the... weaker minded.”

“Talking from personal experience, I gather?” interrupted Harry.

His comment didn’t make the man flush but had the merit to attract his attention.

“And you are...?”

“Harry,” said Harry.

“No last name?”

“None that matter.”

“I see.” The man sneered.

It was very clear what the man thought of his lack of a name. Some things never changed, especially in the wizarding world. Harry held his chin high and stared at him unblinkingly.

“You have strange taste in company Dumbledore. But once again, one shouldn’t expect anything different from you .”

Dumbledore smiled kindly, but didn’t answer. The silence seemed to infuriate Kovski even more. It was quite strange to Harry to find out that he had missed this. The little glimpse he had had of Dumbledore defying the Minister of Magic, the Aurors, whomever... well, pissed him off was Harry’s best guess.

Kovski sneered and got up. “You won’t ever leave this land, Dumbledore. Don’t think you can
run away from war again .”

“I am not the one ready to go here, Melbourn . But I appreciate the attention.”

Kovski stumped out, leaving the three men alone at last. He tried to slam the door, but the mechanism didn’t let him.

From his corner of the table, Newt snorted softly. Harry was pretty sure he heard something along the line of “cunt” as the man stroked the little twig hanging at the top of his hand.

“Are you not afraid that it’ll be hurt like that in the open?”

“Oh, well, I tried to put him back, but the cute little thing refuses to stay put.” Newt cooed at the thing like it was a disobedient baby, which, well.

The people at the tables around them threw them looks since Kovski’s departure, but none moved to talk to them.

The elf popped back, and if he looked surprised at the disparition at one of his client’s disappearance, he didn’t comment on it.

Something smelled wrong. Something felt wrong.

“Dumbledore, tell me, aren’t the kitchens inside the building?”

The professor looked at him questioningly and took his glass in his hand. He tried to put it at his lips when Harry hand shot up and seized his forearm. “Are they?” he insisted.

Newt’s wand was pointed at Harry under the table. “What are you doing?” he whispered with ice Harry had never imagined he would hear in his voice.

“The elf took ten minutes bringing back four glasses. If the kitchens are inside , he can apparate back and forth in less than a fucking second. So, are the fucking kitchens inside , professor?”

Dumbledore immediately paled and slowly put the glass down. From the corner of his eye, Harry saw half the people in the room tense. A man put his hand in his pocket to grab something, a woman was casually touching the pendant she had around her neck in a regular pattern.

“Alright, Professor. We’re going to have to drink these.”

If there was one thing Harry appreciated, it was Dumbledore’s calm at the situation. Because Harry’s heart had frozen at the second he had realised that the professor’s life was being threatened.

The hand dark, as if burnt, as if dead-

“I thought it was poisoned?”

“It is. But we are also surrounded. At least six wizards here, probably more out. The access to the door is out for us. They’ll attack us if they think they’re spotted. Professor, please laugh now.”

It took half a beat for Dumbledore to obey. Harry forced himself to put a grin on his face. He patted the professor's arm. He wasn’t sure if it was for the play or to assure himself that he was safe and whole.

This was becoming ridiculous.
“Scamander, do you have a bezoar?”

“Oh, hum, inside the suite-case-”

“So no,” Harry cut in, with another false grin. “And we cannot use magic, they probably have captors somewhere-”

Dumbledore mutely nodded. Of course, an embassy in time of civil war would be stuffed with magical detectors of all sorts.

“Ok, I’m gonna drink all of them, and go to the bathroom. Pretend it’s a joke.”

Harry felt Dumbledore’s arm tense under his hand. Realising he had casually let it there, he withdrew immediately. “No,” the man said sharply.”

“You have to go back to England professor, and I-”

“There’s no need for sacrifice here.”

“There is. For the greater good, uh?”

Harry internally winced when Dumbledore paled. The professor's mouth thinned and his eyes became sharp. “There are many other ways to get out of this situation, Harry.”

Harry could almost have cowered at the tone. But he wasn’t a child and hadn’t been for a long, long time. What could he say? That he wasn’t going to die because he actually couldn’t?

“I was bit by a basilisk and healed by a phoenix. The poison won’t kill me.” He finally said.

“Even if such a thing was possible, it might cause unbearable pain. We will find something else.”

Harry sighed in frustration. “Well, the muggle way then. Fake drinking, don’t try to throw it behind your shoulder.”

“Why would we try to throw it behind our shoulder?”

Harry snorted. “Muggle thing.”

There seemed to have a little less tension after that, even if Harry’s hand was still on his wand.

Luckily, it took only a few more minutes for the Aurors to arrive. Harry didn’t have to tell the two others not to trust them; it was very clear on Dumbledore’s face that he wouldn’t. No, not his face. His face was kind and serious as always… no, it was more his posture. The straightness of his shoulders, the smoothness of his walk, the posture of his feet talked about a duel.

“Please follow us, Professor,” said one of the Aurors as commandingly as he could (dared). They walked quickly to the portkey point, a large, white, empty room that gave Harry the chills.

“Please Professor, sign this. It is a guarantee for your two co-travelers; they will, of course, be interrogated after landing.”

“Yes, yes, thank you.”

A little ball was given to them.

“You have a twenty second - landing in Paris. From there, you’ll have a pass to cross to England
after the Aurors check. Good travel.”

“I must warn you, I’m always sick with these things,” said Harry cheerfully.

The three of them touched the ball, Newt clutching to his suitcase like a life-line, and with a tug on the stomach, they were gone.

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Seraphina Pickety hadn’t become president of the United-States out of luck and kindness. Not that she didn’t have these two qualities, only, they didn’t have any use in her position. She had one of the largest, most eclectic and most anarchique magical country to rule.

Every day, there was some redneck that found it funny to make a car float, to refill infinitely some beer bottle, to show off in front of muggles. Every day, there was trials, imprisonments, and sometimes, executions.

