Carry On

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Additional Tags: Harry Potter is Skull (Reborn), Mind muckery, Memories, Loss of Memory, More tags to be added, expect violence, Potter Luck, Character Study, Murphy's Law, a bit absurd, Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms, seat of the pants, Department of Mysteries, Potter Children do things, denial doesn't help, there are hints scattered about for things, Gore, twisty plot twists, bad things happen, the mafia is a thing, the corruption is another thing, abuse of memory charms, abuse of squibs, magic abuse, everything abuse, people die, FYI there are spoilers here, plot twists for days, Fire, Everything is on fire, fire burns, probably not the help anyone wanted, things not going to plan, London burning, obliviate, actions have consequences, subtle suicidal thoughts, we make choices, Legilimency, probably a bad choice, the rain is ashes, The future is scary, INTERNAL SCREAMING, fire is not our friend, scared or angry, angry AND scared, War related trauma, a lot of running, Drugging, Foot Chase, Dangerous Stunts, jumping out of windows, destroying all the public transport, Fear of doctors, Leon the chameleon, Drinking Games, Drunk Shopping, Black Out, Going insane, talking to an octopus like a person, not thinking things through, whims, bad memories, don't think, Falco the hawk, Run Away, where does the money go?, Manipulation, Blatant lies, Longwei is not an OC, false names, Disappointment, it was going well till it wasn't, some gore, good and bad memories, the great Skull hunt continues, I Wrote This Instead of Sleeping, twisty plot twists are twisting, cloud references are funny, a lot of sun references, Feelings, Family, philosiphal musing, Eventual acceptance, life and lemons, Maggots, rage shooting, Glitter, creeping about, demented hide and go seek game, with more mafia, Moons, Liliana is an OC, prophecy in pockets

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Carry On

by Akua
Summary

Harry went to work one day. And woke up decades later, with no sense of what has happened between. With nothing to tie him down, Harry wants to know where he has been.

And how to care for an octopus.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
“Welcome back, Auror Potter.” Harry blinked through the ringing in his ears and sat up all the way. He glanced down to his bound hands, the rope surprisingly soft against his wrists as he shifted.

“Are you with us?” The voice asked again, and Harry raised his eyes. A nondescript plain face greeted him. One he didn’t recognize, but the red of their robes signified that they were an Auror as well. Harry opened his mouth to reply, but only wheezed instead. The face gave a quirk of a smile and reached over to the table next to their cushy white arm chair, and picked up the glass of water.

It had a thankful little bendy straw. But Harry merely frowned and leaned back against his own cushy prisons.

“Ah, right. Here, let me do the spells…” The person—a man—stated softly as he tapped his wand against the lip of the glass. Showing off the diagnostic spells and the results. It seemed the longer Harry waited to take the straw, the more spells the man kept doing.

Eventually, Harry leaned forward and accepted the straw. He took a few careful sips before he leaned back. His eyes lifted and he glanced around the room. It was a cramped little office, one he recognized as part of the Auror department. It looked worse for wear, like an explosion had happened in several key points of the office. But overall it seemed functional enough.

“… where are my glasses?” The words tore through his throat, but Harry felt itchy without the familiar weight on his nose. The man let out a relieved sigh and set the glass back on the table.

“I believe that is the result of a… um… muggle procedure?” The man offered, his plain face coming alive with the smile that he now wore. He looked like plain now, merely homely.

Harry cocked his head to the side, “… what?” That was pretty much the sum of things. Why was he here? What was he doing? Why were his hands tied to this chair? And his feet? Harry shifted his feet, and gave the man a pointed look.

He gave a nervous laugh. “Ah, yeah. That. Um—I’m Frank. And, well. Um. What was the last thing you remember?” Well, that was not an answer (or anything even close to an answer) that Harry wanted. But he would take that lead in, as long as he got an answer and was released soon. After all, Harry wanted one to be tied down. He could feel his magic humming in his chest, and if he had to stay bound like this, he was going to break himself free.
Being confined wasn’t in his nature. Not anymore.

“Yeah… Dropped my children off on the Express, then came to work for a new assignment… a… a deep cover? To uncover if magic was being used on muggles…” Harry trailed off with a frown. Things were… Fuzzy, after that. “I can’t… put a finger, on the particular that is.” Harry clenched and unclenched his fingers had turned his gaze to lock on to the so called Frank.

“Um. Yes. You were given a deep cover mission. They’re normally given to the unspeakables. But you were specifically placed to this one. It didn’t say why in the files. But you were recruited. An honorary unspeakable, yeah?” Frank grinned, although it slowly fell when Harry clearly didn’t share his joy over the matter.

“I’ve been… cursed?” Harry probed, digging his nails in to his palms as he fought for calm.

Frank scrambled to calm, “oh, no, no—good heaven’s no. Um. Whatever was up down there—the mission that they wanted was to send you to, ah, Germany. Everything else was classified. It’s just. They, um. Did a… mind graft? They needed to have you act a certain way to make you the bait.” Frank looked apprehensive then.

Harry figured he was right to be apprehensive then. He could feel a welling of not-calm in the center of his chest. He clenched his fists harder. And then, silently, with his wandless magic—cut the ropes.

There. A bit better.

Harry took a few calming deep breaths as he moved to clench his hands together over his lap. He took his moment of calm before he held out his hand. Frank silently passed over a wand. Harry’s wand. The wand joyfully let out several happy red and gold sparks before settling down. Harry kept it in hand as he settled back against the chair.

Still, with how things were going… he eyed the black marks on the walls. And the floors. Evidence of an explosion…

Frank followed his gaze, “ah. That. Well—the mind graft was supposed to make you a, well, a muggle. But it seems that your magic was so strong it manifested in a… mysterious way.” Frank gave a little shrug, and Harry reached up and rubbed at his face. When he pulled his hand away, it was covered in… white make up?
In fact… his bare arms—they appeared to be covered as well? They were so much paler than his normal skin tone.

“H.. hey. Before you, um. Figure that out. You need to know that, as a muggle—or at least thinking you were one… you, you uh… slipped your watchers. For a while. It took a, um, long time to track you down.” Frank offered. And there was something about his face. It might be the bigness of his ears, or the strong hinge of his jaw, or maybe even the lightness of his hair, but something was itching at Harry’s mind the longer he looked at him.

But slipping his minders (the thought angered him that he had to have minders — minders were never good at their jobs, not even official Auror ones apparently) while thinking he was a muggle? “Why don’t I remember any of this?” Harry asked hoarsely, even as he used his wand to summon the cup to his hand. His bones felt… tired. He was feeling terribly drained. And… sore?

He glanced down. Hospital scrubs. He must not have come back quietly.

“It was the graft. You had an absence of memories. When the graft was dismantled, the new ones went with it. The unspeakables were going to drain them in to a pensive for your viewing, but, well… you were just a bit too difficult to handle to do that. They were lost in the process.” Frank supplied, twitching slightly at the memory, even as he shifted to stand up.

“There are a few edited reports ready for you. As well as the contents of what was on your person when you were retrieved.” Frank added cheerily. It took Harry a moment before he woodenly stood up as well. He followed Frank’s beckoning hand to a blank space of wall. Harry moved to stand next to Frank, glancing between the other wizard and the blank space of scorched wall. Why were they here?

Frank cleared his throat. “I, um… don’t want you to panic. But… well—“ Frank cut off, and with a few mumbles and flicks of his wand, he transfigured a bit of wall space in to a large mirror.

Harry recoiled—how could that be him?

Purple hair, smeared thick white make up—it clashed terribly with the green-green of his eyes. It was still his face. But… but… Harry paused and shifted a step closer. And then another. He touched make up smeared fingers to his mirror. He could see swaths of his own skin on his face. Where thick make up had been brushed away. Wiped away. The tear tracks. The…
The scars. Harry reached up and brushed away the make up over his forehead. Well, he tried in any case. It stuck like glue. His wand came up and he soon vanished the mess. And recoiled again. The scars… his lightning bolt was there—but the other scars! His face was littered with them! His neck! His arms!

Harry drew in a panicked breath and hauled off his shirt.

It got worse.

He could see his own marks—but these scars were a lifetime of violence. Painted on to his skin. And he couldn’t remember a single one of them!

“Frank—what—“ Harry’s wand was shooting angry red sparks now, which Frank eyed warily.

“You’ve uh, been gone a long time, Harry Potter.” The man offered him.

Harry’s hand traveled over the gut marks over his stomach, short breaths whistling in through his nose. He got enough breath in his lungs to choke out, “how long?”

Frank stood silently next to him, silent long enough that Harry turned and looked to him.

“Well, um. My name is Frank Longbottom. I’m Neville Longbottom’s grandson.” Frank offered. Trying to be gentle but knowing there was no good way to go about this.

Harry felt like the ground was rolling under his feet.

“If… if that’s the case… Why… My face—I’m not…” Harry choked.

Frank shifted, “yeah, that caused a bit uproar. No one rightly knows why. Exactly. I mean, you were rather young looking when they pulled you in at twenty eight.” He gave a little shrug.
Harry focused on Frank. (Who did Neville even marry?)

“Ginny?”

“Remarried.”

“My children?”

“All graduated. James moved to the Americas. Joined MACUSA and had his family there. Three kids. They seem nice.” Frank offered.

And then Frank didn’t wait for Harry’s questions. “Albus moved to France. He has become a potions master. Rather famous, that one. And Lily—well, she actually became a magizoologist. Currently in Asia, I believe. No children. Neither her nor Albus. I don’t think they’re going to have any.”

Harry slowly dropped down to his knees and pressed his face to the carpet as he focused on breathing. Frank quietly stepped away.

What was he going to do?

… what *could* he even do?

After a time, Harry looked up to find Frank muscled behind a cramped little desk. Harry slowly rose to his feet and padded over to stand in front of the desk. Frank gave him a smile, “hey. Um, so my shift will be closing soon. This box here is everything you had on you—after it was picked over by unspeakables.” Frank set an old fashioned leather shoebox in front of Harry on the desk.

“And this… creature, was attached to you? It was scanned, and we believe you connected and made it your new familiar.” He offered with a smile. And set down a water tank with what looked to be an… octopus?

Well, Harry was more confused than heartbroken about that.
A small, toy sized motorcycle was placed on the desk next to everything else. As well as a bank card, “this here, um. Modernized Gringotts, you know? Anyway, this is your key and new account. When you were found alive, the department went through and allocated you all your missing pay from… over the years. We placed it in a new account to give you time to… think.” It went without saying that no one had been contacted about his sudden alive status.

Harry didn’t know if that was a good thing or not. His feet itched for him to run.

A larger part of him just wanted to scream.

“Could I have a sheet?” Harry croaked, motioning to a bit of parchment to the side. Frank nodded and mutely handed it over. Harry transfigured a simply bag and quietly stuck everything inside. He hesitated at the tank, not wanting to upset the creature and his little home.

“It should be fine. The cage has its own gravity, you know?” Frank offered. And Harry tipped it to the side to test. The water didn’t suddenly fall out. Although the octopus swam closer to him, almost preaching the surface of his water.

“Right… right.” Harry nudged the aquarium in to the bag. Frank helpfully added some expansion charms. Harry to the card in hand and stood in front of Frank for a long moment.

“… right.” Harry took a deep breath. “Do I… am I still an Auror? Do I need to debrief?”

“No, you don’t need to debrief. As for your status… it is pending. A lot has changed. And much of the old practices have evolved with the times. You’d have to be retrained, if you’d wish to return.” Frank was reaching for information packets, probably prepared.

Harry shook his head from side to side, “no, no… I’ll just… I’ll just go.”

“… good luck then, Mr. Potter. I’d still suggest a glamor, though.” Frank made a gesture toward his own face.

Harry woodenly complied. And left.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Things are very, very different. Harry will cope the best he can. He has always been skilled with making the best of things.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The purple hair might be the reason why there were no second looks or glances. Or just the fact that he had been dead for so many years. Harry reached up with his fingers to trace the bridge of his nose, where his glasses would have rested if they had been there. There was no sign of them, but he could see crystal clear. Clear enough to see how wrong-wrong-wrong the entire Ministry looked. It made his skin crawl. The floor was a nice marble, now. The walls were wood paneled and, overall—it looked plain.

Which was better than the self-chosen ostentatious self-importance of before.

But it was still wrong.

Harry pressed his lips together and kept close to the walls as he skirted around the atrium—and came to a dead stop. For a moment. Someone ran in to his back, and swore at Harry as they roughly skirted around him. Harry couldn’t help buy ignore them, though.

The atrium statue had been replaced. Again. Again again. Of course the statue that the Voldemort regime had instated had been torn down the same day as his demise. But the statue that had been erected in its place had been a simple statue of three tall golden wands crossed. Still ostentatious. But equal, in a sense. Hermione had reasoned that it was supposed to represent the three levels of blood status.

Those were not wands.

It was… a giant golden peacock.

“This is too much…” Harry mumbled to himself as his feet drew him toward the statue. It was raised
up on a wooden platform. The details of the feathers were so life like, that Harry wouldn’t have been surprised if the bird breathed. It didn’t, but it sure looked like it.

Harry rubbed his face, re-shouldered his bag, and resolutely shook his head. He didn’t want to deal with this right now. As wrong-wrong as the ministry was, the outside couldn’t be that different. Diagon Ally had remained unchanging for decades. What was a few decades more?

Harry soon came to find that he was so, so wrong.

There were sidewalks and curbs. There was a nice brick road now, fairly even and far better than the old cobblestone. Harry walked to where Knockturn Alley had been and found it missing. Entirely. The whole street was gone and had been expanded in to some kind of large park with a… library building?

Harry walked to it, and soon stood in front of the ‘Grand Granger Library’. Harry tilted his head to the side, if only to right the off feeling of tilting the world was doing. The sun was setting, there were children on the play stations of the park—and everything was just… too bright.

Harry mutely turned away from the library and moved on. The buildings were cleaner. Straighter. The displays looked nicer. There were teenagers waving signs in the streets, doing tricks for small crowds. Signs that advertised their sponsor stores. Harry eventually just let his eyes lock to the bricks and plodded along. He just needed to get to the Leaky Cauldron. Once he was there he could… could…

Not get a room. Because he had no money.

He turned on his heel and marched to…

Not Gringotts. Or, perhaps as Frank stated ‘Modernized Gringotts’.

The majestic marble pillars were still there. But the actual front of the building had been changed to modern reflective glass. The goblin guards were gone. Harry stood in front of the building for a short minute, and silently begged for his own sanity that the inside would be the same. That they just added the front to put in better light.

It was not the same.
Harry felt cold. And he felt twitchy. He needed to leave.

But all the same, he forced himself inside. To a reception area with multiple human tellers and many humans standing in line in front of rows of desks. They even had uniforms that reminded Harry of muggles. Harry focused on his breathing, focused on the way the card he had been given cut in to his hand from how tightly he held on it. He got in line, and successfully stamped down the urge to flee.

Harry didn’t know how long it took the line he selected to get to the front. He felt exhausted—the same exhausted he had fought against during Auror training. Harry just wanted to lay down and not move an inch for a few months.

The blond lady on the other side of the counter reminded him of Lockhart.

“Hello! Welcome to Gringotts incorporated. My name is Deliah. How may I help you?” She was young, perhaps a bit past her teens. There was a little plaque on the desk that looked like the Hufflepuff badger.

Harry pressed his lips together and then held out the card. “Um, how do I use this?”

Deliah smiled and accepted the card gingerly before putting it in front of her on the desk. She pulled a notebook closer and used a pen to scrawl a series of numbers on to the top of the page. “It’s a new card, when it is activated it changes from green to gold. Let’s get you set up, okay Mr. Wallowby.” She was definitely winning the award for sunny disposition, Harry had come to find.

As well as the fact his name was apparently Chris Wallowby. What kind of name was even that?

Harry numbly accepted pamphlet after pamphlet from the woman. He had a nice stack in his hands that gave step by step instructions on how to work and access ATMs in the Wizarding Sections versus the Mundane ATMs.

He was starting to think his brain was shutting down. Nothing was going in.

“Um… how do I… make withdrawls?” Harry asked. Because this card thing—he was not prepared to handle it at this moment. He needed cold, hard cash in his hands. Deliah smiled and pointed to a
crowded wall.

“We have some cash machines here. And tellers over there to assist you through a first time withdrawal. It'll dispense notes or coins. Currency of your choosing.” She closed a folder on the desk, slid the card in to a fancy looking wallet, and slid the bunch to Harry.

“Now, do you have any questions about anything?” Deliah asked brightly.

Yes. Harry had many questions. For one, where were the damn Goblins? Sure, Harry did not have a good relationship with them, but having a bank without Goblins rubbed him the wrong way. There were Aurors stationed here.

Harry numbly shook his head negatively.

“Have a lovely rest of your evening!” Deliah concluded brightly. Harry picked up his folder and new (apparently) complimentary wallet and stepped out of the line. He loitered for a moment before he went to the named cash machines. They were large screens with a rectangle of numbered keys and slots and… and everything just blurred. A woman was there in blue that walked him through it, and soon Harry had several paper notes and coins and was walking away.

He felt cold.

Very, very cold.

It felt like he was walking through a fog. The crowds had thinned, and the sticky hotness of the summer had faded to something crisp and easing. Harry drifted to the side, and found a nice space of curb to perch on so he could open his transfigured bag and shove everything inside.

The face of the octopus was pressed against the glass. And gave off a nice shining light of day that had Harry squinting. “… uh. Hey. I’ll, uh… get you out of there soon. Lets… um.” Harry stared blankly at the octopus for a few minutes.

“… what do you even eat?”
A quick trip to the pet shop found that they didn’t deal with aquatic animals. Or at least, didn’t know what his octopus ate or even how to take care of it. Harry rubbed his eyes and focused on the octopus. It was just an animal, an animal that was in his care and he could take care of it. He didn’t need to think about anything else aside from feeding the both of them and getting a place to sleep for the night. He didn’t need to panic. He just needed to focus on these basic needs and build up from there.

He has had enough shocks for the day.

Flourish and Blotts was still there. Perhaps double the size. And a small café situated on the sidewalk in front of them. Harry padded inside and nearly ran in to wrinkly older man in a black uniform. Harry went stiff and shuffled back a few steps.

“Good evening,” the man rasped with a quirked little smile. “Could I help you find what you’re looking for?” Harry felt something like chills go down his back as the man’s eyes traced his face (and some distant, squeamish part of Harry wondered if this man was someone that had gone to school with him).