After the passage of Credence Barebone and Gellert Grindelwald in the ministry, there had been more and more executions. Wizards were starting to be scared.

People used to laugh at how wizards never seemed to change, to go forward. But they remembered. Thousands and thousands of memories collected during the Salem Trials, the Witch Hunts made them remember. They weren’t the masters of their land, and as close to a magical war as they were, they were starting to feel it.

“Like a blind ceiling trying to mimic the sun…” She whispered to herself, gazing at the moving painting on her office’s ceiling.

Two knocks. One, two, one. Ah.

The door opened itself.

Two faceless individuals entered the office.

“Report.”

“The individual was seen along with Dumbledore and Scamander. They went from the Grave’s household to a Chicago’s safehouse. Graves wasn’t seen since his departure from the ministry, his death is in the realm of possibilities. The individual left the United States two hours ago by portkey.”

“Good, good. At least he’s not our problem anymore. Something else?”

“We weren’t able to check the Graves’s household because of the wards, but there was not a trace of Dark Magic in the safe house.”

Seraphina sighed. “I will go myself to the Grave’s household. ’Prepare the expedition for this evening, please. “

“Yes, Madame.”

“We also discovered a certain number of leaks inside the ministry, Madame.”
Seraphina nodded for the man to continue. “Fifteen individuals were arrested for conspiracy and association with a known criminal and enemy of the state. It is certain, however, that they are not the only ones. The list of name is in the file, along with the possible sentences. We also found a case that we found necessary to give to your… attention, Madame.”

“It is about the Goldstein Sisters, Madame.”

“Go on.”

“We found out that Queenie Goldstein had an illicit relationship with a muggle. As per your orders, and considering the obliviation of said muggle during the events of New York, we didn’t pursue further. It has come to our attention, however, that Miss Goldstein pursued her attentions on said muggle, and thus under the protection and at the discretion of her younger sister. It is apparent that said relationship gave… fruits.”

“You mean that Goldstein is pregnant with a half-blood?”

There was a moment of silence. “Yes, Madame.”

Seraphina closed her eyes. No, kindness wasn’t a part of her duty. “Thank you. Go prepare for our little outing and bring the oldest Goldstein here,” she said finally.

“Yes, Madam.”

Seraphina opened the file, noting the way the ministry’s business was going to be affected by the last arrest campaign. The truth was, the richest on the list would probably get out unscattered, simply because they were needed. The others on the other hand… Canon folders for both sides, unfortunately.

Three knocks on the door.

“Come in!”

Queenie Goldstein entered, followed by the two faceless men. She was dressed in the brightest pink, as per usual, with a flowing dress that no one should dare to wear past summer. Her notorious solar smile, however, was absent.

She knows.

Of course, she did. That girl was far from stupid, and one of the best legilimens in the ministry. A bit of luck for her that she hadn’t be diagnosed earlier -- she would have ended like the two faceless men behind her.

“I assume that you know why you’re here.”

Queenie’s lips thinned and her hand crossed protectively in front of her. Well, if the girl had been a good liar, she wasn’t even trying anymore.

Seraphina stood up to take her coat. “You have only a few choices, Miss Goldstein. The first one is to abort the child.”

Goldstein’s eyes widened. “You would have an innocent child killed?”

“The son of a muggle isn’t under my jurisdiction.”

“What is my second choice?”
“You give birth and never see the father again. Marry to a good wizard. The ministry will check on the child; if at four he isn’t presenting any sign of magic, he will be dealt with as a function of the law at that time.”

“You mean that they could kill him.”

“In five years? Yes, there is a possibility. You can deal with it now, or take the risk to become attached and have to deal with it later. Of course, your transgression of the status of secrecy will not be overlooked. As soon as the child is in age of reason - past 6 years of age, he will be sent to the ministry’s orphanage, and you will go to prison. I believe twenty years is the common sentence for such a thing.”

The woman looked like the whole world had fallen on her shoulders. Seraphina wished she could help her. She wished she could at least show sympathy. But the State didn’t, and so she couldn’t. “The sentence may be reduced considering the help you provided in the arrest of a wanted criminal at the time,” she added softly, berating herself at the same time, “and you will be able to see your child once out. It’s more than most had. It is more than you should have.”

Queenie gulped. “Don’t worry, no one but us will know what happened until then.” Seraphina turned towards one of the men. “She can go home, but she is not to be alone until the matter is settled,” Seraphina ordered to the guard.

“Yes, Madam. Your car is ready, Madame.”

“Thank you.”

Seraphina took her hat and checked the lines of her coat. She closed her door and waited until the wards went up only then did she consent to follow her escort outside. The black Ministry’s car was indeed waiting for her.

The landscape passed from city to countryside, and soon enough they were in front of the Graves’s ancestral home. Well, “ancestral” was a bit far-stretched for an American family.

It wasn’t a pretty home. Impressive, yes, but not made for comfort. Like the Graves. Seraphina put her hand on the outside wall, and waited for the wards to let her pass. She wouldn’t take any risks with these ones.

Finally, the door opened. She made a sign for the guards to follow her and walked inside the house.

It always was a strange feeling, to enter someone else's home alone. Seraphina might have felt this twinge of excitement if didn’t know that it wasn’t Grave’s home. For the ones who knew him -- and they were very few -- it was obvious. Nothing emotional, nothing truly belonging to him was left here. No, Graves’s home was at the M.A.C.U.S.A.

Immediately, the men started to check the house, room after room. Any information would be useful, every bit of information would be vital.

It took less than ten minutes for one of the men to call her.

She climbed the stairs and joined him in the last room of the corridor. The man pointed at the mantel with his wand, as if not wanting to put his hand too close.

Seraphina knelt at a good distance from it and stared. There, at the bottom of the door, someone had carved runes. And Seraphina may not have been the most expert witch in rune and their
significance, but she was quite sure she had never seen something like that before. The little letters they… they felt wrong.

“Dark Magic?” she asked.

“I would like to tell you that’s what it is, Madam. But frankly I have absolutely no idea.”

Seraphina tilted her head, committing the symbols in her memory. “Copy them and send them to an expert,” she said.

What the fuck are you getting yourself into, Percy?

----

Credence at La Sorbonne+ Paris

The morning came above Paris and Credence watched. It was a strange thing. Strange air, strange light. The city was so crowded, and yet it seemed… light somehow. The sun rays found ways to appear everywhere, to reflect themselves on the glass, to shower the blue-grey roofs tops.

A knock on the door. “Credence? The breakfast is ready, we’re leaving in an hour.”

“I’m coming right away, Sir!”

The young man quickly put on his new jacket (he had tried to refuse it when Mrs. Flamel had given it to him, but the woman had her ways to make you accept anything) and got down to the dining room. A full breakfast was waiting for him on the table. Credence was still surprise at how rich and different french food was. There was a lot of things derived from fruits and milk. Bread at every meal -- but a different type of bread each time, or with something different on it. Even the cheeses, there were different types of cheese!

“You’re not going to eat simply by staring, are you young man?”

“Oh, hum, sorry, Sir. I mean, no, Sir.”

“Good, good. Now, you eat. You’ll need all your strength to behold the animals we usually call “French Students”.”

Credence smiled shyly, not quite knowing if it was a joke or a warning. Mr. Flamel looked unafraid of his students, but they were wizards, and Credence had seen what wizards could do.

“Don’t worry, kiddo, it’ll be alright. I will show you how to go there on a map, so if for some reason you found yourself alone, you’ll be able to go home without trouble, alright?”

“Alright, Sir.”

The map was an enormous piece of parchment stuck on a wall, behind piles and piles of books and… other stuff. Mr. Flamel took some time to take it out, refused Credence’s help despite everything (I’m not quite yet good for the auspice, child!).
“Come and take a look,” said Flamel, pointing at a chair. Credence immediately obeyed, his hands on his lap. “As you can see, Paris is an intricate city. It’s living, you see, not like the square things you have in America. It is what makes the city beautiful, but it is also what makes it a maze for the ones that don’t take the time to learn how to know it.” Flamel huffed, and Credence had the distinct impression that it was a long-time argument he must have had with someone. “Anyway, there is two more or less direct ways to go the University from here. One of them involves the métro -- French subway. It is fast indeed, but it reeks and it’s quite full at rush-time. I mean, between 6 to ten in the morning and four to ten in the evening.”

“It’s almost all day…”

“Even more reason not to use it. I think it’s practical if you’re hurt, or overly tired, but that’s it. Our line is the line four. You take the nearest station and down to St. Michel. We’re North, the university is South. Will you remember it?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Good, good. Now, if you go on foot, it’s almost a straight line.” He put a bony finger on the map. “We are here. You go straight, then around this little thing, in front of le Tour St Martin. You cross the river -- la Scène, the Island -- La Cité, then the river again. then you follow the road until La Rue des Ecoles -- the street of schools. Will you remember it?”

“I’ll-- I’ll try, Sir.”

Flamel raised an eyebrow. “I can write it down for you if you wish.”

Credence blushed but nodded all the same.

“Good good. Now, go take your coat and bag, and we’re out.”

“Yes, Sir.”

It finally took several minutes for them to get out of the house as Mrs. Flamel insisted that they take some food with them, checked on the coats, and took the time to put Mr. Flamel’s robes straight.

“What does she do of her day?” asked Credence once they were outside on the small street.

“Don’t fool yourself on how careful she is -- she’s no housewife. She helps witches everywhere in the country with pregnancy and giving birth. It is a quite complicated matter with the epidemics that run in here.”

“You mean -- like the flu?”

“No, magical ones. Dragon Pox is the worst of them. But don’t worry, there is very little chance for you to catch them. They’re mostly coming from the East. It’s just that babies are sensitive, you know?”

“Yes. The younger kids always fell ill at the orphanage.”

Flamel hummed his assent.

They walked on a somewhat bigger street, along with many people. It was strange for Credence to feel the cobbles under his feet and not smooth pavement.

“You came from a religious place, don’t you?”
Credence startled slightly. “Hum, uh- yes Sir.”

“Do you practice? And I don’t mean what people forced you to do before.”

Credence frowned. Did he? Did he still believe? Would that be allowed for a wizard? He wasn’t even sure he was a wizard in truth.

“Peace, child. I won’t judge you on your answer. Well, anyway, if you do, this is the catholic church of St. Mary. I’m afraid there is nothing like these congregations you have in America here, but it’s the closest church from home. I won’t go with you inside, but you’re free to go as long as you tell someone where you are.”

Credence looked from the imposing building to Flamel in wonder.

“Yes, Sir.”

They arrived in front of a big gothic tower that stood all alone in the middle of a small park. It looked old and lonely, like a tree without it’s forest.

“This is La Tour St Jacques. It’s a good point to remember if you’re lost.”

They crossed a bridge to the island Mr Flamel had called La Cité. Every building here seemed… older, fuller. Credence could almost feel the “thing”, the time, the magic in this place.

“And this, Credence, is the darling of Paris. Notre-Dame.”

The young man’s jaw dropped. Of course, he had been impressed when he had seen the other church. And he was used to the tall building of New York, but this… There was a large place paved with clear grey stones. At the point of the island, the formidable Cathedral was everything like the door to the heavens Credence had imagined.

“I know, right? She a bit dirty, these days, what with the cars everywhere. But come, come. You’ll have time to see her all you like another time. I don’t want to be late for my own lesson.

Credence nodded and the hurried up. He didn’t see much more of the road, preferring to keep his eyes on the ground by habit.