“Yeah… um. I have a small octopus. I don’t know how to care for it…” Harry let the words tumble out before the silence between them grew uncomfortable.

The man nodded, “our animal care and information section is this way. Main floor.” The man shifted, and Harry could swear he heard a few pops as the old man moved. The man held out an arm, and motioned for Harry to follow along. Harry hesitated, and then plodded along after the old man through the aisles. They towered above him, and Harry felt his stomach unclench as he spotted the thin climbing ladders and rows upon rows of familiar looking books.

Harry breathed in the smell of books, and wondered when books were a thing he could possibly enjoy. The old man led him past the huge books of owl care, how to care for a frog, and a tell-all book about how to make a cat familiar fall in love with their owner. Harry rubbed the side of his face as he eyed the books, and came to a stop next to the older man.

“I collected frogs, when I was younger. I always had a love for the ocean after that,” the man said as he reached out and drew a shiny covered book down and held it out to Harry. It was a book about octopi. General information, it seemed. A pamphlet soon followed, titled in brightly colored letters ‘so now you have an octopus’ that Harry had no doubt was geared toward a much younger reader.

It had sections listed for ‘feeding’, ‘aquarium care’, ‘life time expectancy’ and Harry figured this worked well enough.
… the little guy was only going to live for a year? At best? Harry pressed his lips together, eyebrows drawing to a close as he felt his heart clench at the thought. He shook his head and focused his eyes on what they ate. The list was simple and with good variation—crabs, crayfish, mollusks, shrimp, small fish. Harry hummed, it seemed easy enough.

Even if it was just for a year, this octopus would get to eat nicely.

“Does this help?” The old man asked.

Harry nodded.

“Do you need any more help locating another book?” The old man asked, hand out and patting Harry on the shoulder. Harry smiled and gingerly maneuvered his shoulder out of the way as best as he could without alienating the man.

Harry started to negatively shake his head, but paused and said “um, a history book. Just, um…. Modern history?”

“Mundane or Wizard?” The man asked, and once they had decided on wizard, they climbed a swirled staircase to the second floor. Harry accepted the man’s help and got a book that gave a nice overview of Wizarding history as a whole. And another book about the last century. Harry really wanted to know what happened to the Goblins.

(And everything else—but that would come in time.)

Harry thanked the old man, made his purchases, and left the bookstore. He stopped by the pet store again and picked up some small fish for the time being. Everything was going smooth, so Harry decided to keep to this zen state and get everything that needed getting done, done.

The Leaky Cauldron was run by a woman. Harry blurred through the encounter. He got his room, got supper on a tray, and squirreled away in to a room that looked similar to what he had been in the last time he had to take a room out. Harry set the aquarium on his desk next to his supper tray and let the live fish drop in to the tank. The octopus stared at him for a time before it started to chase. Harry sealed the top and let out a sigh.
Harry pulled out the chair and looked at the simple sandwich-soup combo.

It tasted like ashes and anxiety. He choked it down and shoved it in to the take away box that the house elves would pick up from the room. Harry stretched across the bed and buried his face against the pillow.

It felt like seconds when he jerked away and groaned, a futile hand coming out to block the sunlight as he rolled on to his back. His head pleasantly empty and his eyes locked on to his outstretched hand.

Even the backs of his hands were littered in scars.

Where his words had been (I must not tell lies) was just a big blotch of raised scar. Harry ran his fingers over that, and shivered at the sensitivity of the skin. That was not pleasant. “I should get some potions or something.” Harry spoke to himself as he sat up. He looked to the aquarium, and found the octopus floating lazily. “And you need a name,” he added.

A glance to his bag on the floor showed the contents all spilled out. Right where he had left them. His books were on the floor as well. Harry glanced between the shoebox and the books—what should he open? Harry slid off of the bed and padded the two steps necessary to reach the mess. He picked up the books and placed them on the desk first. He neatly angled them in line with the aquarium, and then set the rest of the contents of the bag on the desk.


Harry peaked in to the folder, and stared at the name. Chris Wallowby. Honestly.

He pushed the folder away and grabbed for the shoebox. He slowly eased the lid off and dropped it to the floor.

Harry pulled out the cloth first. It didn’t take a genius to realize that the box contained wizard space. The padded motorcycle suit stained in blood and rips was not something Harry cared for. Harry stood from the chair and shook it out. It was definitely his size—Harry brought it to his shoulders and checked for a tag inside. No tag. Anywhere.

He banished the blood, but left the rips. The pockets were empty, so he tossed that on to the bed and
returned to the box. There was a wallet in the box. Soft black leather that felt like it cost far too much money to acquire. There were several punch cards. A few train tickets between France and Italy amongst the notes. Harry didn’t know the conversion rate of Italian notes to British, but the sheer amount of notes had him suspecting that there was a lot of money in here.

The I.D. card said…. ‘John Smith’.

“… For real?” Harry huffed a laugh at his own make-up covered face. It looked like his face was barely withholding a scowl. He chuckled at himself and added the wallet to the desk. This was interesting, rummaging through the box.

The motorcycle gloves. Harry definitely liked those and they fit snugly over his hands. He wiggled his fingers, and felt less naked for it. The purple styled flame on the palm of the left glove was interesting.

“Red is my favorite color,” Harry told himself. Even with his memories altered—even that had changed? Harry shuddered and pushed his thoughts away from that as he blindly reached for the next thing.

“… huh.” Harry delicately held up the black pistol between his thumb and index finger like how one held a particularly horribly soiled nappie. “Huh,” he said again, as the next several guns came out of the box. All of them had a purple flame painted on to them.

“What?” Harry turned the box upside down and let the empty bullet shells rain out.

“What the fuck happened!” The calm had definitely shattered.

Chapter End Notes

World building.

As someone in the comments stated 'ride or die'.
I don't know where this is going. Let's have a party.

(What is canon, even...)
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Reading books is helpful.
Seeing swarms of Aurors, not so much.

(Et vu, Frank?)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 3

Perhaps it hadn’t been the smartest thing to upend all of the empty bullet casings all over the floor. Probably not his brightest moment when Harry hunted them all down and picked them up by hand rather than using his wand and magicking them all back in to the box.

Perhaps it was a good thing he had finished and put the box down on the desk before it dawned on him. Harry sighed to himself and slumped back in his chair as he stared at the box. Silently, he grabbed the lid and put it on top. A bit of movement out of the corner of his eye had Harry looking back up at the aquarium.

The red octopus had drifted in close. Its red body sticking to the side of the aquarium as it peered up at Harry with its bulbous eyes. Harry shifted and reached out to touch the glass where the suckers had latched on. The octopus shifted, seemingly nuzzling closer to the hand even though they were separated by glass. Harry shifted and pulled his hand away. If an octopus could look forlorn, Harry would bet that this octopus was feeling it.

“You are a nice shade of red,” Harry mumbled to himself, even as he glanced back to his desktop. Well, he had gone through his clues and he didn’t find much about the person he had been under the graft. Harry glanced over his shoulder at the suit, before he turned to the motorcycle. It was still toy-sized, but it looked big. Harry glanced at his room and decided to unshrink the vehicle once he found a nice open space. It was nice to think that he finally fulfilled his ambition of learning how to ride a motorcycle, even if he couldn’t remember such a thing.

Harry regretfully pulled the books closer.
He paged through the table of contents of his history books. Of course, an hour of staring at his pages didn’t help the fact that apparently three years after he gave his handlers the slip, there had been a goblin war against wizards. Harry hesitated to even look in to that further. Seeing the bank was more than telling enough that the goblins had lost terribly. It smelled like trouble, and Harry just knew that he didn’t want to stir this hornet nest. (But did that mean he should just let sleeping dogs lie?)

Harry took some time to pace, stretch, pop out and get some sustenance (a quick snack from the bar)—and then forced himself to sit down and really gather some information.

The Great Goblin Galumph, as it was called. (Harry squinted at the word ‘Galumph’ and had to wonder if that was a wizard made word or an actual word.) The book only dedicated a few pages to that, and didn’t go in to explicit detail other than stated that the goblin nation’s self-importance and self-entitlement had brought down the might of the ministry and inevitable hostile takeover. The goblins were ousted and human bankers were set in to place. In fact, the bank was the largest place of employment for squibs—where the Aurors were security, and enchanted objects were used to make up for the squibs’ lack of magic.

Harry didn’t know how to feel about this. He didn’t have the best relationship with the goblins, but for the goblins to be taken out the way that they were? It sounded awful.

This was also a system that had been in place for a few decades, too.

It seemed to be working?

Hermione Weasley nee Granger became a very famous political activist. While she never made it to the chair of minister of magic (despite campaigning at least two times) she had been minister in all but name due to her political clout and how much she shaped society with new bills, laws, and the general distribution of knowledge. That was the sum Harry got from the paragraphs he glanced through under Hermione’s chapter title. He didn’t dare go to the end of her chapter, and flipped over to the next one. To the chapter under his own name. A significantly shorter chapter. A single page.

Harry got a tiny blurb in the modern history book. Killed on the job—not even a ‘MIA’ stamped down. He had just been put down as ‘killed’.

… that seemed terribly fishy. Harry leaned back in his chair, even as he squinted at his page.
Harry frowned. His ‘handlers’ he was said to have given the slip. But they had declared him dead rather than missing? If they had said he was missing, then perhaps it would have been easier to find him with more people? Unless… unless in his altered state, he knew something that the unspeakables couldn’t take the chance of spreading. Harry pressed his lips together, his stomach fluttering in nervous tension as he thought back to his re-arrival back to the wizarding world.

None of this seemed very… good.

Harry just—he had to know what had happened. “Even if I have to hunt down everyone I ever met…” Harry quietly vowed to himself. Maybe it wasn’t that his memories had been lost, so much as they had been forcibly destroyed. Harry dropped his face in to his hands and spent a moment just to rock back and forth. Harry had always had a strong gut instinct, all of his life. But it was making him jittery now, especially when he didn’t know what exactly was throwing him off so thoroughly.

He was here, alive and now, in an era beyond his friends. (He refused to believe that anyone had… passed, from old age. He refused to even look. He didn’t dare. Harry knew that it would be just too much. Too much too soon.) Harry understood that even just the absence of the driving force of good could let evil in. And all those he had trusted had either retired or—(not going to think about that).

“What’s the peacock for?” Harry blinked at his hands, and then hooked the book closer to search for that answer.

Apparently, it was donated during the prosperous reign of Scorpius Malfoy when the boy attained the seat of Minister of Magic. He lasted three terms before he joined the International Federation of Wizards. Teddy Lupin succeeded him, and held the title of longest reigning Minister of Magic. The peacock was to be the new symbol of the Malfoy line, or so it says.

Harry scoffed, as if he could attribute anything but a skull to the family. Even Draco Malfoy. Still… Draco Malfoy was old and feeble now. And apparently Scorpius wasn’t too terrible a person. Albus had had good taste even at a young age it seemed for friends. Harry raised a hand and put pressure against his eyes with his palms.

He warred with himself. To find out more about this segment of history… or to focus on himself.

In the end—it was a bit of both. He was obviously out of the wizarding world for a long, long time. And the Wizarding World had advanced to the point where it could catch him. And somehow he didn’t age in the between years.
... why had they let him go? Why wasn’t he attached to some table somewhere?

Harry had to find out.

Being a curious boy had always been a problem for him. And being a curious man wouldn’t help him either. Harry eyed his wand on the bed. As great as the purple hair was as a disguise... he should probably change things up. Change it up... and slip back in to the ministry.

The Unspeakables made the mission he had been on. The Department of Mysteries wasn’t that hard to break in to... when one had an invisibility cloak.

"Aw fuck." Grumbled Harry. Complication after complication!

"Okay little octopus... first thing is first! We’re going to break in to the Department of Mysteries—somehow—and then we’re going to find out all we can about what they had me do. And what they did to me.” Harry held up one finger to the octopus. And Harry could swear that the octopus was watching his hands intently. It was almost eerie how fixated it was on him, and Harry wiggled his fingers in front of the octopus and watched the thing dance its tentacles around in some kind of mirror response. Harry felt better talking about his plan out loud, but was also a bit weirded out by the pet. But he was thankful that the octopus was there, because if nothing else it wasn’t crazy as long as someone was listening. Or, was it he wasn’t crazy as long as he was actually talking to someone?

(Animals counted as 'someones'.)

“Well, even before that... New disguise! In order to look not like me.... Red hair sounds nice.” Harry touched at his short hair. The purple wasn’t so bad. He was actually getting used to it, really. A quick glamor would be fine for this. And... Harry eyed the leather motorbike suit.

“If I had a helmet, I wouldn’t even bother with the glamor.” Harry grumbled.

And dropped his hand in to his face. “And I’m a wizard!” It was like Hermione’s witch moment during the gambit to save the philosopher’s stone! He was a wizard and he could make a helmet!

Or, well, Harry thought he could. He went through five failed attempts of helmet construction from his pillow before having to give it up as a bad job. He’d never actually handled one before...
attaching a hood to his motorcycle suit would just have to do. Harry ran his fingers over the rips, and
vowed to learn some household spells to fix things like this. Ginny had—Harry inhaled sharply and
shook his head. Nope. He wasn’t going there. Not yet. Not when there were things that needed to be
done. Harry checked himself in the mirror. Suit and glamor in place. He transfigured his scrubs from
the day before in to a nice cloak that would cover his suit.

“Okay. Steps to plan one have been successful. So, disguise is good. Now… I have a whole day.
To, um, loiter…” Harry trailed off and dazedly looked out the window of his hotel room. As if he
would try to get in to the ministry during the day. Of course he was going to go at night! Just like
before. And just like before, he had a bit of a mess of a plan to somehow make it so he accomplished
something. Harry found his wand and slipped it in to the tight sleeve of his motorcycle suit.

He carefully re-packed his things in to his bag, thankful for the wizard space. When he got to the
aquarium, well, his Octopus was making a sad face at him. “Don’t look like that,” Harry cringed,
even as he nudged one end of the aquarium in to his bag. “It’s just for a day, okay? After this, we’ll
go to Germany.” That’s where it was said his mission had taken place. He would confirm the
location once he got his hands on his file.

(Even the unspeakables had to have files. They were still a department. Even if the files never left the
department—right?)

“After all… Octopus uh… little guy? Yeah, little guy—we’re just going to double check, nick
something… I think this is what Hermione always talked about. My refusal to listen to authority and
follow the general laws.” Harry murmured as he nudged the aquarium in to the bag and buckled it
shut. He shouldered the bag and drew the cloak around himself so it covered himself and the bag.

He looked in to the mirror, “well, having a hunchback will help the disguise.” Harry swished his
wand and added some grey strands to his hair and wrinkles to his face. He chuckled and added a
bigger nose just for fun. With that, he did one last check over the room.

Oh, right.

The guns. Harry paused before he stuck the two pistols that had remained on the desk in to the large
pockets of his suit. His bag was already on his back, and he would just put it away later. His bank
card went to the zipper pocket on his chest. Best not to lose that.

In fact—Hermione was always going on about being prepared. Perhaps Harry should do the same.
He had the whole day to get ready in case things went wrong. And get some potions. Harry would
find out the history behind his scars and erase them, so he needed to get something that would do
Harry cleared the room of all traces of himself, and strolled on down to the bar of the Leaky Cauldron. It was closer to lunch than breakfast, so he got himself a nice hot meal and listened to the conversation around himself in the pub. Nothing really interesting was being spoken about (was Harry hearing about Cauldron bottoms again? Percy had always been going on about that, had no one ever investigated that? Harry snorted, that was silly) and Harry kept his eyes down and to himself.

But a flash of familiar red out of the corner of his eye had him minutely turning his head to the side. There was a sizeable squad of ten Aurors clustered around the barkeeper. She eventually pointed to the stairs of the second floor. Harry kept his face toward his food, but watched how all but one of the Aurors camouflaged themselves, and the one non-camouflaged one walked to the stairs.

A grim faced Frank.

That… could only mean one thing. Harry placed his coins on the table and smiled to the lady behind the bar. He lowered his voice to something thick and gave her a slurred thanks before he fake ‘limped’ from the bar to go out the back and in to the alley.

Well. Harry didn’t believe in coincidences. And he could only guess the squad was for him. And no one looked ready to celebrate. Once out of sight, Harry forwent the limp and looked around the alley.

Okay.

Quick plan.

He spotted a cash machine with a short line near the alley entrance. Harry got in to the line and scrambled to bring out his money folder. He flipped it open and cursed as everything dropped to the floor and scattered. Harry used his old-man-voice to thank everyone that scrambled to help, and laughed at their easy smiles and gathered everything back in his arms. He fished for the pamphlet that told him how to work the cash machine.

Scrawled on the back of the pamphlet was a tiny message.
'Get out'.

It sent chills down his back. Why hadn’t he noticed that the night before?

Harry’s hands didn’t shake as he inserted his card and his PIN. Get as much as possible seemed like the best idea for things, really. He opened his bag and got his enchanted shoebox full of bullet shells, and let the galleons pour in to it. Until he switched to notes, and he just stuffed that on top as much as he could. Until the numbers ran low. People were giving him strange looks.

He stuffed everything in and scampered off with determination. He turned a few corners, dropped the folder and card in to the trash—and changed the glamor to have black hair and a small pointy nose. No wrinkles. A dark purple cloak instead of red…

Harry could do this.

After all, how hard was it to evade some Aurors for a day?

The Granger library came to mind.

Harry checked his bag and charmed the bag to a black color. And then took off at a jog. The Department of Mysteries would be his objective for the night. For now, it was time to pray that he hoped they thought he absconded in to the muggle world the night before. Of course, the fact that there were Aurors clearly stationed outside of the Granger library had Harry checking a pretend watch and doing a turn-about to go in the opposite direction.

Okay. Well. Harry Potter would obviously go there.

In fact… there were a lot of Aurors everywhere. Harry could spot the reds of their uniforms easing through the light crowds and headed in the direction of the Leaky Cauldron. Harry took a deep breath and let it out slow. He glanced to his hands and found them steady.

“Well… I’ve always done well flying by the seat of my pants.” Harry grumbled to himself.

To the ministry, then.
It was terribly easy, sneaking in to the Department of Mysteries. The ‘back door’ to the Auror department was still there, although rather thickly coated with dust. Harry suspected that it had not been used in a long, long time. Perhaps it had even been forgotten in the grand scheme of things. A quick twist of his wand had Harry looking like an Auror, a plain face situated on him as well as a few enchantments for anyone who spotted him to ignore him.

It was where you were most comfortable at, the ministry. It was supposed to be a safe place. From what Harry had gleaned, the wizarding world has been at peace for a while. The ministry had been safe once the corruption had been ousted in Harry’s time. Harry had made sure of that, along with Hermione, Ron, and the rest of his generation. This was a safe place, and Harry would gladly take their ease for granted to solve this mystery.

They were hunting for him—it didn’t feel so long ago that the ministry had been after him before.

(It stung that even Frank was hunting him now—)

The ministry was emptying for the lunch hour, and Harry slipped in to the lift behind a gossiping pair of secretaries and made his way down. Harry pressed himself against the back of the elevator and made his breathing slow.

“Did you hear about the new street ordinances?” The blond woman on the left asked the brown haired man at her elbow.

The man raised an eyebrow, “the one about the cars, yeah?”

The blond clapped her hands with a grin, “yes! How did you know I was talking about that one?”

“Well, you’ve only mentioned it over a hundred times since it was signed in to law three days ago.” The man must have rolled his eyes, but Harry couldn’t see his face.

The woman let out a breath of air and drew her shoulders up, “well! *Excuse* me, but I think that it’s great that they’re enforcing a quality control.”

The man hummed his acknowledgement as he shifted.
“Come on! When that Gracy Riggs hit that boy with her truck—that was a catastrophe!” The lift doors opened to the first underground floor, and the duo stepped out. Harry watched them go, “I mean, that little boy had to regrow an eye! It’s a good thing that Potter boy made that potion.” The woman went on, and Harry barely stopped himself from lunging out through the closing doors of the lift.

Harry let out a shaky breath before he used a finger to poke at the numbered panel to the side.

Down one floor.

Harry watched the doors open, and didn’t let himself hesitate to step out on to the dark tiles. This place was exactly like he remembered it. Harry shivered, and found that he wasn’t thankful for the temporal stability as he thought he would be. He glanced down once to the tiles under his feet, and got the disconcerting view of the seemingly black water moving under the tiles as the golden light of the lift disappeared with the shutting of the doors.

He looked to the walls, and found the same effect. The blue light of the torches was not helping the sea sick effect that he was getting. Harry inched a foot forward, and then another foot went forward—and he walked to the end of the hall quickly. Thank goodness for the silencing effect on his shoes, Harry’s twisting stomach would not be able to survive the sound of that in the void of sound that was the department.

The black door groaned after he shut it, and Harry closed his eyes against the spinning of the hall. Harry counted to ten and opened his eyes.

The blue candles and light did not help penetrate the gloom. Harry pressed his lips together, and resisted lighting the tip of his wand. At least he was smarter than when he was a teenager.

The first door led right to—the hall of prophecies.

Harry shut the door behind himself. He couldn’t truly see the depth of the room. But the walls were lined with shelves that were not as high as he remembered. But there were still orbs. Harry pressed a hand to his stomach, and if he wasn’t sure he wasn’t cursed, he would swear the sensation in his stomach and chest was someone else’s intent.

It felt like… a direction.
And it felt like… he should be quick.

Harry jogged forward. The door to another room should be close. He jogged for a bit, and followed the sensations. His instincts weren’t wrong too often, so Harry hoped that it was helping him here. And now. Harry slowly came to a stop when the feeling suddenly dissipated. Harry frowned as he looked around.

It caught him out of the corner of his eye.

‘HARRY POTTER’. Harry paused and looked on the little plaque again. Harry looked to the slots above his name and found… three.

Only the person whose name was listed could pull them out or risk madness.

Harry pulled the first one off. He stared at it a moment before he numbly let it drop and shatter. The sound was muffled, and Harry felt his head ache as he focused in on the soft glow of the little man that appeared. He was middle aged perhaps. He opened his mouth and—

“Harry Potter burns.”

And then he was gone.

Harry felt his breath hitch as he reached for the next one.

A woman came out of the shattered remains of this one.

“I prescelti sette.”

Harry stared at the glass graveyard at his feet. Was that even allowed? Prophecy in another language? Harry reached for the last one, and was about to let it tumble when he heard the brief snap of a door opening. Harry held his breath, and calmly stuck the last prophecy in to a pocket.
He nudged at the glass, gently sweeping it under a rack to hide the evidence against the least observant.

Right. He could freak out later. (Harry was starting to feel like he was deciding to freak out later was becoming a common decision for him. If he didn’t watch out, this was going to become a life choice rather than a snap decision.)

Harry took off on a jog.

Overall—things weren’t so bad.

Harry found a door and slipped through it. He slowly turned the handle and inched the door forward. It opened easily. Harry pressed his eye to the crack, and kept his ears open for behind him in case someone spotted him. The next room was… empty. Harry paused and pushed the door open.

Across the way was a door… in a room with no floor.

Harry inched a foot out and tapped the ‘floor’. Or he tried. It wasn’t just an invisible floor. It was just gone. Harry bemusedly looked down and squinted in to the dark. Well, this room went somewhere. Sometimes Harry wondered how wizards could be so frustrating. Still, Harry took a step back, and followed his instincts.

His body was all for jumping. So the rest of himself would just follow along for now.

If he couldn’t trust himself, he would be in a very bad place right now. (Don’t think, don’t let your mind go there—)

So he jumped.

Hopefully that file will be somewhere close.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you all for reading.

Question for anyone who wants to answer it.
Who is the first Arcobaleno you want to see in this fic (aside from Skull?), and any particular reason why?

((And Galumph is actually a word. It's in the dictionary and everything.))
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

He was a desperate man.  
Desperate men do terrible things.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 4

The free-fall was exhilarating.

The landing, not so much.

Harry grimaced as he canceled a hover spell and let himself flop on to the ground. Quietly to rolled on to the side and wrapped his arms around his stomach. That really hadn’t been the best spell to use on himself, and his stomach seemed to shift back and forth in protest even as the throb in his head worsened.

He closed his eyes for a moment before he sighed and pushed himself to his knees. A quick glance around and he knew exactly where he was. Harry leaned back and took a moment to really observe the death chamber before he let his eyes up look to the ceiling. Well, where a ceiling should have been. It was just darkness up there.

With his stomach quickly settled, Harry rolled on to his feet and focused on the arch. Hermione had mentioned campaigning to demolish the terrible thing just a few weeks ago. It seemed like she hadn’t succeeded. Harry pursed his lips together, and didn’t even realize his feet were moving until he stood at the bottom of the short five step staircase that led up to the platform that housed the veil.

“I can’t hear anything,” Harry whispered to himself. The last time he had been here, he could have sworn he had heard whispers in here. He could have sworn there was something. Harry stepped forward to get on to that first step—

A flash of blue light and a clap of thunder, and Harry found himself slumped against the wall clear to
the other side of the room. The only evidence of his launch the ache in his back as he wheezed. His mind just couldn’t catch up to what had happened for a few long seconds and he sucked in air through clenched teeth. Desperate for breath even as he tried to wiggle feeling back in to his fingers and toes.

That had been so… Harry shuffled and slumped over and on to his side. He squinted out at the veil.

“I’ll destroy you.” Harry somehow hissed out. A white hot anger blossomed in his heart as he glared at it. This place had haunted him (still haunted him) and knowing that Hermione had failed in this mission left him with a bitter taste.

But, well, he didn’t exactly have the time to blast an apparent ward to smithereens and didn’t have the time to somehow figure out how to curse break in a few minutes.

Harry rubbed at his face and unhooked the clasp of his cloak. This was too heavy, and was going to get in the way. The glamour magic went as well. If he was caught down here, they probably wouldn’t care what he looked like. As it was, Harry rolled his shoulders and—

… his bag!

Harry’s breath hitched as he scrambled to pull off his bag—the aquarium! The octopus! Harry couldn’t even feel his body as he ripped at the clasps and shoved the lip open and—and there was the octopus’ curious, hopeful little face. Harry breathed a sigh of relief and let his head drop down to rest on top of the glass.

“Our Thank Merlin,” Harry breathed, somehow knowing that the octopus was nuzzling back through the glass with the allocated contact. Harry didn’t even know what he would have done if he had accidentally crushed the little guy.

He shook his head and quickly closed up the bag before he could convince himself that he should take the octopus out of there. It looked so sad! But Harry was sure it couldn’t actually leave a body of water. He would have to check his pamphlet out at a later date for that information. He re-shouldered his bag and hopped to his feet. There was the door right there, the launch had definitely shortened his walking time if nothing else. Harry stood still a moment to shake out his right leg, and grinned to himself. Harry was still rather smug about his pain tolerance (Ron had learned to be more annoyed than jealous in time during Auror training. Those years had been memorable, very much so). He felt right as rain.
He opened the door.

Frank’s face—

—red light—

Harry groaned as he woke up to screaming. He cringed and opened his eyes—where was that screaming coming from? It was so constant that it seemed unbelievable that it just kept going on, and on, and on… Harry rolled, or he tried to. He twitched, and found that the only thing he could do was move his head. He lifted his head up, and then let out another groan and his head dropped down on to the stone floor.

Frank stepped over to hover next to Harry’s head with a contrite frown over his face.

“I know you’d come here. It was just—such a Harry Potter thing, I thought.” Frank added with a shuffle, and a nervous glance to over his shoulder. Harry followed Frank’s look and realized that the veil was looming over them. Harry pulled his lips back, ready to do what he did best (piss off his enemies until he could figure out how to escape) when Frank continued on, “Harry Potter, I need your help. The unspeakables have taken over the Ministry, and all of Britain and Scotland.” Frank shifted and kneeled down next Harry’s head.

And all he could see was Neville’s teary, young eyes and hear that screaming—

“What?” Harry croaked.

“No one knows how this… this happened. They’ve been memory charming—everyone! They started out pretty subtle I think. I think… I think they got Hermione Granger first. All of her family said she was different after you were declared dead, but not so different. She became…” Frank grasped for straws to explain but came up with nothing.

He shivered, “my… my charm broke, I think. When my mum passed, I got… well, she was a curse breaker. She left me a necklace in her will. It broke the charms on me. And, and I can’t believe I’ve been so blind. It doesn’t stick on me—the charms. But the unspeakables, they come and charm the auror department twice a month. They make a yearly trip to Hogwarts before the summer holidays.” Frank took a sharp breath with his nose, and clenched his fist on his knees. He kept eye contact with Harry, even as he struggled to keep his panic and fear in check to be understandable.
“The squibs, in the bank—the unspeakables rounded them up. They’re there against their wills. They’ve… they’ve even set up breeding programs. They just charm them to do as they want. I’ve broken a few of them of their charms. I’m rather gifted, yunno, in charms. And it’s just… It’s terrible. And I didn’t know what to do. And one of my informants told me that the unspeakables found you—I brought my team in first. I got you out before they could take you out and…”

Harry struggled against the obvious body bind he was still under. He couldn’t move still, but his skin itched to get out with enough intensity that he knew that if Frank didn’t let him loose, he would break out given enough time.

Although even with that, the horror of what he was hearing, the mere possibility…

“Why? Why is this… why am I?” Harry trailed off, his pinky finger twitching.

Frank’s eyes drifted to the side. “The group you were with—I had to make a decision. You don’t look like Harry Potter anymore. But there was another man you were with. A few charms and he could pass off as you. I handed him over to the unspeakables when they came for you. I claimed that you, purple haired and white faced you—were just some random bystander.” His grim face grew taut and his shoulders rose to almost touch his ears.

Harry didn’t even have words to express himself. Couldn’t even understand himself.

Well, Frank seemed to feel his judgment anyway.

“It’s just—I need your help. You, it was always said that you could do the impossible. And I had heard that there were three prophecies and pertained to you and the ministry. I charmed you, a little nudge. To get them. I have…” Frank trailed off as Harry abruptly sat up with no fanfare to speak of, and Frank jerked back in time not to get a hard forehead to his nose.

“I’m not a tool for you to use!” Harry hissed, his skin beyond sensitive and was downright prickly and his muscles jumpy. He had been used, and apparently the gut feelings had been a lie. It had all been done to lead him here.

… to a begging, scared young man.

Frank looked up. “Please.” He whispered, a hand raised as if to touch Harry’s shoulder. Before he
dropped his hand.

“*Please.* We can’t go on like this. It’s not right.” Frank added. Frank begged. And Harry hated the sympathetic flight response he had at the idea of the wizarding world under the control of charms.

Frank took a deep breath.

“They killed Teddy Lupin. It was a big mistake—so they re-created him with some poor son of a bitch they pulled off the streets somewhere. I don’t know who they were, before. But your son Albus seemed to know when things had gone wrong and distanced himself before he fled… Teddy Lupin is dead, and a puppet.” Frank’s voice somehow drowned out the wringing scream of the veil in to a dull buzz.

The icy grip on Harry’s heart—

It felt like he was *burning.* Something hot and cold and rage—

“I don’t know the extent of it. But I, for sure, know that Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy—they knew something was up. They fled from Britain. I’ve been in contact with them. They’re not… what they used to be. But we’ve summoned up as best of a resistance as we could. But… but it’s so hard to tell who is an unspeakable and who is not.” Frank dropped his head and rubbed at his face with his shaking hands.

Harry would have reached out to comfort him, but he feared that he would break the other with the strength of his grip. He could see the seams of his gloves stretch to their near breaking point.

Again. It had happened again. Or maybe, it had never changed? Maybe it wasn’t something that could be changed.

Harry paused and reached in to his pocket. He felt around for the orb—and pulled out a handful of glass shards. Frank went silent as he watched the handful of glass merrily bounce against the stone that they were seated on.

Harry didn’t even bother to stop the giggle that slipped out. The rage and hysteria were warring something terrible in his body. Harry had always been more hormonal than most, but this was reminiscent to his late teenagedom, on the run from the Death Eater Ministry and about to face his
death on the outskirts of Hogwarts.

Well, that prophecy was never going to be heard from again.

Frank actually whimpered.

“Man up, Frank.” Harry said, his eyes raising to lock with Frank. Harry rolled to his knees and loomed over Frank. Inching closer and closer until Frank sprawled out silently on to his back. Harry snorted.

“If you want me to help—you gotta do one thing for me.” Harry concluded.

“Anything!” Frank gasped—and Harry could see the desperation in Frank’s eyes. And he could understand Frank and his desperation. He could understand the careful manipulations as a last ditch act of desperation. Of a war that only a select few even knew about as well as an overwhelming enemy that they had no chance to win against. Harry had lived it, technically less than a decade ago.

Harry hated the sympathy. Hated that he could understand why everyone kept coming back to him. Harry had done the impossible more often than someone should be able to do, and still come out alive. He was the man that death hated, and Harry knew no other could claim that title quite like he could. He had died twice, after all. But perhaps this memory business made it a third time, in its own way. “The man you handed over to the unspeakables—he has to be innocent. We’re going to go get him, and you need to return him to where you found him.”

Frank blinked, eyebrows drawing together in confusion, and no small amount of incredulity. Harry spoke before Frank could get himself thinking straight, “Put him back. No one deserves the Harry Potter treatment everyone slathers on to me.”

Harry sat back on his heels before he stood up and narrowed his eyes at the veil.

“Right. Yeah. Done deal Mr. Potter… but, um… could you help spring him out?” Frank scrambled to his feet as well.

Harry shifted, and nodded. Yeah. Yeah, that could be done.
“Why’d you put this shield around the veil?” Harry asked, instead of replying.

Frank drifted in to place next to Harry, and looked up at the raggedy curtains. “… seems like the right thing to do. I’m rather good at charms and curse breaking. So I’m pretty good at cursing as well. The unspeakables still haven’t figured out how to crack it, but my inside man says that it’s a near thing.” Frank rubbed his hands together like he had a chill, and then tucked his hands in to his armpits.

Harry, if he strained himself… it sounded like the screaming was a phrase, now. Clearer than ever before, as he stood so close to the veil.

“What do you think is on the other side?” Harry asked faintly.

“Don’t rightly care to know. This whole place needs to burn.” Frank lowered his eyes to Harry. “I think they’ve been throwing a lot of muggles in here… to experiment.”

“Yeah… I could see this place burning.” Harry tapped the toes of one boot against the ground, but didn’t bother to look over to Frank.

“When this is over—I’m done. I’m just…. I’m done. You understand?” Harry stated, more than asked.

Frank paused, and then he nodded. “Harry Potter died years ago. You’ve nearly been erased, you realize?”

“Maybe you should do the final step—and finish it. I’d rather not be nearly headless.” Harry quipped, and Frank jerked at the startled laugh that left his own mouth. Frank stepped away hastily, coughing to cover his laugh.

Harry realized right then and there… that he wanted to leave.

He couldn’t do this much longer.

… once more. That had to be enough.
This death chamber had once been the catalyst for his own metamorphosis of the man that he had become. It was fitting that it was here he had his final realization of how much he just didn’t want to be here anymore. Perhaps it was the lack of the familiar. The lack of friends or family that didn’t think him dead. It could be all or none—or maybe he had always been like this but had blinded himself to it.

Harry turned from the veil, and snagged his bag from the floor as he strode to leave the platform. Frank fell in to step with Harry and parted the protections around the platform to allow them through. Harry didn’t initiate conversation, and Frank didn’t strike up his own. Together, they exited the chamber and in to the hall. Once the door closed the hall spun dizzily again. Harry huffed and moved to choose a door at random, but Frank’s hand on his elbow stopped him.

Harry didn’t even have the time to raise an eyebrow at the other man. Frank shoved a pair of black circle sunglasses in to his hands, and then shoved a pair over his eyes as well. Harry squinted at Frank, and reluctantly put out the counter intuitively dark sunglasses over his eyes. Although when he looked up to peer through the spectacles, it was to see everything in a hue of purple. With white words floating in front of the doors.

It didn’t take much for Harry to twist and look up to the words over the door behind himself. ‘TIME ROOM’ was clearly labeled in floating white. Across from them was the ‘EXIT’, and to the right was the ‘DEATH ROOM’. Frank tugged on Harry’s sleeve and turned to the left. They entered a room titled ‘main offices’ and quietly entered a side door titled ‘BRAIN PESTER’. There was a little reception desk in the tiny entry room they had stepped in.

Someone really should have protested the continual use of the black tile that Harry could still see under the sheen of the purple hue of the sunglasses.

Harry reached for his wand, and found his sleeve empty.