They arrived in front of a tall roman-like building. The place in front of it was crowded with young people, probably students, smoking and talking to each other.

“This is the muggle university. If you want to learn your literature, or muggle science.” said Flamel. He led Credence to the side of the building, where a small double door pierced the stones.

The inside was… strangely bland. Credence had expected the same magical mess he had seen at Flamel’s house, but they walked on large stairs of white stones.

“Don’t worry, the Moldus can’t pass the door. “

“Moldus?”

“Moldus, Muggle, Non-Maj. People without magic.” They walked inside the maze of the university, all large corridors pierced with tall windows. The place seemed the be square, with an open hole in the middle where people could gather on the outside without leaving university grounds.

Flamel opened a door seemingly on chance and entered a big room. The walls were covered in
shelves, themselves crowded with papers and sheets. A lingering smell of cold tobacco and coffee gave it some sort of a homey feeling, along with the few worn-out couches and the wooden table that probably had seen better days.

“This is the professor room. You can leave your coat here, if you wish, or come for a little rest during the day.” Flamel said, putting his own coat on the mantle.

“Nicholas! Tu es presque en avance! Tu es malade?”

Flamel laughed and shook the hand with the small blond man that had just jumped from one of the couches to greet him.

“Credence, I present you, Louis Dauphin. He is a professor of herbology here. Louis, this is Credence.”

The man took Credence’s hand in a firm shake.

“Un nouveau protégé, hein?” He asked merrily.

Credence blushed and lowered his gaze.

“I’m sorry, Sir, I don’t understand French…”

There was a small silence. Flamel squeezed his shoulder, and Credence was glad that the man didn’t seem irritated at his lack of knowledge. Mr. Dauphin quickly shook himself and offered a smile.

“You’re Nicholas new student? I had heard rumors about it. You must be a very special young man, you know. Some people wait years to be tutored by the great Nicholas Flamel.”

“I, hu-”

“Oh! Credence, we’re late, we’re late!”

And with this exclamation, Flamel quickly pushed Credence out of the room. The walked quickly to a big double door behind which Credence could hear the brouhaha of dozen of people talking at the same time.

“It’s going to be fine,” said Flamel softly, obviously noticing how Credence had paled. “They’re a bit… excited, but not mean. The people behind this door are not children anymore, and you are under my responsibility.”

Credence nodded faintly.

“Ok?”

“Ok.”

Flamel opened the door and they entered the amphitheater. Immediately, the lines of students started to hit their tables with their hand, saying their professor’s name as the man raised his arms, palms open toward them. Credence was trying not to flinch at each blow, but he couldn’t help but take some steps back in an unconscious attempt to hide himself.

When Flamel closed his hands, the silence fell on the room.

“I thank you all for reminding me my name, as you took upon youself to do every morning…” he
stopped to let the polite laugh die down. “Good morning everyone! You may have noticed that I am talking in English. This is because we have a new student, Credence here.”

All the attention turned towards him and Credence uneasily waved his hand.

“Credence comes from New York, which some of the more enlightened of you know is in the United States… I will tutor him for at least the next year. I will ask all of you to treat him with the respect he is due and to be kind.”

Flamel stopped to look at his students. “Good, now. Credence, you may take this place.” he said, pointing at an empty seat in the first row. “Alright, Peter, can you remind the room the properties of gold according to the Mushen Law?”

The class passed quite quickly. Even if he didn’t understand much of what was being said, Credence knew that Flamel was a very good professor. He tried to take notes, but things were moving too fast and resigned himself to only listen. He hoped Flamel would not being too disappointed in him.

All the students were wearing an dark uniform that gave them an out-of-time look, with tight sleeves at the wrist that became large around the elbow. They all seemed quite serious, taking notes on parchment, spots of ink on the tip of their fingers. Their hair was longer that the people he had seen in the street (Ma would have called them tramps for it), and Credence even spotted a few women among them. Some threw him curious looks, but they didn’t seem… opposed to his presence here. Well, he wasn’t doing much after all.

At the end of the lesson, after Flamel finished talking to the last remaining students Flamel came down from the platform to ask him if he was ok, which somewhat reassured the young man.

“I… I don’t understand much…”

“It’s perfectly normal. You’re here to learn wizarding society as a whole, not the specifics of alchemical science. Familiarise yourself with the words, the ideas, the people. That’s all I ask for now.”

“Sir, may I ask a question?”

“Well of course.”

Credence hesitated. He didn’t want to look….ungrateful, or anything.

“How…ow are you going to… to cure me?”

Flamel took a long, long look at him, his face perfectly blank.

“I will not.”

Something broke inside Credence. He had been stupid to think he could stop being ill -- cursed. Of course the professor was just here to look after him, to check that he wouldn’t blow anyone up...

“So I can’t be cured?”

Flamel’s hand found its way to his shaking shoulder. The man’s eyes were looking somewhere far away.

“You know, I saw dozen of ‘em. Children, just like you. I used to think I could find a way to treat
them. I was foolish -- my youth made me want to save the whole world by myself. But now I know. You can’t be treated from your past, child. You can’t be cured. But you can learn to live with it. You can heal.’”

Credence frowned.

“I’m not sure I understand, Sir.”

“It’s ok, child. One day you will,” he said with a smile.
As promised, Harry fell on his arse the second they landed in France, and no one could have stopped him from doing so. The cold stones of the floor were highly appropriate for such a landing.

Harry rose to his feet, but it somehow didn’t make things better. There was no use. Everytime he closed his eyes, he could see the tombs, the dark ground, hissing voice KILL THE SPARE -

His eyes met Dumbledore’s and he felt the infamous push at the edge of his mind. He hated it, but it was too late to avoid the connection. He looked up.