Frank sheepishly handed the wand over before Harry could look over to him. Harry snatched it back, checked his bag straps, and promptly kicked in the door. He dived in to the room, aware that Frank was rolling with him as they sooth bathed the room in reds.

It was over before it began, really.

Harry laughed to himself—that was suspiciously easy.
Frank put his hands on his knees, gasping. “Merlin, you’re fast.” Harry raised an eyebrow and frowned. It didn’t seem so, but he suppose he was decently fast. Harry brushed himself off as he looked around. Ten unspeakables littered the floor like trash, vaguely around a single point of a person chained to a chair.

Harry immediately stepped forward, reaching out for them—

Frank stepped in front of Harry resolutely and started to cast detection spells. And in seconds was dismantling the curses around the chained form. Harry didn’t even bother to feel sheepish. “So, what was the Cauldron scene for?” Harry asked, a bit waspish with his tone.

Frank faltered, and then continued on even though he reluctantly started to talk, “well, um… the unspeakables aren’t stupid, you know. They tested the man… and even though he was transfigured to look like you, he isn’t actually you.” Harry nodded along with Frank’s words. He crouched down to look up at his own unconscious face. It really was a good replica.

“My memories?” Harry quietly asked, his voice sibilant in the quiet of the room. The only sound the swish of Frank’s wand.

Frank stopped his casting and let his wand hang at his side. “I… I took them. You weren’t… you weren’t you.” Frank turned and looked up at Harry through his lashes. “Please don’t be angry.”

“I’m not angry.” Harry looked up at Frank with a grin from where he was crouched in front of the chair. No, he wasn’t angry. He was stone cold furious in a way that his brain was shortening out in incomprehension. His hands were aching and his heart was calm in his chest. “Don’t you worry.” After all, he had somewhere to vent his rage.

“How are you going to give them back?” Harry asked.

Frank paused before he reached to his wrist and pulled off a bracelet. He held it out to Harry, who immediately snatched it up. All the pretty white gems were actually small vials… full of memories. There were hundreds of them, all clustered together like gems. “They’re unbreakable. So you… when you’re comfortable. When you have the time you can slowly reintroduce yourself.”

Harry stared at the bracelet for a long time before he clasped it to his wrist, and tugged his sleeve over it.
“Was the graft-thing you sold me a lie?” Harry whispered.

“… in a way, yes.” Frank whispered back.

Harry slowly stood up, unable to bring himself to look at Frank. Harry had made his stance rather clear, as it were. If he hadn’t already decided on his course of action, this would have definitely been a turning point for him. But he had already reached the point of no return.

“The protections gone?” Harry asked. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Frank nod and step back. Harry flicked his wand, “finite,” and watched the transfigurations revert.

Harry watched the man’s hair go from inky black to red stained blond. And flinched back in horror at the empty nothing where his eyes had been. Harry inhaled sharply, and looked to Frank for an explanation. Frank had gone pale faced, but hadn’t frozen up.

“I think… I think they were preparing him to be… be… Well…. ” Frank trailed off and motioned to the wall across from the door. It wasn’t tile there, Harry realized. Just a wall of small aquarium tanks full of human brains. Harry quickly focused on the man, hand shooting out to rest on his pulse point (when did he learn this?) and let out a relieved sigh that the man still breathed, still had a pulse and a heartbeat.

Harry stepped away. Unable to look away from the gore of the dark red—empty—sockets.

“What can fix this?” Harry asked hoarsely. His body was shaking in sympathetic horror. The man was unconscious, and Harry didn’t want him awake to feel this. Harry found his eyes watering in pain, and didn’t resist rubbing at his own eyes.

The building, burning pain only eased when he looked away.

“Some potions. Y-yeah. Potions. And, um. A healer. We can’t exactly put him back where we found him, just yet…” Frank said, even as he dug through his pockets before he pulled out his trunk and unshrank it. It was large, and it didn’t take Harry long to recognize Mad Eye Moody’s trunk, where the man himself had been imprisoned.
“… don’t let him wake up.” Harry whispered. Frank paused, before he nodded and crafted a small enchantment before he tucked the man away.

“Can you get to… the headquarters of the order of the phoenix?” Harry asked in the stillness. Frank looked over, then he nodded.

“Put him there. I’ll get him when I’m finished.” Harry would fix this. He had brought this madness down on that poor muggle’s head. He would make this right. Even if it took a little bit of time. Harry pressed his pales to his eyes, and was glad when the green clad, blood splattered form was tucked away.

Frank reached out to touch his shoulder, and Harry unsubtly stepped away.

Frank dropped his hand. And didn’t offer it again.

“Go.” Harry hissed. “You have ten minutes to clear anything precious from these halls.” Frank didn’t hesitate, and ducked out of the room as if it was already on fire. Harry let out a long, shuddering breath before he nodded to himself.

Auror training had not readied him for this. The guerrilla warfare against Voldemort had. Harry pressed his hands even more firmly against his eyes and rocked himself back and forth for a moment, humming a soft lullaby. Soon, he would be done and gone from this place. From the obviously unsalvageable existence that was wizard-kind. Harry Potter had only ever killed one man in his life, and he already felt bruised and stained from just that one kill.

Somehow he doubted that he was going to keep that number the same after today. But wasn’t he a good little soldier? Getting dirty in the place of others? Harry mentally cursed at McGonagall, at all of Hogwarts—the Auror corps were not like the muggle police, as they were so often compared. They were more like some strange mix of secret police and committee for state security. Maybe even comparable to the British Military Intelligence offices. He had debated this with Hermione, even as he and Ron told her every dirty detail of their training, easily getting around the oaths that they refused to let tie them to secrecy. Hermione had thought that their rule breaking then was appropriate.

But Harry had been conditioned. Even if it was on the tailcoats of a guerilla war—he had still technically been trained by a wartime system.

“Was it always going to end here?” Harry asked himself, staring at the empty chair the muggle had
once been strapped in to.

Harry shook his head and snapped his glasses back in to place.

… there was still, undoubtedly, a file with his name on it. He would need it. It wasn’t like Frank could be completely trusted. Just enough to make it through this trial.

Once he had what he wanted—the rest of this place was going to burn.

Chapter End Notes

Welcome to the emotional roller coaster of plot twists?
... I gotta tell you, I really just post chapters right after I finish them. (If you have anything you desperately want to see in here, I'm all ears. I really adore all the comments, they really do help motivate me to write when I should be sleeping.)

On another note, this chapter was probably not something anyone wanted. But it's just where my brain brought me.
I did note that Reborn was a fan favorite in the comments. His time is coming. But I just couldn't see him in the position I opened up in the fic. Can you guess who is there instead?
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

We make our choices. And our choices make us.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 5

Harry had already been in the offices, so once he left the brain preparation room, turned to the left and opened the door to a large and near empty office. Harry wrinkled his nose at the continued not-still black walls. This place was terrible, and Harry hated it. He had hated it when he had seen it the first time in his dreams. He had all the more reason to despise it now with every fiber of his being.

He nudged the wooden chair behind the blank desk with his boot. Nothing happened, so he kicked it away and to the back side of the desk to inspect it. Everything was black here. The chair was such a dark brown it might as well be black, standing next to the black desk. On a black rug. In a black room, lit only by the icy blue candles which seemed to be the only thing used in this terrible place. He found no drawers on the back of the desk where someone sitting could reach. It was just a desk. Just a table with legs. Harry raised his eyes and panned slowly around the room. Having an office with nothing in it? No pens on the desk. No drawers with paper.

No files. No pictures. No name plate. It was remarkable in its lack of remarkability.

Harry rubbed his eyes under his glasses, and re-affixed the dark lens over his eyes. He caught a hint of luminescent writing, and tracked it to the disgustingly shifting black behind the wall tiles. Harry squinted and watched flashes and tracks of letters brush against the tile and sink down beneath the faux waters. Harry paused before he drifted closer. He reached out and brushed his fingers against the wall, and watched large tracks of luminescent white follow in his finger’s path.

How did Frank get his hands on these glasses? Harry pulled his wand from his pocket and scrawled out the word ‘Finite’.

His scrawl disappeared, and answering words came back. Harry watched a handwriting not his own appear before his eyes, stretching across the entire wall of the room, detailing the history behind the research behind the spell. The uses. And everything between. Harry didn’t bother to read much of it.
This wasn’t what he was looking for. While extremely useful and something that had obviously taken a lot of work to create—it was beautiful and useful in its own way. The question of the day was no longer where the information was, but how to access it easily. How to wipe away what he no longer needed to make room for what he desired to learn about. How to erase this rather ingenious information system.

He took a step back, and watched the words fade away.

**Distance of his person to the wall then?**

When the wall was empty, he pressed the tip of his wand to the wall and scrawled his own name. He prayed that this really wasn’t like Tom Riddle’s diary with a soul on the other side, and waited for his name to sink away.

Every inch of wall was soon coated in words. Words written in a very familiar hand. Harry stood still as the entire record of his life came to be. A detailed history of his birth, his family life at the Dursleys, his time at Hogwarts… Harry skimmed it. He didn’t need that. He needed… he needed the end. He spun in place and tried to find it… there.

By the door. The exit.

Harry kept the same distance to the wall as he was now, and paced over to stand by the only door that led in and out of the room. Harry stood in front of what he wanted to know, a finger raised to trail over the dated entries to the last handfuls that made up the end.

_Auror Potter has agreed to the locating of a XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Graded creature. The most dangerous one that exists on this planet. It has haunted our race, and had been culling it every hundred years, usually using a proxy induced by madness. The most recent note of this culling was through the manipulation of thus noted ‘Voldemort’. While not the cause, this creature is known to exacerbate existing conditions to its favor, with a clear desire for the eradication of Wizardkind through the use of wizards. A reason as to why the creature desires the death of wizards is unknown.

This creature is commonly found amongst the small enclave of mutated squibs._

Harry pursed his lips—yes, he could see himself stepping up for this. He wasn’t sure he had been given all of this information the first time. But seeing it all in its slowly growing entirety, he could see himself not only accepting such a burden on to his soul, but Harry could even imagine himself volunteering for this. If worded the right way, he’d hardly even think about it. (Ginny would hate him for it, without a doubt…)
Auror Potter has agreed to go undercover as a ‘muggle’ – under the impression that he is locating an upcoming dark lord that kidnaps muggles for experimentation and has agreed to be bait. Once under, his magic will be bound, memories bound, and will be subject to personality alteration to make him perfect bait for the creature identified by the checkerface mark on a metal mask.

Once Auror Potter has drawn the creature out, he will be captured and brought to the department of mysteries.

—Entry 423, Date September First, the year Two Thousand and Seventeen.

Auror Harry Potter has been altered, and set in to place.

Harry’s fingers trailed over the listed procedures, enchantments, and potions that they had subjected him to. Things that could not easily be undone. Harry remembered the blackened marks in Frank’s office. He could see now, looking back, that fearful desperation. Frank was strong in his own way. And he had undone all of this, all that the unspeakables had done to him.

—Entry 424, Date January Eighth, the year Two Thousand and Nineteen.

Harry Potter’s trail has disappeared with a coinciding leaving of a muggle circus, occurring shortly after U.T. Henrick was spotted tailing Potter during his day. Compulsion charms from Thatcher failed to land.

A confrontation occurred.

Harry Potter has disappeared.

—Entry 425, Date February Twelfth, the year Two Thousand and twenty-two.

Official report.

Project Potter is now declared over.

He is in the clutches of the creature, spotted alive in Poland. Presumed infected by the creature’s unknown ideology. New objective; capture Potter and harvest his brain for further research on the creature.

Harry’s eyes trailed down and barely glanced over the last report and that had him being sent to the brain preparation room. Harry closed his eyes and pressed his forehead against the too warm tiles of the walls. He took in a deep breath and let it out slow. In the end, there had only been the bare minimum of information here for him. Harry focused on his breathing.
... it was a start.

That was all he needed.

Harry took several steps back from the wall and watched his life disappear. He stepped to the door to leave, hand out and on the handle before he stilled. A terrible, terrible thought bloomed to life behind his eyes. His fingers around the handle of the door clenched hard, and he heard the protesting groan of the strength of his fingers.

It was like watching a stranger control his own body. Slowly letting go of that handle finger by finger. Shuffling to his right so he stood in front of the wall once more. He reached out with his wand, and traced out name... after name... after name...

Hermione Granger nee Weasley. Ron Weasley. Luna Lovegood. Neville Longbottom—

*Teddy Lupin.*

*Date of death and replacement; June twenty-fifth, the year Two thousand and fifty two.*

Harry turned on his heel, shutting his eyes as he focused on his breathing. He mentally scrambled for stability against the dull roar of his mind. Harry was a master of himself, not to be controlled by anything. Not even his own emotions. He would make the very best choice that could be done.

Even though he tasted blood and ashes on his tongue, and even though his hands ached in phantom pains to take his wrath out on the bodies of those that had raised a hand against him—Harry took another slow, calming breath. He needed to relate this to something. To anything. And he hated the fact that the only thing he could bring to mind was Voldemort.

Would this have happened, if Voldemort had been able to keep his hold of the wizarding world?

Would the world have turned to this, if Harry himself had refused that undercover mission?

And what could even be done? What could dissuade a re-take over once he finished with things here? Slapping them on the wrists and wagging a finger in their general direction before he leaves for
his own way was not something Harry would bet his life on working.

No… the solution here would have to be a bit more… permanent.

Merlin, Harry could only imagine what Azkaban was like as of this moment.

In the end, really—it felt like he had no choice. It left him chomping at the bit. Such a waste of human life! Perhaps Harry didn’t believe in second chances as much as Albus Dumbledore had, but he did believe in innocence and guilt. And with this whole mess of memory charms, who knew who was guilty and who was innocent at this point.

Well, Harry had some idea, if nothing else. Perhaps it would be enough.

His brain locked on to his idea.

And his heart settled in to place.

For the wizarding world to be free of its latest tyranny, some people had to die. (The thought was fire, ice, and everything that no one could aptly describe to another that had never felt it before—a terrible realization had taken place in the not-dark depths of the department of mysteries, and it was going to be the last one that would be had here.)

Harry slammed through the office door. He couldn’t—he didn’t want to know anymore. That was enough. That was enough for him. This was enough. Everything was in crystal clarity now. Like the world had slowed down and he was moving at three times the speed of normal.

Harry Potter didn’t feel anything anymore.

He burst out of the offices, slamming the door on his way. It shattered. The tiles were shattering under the slamming steps of his feet. He was going to break everything. It wasn’t even a desire, it was just a matter of fact. The glasses brought him through the changing hall, and he grabbed on to the ‘EXIT’. Harry came to a halt, however, with his hand on the doorknob. He felt more than heard every doors of the hall open.
They really were moving in slow motion.

Harry’s wand was already alight and aloft in his hand.

Everything had led to this moment. This, right here, was the sum of all of his parts.

*Fiendfyre.*

The roar came first. And then the flame. Harry didn’t bother to control it. He let it free to the rain of multi-colored lights that came toward him. It was free, it was loose—and Harry slammed the door behind him and enchanted it with a few flicks of his wand.

Harry sprinted down the hall and slammed in to the elevator, pushing the call button over and over again as he watched the door over his shoulder. The door at the end of the hall. The door he had spent over a year dreaming about due to Voldemort. A door that Sirius had gone in and had never come out of. Harry did one final press of the button as he watched the door that led to the Department of Mysteries blacken.

… maybe not one of his better ideas.

Harry raised his wand and broke the lift. He scrabbled in to his bag, his hand hauling out the shrunken motorcycle. Yes, Harry really worked just fine by the seat of his pants. The cursed flames were stomping down the corridor now, snorting like dragons. Harry laughed, his grin stretched so wide that it hurt as the motorcycle grew to normal size under his hands.

His magic… it was so potent. So tightly bound to his control—like it had been stuffed in to a small box for years and was now finally free. So free it jumped to his call without much waiting or thought. Harry looked down to the slot where a key obviously went, and reached in to the small slot in the back of the collar of his leather suit. A key was stored there, and he had mostly ignored it because he didn’t know where it went to. He took it out now, and guessed it was the right size for the bike and jammed it in to place.

Sweat was pouring down his back, and he could see the twisted faces of his dragons coming in from the sides. His spells on the lift was forming a ramp out of the remains of the wrecked remains—Harry twisted the key and revved the engine. He had seen people ride these before. The handles twisted under his hands and—
He shot forward with a scream, wobbling from side to side as he revved it to the max, narrowly escaping the tidal wave of flaming dragon teeth as it came down. The spell forming the newly made ramp was over stretched and weak, and Harry felt it shattering under his wheels as he went up, and up, and up—

He roared in to the atrium, narrowly missing the updraft of Flames as he leaned forward and swerved around the golden peacock, and eventually skidded to a stop.

Harry tilted his head to the side as he eyed the crowd of Witches and Wizards, all frozen in to place like startled doe. He could already see the Aurors flooding in merely on the merit of their movements against the stillness of the common ministry worker bee. Harry’s hand slipped on the handle, and the engine dramatically roared. The crowd scrambled backwards, putting their backs to the walls to get away from him.

Something was snapping, in the back of his head. Everything was getting slower.

Harry raised a hand toward the crowd, and watched his hand take the shape of a gun.

… even if the wizards somehow covered this mess up, and the ministry survived this—well, Harry would break their hold enough for something new to take its place. Destroy their base. And Frank would do the rest. Because these people were not his own. This witches and wizards had not fought with him, had not bled nor suffered with him. But he was a decent man, and he would give them a guiding touch. He jerked his hand back.

Just a smidge of a touch. In honor of the society that his friends and family had fought for.

“Boom.”

The fiendfyre roared in to the room, and everyone scrambled. Everyone screamed.

They all had a choice, now. As everyone that has ever lived as a human being has always had a choice. Run or fight.

Harry closed his eyes, and revved his engine again.
His auror training had made this far too easy. The training, and a history of guerilla warfare. No, Harry was less like a policeman than he wished he was.

He opened his eyes as he watched most of them flee. And watched the red robed aurors scramble forward. No time to deal with Harry with a rogue dark spell on the loose. Swiftly eating the ministry. Harry didn’t know what his tally was, now. And he hoped he never knew. He wanted to at least think of himself as a decent man. He lifted his foot off of the floor and let the motorcycle carry him to the lift that would take him to the streets of London. Unsurprised when he found no one there, as everyone had scrambled for the fireplaces.

Harry crashed in to the side, unable to predict the distance needed to come to a halt. Harry, as result, slipped to the side and crashed right in to the booth. His raised arms protected his face, and the suit did the rest. Harry Potter took a moment to rest his head against the ground before he yanked his leg out from under the motorcycle. Harry didn’t feel any pain, but he was sure that he would once this was over.

With the motorcycle the size of a toy and in his fist, Harry hopped in to the lift and pressed the appropriate button. And rolled his eyes at the slow rise of the lift as it would bring him to street level of muggle London.

Once the lift was level with the street—he was gone.

He had one more place to go. One more thing to do.

And then he’d be free of this. For the last time.

Chapter End Notes

The wizarding arc is coming to a close. I'm sure I could have done some kind of long, drawn out wizarding war. But really, that wasn't much the focus when I started this fic. (Perhaps an AU will come about, who even knows.)

You may have noticed the crazy dates. I'm taking extreme liberties with that (mostly on the Hitman side, to be honest). I considered moving the HP dates, but decided against it. WWII is a major plot point in the HP story line, even if never directly mentioned. I felt like I couldn't change that... and the hitman have crazy technologies so might as well just roll with things.

Harry has been gone a long, long time.
Can anyone guess what the last thing Harry feels he needs to do is?
Chapter 6

Harry found his location easily enough. He had walked most of the way amongst other things, and now in the late dawn hours sat in front of the suburban home that gave him little chills. It wasn’t the same kind of monstrosity that the Dursleys had owned. The houses were not identical, and the lawns were average grass, fake grass, to crazy rock imaginations. There were kid toys scattered over one lawn in particular, and the houses weren’t so much upper middle class as they were comfortable, with none of them having a second floor.

The differences helped subside the itching in his skin. But Harry still felt uneasy here. Or perhaps he had been uneasy for a long time, and he was just acknowledging it now?

He had carefully sat himself between two bushes under a house window across the street from his target. None of the houses were stirring, all occupants asleep. Harry raised his hands and rubbed his face—he just felt weary. Not sleeping for a night didn’t help, obviously. But his body was just about done with him.

His mind was about done with him. It felt like the world was closing in on him, and it was driving him crazy. Harry was determined to keep his focus on the present, if only to resist the temptation to second guess his decisions over the past several hours. He had made his choices—and he had made them with as much information as he had had at the time. Perhaps not all of them had been for the best (London was still burning, last he heard on the news from the house he was perched under—but he could guess that the international platform of wizardry would send help over this emergency), but they were his decisions. He had made them. And that was that.

Harry only had this one thing to finish before he would go to headquarters. Go and collect the blond man, and then work on getting him returned to where he belonged. From there, Harry would….

Well, he’d choke down his memories.
Harry’s mind unhelpfully changed that thought to ‘choke on his memories’.

*Merlin,* even Harry was tired of himself. That was in poor taste.

(Harry might need to see a mind healer from all this stress. He felt not whole and more fractured than he could remember feeling in a long, long time. But question was, would Frank out him to the world? Vilify him? Such services would be impossible to get if there were those after his life. Harry Potter—the man who made London burn. Harry could only imagine the Daily Prophet’s most likely headlines now..)

He reached down and inched the sleeve of his jumpsuit down enough to look at the wispy light the bracelet gave off. Frank was a mystery Harry didn’t know how to really feel about. He was a manipulative tosser, but Harry could understand and relate with the steps that he had done for the most part. It wasn’t too terrible, in the long run.

It was just that it was him. It was Harry and his memories that had been so attacked.

Harry felt his thinned out rage flicker back in to place—and he hated the fact that he was just so used to being angry now that it was like a state or normality. Being so angry all the time was not normal. It was something he had had to live with while on the run from Death Eaters. But this was not the same. Harry hoped that he hadn’t been living his other life in a state of similar anger. Because then those memories were going to be exhausting as well. Of course, Harry also considered the fact that that he had more than his memories altered for that strange bait trap that the unspeakables had placed him down for.

He would need to make sure nothing else was attached or altered to him, before he left this place. Harry slowly leaned forward until he could rest his forehead on his criss-crossed legs. Harry raised his hands and ruffled his hair, pressing his dull nails against his scalp.

Let’s finish this.

Harry ruffled his hair a few more times before he sat up all the way. He had been here since late at night, and was rather stiff. He reached behind himself and pressed his knuckles against his back. A bit of pressure against the tense muscles of the small of his back. He rolled his shoulders, stretched as much as he could within his leafy confines of his hide-away, and then rolled out of the bushes. He rolled on to his feet, and neatly moved in to a walk as he moved to his simple target.
Harry didn’t walk up to the front door. He skirted to the side and found the wooden gate to the side. Harry inspected it with his eyes, letting them slowly go out of focus. He grinned to himself when he caught a blue shimmer. Harry blinked his eyes back in to focus, and used his wand to poke at the shimmer. Harry watched the lock unlatch, and he stepped through the wooden gate. Harry gently eased it shut, and padded along the narrow side yard of the house. He eased around the corner, and grimaced at the small backyard. It was nicely done, of course. It was just claustrophobic small.

He looked up to the pinking sky before he tapped his wand on the handle of the backdoor. He heard the click. The door eased open with silence, and Harry wiped off his boots on the outside matt. The house was night dark inside with all of the shutters closed. Everything was expanded with wizard space, and Harry mentally groaned at the tightening in his stomach, even as he shut the door.

Harry had always hated this house. Hermione had called it a good ‘starter house’ when she had helped him pick it out. Harry hadn’t had a crazy amount of funds, but he had had enough for this. He had set this up for Teddy once he had successfully entered the Auror program. It was well taken care of, smelled pleasantly, and was extensively warded and charmed.

But Harry had been here during the charming. The Weasley family had all pitched in for this building when they could. Charms, wards, as much magic as possible—Teddy had, technically, been his first child. He had been desperate to have everything to give Teddy anything he could ever want. To give Teddy the life Harry had never been able to have as a child.

Harry ran his left hand over a cool bit of counter. His glove didn’t allow him to feel much but a faint almost cold sensation, but Harry imagined it was cool like ice to the touch. His eyes looked to the walls, and he found a green theme there that was neutral enough to be soothing. The kitchen was cozy, but there were no clues and no people there. Harry drifted out of the kitchen and in to a hallway, which he noticed went to the front door. Harry slowed down when he spotted the picture frames hanging on the long hall walls.

A flick of his wrist, and his wand was alight enough so he could see the pictures.

A lovely photo of Remus and Tonks. Harry recognized 12 Grimmauld Place in the background, along with the ancient looking cozy chairs the two were perched on. A moving picture, with the two leaning forward and talking to each other. They were so focused on each other, and even years later Harry found his heart clenching in sympathy. Harry stood and watched them for a time, wondering what the magic of this photograph had captured. They were speaking deeply, and looked so in love.

A shimmering flash of red out of the corner of his eye had Harry turning to check. There was nothing there. But that shade of red matched the memory he had of Ginny’s hair—
Harry moved on to the next. So many photos on the walls—a photo of Harry holding up a young Teddy. Oh, the both of them had been so young then. And a few of Andromeda. Giant group photos of the Weasley family, encircling young Teddy. Harry mourned, then, biting the inside of his mouth as he continued his walk. Each picture of Teddy’s smiling face as he got older. The friendships he had cultivated with Harry’s children were so easy to see. Harry had treated Teddy like a son, and Teddy had been the older brother for all of his children.

Eventually, Harry found the spot where he could notice the difference. He looked to Teddy’s aged face and knew that the smile was different. The quirk of his mouth just a little bit off. The look in his eyes was wrong, but perhaps not wrong enough for other to have noticed? Perhaps not completely off, but Harry could see the differences no matter how subtle they were. A father always understood all the nuances of the faces of his children. Harry took a moment to take a breath, breathing carefully—Teddy had married and had children before he was replaced.

His wife—Harry didn’t know who she was. Couldn’t place her. Teddy had had four children. Harry calculated their ages and knew they’d all be old enough to have left home by now. Harry cut off the light to his wand and took a final deep breath. Harry shook his head, straightened his back, and prowled ahead. This offender to his line would not survive this morning. Harry needed to right this wrong as best he could.

Harry found the bedroom, was inside—and he took a moment slide open a shutter to bring the dim morning light in to the room.

A large bed that should have held two but only held one.

An old man laid there, an eye mask hiding his eyes as he breathed deeply. Harry stood next to his sleeping form, kicking the worn slippers away from where he wanted to stand. The man was wrinkled and grey, but his skin had a healthy tone from what he could tell.

Blue pinstripe pajamas. They were so familiar, and looked terribly much like the ones Harry himself used to wear. Except for the hand stitched ‘EL’ on the left breast.

Harry raised his wand, mentally noting the creak of the leather of his body suit.

*Reparifarge.*
Harry found himself unsurprised that once the blue-white light faded, there was no difference in Not-Teddy’s face. It mattered not, Harry had more things that could be tried.

Specialis revelio.

The blue-white light of this spell dissipated with no change again. Harry resisted a sigh as he waved his wand again. And again and again. That eye cover must be especially good, since Not-Teddy had yet to stir. Of course, by the time Harry exhausting his revealing spells, Teddy had yet to show any change. Harry lowered his wand and watched the Not-Teddy.

It was practically morning now.

Harry raised his eyes and looked to the bedroom again. A dead wife, as shown by the terrible neatness of ‘her side’ of the bed. The pressed pillows and sheets. Harry looked down to Not-Teddy, moving to put his hands on his hips. His fingertips brushed over the lump of the muggle gun in his too big pockets. Harry burned—but he wasn’t blind to the continued pictures of Not-Teddy with his ‘grandchildren’. There had been love here, even then.

Harry threw his magic down before he thought better of it. An upward flick of his wand and—

Levicorpus!

A green explosion of light—

Not-Teddy yelped as he was hauled in to the air, dangling by his left ankle as he flailed around. He ripped the eye mask from his face and gapped at Harry. Before the wizard could wave his hand, Harry deliberately snatched up the wand on the bed-side table. This was not his godson’s wand—even if it looked like it. It didn’t feel like it.

“Who—!” Not-Teddy started.

“Give me your name.” Harry intoned, eyes intent on the startled, and wary eyes in Teddy’s face.

The old man was practically spitting as he squirmed in the spell. Harry could feel the wizard
muscling along against the jinx, but Not-Teddy would need a lot more time than Harry would give him to break through. “I refuse. You, who have—“ Harry could feel the tirade coming from a mile away, but refused to sit and listen.

Harry threw an overpowered cheering charm at the old man’s face, and held it until the laughs sounded like they were being ripped out of the old man between gasping breaths. Until the tears were streaming down.

A cancel of the charm—“your name.”

Not-Teddy clicked his mouth shut.

Harry used the tickle charm this time. Used it until Not-Teddy was a gasping red faced man with a gapping fish mouth as he struggled to breath.

Harry canceled the charm again.

He didn’t ask, but the breathless Not-Teddy stumbled through “E-Edward Lupin.” The old man gingerly touched his sides as he continued gasping for breath. His eyes locked with Harry’s own. Harry could feel the accusation behind the look that Not-Teddy was giving him. The furrow of his eyebrows and the stretch of his wrinkles made Harry want to reach out and punch. It made him want to be violent, in ways he hadn’t been since the days of the battle for Hogwarts.

The desperate kind of anger that only had one logical thing to blame. But was impossible to throw one’s anger on said logical thing. Harry was starting to feel like this was going to be a very similar situation. Just the look on Not-Teddy’s face brought that sinking sensation. Brought that banking to his rage.

“This will be easier, if you answer me the first time,” Harry filled in the silence with a tilt of his head, pushing his feelings and wrecked rage down as best as he could.

Not-Teddy narrowed his eyes at Harry, and Harry couldn’t help but admit to himself that the unspeakables had done a fabulous job with this. But it was the little things that Harry knew was off. Things that were hard to completely transfer over no matter the spell work. Like the fact that Teddy hadn’t suffered any uncontrollable metamorphmagus induced changes. The slight distress of the charms should have thrown Teddy’s biology out of control. Teddy, even as a young boy, the slightest tickle would send his hair in to rainbows.
So, Harry hardened his heart.

“Now. Do you love your family, Mr. Lupin?” Harry smiled, feeling the odd scars on his face stretch in ways that made him want to claw them off. He saw Teddy’s slightly trembling hands, and Harry felt that rage flicker back to life within his body. “Because, I can assure you, you will regret that soon enough.”

It was the silence that did it, this time. The old man drew himself together in a pained growing rage…

People are always the easiest to read when they’re hurting.

“Legilimens!” Harry jabbed his wand at Not-Teddy—and Harry felt his mind explode in white sparks. He gritted his teeth, groaning even as he refused to lose eye contact with Not-Teddy.

The information—it hurt. Nonsensical in the sum of it, but Harry did his best to pick things apart, even as he noticed that Not-Teddy was breathing hard and sweating profusely, eyes occasionally rolling as he struggled to push Harry out of his mind. Harry, if nothing else, could legilimens, even if he couldn’t protect well against such an attack itself.

In the end, Harry discovered exactly what he didn’t want to. He ended the spell, stupefied Not-Teddy, and dropped the old man back on to his bed.

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes against the migraine that had formed. It was all quickly getting foggy, he didn’t have many instances where he actually used the legilimens spell and this result was something that normally happened to it. But that still didn’t hide the fact that there was nothing else inside this man but Teddy. A terrible echo of his godson had been built upon this soul.

The brains that the unspeakables harvested were terrible, terrible things.

Harry was glad they burned. That all of it burned. Especially the unspeakables.

But that still left him here, with a man he couldn’t identify, who knew no other life than that was
Edward Lupin. Who had no memories outside of being Edward Lupin. Who loved them as much as Teddy hoped his actual godson loved his family.

The rage had dissipated in to a cool ash in his chest.

This monstrosity that had happened to this man wasn’t even made with the false memory charm. These did not feel like false memories. They had an itch to them that just wasn’t here. There was no adding.

((This was him. This was Harry. This was what Harry had been until Frank meddled. His skin crawled and he was too cold and too hot at the same time. Harry wanted to scream and he wanted to run. He needed to bunker down and protect himself. This would not be him ever again—Harry refused to be stripped of who he was ever again and be made once more like a blank slate. He refused. Harry vowed to make the world burn before he would allow such a thing.))

Harry pointed his want at the man who was now Teddy. “Obliviate,” Harry murmured after the slow rotation of his wrist. After the light dissipated, Harry let his wand drop to his side.

Harry reached out with his free hand, his fingers slightly shaking as he touched Teddy’s brow. His gloved fingers delicately slid over what remained of Teddy’s wispy hair. “… you’re not my godson.” Harry murmured, “… my godson is dead.” Harry felt numb, just speaking his words as he was. “But Teddy’s children, his real children, live on.” Teddy, in a sense, would live on. Just as Harry lived on after his own parents passed.

“The man you are—you are dead. And this remains.” Harry took a step back. And then another. He was down the hall soon enough.

—this is not me. This is not me. This is not me. I exist. I exist. I am unaltered. I am me. These are my memories. I am a whole person—

A slightly moving form in one of the many photographs on the wall caught his eye. It entranced his frazzled mind and nudged him out of his numb mental screaming. He was entranced by the slow, calming sway of the body, and the seemingly endless scream in his head listlessly settled and disappeared. Harry didn’t hesitate when he reached out and yanked down the picture, frame and all. The photograph of Harry and a toddler Teddy in his arms, gently swaying little Teddy to sleep. Harry tucked the frame and picture under his arm and continued on his way.
This was all that remains.

This was evidence.

Harry pressed the photograph and frame to his heart, mentally timing his breath as he walked out the backdoor, through the narrow side ‘alley’ next to the house, and back to the street. He pressed it to his heart and wished that his anger was back.

Being angry was better than being scared. Better than the anxiety that riddled his bones and made his eyes burn.

If Ron was at his side, he’d feel safer.

If Hermione was here—he’d feel more confident.

They had always worked best when they were together. It was why he and Ron were partners. Were a team. Harry took deep breaths through his mouth. Slowly letting them out and he picked up his walking pace.

A future he had to accept was yawning open before him. And Harry was charging right in to it. His wife was old and remarried and thought he was dead. All of his children were old, with their own lives, and had lived nearly their entire lives without him. His godson was dead. Everyone else had potentially been memory charmed or obliviated or even replaced.

… Harry had never wanted this.

And he’d never had an answer as to why this had happened. History books were written by the victor, and Harry could only guess the reasoning behind the unspeakables and their actions. Their reasoning probably burned up in the department of mysteries along with everything else.

Harry felt he was far enough from Teddy’s home, and promptly apparated himself to an alley that was close enough to Grimmauld place that he would be within the warded property soon. Perhaps five more minutes. Of course, that left him with five more minutes of his thoughts before he could focus on his actions.
The sky was raining ashes and the weak morning light helped cast even more in grey. The air was filled with wailing sirens, and Harry could see evidence of evacuations that had emptied this neighborhood. All of the cars that should have been on the streets were gone. He absently casted a bubble head charm, as well as a quick notice-me-not. There were the shouts of firemen that he ignored. The ground looked a bit wet, and Harry supposed that this was a neighborhood that would soon be lost as well.

Grimmauld Place was going to burn.

Harry climbed the small stoop with a weary acceptance. When he made it to the top, he turned and looked to the sky. The orange of the fiendfyre as it approached made the ashes darker here. Harry took a deep breath and he swear he could smell despair.

Harry Potter, the man who burned London.

Harry reached out toward the orange tinted grey sky and spread his fingers. For a moment, he debated just laying down and letting himself burn up along with all of the no doubt innocent lives that had been lost. Would that be penance for his rash actions? Would it change anything? Would it even matter? The orange was so inviting that Harry just—

He dropped his hand.

There it was again. The burning in his chest. Harry sighed, and knew he wouldn’t accept just laying down to die. He had already done that once. Laid himself out as defenseless and let himself die. It had led him to here, that decision.

Harry turned on his heel and stomped in to Grimmauld Place.

Chapter End Notes

... I failed my exam. I've been sleep deprived for several days. And am kind of shaking apart. How is everyone else?

This chapter ended up being more character study than anything else. The story is moving forward, and we'll get to the parts you've all been waiting for. Blondie will be in the next chapter! (I'm excited.)

You all still with me? Is there anything you'd like to see Harry muck up in the
Wizarding world before we take leave of it? Or anything you’d want more explanation on in this strange universe?