“I told you I didn’t like portkeys,” Harry said. It was meant as a joke, but it came out in a shaky breath that made him feel foolish.

He wondered why his reaction had been so strong this time. Maybe it was the accumulation of everything that was becoming a little too much.

Newt, at least seemed quite oblivious to the entire situation, occupied as he was with a check on his suitcase. The Auror that was there to check on their landing was looking at the cooing man quizzically.

“We better take care of that before the Aurors decide to check on it.” He said, rushing past the professor. He wasn’t oblivious to the look his old- not so old now - mentor threw him, but it was better to ignore it all. Easier this way.

“Newt, I believe your material is ok, you can let that case alone now,” Dumbledore said in a fond tone. One hand on Newts shoulder, the other on his case, he put himself between the magicozoologist and the auror as if nothing was more natural. Harry felt his lips twitch in amusement at the professor’s antics, and sure enough, the auror was quite soon so overwhelmed by Dumbledore's demeanor that he entirely forgot about Newt’s suitcase.

Harry let himself concentrate on their safety, checking the corners, always gazing at anyone that came too close, instead of the place they were in. As far as he was concerned, it was just another administrative maze that he had nothing to do with.

He clearly wasn’t the politician of the lot.

They finally got out of the place and Harry had rarely been so happy to feel the wind on his face, despite the late fall’s chill.

“Well, welcome to Paris!” said Dumbledore with thinly veiled amusement. “I have a few friends here-- Nicholas and his wife-- that will let us stay until we can go to England.”
Harry distractedly nodded, looking around him. It was strange how much Paris had changed from the present time -- well, his time. He remembered the neon, the advertisement panels glowing night and day, the shiny cars. He hadn’t been in Paris long; barely a few weeks, truly. Exile in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, there were worse fates, and yet, at the time, he hadn’t been able to appreciate the beauty around him.

Considering everything, he might not be able to properly visit the city now either.

“Nicholas, you mean Nicholas Flamel? The Nicholas Flamel?”

Harry tilted his head.

“Yes, my dear Newt. Nicholas and I have been friends for a long time, and I must say, he did quite help me in many of my discoveries,” the professor chuckled

“We should go. I don’t like us to stay here out in the open.”

He turned to see the two men’s stare. “What? I’m sure Mr. Flamel is even more impressive in person, so let’s hurry and go,” Harry said, already going.

“Do you know where he lives?” asked Dumbledore, and there was again a note of coldness in his voice. Harry sighed, not quite knowing what to say. He wasn’t used of that sort of mistrust.

“I know many things!” he said, forcing a smile on his face. Dumbledore was clearly unimpressed, and Newt only gave him a frown, but Harry choose to ignore it. He had had a rough journey, hellish few weeks and two portkey travels. If things continued like this he would just go and bury himself inside the bloody catacombs to be sure not to be swiped somewhere else.

As soon as Harry put his foot on the first pavement of Paris, he felt it. Fuck, he had forgotten about it.

Luckily, Nicholas Flamel lived already in the same house, which wasn’t far from their location. He was probably the only wizard in Paris that didn’t live in a wizarding neighbourhood -- because he had been there before the creation of the wizarding neighbourhood. Harry remembered perusing through the man’s notes, a long, long time after he and his wife had died. He remembered the awe of centuries of living history and the crushing guilt of having participated the man’s demise.

Then, he remembered that Flamel had chosen to die. On his own terms, in his own time. Lucky man.

Dumbledore knocked at the big wooden door.

The face of a surprisingly not-old man appeared when it opened. His eyes traveled across them until they locked on Dumbledore. He raised an eyebrow, nonplussed.

“What have you done this time?”

There was a silence, and then, Newt snorted.

The man - Harry knew he was Flamel- opened the door slightly more before Dumbledore had the time to answer, and nodded them in.

Harry almost smiled when he entered the room. The only time he had been here it had been…
well, dead. Looted by many people before him -- people that didn’t necessarily hold the previous occupants in high regards. Now, with all the magical mess, the smell of old books, tea, leaves, yes, it felt like a wizarding home.

“Sit, sit,” invited Flamel once they managed to go through whatever was piled on the floor.

There was a few minutes of uneasy silence as Flamel prepared the tea and walked around the house to put things in a bit more order.

“So,” the old wizard said as he sat, “why are you here?”

It was very clear to Harry that the man knew Dumbledore since a very long time, and had the weariness of such experience.

“I am glad to see you too, my friend. We came to seek refuge for a day or two, and we will be on our way to England.”

There was a silence as Flamel tapped his finger on the wooden table. “I see. And who are your companions?”

“I am Newt Scamander, Sir. I believe we met once.”

“Ah, yes. The magicozoologist. Yes, yes, I remember you. A very good thesis you published last year, I must say I had the most… instructive time reading it.”

Newt blushed and tilted his head in thanks. “And you?”

Dumbledore opened his mouth to introduce Harry, but the young man was quicker. “My name is Harry,” he said with one of those dazzling smiles that didn’t meet his eyes. “I’m afraid, I too am on the run.”

He held his hand for the man to shake. The second their skins touched, Flamels eyes met Harry’s. He knew, and Harry knew he knew.

Harry should have expected it. The man had kept himself alive for far too long not to feel it.

“Very well. I will, of course, offer you hospitality for a night or two, on the condition that it does not bother anyone living in this house.”

Dumbledore nodded with a smile, but Harry had the feeling that the words were much more ominous than what they should be.

There was another silence while Harry, Dumbledore, and Flamel siped their tea while poor Newt was fidgeting in his chair. The man clearly wasn’t used to such situation --- and it was quite normal, for this time. Harry had sometimes to remind himself that now, not everybody was a soldier and many men had lived without the constant pressure of a civil war.

The entry door opened.

“Mr. Flamel! I’m home!”

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It was very awkward for Harry to see the young man run into Newt’s arms, while Dumbledore
and Flamel looked at each other in a way that let him know that there were entire conversations being exchanged. Harry observed the young man with curiosity. He would be tall if his back wasn’t constantly curved as if he was trying to hide himself. He had dark hair cut with the same care as Harry’s own, which meant probably none at all, but quite shorter. Even in happiness, his eyes roamed around in the room.

He and Newt were having a hushed conversation with a childlike excitement, their hands flying like a band of butterfly to draw what they couldn’t say with words.

After a moment, Flamel coughed to remind the two that they were not the only people in the room.

“Ah, hum, I apologise, Mr. Flamel.”

The old wizard waved his hand. “Quite alright, child. Now, let me introduce you to Albus Dumbledore, I believe you two know each other…”

“Professor.”

“Credence. I am happy to see you in such good shape,” said Dumbledore with a smile.

They started to talk, with Flamel and Dumbledore, of the boy’s progress. Of how he fared quite well at the university, even if he could stay there only a few hours. Flamel seemed to entertain an entirely other conversation with Dumbledore by looks and innuendos alone, and Harry knew that the boy wasn’t blind to it.

“Thank you, Professor. For your help, I mean.”

Dumbledore waved his hand as if to swipe away the compliment “It’s nothing, I assure you.”

“It’s… it’s much more than I deserved, Sir.”

“Nonsense, child, I am sure-”

“What makes you think that you didn’t deserve help?” Harry cut in. He had seen the glimmer in the boy’s eyes. He knew it, he knew it far too well. And he knew that no matter his good intention, it didn’t do any good for Dumbledore to dismiss this so easily.

The boy looked at him, then, with big, startled eyes. “Who are you, Sir?”

Harry smiled warmly at him and held his hand. “Harry. Harry Potter. I arrived here with Newt and the professor Dumbledore.”

Credence barely took his hand, as if he was afraid Harry would do something to hurt him by a simple touch. Harry made sure that nothing on his face showed earnestness nor aggressivity, but he could feel it on the boy’s eyes. These eyes were the ones of a child who had seen death from too close.

Flamel put a hand on Credence’s shoulder. “You don’t have to answer his question, Credence.”

"Credence." Once again, Newt hadn’t given any attention to what was happening around him. He had opened his case on the bear floor and had apparently been talking to the twig-like creature. "There's someone inside there I'm sure you'd like to see."

The boy’s eyes widened and he rushed inside the case.

Harry didn't move, even as Dumbledore and Newt followed the boy down the case. He was curious of course, but he had a very good idea of what would happen down there.
Nicholas Flamel introduced him to his wife before following all the others inside the case, and the woman showed him his bed. It was obvious that the new guest were not expected, and they would have to make do with transfigured inside what was probably an extended closet.

Harry’s room was small, but he had had smaller. He sat on the bed, not quite knowing what to do. He felt alone, dejected, for he knew that whatever was happening in the suitcase was not for his eyes to see. Of course, he’ll know what happened at a later time, but not now. There was a story between these men, and it was a story he wasn’t part of. He passed the rest of his day trying to remember the English pureblooded families, the people he had only heard of.

It was hard to stay concentrated with the thrumming of the catacombs under his feet.

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The next day passed uneventfully. Flamel was still looking at him strangely, and Credence seemed to be deep in thought most of the time. Harry went to see Graves sometimes when no one else was around. He didn’t know what to feel about someone that had just ran to the ministry with precious information, so he kept silent. If the man noticed it, he didn’t say.

Newt came and went to organise the next trip, but neither Harry nor Dumbledore really dared to get into the streets. Paris was a strange city, politically neutral in the conflict that loomed over the horizon, and hence, the best place of confrontation. And no one here wanted to spill blood in vain, for Harry was sure that he wouldn’t let Grindelwald’s soldiers go away as easily as he had muggles, if only because he was now closer to Tom.

It had dawned on him, then, that even if he was the boy’s best chance at protection, his very presence would also put him in danger.

He didn’t know what to do. It was the ugly head of doubt that was starting to show itself, and each day away from his duty fed it a bit more. The days of waiting were horrible. It reminded him of Sirius, it reminded him of prison, it reminded him of the camp.

Yet, he had to wait. Luckily Dumbledore seemed to feel his restlessness, and despite the usual suspicion the man seemed to have around everyone -- not that he showed it overtly, but Harry still could tell-- and helped with it as much as he could. He took upon himself to teach Harry the basis of alchemy, using the Flamel laboratory while the man was away.

Dumbledore was a very good teacher. His eyes seemed to shine with the passion he had for magic, for knowledge. His voice was soft and his lessons interesting enough to make Harry forget the ticking clock.

After awhile, Credence finally looked at him from the other side of the table. They had decided to sit inside the suitcase, everyone but Mrs. Flamel who still had work outside and preferred to “leave the men to themselves”. It was a good arrangement that allowed them to include Graves into a sense of normalcy his wound didn’t allow him to the rest of the time.

“What you said, the other time... “ Credence fidgeted a bit on his chair. Harry wondered if he had been like that when he was younger. “Mr. Graves said I should trust you. On this, at least.”

Credence threw a look at Graves who nodded.

Harry leaned back into his chair. “Talk,” Harry said softly because really, he didn’t have much to say. He didn’t know this boy -- had barely talked to him-- but he knew the look.

“You- you asked me why I didn’t think I need help.”
Harry nodded. “I killed people.” blurted the boy.

Harry saw everyone around the table tense, but he just stared at him for a while. When it was apparent that Credence didn’t have anything more to say, Harry decided to talk. “And why killing someone should make you undeserving of help?”

Harry ignored the way everyone was looking at him like he had sprouted a second head.

“Because it’s… it’s wrong! it’s a crime, a sin!”

“ Did you enjoy killing this person?”

“N-no, I-”

“Did you planned to kill this person?”