I may not respond to every comment, but I read all of them. It makes me happy to read them. So anything you want to say, I'll gladly read it.

Thanks for reading and sticking with me!
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Harry Potter Burns. London is Burning. Frank Longbottom was burned.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 7

It was like stepping back in to the war, entering Grimmauld Place. Harry eased the door shut behind himself as he took in the dark, moldy interior. The thick smell of it all, just the smell, was making his body tense. He remembered every moment of his life that he had ever lived or existed in this place.

Although that might have been just because of how little time he had spent here. Especially after the war, he hadn’t been able to stand the thought of returning then.

He wouldn’t be here now, if he had a better place to be.

Harry ghosted forward once his eyes adjusted. He could read the distinction of light enough to catch the cracks of light coming in to the hall from the kitchen. The musty smell of the house always lessened when one was close to the kitchen, and Harry found that still to be true as he lingered by the closed door.

A quick glance around, and Harry silently lowered himself to the ground to peer in to the kitchen under the considerable gap between the door and the floor. Harry mentally applauded the poor interior design of this home, for the large kitchen table was far enough away that he was able to get a good look at Frank’s waiting frame.

Harry pulled back, rolling to sit on his heels before popping up to his feet. Another glance around and he noted that it was extremely doubtful that there was anyone else lingering around.

Frank could... wait. A little more.

Harry tucked the photograph and frame closer to his chest as he padded away and located the stairs. A quick hurry up and he was at the top. If this home was going to burn, there were a few more things that he wished to take with him. Just a bit... more.

The bedroom he had inhabited with Ron when this place had been a headquarters for war was scrubbed clean and empty. Certainly not like the last time he had been here. Sirius’ room was of the same state. Harry frowned at the pristine state, and reluctantly moved to the other side of the landing that Sirius’ room was located in, and he nudged open the door to Regulus’ room.

The preservation charms here were cracking. Harry doubted they would have lasted much longer even if it wasn’t going to burn. Even still, Harry needed a few things, and this would work well enough. Harry couldn’t even feel the backpack he had been toting around, but he unshouldered it and opened up the flap.

Right. The octopus.
“Hey, little guy. Just a bit longer, okay? I’m just getting a few more things settled. Then we’re off to Germany.” Harry smiled, tapping the glass and mentally making himself not acknowledge the frantic little wiggles of it’s tentacles. Harry reached around the aquarium and pulled out the enchanted shoebox. It was teeming with money, and Harry pulled out several wads of British currency, and shoved them in to his pockets.

The two guns he had in his pockets got chucked in, now that he had the box open. Frank had done him a favor with all the money and the box. Harry would need to pick up some book on enchantments or something, because having a space like this was handy on so many levels. Harry set the open shoebox on top of the not dusty bed and raised the closet. Sure, the clothes were severely outdated, but Harry just needed a few changes. He was a bit bigger than Regulus had ever been, but it was close enough. Some pants Harry could use for sleeping, a few changes of shirts—all of that and Harry was good to go.

Anything that even looked useful was chucked in. Some quills and papers, some ink wells (after he checked to make sure it wasn’t dried out), a few books that look passable for reading if he needed it. The fancy duvet cover was shrunk before he chucked it in.

Seriously, he needed to learn some enchantments.

... and there was a library in this house.

Harry rubbed the back of his neck, debated on if he would actually read the books, and supposed he could take some with him. Harry quietly picked up a few photos that he found in the room. Little things. Not all of them had Sirius, and he’d toss them later—but he no longer had his album.

(His precious things had stayed in the family, and he could only wonder who had inherited his cloak after his announced death and will reading.. maybe James, maybe Albus, maybe Lily—it hadn’t been Teddy. It was one of them. Ginny wouldn’t have let anyone else take it, even if anyone outside of his tight circle had known it was a hallow...)

Harry shook his head and waved goodbye to his octopus for now, whispering promises for treats later as he closed up the bag and tugged it on. He kept the shoebox and lid in his arms. He walked down the hall, and anything that he felt like taking with him he magicked it in to his seemingly infinite box. Harry was sure he would find the limit. This was his only chance to carry some small part of his past with him, and he’d be damned if he wouldn’t take it.

It wasn’t what he wanted—but it was what he was getting. He’d take it.

The library was still in disorder. Several sections were also suspiciously empty. But there were still a few books on enchantments and enchanting, so Harry tossed those in first. Curse books, charms, Harry shrunk and shoved. Although from the sheer number of books, he was rather doubtful that everything was useful, and he doubted even more that he’d read them all. But for some reason he took as much as he wanted and then closed the box.

Harry paused when he heard a growl, and raised his eyes to the squirming monster book of monsters that had been left on the shelf. “I always thought you were kind of a stupid book,” Harry grumbled, watching the book stretch against the confines of a belt. In fact—Harry squinted at the book.

.... was that his book? That belt certainly looked familiar. And large. That belt wrapped around it so many times that it looked Dudley large. Harry eventually rolled his eyes, it wasn’t as if he wanted to take that ridiculous book with him. He glanced around the library and noted how orange tinted everything seemed all of the sudden.
A look outside of the home and he could see that the fiendfyre was even closer. Perhaps just a row of houses between them now.

“... you’re obviously leaving,” Frank assessed from the doorway, and Harry turned to look at him.

And the horror that was half of Frank’s obviously mangled form. Fire and burned much of his skin, and Harry had congratulated himself on not yelping at the sudden sight. The skin was raised, bumpy, peeling—some healing magic had obviously been used. Frank’s eyes were glazed, so Harry didn’t doubt that potions had been used to dull the pain.

“The fire got you,” Harry edged closer to the doorway (and coincidently Frank as well) as he spoke. This close and he could smell the pain as well as the potions.

Frank’s eyes were both unmanaged, though. And were locked on Harry. Watching his every movement with a terrible calm. “It did,” Frank mildly replied, hands at his side. Harry noted the white fingered grip that Frank had on his wand in his right hand. Harry didn’t let his eyes linger on it, though, if only so that Frank wouldn’t catch on to the fact that Harry knew how prepared Frank was to lash out.

“IT got a lot of people. Hundreds. Witches, Wizards, mundanes, creatures—we’re all burning.” Frank wasn’t calm, Harry realized. Harry could feel the hidden rage there. And now that he noted it, he could tell it was there behind Frank’s eyes.

“I didn’t pull you back so you could RUIN US!” Frank exploded, angry red sparks shooting out of his wand as he took a determined step forward. Harry already had his wand in hand, but knew he was burdened by the shoebox. Perhaps Frank wouldn’t attack, but Harry didn’t survive a war and his time as an Auror on the good will of others. So Harry shuffled a bit to the side, watching Frank mirror him until Frank stood near a bookcase that still had some books. Harry spotted the monster book of monsters, and considered himself good.

Harry debated what to say even as he watched Frank draw himself up. Ron had been splendid at negotiations, and Harry felt unbalanced without the familiar precense at his elbow now that he had entered a ‘hot’ situation. Before Frank could explode, Harry decided to just blunder through it. “I didn’t ask to be put here—” Harry started, or tried too.

“I didn’t ask you to BURN US!” Frank’s raised voice was making Harry internally cringe, just as he wondered why Walburga’s craggy voice wasn’t making itself known.

Harry let out a breath, hiding the tip of his wand behind his thigh but not his hand. “That place was corrupted beyond anything that was salvageable. It needed to be scrubbed off the face of the earth.” Harry kept his tone even and calm, clawing at his mind for all of Ron’s negotiation tips that Ron had tried to beat in to his head.

“The research! Hundreds of years of research! All of those people!” Frank jabbed his wand in Harry’s direction, and Harry watched those sparks. No spell came, not yet.

“So what, I’m the bad guy all of the sudden?” Harry hissed, his own anger fanning back in retaliation to Frank’s rage. “I’m not the one that let this happen!”

“You did! You did, you did, you did! You let them take you away!” Frank was screaming, and a flick of his wand in rage and he blasted a bookcase to the left in to the wall. Harry heard the wall crack, and the roof creaked. The fire was getting closer, and it was so warm inside the library Harry doubted that it was just him. He didn’t dare take his eyes off Frank to check the fires outside.
Harry scoffed—screw being calm. “I LET them take me away, did I? Just like I let them abduct all the squibs and chain them in to desks? Like I let the ministry slaughter the goblins?” Harry hissed, fully ready to mock Frank with a viscous ness that Harry was not surprised to feel. He had always had a vindicative streak that he had kept hidden in the past. It wasn’t something that had fit his image, and something that hadn’t much come up after the war ended.

“There were other wizard and witches, smarter and stronger than me—that could have done something! Anything! WHERE WERE THEY! Huh!” Harry flicked his wand, and banished half of the bookcases in the room to slam in to the wall, using the magic to hide the weak cutting spell that he cast on the belt caging the monster book of monsters. The thing started to wiggle frantically, as if it could sense that freedom was close.

Harry had started his own tirade, and he stalked closer to Frank, teeth barred and ready to make the man feel the brunt of his rage. Frank faltered, paling even as he took a shaky step back before he stopped. Harry remembered Frank’s office, then. The black marks. The destruction.

(I did that, Harry thought viciously. Frank knew from the very start exactly who he was dealing with. Frank should have known better... Harry should have been a better person.)

There were tears welling in Frank’s eyes.

“You’re nothing like what grandpa said you were,” Frank hissed, partially scared and mostly angry.

Harry stilled. ... grandpa?

“How long have I been gone, Frank?” Harry asked, voice absent of the rage he had felt moments ago.

Frank’s eyes widened, before they narrowed. “Come on, Potter. For a man over a hundred years, your memory is starting to really go, isn’t it?” He hissed, finally realizing the dent in Harry’s seemingly impenetrable armor. “All your children old and nearly dead—all of your friends gone. They all died because you were gone! They died altered and confused and unable to comprehend the crimes wrecked upon them because you got suckered in by the unspeakables!”

The scream in Harry’s head seemed louder than before, the longer that Harry stared at Frank and the more that he heard. Frank was getting bolder the longer he continued on with his raging. Harry could see the subtle movements of Frank’s wand, and wondered who Frank thought he was with a soft kind of numbness that was going to crack soon.

“How long have I been gone, Frank?” Harry asked again, his voice coming down like a whip. Frank stuttered to a halt and blinked at Harry. Slowly, the man took another little step back.

“... it’s been seventy eight years, Potter.” Frank’s voice didn’t crack, and didn’t hurt.

Harry felt numb, mostly. His mind calculating ages rapidly in his head. What was he, a hundred and six, then? That was a lot of time for things to go wrong like it did, wasn’t it? Nearly a century?

“Why were you even looking anymore?” Harry murmured, but his voice carried over the faint screams of sirens.

“Because the Unspeakables were still looking.” Frank replied.

“... and why were they still looking?” Harry almost couldn’t hear Frank or himself over the roar in his head.
“The prophecies, of course. The strongest seven—however it was said, exactly.” Frank was pulling back from this short bout of friendliness. But the mention of prophecy, and the fact that Frank actually knew what it said spoke more to Harry than anything that Harry could say.

Frank was not going to let him go. Not after a prophecy.

The noise in his head became silent.

His ears were ringing.

Harry whipped his wand up, already in his spell as Frank smoothly responded.

“ACCIO!”

“STUPEFY!”

Harry neatly rolled under the red stunning spell, but Frank wasn’t so lucky, getting a monster of his book smacking against the back of his head, and then biting down. Frank screamed, falling to the ground and rolling in desperation to get the book off of him.

This was it, then. Harry silently summoned Frank’s wand before he stunned the Auror. With Frank still and unconscious, Harry skipped forward and stroked the spine of the book. The book groaned and went still. Harry rolled his eyes and pried it off of Frank’s face. Those bite marks were horrendous.

Still... Harry quickly shuffled through Frank’s pockets and found Moody’s expanding trunk. As well as some handcuffs? Harry eyed the metal things that obviously had to have belonged to a muggle at one point. Still, the trunk was what he wanted, and Harry quickly had it to the correct size and open. The hole in the trunk wasn’t as steep, and the blond was nestled inside safely. Harry could still see him breathing. That worked for now.

Harry shut the lid, but paused when he noticed the other handle that he hadn’t pushed up before. There were two latches, with two different colored handles. The one he had pushed up had been leather edged in black. The other leather one was edged in a light blue. Harry considered it, and grabbed the blue one and pushed it up.

It was like looking in to a medicine cabinet, but perhaps more obsessive. Harry reached in and picked up a vial. He squinted at the obviously type written font and found that it was a blood clotting potion.

Harry glanced down to Frank, then out of the windows.

“Well... nothing for it, then.” Harry did have a medic certification, after all. He could always go to a wizarding community in Germany or France if he really needed to. Harry shut the lid and re-shrunk the trunk. He ripped off a piece of Frank’s sleeve and made a necklace out of the cloth. With the trunk secured in to place, Harry stood.

And then cursed himself for not sticking the damn shoebox in there. He rushed through shoving the shoebox in to his backpack and scrambled to grab the calm monster book of monsters. He gave it another stroke before he tapped it with his wand. “Portus,” the book glowed blue for a moment, and once it was settled Harry placed the book on top of Frank’s chest, and adding a sticking charm to keep it there.

“... I’ve burned you enough, haven’t I?” Harry asked himself, before he murmured the password and watched Frank disappear.
Harry jumped when he heard the glass windowpanes cracking. A look out and he could tell that the fire was on the house now. Noticed how profusely he was sweating. And remembered the anti-apparition wards. “Oh f—” Harry slurred, scrambling to his feet once he was sure he had the trunk and the bag. He jumped down the flights of stairs, slipped a bit near the bottom and rolled to his feet in front of Walburga’s portrait.

... or where it used to be.

Harry stalled, eyes widening as he caught a glimpse of what was there. He reached out and yanked the ratty curtain down and let it crumble. There was no portrait here. Instead... instead...

“Hello Harry,” Ginny smiled sadly down at him. Harry felt his breath hitch. There, that perfect red of her hair. The dimple of her cheek that he was so familiar with. The curve of her shoulders and her decorative freckles.

He breathed her name like it was oxygen.

“I thought it was something like this. When we got the news, I made this portrait.” Ginny murmured, one of her painted hands reaching out as if gesturing against the frame. Harry felt the tears—hot and stinging—raining down his face as he touched the bumps of dried paint and slid to his knees.

It was so... final. Here. His Ginny.

The portrait was life sized. And she kneeled down in front of him as well. Pressing her hands against where he had placed his own. Like some demented mirror, but there was no other side. “I love you, Harry. I’ve loved you every second we’ve been together. And I can tell you that the other me has loved you until the end.”

Harry hiccuped and pressed his hands firmer against the painting.

“H-h-” Harry choked.

Ginny just smiled, “how can I tell it’s you?” She asked, the curtain of her hair sliding over her shoulders with the tilt of her head.

“Your eyes.” She murmured, one hand moving as if to caress the skin next to his eyes. His skin prickled in sympathetic feeling. Harry could smell the burning of Grimmauld Place, could hear everything cracking as the fiendfyre ate the wards around the house.

There was no time. No time.

Harry snapped to his feet, his hands reaching out to grasp the frame of Ginny’s portrait to give it a mighty yank. It didn’t come off.

“It’s not a canvas, Harry. It’s painted right on the wall.” Ginny murmured as she stood up.

“Then I’ll take the whole damn wall with me!” Harry yelled, wand out and a tempered blasting curse on his lips before he spotted Ginny’s face. There were tears there, and the light of his spell died as he focused on her.

Slowly, Ginny shook her head ‘no’. “The magic won’t survive. It’s already being eaten.” She pressed her hand to the confine of the painting, and Harry mirrored her.

There was no warmth to their touch.
He felt so cold.

“I love you, Harry Potter.”

“I love you, Ginny Potter.” Harry trembled under that smile.

It was just... just too much.

“Go,” she murmured, eyes flickering to behind Harry. The roar had gotten louder. Dragon snarls and hissing flames.

“No,” Harry whispered. Just, no.

“Go, or I’ll make you regret it Potter!” Ginny yelled, turning fiery once again under his eyes as he felt the flames at his back.

The wards cracked like an egg.

Harry apparated.

Harry stumbled and fell with a shout, his shoulder on fire. He snarled, wand up and the world was awash with colors and spells as he beat the fiendfyre attached to him in to submission. Time slipped from his fingers, but the sky was dark above him, and even breathing hurt. His left shoulder was a numb, blackened mess, and Harry didn’t even have the energy to sit up from the pile of leaves that he tumbled in to.

The Forest of Dean.

Harry could recognize this place with his eyes shut.

Harry laid on his right side, eyes closed and just breathing. He ignored the tremors of his body, and the tears still on his face. He gasped to himself, and ignored the world. He needed this. His chest was ice and his body was frozen and he just... just...

No. Not yet.

Harry gingerly rolled on to his knees. He ignored the scream that was his shoulder and slowly pulled his necklace off. The trunk he had pilfered was soon normal sized and the medical section out.

Frank had been burned. With this stash, Harry could just bet that Frank had healed it as much as he could by himself. Harry found the first pain potion that would work with him and downed it. Harry, once sure he couldn’t feel anything anymore, cast a simple lumos for the dark clearing and set his wand down at his knee. Harry unzipped his leather jumpsuit and pulled both arms out of his sleeves. He tied the sleeves around his waist and shifted to settle on to his bottom.

That was two brushes with the same fire that he had survived. Harry was sure that the fiendfyre was frothing with sentient anger over missing consuming it’s castor not once, but twice. Harry downed another potion. A nerve booster. He slapped on a thick layer of burn paste and jumped at the sensation. Even with the pain potion, he had still felt that. Maybe the nerve potion should have come after. Harry rubbed his eye with the back of his right hand.

The tears were half dried and itchy as hell.

Harry checked the incubation time for the burn paste, and mentally timed out thirty minutes. Thirty minutes and he’d need to chip off the shell and look at what was there. Harry stared down at the vials
at his feet, before he shuffled forward and peered in to the mouth of the trunk.

Might as well...

Harry pawed through labels. A blood replenished. A pepper up. There was a skele-grow here, but it wasn’t what Harry needed. There was something tickling at the back of his mind that was important, but Harry couldn’t recall what it was. He picked through jars and vials and—

Potter Pupil Restorer?

*Your modern solution to everyday eye problems! A quill to your pupil? An eye-gouging curse misaimed at you instead of your opponent? Fear no more! The famous Albus Potter has created this lovely potion to meet all your needs! Vanish the mess, wrap up the eyes for a twenty four hour period, and eyes restored!*

*Instructions:*

*Half-vial for one eye. Full vial for both eyes. Add three drops of blood, stir vigorously for ten seconds, and then consume.*

*Warning:*

*Those of mixed heritage (creature and human) should consult a healer before consumption.*

Harry reached out and caressed the name. Albus... Harry felt the world wobble before it stabilized. Harry shook his head and set the vial down with the others. This was the potion that those ministry workers had been talking about when he had stepped in behind them at the lift. The eye potion from that ‘Potter boy’. Who wasn’t a boy, not really (it’s been 78 years, Harry. 78, he told himself.) and would never be a boy again.

Still, he looked over everything and picked out a few more general healing potions before he switched handles and spotted the blond. Harry levitated the man out of the trunk and laid him flat on the ground.

A bit of charm work and he had the blond man on a conjured sleeping bag and pillow. The leaves banished away from the makeshift campsite. A charm on the air to keep away the chill. A proximity ward and, well... Harry sighed and focused on that mess of a face.

It was good he had a hard stomach.

He vanished the goo that looked faintly like it could have been eyes. A few healing spells had the rips on his face and his broken nose snapped in to place. Harry inspected the blond, not looking at the empty sockets were the eyes were. Well, he waited as long as he could before he focused on them.

The eyelids were gone. Harry grimaced and searched his mind for something that could fix that. Eventually he just settled on a restoration healing spell, got ready to supercharge it—and prayed.

A bright ball of white light made the clearing light up like a lightning strike. Harry was blinking away spots for several nauseous minutes.

There, eyelids.

Harry lurched, hand clamping over his mouth. He closed his eyes and breathed for a few minutes. He was exhausted! A little more... Harry, once he was sure he would be keeping his stomach inside, focused on the blond man again. A quick peel back of his eyelids showed that the eyeballs hadn’t magically reformed. So Harry followed the instructions and conjured the bandages that swiftly
wrapped around the blond’s face.

A bit of blood, a count to ten—and Harry poured the potion down the blond’s throat and sat back on his heels with a sigh. His body felt so, so heavy. Harry was already slipping down without conscious thought. His head cushioned by an arm. It was okay to sleep for a little, right?

Harry raised his wand and tapped it on the hardened paste on his shoulder. The paste shattered and tumbled to the dirt. And that was fine. Harry couldn’t feel the burn right now, but a quick glance showed that it was less black and more raw red. It looked less like the steak on the grill and more like raw steak.

... not a great comparison.

But he was slipping.

Down... down... down...

Harry sniffed, jerking slightly when the salt of the ocean stung his nose. Harry went from his exhausted desire to sleep all the way up to full blown panic. He would have jerked to his feet and would have been running if the arm around his middle hadn’t tightened in to a band of iron.

Harry wheezed, eyes blinding by the bright sun reflected off of the ocean water to the point that tears dripped down his sensitive face. His fingers scrambled at the arm around his middle, digging in as he snarled. There was a shout in his ear, and it took a stinging slap to the back of his head before the language translated itself.

“Oi, oi, oi! Settle down—kora!” A man had yelled that in to his ear.

Harry froze, blinked, and tilted his head up to look in to the ice chips that the blond man had for eyes. The green was gone. It was... a dark blue suit? With a tie and matching hat. Harry glanced down, and found their feet propped up on the trunk. The backpack that should have been with him... it was gone!

“My bag!” Harry helped, squirming again—

Harry wobbled, suddenly woozy, as if all of the strength left his body. He sagged back against the seat of the ferry that they obviously were on. Sagged right in to the arm that was still holding him up.

Harry tried to speak—but nothing intelligible came out.

Several things came to Harry at once. The fact that he was no longer wearing the jumpsuit. Simple jeans and a hoodie were what he could spot. If he was wearing more, he couldn’t feel it. Those were the boots he had been wearing, though. His face felt heavy, and Harry could spot the slathered white makeup over the back of his hands and could only assume the same was on his face.

This man had dressed him. In more ways than one.

Was familiar with Harry enough that he knew how to put that makeup on. What was this man to Harry. It seemed to take hours to angle his face to look the blond man in the eyes.

“Don’t worry. I’ve called the others.” The man spoke lowly, in such a tone that would never be heard by others. But that wasn’t English. It wasn’t English at all. It felt like something in his mind was breaking, and Harry didn’t think he had the energy to stop it.

This man knew him. From his past.
“W... w...” Harry felt his eyes rolling. This man had done something to him. This man had to have some kind of magic! Harry would never be this weak otherwise. Even when he was dying, he hadn’t been so unable to move.

“You’ve saved me. And you’ve suffered for it. I’ll take care of you.” The man reached out and tilted Harry’s head. Harry mentally groaned when he lost sight of the blond and the strange expression on his face. “A sealed flame—that is serious business. But don’t worry.” A pat on his head and—

Harry gasped awake, jerking. He was in a hotel—his mind quickly supplied. There was a shower going on and the trunk was closed at the foot of the single bed in the room. Harry was up and on his feet. He didn’t have his shoes, but he spotted them by the door. Harry ran for the trunk and shoved it open. There, his bag was inside. He yanked it out and closed it.

He yanked the bag open and hauled the aquarium out. A limp octopus came in to sight... and jerked to happy life when it spotted Harry. Harry resisted the urge to sob. Harry knew that when he exhausted himself, he could be out for days. “You must be hungry... don’t worry, I’ll take care of you.” Harry shivered, and glanced down.

He was shirtless, and his shoulder newly bandaged.

Harry pressed his lips together, taking in the hotel room in a calmer state of mind now that he was sure that the pet wasn’t dead. Harry took a few shaky breaths and wiped at his eyes. He was so close to the mental edge that his eyes were being terribly disobedient. Harry’s eyes eventually landed on to an in-hotel menu. The decor was very, very rich looking.

... the menu was in French.

Harry pressed a hand against his heart and looked to the bathroom door. The shower was still going on, so he assumed that the blond man was still inside.

Harry was completely unprepared for this. He wasn’t ready to reconnect with his past. He needed some distance. But... Harry placed the aquarium down on the side table next to the bed. From there, he dug his wand out of the medical compartment of the trunk and closed it. He scrambled for the bracelet on his wrist. It was no longer glowing, but Harry could still see the shifting.

Harry picked a cluster of one of the tiny vials and enlarged it. It was a cluster of seven vials. He resituated the vials and held up the small fistful that had been returned to normal size.

The water in the bathroom cut off.

Harry felt the panic beating in his heart, even as he used his magic to pop off the tops of the vials, grab the seven memories, and shove them all to his temple.

Harry had a single moment of clarity—this was definitely not the best of choices he could have made—before things started to go dark around the edges. Harry frantically casted a handful of spells. A notice-me-not on his wand and on the bag. He stuck his wand to his arm and kicked the empty vials under the bed as visions of other people and other places swam in front of his eyes.

The floor was carpet.

Harry closed his eyes—and the world heaved.

When he opened his eyes again, he was in a new hotel. Wearing new things with a new bandage. It was empty again. Although this suite looked even fancier. He was on a large bed, and his body felt as drugged as it had that one time the blond man had had a hold of him. The blond—Colonello.
... Harry remembered... an island.

And... a blond baby? That he called Colonello? Who looked like a tiny version of the blond man? His body was already aching, and it ached even more in sympathetic pain as he recalled the blows he received from the blond baby. And... the bullets from the black haired one?

It hurt. It had hurt. And it hurt now. Why was his body so fragile to pain? Where had his threshold for pain gone?

Harry didn’t know.

All he knew was that he had to leave. Being carried around... being yanked to place—it made his skin feel like it was burning. He needed to leave. Harry needed to get to a place where he could hunker down and become one with his memories again.

He heard frantic tapping, and found the octopus in the aquarium next to the bed. There was even some wiggling fish in there. Harry smiled when he saw it. Well—there was that. “At least one of us isn’t hungry anymore, right little guy?”

That... that was a good thing. He needed to focus on the good thing. Harry looked down to his wrist.

.... his bracelet of memories was gone.

Chapter End Notes

... so hey. I had to take my car to the shop. So guess what I did for three hours while I waited?

So, we’ve got our first contact! Kinda. It’s happening, sh. I read through the comments so I hope this answered some of it. I was kind of avoiding the ages, but all things considered, it was a nice reveal here. I think I’ve shattered Harry enough that I can focus on building him back up.

TBh I’ve always had mixed feelings on Ginny. I’ve finally decided that she just could have been written better in canon and left it at that. She has become more of an idea over the years, hasn’t she?

As it is, we’re firmly in Mafia territory now, even if it isn’t mafia land. Much quicker than Harry would have wanted, that is for sure. But Harry has always worked well with a ‘no plan is a good plan’ right? Or it just seems like it.

Are there any more questions lingering amongst you guys? I’ll find a way to wiggle in answers in to my next chapter if its possible. IDK when the next one will pop up. Perhaps over the weekend.

Thank you for reading!
Chapter 8

Don’t panic, Potter—Harry blinked down at his white not-right-pasty wrist for one long second before he sharply inhaled and let it go. Slowly, calmly, his eyes panned to the right. Then the left. And then he took a slow, woozy circle as he took in the room at large. It was a bit ridiculous, now that he looked at it with suddenly calmer eyes. The bed was king sized at the least. The carpet under his feet was plush and white (if a hotel has white carpet, then it definitely had money to keep it clean) and he glanced down to his toes to check it.

Harry reached out and touched the side of the aquarium, leaning in to squint at the octopus inside. “… I remember you being… bigger?” Harry squinted at the wiggling creature. Harry squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head. He stood up and looked around the room. There was literally nothing in this room that he had brought with him.

It took far more effort to stop his walk to the door, but Harry found that the longer he kept at it, the easier it was to keep going. In fact, he felt like he was getting stronger the longer he continued.

His arm itched—and Harry scratched at it idly as he came to the door. That handle… looked like gold plating or something. Harry glanced down to his arm when his fingers encountered more than skin. Right—his arm, his wand stuck to his skin. Harry reached over worked his wand off of his skin. He felt eerily calm with nothing in his head as he stood before the door.

There was frantic tapping coming from the aquarium that had Harry pausing to look behind. The octopus was still there, its bulbous little eyes trained on Harry. “I’ll be back in a second,” Harry murmured, not bothering to wonder if the little creature could understand him or not. So many animals understood more than one would expect, he didn’t doubt that there was something there. “Just hold on little guy.”

Harry slowly cracked open the door and nudged it slightly. The closed curtains of the bedroom he
was in made him ill adjusted to the sudden sting of the bright room on the other side. Harry blinked rapidly, and tried not to feel like he was trapped in his cupboard once again, squinting through the vents in to a too bright hall. It seemed to take ages, but soon Harry could make out the other room through the crack between the door and frame.

A large sitting area, filled with couches, gilded chairs, a glass coffee table with what looked like the remains of a large breakfast on it. Harry's stomach gave a sympathetic pang, and he couldn’t really recall when he ate last, or how long it had even been. His eyes traced the walls and found that everything was a calming plain white—which probably offset the frankly gaudy blue and green decorations everywhere else. The curtains, the carpets, the furniture—it was rather terrible.

The blonde man must have picked this place, then. If Harry was still with him. Harry pressed his cheek firmly against the door frame, trying to get in as much of a view as possible. There were branching short halls, closed doors, and doorways that led to other rooms that he could see from this view. This was a suite, then.

It was silent.

And probably about noon time. Maybe afternoon.

Harry inched the door open a tad, eventually just enough to slip out of his room. He inched the door until it was almost closed before he padded out of the room. He padded around the room, his bare feet telling him how soft the rugs were, and the skin of his arms noted only the faintest of chills as he walked toward a large open window.

Well, balcony doors.

Seeing the Eiffel tower so casually outside of this hotel was a sight to see. Harry blinked at the tall metal construction, and he could feel it’s height in his very bones as he craned his head up. He was rather… close—if he had to guess. Since he had to tilt his head so far back. Harry rubbed at his cheek absently, and grimaced at the tacky feel of the white make up. Seriously—why had this guy put that shit back on him? Sure, it covered the scars and made his skin look as if it was baby smooth, but it made his skin crawl.

Harry wrinkled his nose and peeked out on to the balcony. That was empty. But… was that a gun? A rather large… rifle? Harry stared at the little metal table before he inched back and turned back to the hotel room. There was nothing in this room that he was looking for, so he took the first closed door he could find and listened through the wood. Harry heard nothing on the other side for a nice twenty count, so he popped open the door and peered in to an empty bathroom.

*(Ginny liked the smell of Vanilla—not now memories!)*

“… Fancy.” Harry mumbled, feeling rather like this hotel was a bit much. Sure, with magic making a home look like this wasn’t hard or even costly, but he was rather sure that this was a muggle place. Which meant that it cost a lot. Which made this whole place absurd.

Harry found a hall that led to a door which led to another bedroom. Empty of anyone, but there were a few suits and clothes scattered around. Harry, inevitably, walked in to the bedroom that he hadn’t woken up in. There was no one here, so he could poke around right? Harry walked to the bed where the clothes were scattered about, and lifted a few to check under. Nothing, which wasn’t disappointing (he told this to himself—it wasn’t like everyone kept their secrets in easy to find places).

The bedroom here was blue with red accents while his own had been green with purple accents. Which was fine, really. It was just interesting to note. (All of these colors were silly, and Harry wouldn’t approve of any of this decoration in his future place of living.) Harry pressed his lips together, scratched at the back of his right hand, and then walked himself out of the room. He made sure to shut the door.

He stumbled in to a small hotel kitchen eventually.

And swiftly snatched his bracelet from the counter before he could think twice about it. He gripped it hard in his hand, and felt his body settle down. The prickle in his skin didn’t feel so bad now. In fact, Harry could almost say he was relaxing. He was obviously no longer in London, or England in general. Which was good for him in the long run really.

He pulled on the bracelet and felt it settle in to place. And there was his bag! Harry hauled it close and peeked in—his things were still there. That stupid shoebox, the motorcycle—Harry plucked out the Octopus care pamphlet when he spotted it. He was sure that there was something he probably needed to be doing for his little guy. Harry closed the top and slung it over his shoulder.

… it was the trunk that might be the problem. It was open in the middle of the kitchen. To the medical side. And there were bottles all over the floor. Scattered about in some kind of organizational system that Harry couldn’t understand. Harry glanced around, chewing on a knuckle for a second
before he slowly pulled the knuckle away from his mouth.

Make up did not taste good. *Yuck.*

Harry debated for a few minutes of how to get everything back in the trunk before he decided that by hand would be the best bet. He didn’t want to accidentally blow himself up with some strange accident. Harry stuck his wand in to his waist band and crouched down. Harry had no system for putting everything back, and just stacked them the best he could. Harry soon had the floor cleared, and hoped that there was nothing else stacked away. Harry sighed with relief when he closed the trunk and shrunk it back to charm sized.

He was on his feet in a second, and back in his room a few moments later. “Okay—okay. We’re good to go. Green light, little buddy. But, um… going back in the bag again.” Harry grinned at the little octopus as he pulled out the shoebox and pulled out a few more wads of bills.

… how did one exchange money again? These were British pounds, not euros. Harry found he have to find a bank later.

He tossed them on to the bed, shoved the shoe box and the aquarium in to his bag once more and—

… clothes.

“Well, that’s a problem.” Probably not as much of a problem as him talking to himself so much. He glanced down at the sleep pants that he was in. It was a garish kind of purple that had him cringing, even if they were soft. Harry pulled his wand out of his waist band and with a few taps had them more fitted and a nicer color of black. Harry tapped his stomach and squinted down at his pasty chest—that was a bit much, wasn’t it? This make up thing really had to go. He needed to go through that potion and cream stash to find any scars removers. “Another problem…” Harry groaned to himself.

… but really, he was secretly happy about his current level of problems.

*(Only think about the present. Nothing exists beyond this. This is the present…)*

… There had been clothes in the other room.
It was just a shirt.

…and some shoes.

Harry just needed to get out. Harry packed up with a hum. Harry shoved the wads of cash in to his pockets, stuck his wand in to the band of his pants, and had his bag read and on his shoulder. Harry scratched the back of his right hand once again.

“Right.” He nodded to himself, turned, and yanked open the door.

Harry couldn’t help but jump when he found the blond man on the other side. The blond was in a simple white t-shirt and what Harry supposed were green combat pants. The headband matched the pants for the most part (camouflage, Harry thought that was what it was) –but it wasn’t really the outfit that had Harry pausing (it felt right, to his head, that there was so much green).

His blond eyebrows were furrowed. Perhaps his face was a bit confused. Harry opened his mouth, paused, and then closed it. He didn’t know what to say. Was there something he could say? This man knew him as the Harry-before, rather than the Harry he currently was.

The blond man’s hand snapped out and yanked at the backpack strap Harry had on his shoulder. “Hey!” Harry snarled, arm clamped down to hold on to the bag before it could be ripped away. “The fuck do you think you’re doing?” Harry, with a good enough grip, yanked back.

The blond didn’t let go.

“The fuck do I think I’m doing? What are you doing, kora!” The man took a step forward, and Harry hated the few inches of height the other had over him. But Harry refused to be yanked around by this guy—

Harry felt it, as hyper aware as he was. That sudden heaviness of his body. The blue tinge around the blond man’s skin. Harry couldn’t even form words as everything in him revolted to the idea of a drugged state once more. Harry was back to reacting again.

He kicked out—kicked the blond man’s knee out and made him falter.
Harry couldn’t break the strap free from the man’s iron grip.

The blond went down with a shout, but Harry soon followed with a choked gasp when a hand gripped at his throat and made him follow.

Everything blurred from there. Elbows knocking in to the door frame. Knees slamming in to the floors or guts. Harry lost his bag, but used the loss to squirm like a monkey. Harry tried for a rear wrist lock—the blond slipped out of that with ease and Harry got an open palm strike to his nose for the effort.

(Well, rear wrist locks were best when one was still standing…)

If the blond was talking (or yelling), Harry didn’t want to hear it.

This man had tried to control him again.

Once had to be a fluke. Twice, meant it was a natural thought process to submission.

A third time would make it a pattern. Harry refused to allow that.

Harry got several kidney shots in before the blond grabbed a fistful of hair and slammed his head in to the floor. Harry couldn’t even feel the pain—when had that happened? Why couldn’t he feel pain now when he had been so sensitive before? –but Harry could feel the intent. The hits the man was doing, they were not meant for permanent injury, but for a knock out or a stunning.