“Of course not-”

“Did you kill this person for no reason at all?”

“No…” Credence had lowered his eyes, flushed. Harry was happy to see that there was no trace of wild magic. It was still there, rampant under the surface, in tide with the boy’ emotions. Oh, Harry knew what it was to be in this child’s shoes, to be sitting on a wooden chair, head bowed in shame and heart heavy in guilt.

“Well, I don’t see the problem.” His words rang into the room. “Do you think you are the first one to commit murder? The last? From the look of things, you killed someone without wishing to do so, and you regret what happened. It doesn’t repair everything, but it is enough.”

That made the boy look up. Harry knew he had to do something, or the boy would just return into the ocean of self-hatred. Never quite looking for death, never quite avoiding it when it was presented.

“I was eleven.”

There was a stunned silence as every eye but Credence’ moved on him. But Harry didn’t look at them. All his attention was on the cowed young man in front of him. "He was a professor. Someone I trusted. He tried to kill me, and I put my hands on him. His flesh… Turned to ash. Raw magic. And for the longest time, he had that look on his face… But I was scared and angry and hurt. So I put my hands on his face and burned him until he was no more than a pile of ashes and his screams just a buzz in my head. The adults around me acted like nothing had happened. Told me it wasn't me, it wasn't my fault. The kids quickly forgot the professor. I never did. For a long, long night I wondered: was I a monster? Did I deserve to go to jail, to die? Were the muggles I lived with right, was I a dangerous freak that should be put down? But then, many things happened. I chose to decide that it didn't matter. I lived. I defended myself, I defended others, and I lived.” Harry sighed and looked away, for a moment. “You know, they tell you that there is something in you that goes when you kill. You think: “that’s it, I killed a man. I will never be the same again.” But you wake up the next day, and you are the same. You are still you. What happened was in you, you just didn’t know it. What you need, now, is to try to live with it.”

Harry stood up, trying very hard to ignore the stares that were burning him from everywhere. He was doing a good thing. *He was.*

“You’ll be good, kiddo. You’ll be fine,” Harry said, and left.
Harry was sitting on the rooftop. It was strange how Paris’ roofs seemed to be made to stand on. The city was a whole new one from up high, a more tranquil, maybe more peaceful one. The roofs of Paris were it’s lungs.

He didn’t turn when he heard Dumbledore walk beside him. It could only be the Professor, with such light steps whose silence was undone by the swish of his robes.

Dumbledore sat next to him.

“A penny for your thoughts?”

Harry snorted, then sighed. He didn’t know what to say, he didn’t know where to start.

But after a moment of reflection, Harry knew he wanted to trust Dumbledore. As much as one could trust such a man.

“There is a little boy. A little wizard,” he started, feeling something hollow creeping into him. “A child. This child, he is smart. Smarter than anyone, in a way. Powerful too. Hurt.”

Harry could feel Dumbledore’s eyes on him, like he had so, so long ago. He felt like a little boy all over again.

“This child can become a Dark Lord. He can start a war that will, one day annihilate most of us. Most living beings. He will be able to do the most terrible things. To go further than anyone before.”

Still, Dumbledore stayed silent.

“Yet, this child could be the best chance to avoid all that. This child could only be a child that needs help. And I don’t know what to do.”

There was a silence.

“And what does your heart tell you?”

Harry tilted his head in thought. “Once, an old man told me that it was our choices that made us who we are. Not our… predispositions.”

“Well, that sounds like something I could say. He must have been a very wise old man indeed.”

Harry huffed a laugh. “Indeed.”

“The question I believe isn’t what you have or don’t have to do. If you choose to help this child despite yourself, I’m afraid it won’t do anyone any good.” The professor put a hand on his shoulder. “The question is: with which decision will you be able to live with?”

“Living.” Harry closed his eyes. “I haven’t thought of myself as living in a very long time.”

When he turned his head, Dumbledore looking at him with something akin to a deep, soft sadness. The professor slid to sit closer to him and took his hand. Harry tensed, but let him do it. Dumbledore put Harry’s hand on his chest, under the sternum. Where his heart was beating. The professor pressed his own hand above Harry’s, and looked at him in the eyes, above his half moon glasses.
“Do you feel it?” he asked calmly, a twinkle in his eyes. “Your heart is beating. You are alive. As long as it beats, you have a future,” his lips quirked in a half-hearted smile. “You just have to learn to live with it.”

Harry could have cried, and from Dumbledore’s expression, the man knew it.

--

"I wonder what you see…”

Flamel was leaning against the brick wall of a chimney.

Harry made a face. "Many things. Paris is a great place for these things."

"Great isn't the word I would have used"

"Mhm. It still terrifies you, doesn't it?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"You lived so many years, seen so many die. Yet you took your wife with you. You never were truly alone, and still, you surround yourself with youth. But death… You're scared shitless of it. The great nothing, the eternal night… and no matter how dangerous, how unuseful it is, you keep your dear stone next to you."

"I wouldn't call my life unuseful, per se."

Harry snorted. “Depends on who’s looking at it, I guess.”

“What are you, exactly?”

There was so much loaded in this question. Not who, not why. What. Not really human, then. Well, if he thought about it carefully, maybe not. The idea made him flinch. “You know what I am. You knew the second you touched me.”
“Not really. Oh, I know that you should be dead. By all means, someone shouldn’t have a hand that cold and still live…” Harry smiled at the attempt of humor. “But I don’t know what.”

“Maybe it’s better that way. You don’t know my what and I don’t know your how. So no one will create a second Stone, and no one will do again… what I was forced to do.”

Flamel hummed this special type of humming Dumbledore did sometimes, and Harry almost scoffed at it. “What do you intend to do, then?”

“The best I can, I guess. ‘Tis not like I could quit.” Harry mumbled.

Flamel was looking at him in horror.

“You mean you can’t…”

“No. I’ve tried many times -- others too. Doesn’t work. I always come back. Hurts like a motherfucker too.”

Flamel was looking at him with pity. Harry should have hated it, but of all the people in the world, he thought that only this strange old man sitting next to him would know the pain it was, not to be able to die.

“You’ll be able to go back to England tomorrow if that is what you wish.”

Flamel was giving him a way out, he realised. The man didn’t know how tempting, how horrifyingly tempting this offer was. Harry shook his head. “Thank you. It is what I wish.”

“You’re sure?”

Harry grinned. “You’re a nice old man, but I still have stuff to do. Not all of us can stay stuck in the same gloomy place.”

“Impudent boy,” mumbled Nicolas, and there was something almost soft in his voice.
“Ah! You’re here, Doctor! Enter, enter. And you too, misters.”

The Doctor tipped his hat to Mrs. Cole, showing his respect and masking his disdain. It was two in the afternoon and the woman reeked of alcohol. How she was deemed fit to take care of children, one might only guess. He could almost hear the nurses behind him commenting on the woman’s habits.

Well, the guess might not be as hard as that considering the type of child in the orphanage.

However, something else was wrong. The place was too quiet -- it clung to you as soon as you passed the doorstep. At the top of the staircase -- which was right in front of the main door once you passed the entry hall, a few little kids were trying to hide themselves, staring at the stranger with what he hoped was only curiosity. To tell the truth, the sight of their little heads pressed against the bars of the staircase, the rest of them hidden in the darkness creeped him out.

But he was a man of reason, and so he just kept walking to Mrs. Cole’s office.

The office in question was exactly as he had last left it. Gloomy, cold, and highly professional. Well, if you ignored the half empty bottle not-quite-well hidden behind the desk.

The Doctor sat without asking for hospitality -- there was no use. Not in this place, not with these people. Still, he waited for the woman to sit before he talked.

“The procedure shouldn’t take long. We will put the wild child to sleep one week out of two -- for now. Don’t worry, the… awake week will not be one of energy for that little thing.”

He opened his case and took out a few documents. “Now, I’ll need you to sign these, in loco parentis. It is the authorisation for the procedure, and an eventual internment if the medical institution -- namely me-- see fit.”

The woman smiled fakely. “Of course, of course.” She said, signing where she ought to without even looking at the document. The doctor smiled at her because it was the polite thing to do and took back the sheets of papers.
It was incredible how easy it was these days. Especially for orphans; no well intentioned parents to put themselves between the patients and their treatment.

“I’m glad you came, doctor,” suddenly blurted Mrs. Cole. “We didn’t know what to do anymore.”

“Has there been any...news? On the situation?”

He was worried because Cole seemed truly... unsettled. Not angry, not annoyed, not even afraid. It wasn’t the first child like this one he had found. After the World War, many hurt fathers had come home, and many children had been changed in consequence. Some sort of ripple effect, with disastrous consequences that will probably last generations.

“We locked the child in his rooms, after you left. ‘Twas the only way to be sure he wouldn’t run off. He… he manipulated the other kids. Through the door.” She started to fidget with the hem of her sleeves. “He convinced them to open the door, and tried to run away. He was so silent, it took a long time before we noticed what was happening.”

_Just say you were too drunk to look after the kids._

“When I found him, he was... attacking one of our girls. She apparently had put herself between him and the way out. The poor girl may have scars -- we’re lucky he’s so young and was unharmed. This… could have turned very ugly indeed.”

The doctor nodded. Yes, all of this was clearly confirming his diagnostic, and his decision to incapacitate the child. Even in an institution, in a few years, that one would create havoc, and probably hurt everyone around him.

“Don’t you worry, Mrs. Cole. I’ll take care of that,” he said softly, and for once, he truly meant it. The woman may be incapable, but anyone would have lacked the courage to confront such a child.

The doctor opened the door like one would have opened the curtain of a theater. Tom was sitting on his bed, like the first time he had seen him. A book on his knees.

“Hello, Tom.”
The child looked up, understanding dawning on him. Such a smart child. Such a great mind.

Such a shame.

The doctor put his case on the small wooden table that had been put against a wall. The nurses entered the room and started to prepare everything to accommodate the coma the child would begin in a few moments.

In the end, it wasn’t the child’s fault. He was dangerous almost despite himself.

The doctor opened the case with a click.

“It’s a beautiful day, today, isn’t it?” he said lightly, but there was something catching in his throat. It was for the best. For both the child and his surrounding.

He put the syringe -- it was quite bigger than the ones he usually used--, the tube, and the vial of the insulin.

“I don’t want to leave.”

The words startled him. “You’re not going anywhere.” The doctor said with a chuckle.

“Am I not?”

The child was staring at him, and his eyes, his pretty, dark eyes felt like loaded guns pointed at him. The doctor had half a mind to check if the kid had hidden a knife before starting the procedure. But such thoughts were ridiculous.

He was a grown man.

He sank the sharp tip of the needle in the capsule and pulled.
“I trust I won’t have to ask anyone to hold you while I’m doing this, Tom. Give me your arm, now.”

The child only stayed put, looking at him like he was trying to make him burn with a simple stare. When he saw the child wouldn’t move, the doctor took his arm, as gently as he could. He pushed the sleeve away and pressed his fingers against the soft skin behind the elbow to find the vein. One of the nurses came behind the child to hold onto his shoulders, and another stayed behind the doctor, ready to act if needed.

The needle went into the vein easily.

He pressed the syringe to push the insulin into the child’s blood. The product disappeared, and he felt the child tense under his hand.

He shouldn’t have been able to tense.

The doctor waited ten seconds, twenty, a minute, but nothing happened.

Nothing.

The child looked at him with his unreadable, black eyes.

“Looks like I won’t be going today, doc.”