A sound like thunder—a gunshot—had Harry flying back and away from the sudden hole in the floor next to his head. The blond man moved just as quick, and the two turned and looked to the other man in the room.

Harry froze. He hadn’t even noticed him.

… the new man seemed terribly tall, from where Harry sat on the ground. A sleek black suit, a strange hat with a wide golden yellow band. Ironically, to Harry, the thing that stood out the most was the ridiculous looking green chameleon clinging to the matching golden yellow tie.
“He’s gone crazy,” the blond hissed, pointed at Harry.

“I’m not crazy!” It was a poor refute, Harry realized. Even as he started to inch toward the wall. Where his bag was leaning against.

The next gunshot from the chameleon man put a hole in the floor where Harry had been about to put his hand. Harry froze, and decided that, perhaps, it was best to stay still. The blond hissed something out as he rolled to his feet and stood up.

And there was two more people. There. With Mr. Chameleon.

Well, there were two, but Harry found himself focused on a man in a white lab coat ( … “are you a doctor?” Hissed a wispy remnant of Tom Riddle, eleven years old and looking up in to the powerful eyes of Albus Dumbledore). His body felt like it was ice as he trailed up to the man’s face. He looked… impossibly bored. And was watching Harry. Slowly, the man tilted his head to the side as he stared.

The icy feeling was increasing.

*Out*—Harry felt like all of his senses were screaming. This man looked like he was at a zoo—and Harry was the animal in the cage.

But… but Harry was used to being in situations like this. And he felt himself calm down. His escape would be inevitable (it always was, in one way or another) and he didn’t need to panic himself in to failure. He glanced to where the blond man had been, and slowly he got up to his feet under the black eyes of Mr. Chameleon. Harry tuned in on what they were saying (and decided not to question when he learned another language. It would come in time, yeah?).

“—it’s all fucked up. He obviously can’t even feel the bond anymore. I can’t feel him,” the blond man was saying, mostly talking to Mr. Chameleon as he spoke. And was gesturing toward Harry often.

“Whatever they did, it’s messed him up more than me. I still have complete access to my flame. It doesn’t even feel like he has any.” The blond concluded, and Harry watched as all eyes inevitably turned to him. Harry realized he had been backing up for a while, as his fingertips brushed against the wall he had put his back to. He had a nice view of the entire room at large. His bag at his feet.
And the door to his room was a few inches away and wide open.

The doctor in the lab coat and fancy suit cleared his throat, and dropped a heavy suitcase to the ground. It sounded… metal. “Well. Thanks for wasting my time repeating that information.” The man’s voice was flat as he raised a wrist and pressed a button on his watch. Harry mutely watched as the large metal suitcase open up with a mechanical whine. It made a metal table with a computer attached and liquids and chemicals in bottles scattered about.

“I’ll get this settled. Skull, sit.” The doctor pointed to the metal table before he moved to pull on some gloves.

… everyone was looking at Harry.

Mr. Chameleon theatrically cocked his gun.

… were they… talking to him?

“Look—“ Harry started, but jerked to the side as a bullet hole impacted in the wall right next to where his head had been. Harry felt his suddenly calm heart start to race again.

Okay. Okay—forget his memories. Forget what his body was doing. It was obviously not safe here. Bonds. Flames. Whatever—Mr. Chameleon was shooting at him.

“I don’t care who the hell you assholes are, but I’m not getting near that table!” Harry finally hissed, jabbing a finger in their collective direction.

“… Lackey.” Mr. Chameleon’s voice, Harry realized, was deep. And threatening. And his eyes were squinty and his face impassive (none of that went well with his ridiculous side burns). “What are you babbling about. You have ten seconds to explain.” And the gun was up again and pointed at Harry. And Harry was rather sure it was no longer pointed next to his head but at his head. This man was obviously not someone to mess with—he hadn’t even spoken any of that with a question! All demands!

The sudden count down the man started made Harry… panic. “10… 9… 8…”
“I have no clue who you assholes are, but I’m so done. I’m out.” Harry hissed, before he let his body drop. The two following gunshots hit the wall, but Harry focused on scooping up his bag and rolling his body back in to his bedroom. He used the door to roll himself faster and to slam it shut at the same time. Harry’s wand was out in a second, and he cast a few charms to expand the door to make it impossible to open. A sticking charm to make it even harder.

And a shielding charm. Damn, that man was trigger happy.

Harry took a moment to look down and inspect his body. Yup, no holes there.

Harry jumped when something slammed against the door. Harry paused and turned his head to look at the door. There, another slam.

Time to go.

There was really only one way out now.

Harry yanked open the windows and shoved his head out. This hotel room was rather high up. Harry made sure the backpack was on tight. He might not have a shirt, or shoes… but he should be fine. Harry had done okay with less. A leg out and his feet dangling down…

He had been much higher on a broom.

Harry looked to his left. And froze when he caught sight of the blue-blue eyes of the blond man. Who was crouched on the railing of the hotel suite balcony and looked like he was about to climb the walls until he had gotten to the windows. The door was still slamming, and there was cursing now.

“Skull, look—“ the man started.

“I refuse.” Harry promptly replied—and jumped.

He landed hard on an occupied balcony. The two woman taking a lunch fell out of their little metal chairs shrieking.
“Sorry!” Harry called, his shoulder stinging unpleasantly as he rolled to his feet, hopped the rail, and let himself drop. Harry did it two more times before he hit grass. From the yelling and thudding he could hear behind himself, he imagined that the blond man was following his insane drops. Harry could roll with it, he had been trained to roll when he fell off a broom.

All the same, Harry ran. He ran on to the pavement. From the pavement of the courtyard he sprinted on to the street. A bit more, and he was out amongst the throngs of the people of Paris.

On the left.

Harry dodged right and ducked on to another street, narrowly dodging the reaching hand. Harry ducked when his gut said to duck, and twisted out of the way of the fist coming to his head.

“Wait! Skull—shit!” The blond man hissed, another failed attempt that Harry dodged again. Although this time Harry spun to face the blond. Harry brought his hands up in to a standard ready position. Level with his shoulders with one foot facing forward and the other back and perpendicular to the other foot. The blonde’s eyes flickered over Harry’s form, and he came to a stop.

“Look… listen!” The blond had changed his posture to something that wasn’t so hostile, but Harry merely found it to be unnatural looking on him.

“I don’t want to listen to you.” Harry added. “You knocked me out!”

“It was unintended! You’re not usually so susceptible to it!” The blond’s easy posture was curling up in to something tight and defensive. Harry squinted to the man, and let the silence speak for itself. The man shifted, “… I took advantage of it, yes. Your flame is sealed so far down I can’t even sense it.” The man inched closer, and Harry inched back in response.

“Skull, I… you shouldn’t move so much. We need to find the seal, and figure out how to remove it. And from where we can go back against those assholes that dared to…” The man choked, making an abortive motion to his eyes as he let out a shuddering breath.

Harry lowered his arms slightly.
“I already took them out.” Harry pressed his lips together, it was best that these muggles didn’t even try to find wizards again. Especially after Harry had beaten that hornet’s nest.

The blond frowned. And Harry glanced down to his feet and back up to the blond man’s face—it seems that the blond had gotten closer.

“I highly doubt you got all of them—“ the blond snorted, and then caught himself. He pressed his lips together and glanced to Harry through lidded eyes.

Oh.

The danger sounds went off in Harry’s head.

Harry took a step back, to put more distance between them. The blond man burst in to rapid action, lunging at Harry. Harry used the distance between them to dart left, dodge a car in the street, and Harry grinned as he heard the curses of the blond man as he ran. This was merely just another extreme case of Harry hunting, it felt like.

(Why didn’t it feel like Death Eaters were after him instead?)

Still, no matter the fact that it was like Harry hunting, Harry couldn’t risk himself being caught.

Harry passed by a boutique in the street, and with a swift yank had a shirt from the rack. A second later was a satisfying crash as the blond man ran straight in to the tumbling rack. Harry grinned, pumping his legs and keeping the shirt in a fist.

It was impossible to outrun this man—Harry realized this when his lungs started to burn and each breath burned on the way in. It sounded like he was getting closer. And closer. Ever closer. Harry could see when he looked up that the Eifel tower was much father now.

The warning went off too late. The warning of his instincts.

Harry choked at the neat sticking out of an arm from an alley that clotheslined him. He went down hard.
It was Mr. Chameleon. Harry was still gasping when he felt the light pressure of a foot on his chest. Harry’s hands came up and he grasped at the shoe. His eyes were so watery, but he could still see the blank face of the man above him.

It didn’t hurt—Harry didn’t know why that thought was strange.

“Haaahhh... haahhh... Damn, you’re really fast when it counts.” The blond huffed, slowing to a stop next to them in the deserted alley.

“Stuntmen are typically very strong and fast,” a woman spoke up, coming in from the other side. She came with another set of feet. Harry could bet that the doctor man was with her. But all the same, Harry couldn’t look away from Mr. Chameleon, just as Mr. Chameleon kept his eyes pinned on Harry. There was no gun in his hand, and Harry could only guess it was somewhere in that suit.

“Let me go.” Harry spoke to Mr. Chameleon, now. The others could listen, but it was Mr. Chameleon that had him pinned (there was no pressure, but Harry was at a disadvantage). And from all of them, Harry thought that it would be Mr. Chameleon that had the highest chance of catching him as opposed to just tailing him.

(Why did he think that?)

The man was impassive, still. But Harry could see a bit of sweat on the side of his face. Could see the measured breaths he was taking to not seem like he had been running frantically. This man was human, as human as Harry was. “No. I will not.” The man replied.

Harry dug his fingernails in to the fine finish of the shoe on his chest. “Why?” Harry heard his voice reaching deeper octaves than he was used to.

“You are Arcobaleno. You are one of us. The strongest seven.” Mr. Chameleon put some pressure on to Harry’s chest, but not enough to even hinder his breathing.

_I prescelti sette._

Harry held his breath.
“Lackey, I don’t know what they did to you. But we will fix you.” Mr. Chameleon continued on.

*I don’t need fixing.*

These people did not know him. And Harry didn’t know what they wanted to do to him.

“Let me go.” Harry demanded, because he wasn’t going to bed.

Harry swore he saw Mr. Chameleon’s eyes flash yellow.

“Why would I do that? I’ve already caught you.” The man’s face pulled in to a perfect appearance of pure mocking. And Harry hated to the fact that he already, objectively, knew he was going to rise to the bait.

Harry readied his feet. “You can’t keep me.”

“I’m the greatest. I can do anything.” The man was certainly arrogant.

Harry squinted, “I won’t allow it.”

“You can’t stop me,” The man replied, a gun suddenly in hand. It seemed like he was done talking. And the man with the doctor coat was approaching him now. A syringe in hand. The woman was talking, Harry realized this dimly. Talking to the blond. But her voice was coming in patches. There was a roaring in Harry’s ears now, his eyes locked on to the obvious drug that the doctor man had.

This could not be. Harry wouldn’t allow it.

He was not an animal in a zoo.

He was not going to be caged.
Accidental magic at his age was embarrassing—but when the air seemed to ignite, Harry was glad for it as the shockwave of it all knocked everyone off of their feet. Harry mentally grimaced as he saw and heard Mr. Chameleon slam in to an alley wall. But he didn’t have the time. He was on his feet and running.

He was outnumbered.

Harry knew of plenty of ways that a group could take out one person. He needed to end this.

And he had an idea.

Dodge. Dodge. Duck. Bullets! Turn!

Harry fell down the stairs leading to the Paris metro. His chin slammed hard in to a step and there was blood in his mouth. It was disgusting, and he was spitting blood even as he jumped barriers. Gathered the attention of police—how did Mr. Chameleon get in here before him? Harry dodged around the black haired man on the platform, and somehow made it through the closing door of the metro.

Harry was gasping around blood, body shaking as he stared, eye to eye, with Mr. Chameleon. The only thing between them the doors of the metro and the glass.

“You won’t get far.” The man had unbelievably tight control of his face, and while Harry couldn’t hear him, he could still read his lips.

It was still a challenge, though.

“Catch me if you can.” Harry grinned—victory! The widening of Mr. Chameleon’s eyes spoke enough to Harry that Mr. Chameleon could read lips as well. The train started to inch along now. Mr. Chameleon stepped back, eyes glancing up to the top of the metro.
Harry’s stomach went cold. He was sure, then, without a doubt, that Mr. Chameleon could make it on the train. Even with the doors shut. Harry backed away from the door, eyeing the sudden smirk that Mr. Chameleon was sporting. Harry turned, and squirmed through the train.

A plan. He had to think of a plan.

He couldn’t see Mr. Chameleon outside anymore.

This was not good. Harry frantically took a moment to wiggle in to the white button up shirt that he had. His hands fumbled the buttons, and he got it halfway up before he hauled his bag back up and on to his shoulders. He realized then that there was a large bubble around himself. A bubble of open space as the people drew back from him. Harry glanced around and caught his reflection in a dark window.

Oh. He used his sleeve and mopped at the blood covering his chin. “Sorry, took a tumble.” He murmured in English (and retroactively realized that everyone that had been chasing him had been using English as well. Or at least, they were, near the end. When he had been using English at them). The people stood even further back and Harry shuffled awkwardly as he moved further along the cars of the train.

In any case, he needed to get off.

Preferably before the last train station.

Harry got to the end of the train without too much fuss. His feet were throbbing. And there was nowhere for him to go. People were gathering close to the doors now, and Harry supposed that it was about to land.

…and there was Mr. Chameleon. At the other side of the long train car.

He smirked.

Harry scowled and ducked down behind a small cluster of people at the end of the train.
Right. Right. Escape plan.

Harry glanced down at the train car floor.

… whelp.

Desperate times.

Harry reached back and discretely pulled his wand out of the back of the band of his pants. Notice-
me-not to the floor.

Harry pressed himself against the wall of the last car of the train and was about to implement his plan before he looked up—a pair of fancy shoes had planted themselves in front of him. Harry looked up at Mr. Chameleon then, whose smug face looked down at him.

“Well, that was short lived Frank Abagnale,” Mr. Chameleon tipped his hat with one hand, the other on his hip.

“… what?” Harry blinked, was that his name?

“… what?” Mr. Chameleon’s degree of smugness lowered as he blinked down at Harry.

*Confringo.*

Harry made it small, and felt the train car floor give under him, more than ready to tumble back and in to the wreckage. Already, he had a shielding charm ready—

Mr. Chameleon had an impossible grip on the front of Harry’s shirt, and another hand around a stabilization bar. His face tense as he kept Harry from tumbling in to the sparks and failing metal as the end of the train fell apart and everyone scrambled away.
Mr. Chameleon was saying something, but Harry couldn’t hear it over the screams of the metal of the train breaking apart under the small blasting curse he had made. Harry couldn’t believe the man had moved so fast, he was sure that Mr. Chameleon had moved him back from the end of the train by at least a foot.

With a minor heave, Harry tumbled right in to Mr. Chameleon’s chest, and Harry automatically grabbed a hold of the stabilization bar as Mr. Chameleon let go of his shirt. The hand that had been on his shirt went up and grabbed Harry’s jaw in a vice grip. Harry couldn’t stop the yank that had his chin craning up to almost pain. Baring his face and neck for inspection Those dark eyes were roving around his face now.

That insane little chameleon was chilling calmly on this man’s tie—still. Did it not notice the train car falling apart?

Harry glanced up, catching the movement of Mr. Chameleon’s mouth.

“—are you okay?”

“… I’m fine.” Harry answered back, awkward. Even his instincts felt awkward.

The pinch of a needle—Harry shoved at Mr. Chameleon’s chest with one hand, the other hand slapping to his neck where the pinch had been as he stared in open mouth surprised at Mr. Chameleon. The man who calmly dropped the syringe that no one else seemed to notice to the floor.

“You—“ cheat!

Harry moved to stumble back to the hole—to his escape—

Mr. Chameleon had him by the shirt again. Shit, he should have just not worn that! Shit! Harry reached out to pry that hand off—and he rather hated that Mr. Chameleon was so damn unmoved by it all as he struggled against the hand that seemed impossible to pry off. Harry leaned back as far as he could, his feet on the edge of the hole. The train was slowing down, and Harry could swear he saw the light of the train station incoming and—

Harry let go of Mr. Chameleon’s hand.
Harry looked him in the eye. “Catch me if you can.”

Mr. Chameleon’s face froze—

Harry used his two hands to rip away the chunk of his shirt that Mr. Chameleon was clutching, and Harry sleepily grinned to himself as he freely tumbled back and through the hole, slapping away Mr. Chameleon’s swift hand on the way down.

He apparated before he hit the rails.

Harry groaned as he landed face first in an alley. A peek around and he saw it was the same alley that he had been clotheslined in to by Mr. Chameleon. Harry reached up to gingerly touch his nose—he could swear it was broken.

But he had made it.

He lost them.

Harry giggled woozily as he hauled himself to his feet. He stumbled over to himself, found a door, and fell in to a backroom or somewhere. Harry kicked the door shut and fell down on to the cement floor. It smelled… like dust here.

And… and…

And he needed to rest.

He heard nothing.

And let himself fall asleep.
Cheers for another chapter. I actually went through and proof read this a bit (I normally don't, actually...) so hopefully I caught everything.

So the mystery deepens! Or the answers are coming. Depending on your perspective. I'll probably make some oneshots to do Arcobaleno POV just till fill in the blanks. This is going to be a Harry POV story. Unless I do some interludes or something.

I hope you guys enjoyed the run around Paris.

Can you guys list off the Arcobaleno that have been seen so far? And after them, who would you want to see next?
Does the characterization seem alright to you? And anything else you'd like to see now that the major players are all incoming?

Thanks for reading!
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Harry flees Paris. And gets caught up in Munich.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 9

Harry woke up feeling sick. And then was sick. He gagged and threw up bile that burned on the way out. A quick water charm had him spitting out water on to the concrete floor and cleaning his mouth. Merlin, his head was filled with cotton. And everything hurt. Especially…

Harry glanced down at his bare feet and winced. Oh, everything was really cut up.

Still, where was he? Harry sat for a long moment and can only assume that this was an empty and safe spot. The cotton feeling that still remained in his mouth was thick despite the water. And his limbs felt rather heavy, as if he had been sleeping for a while.

And his shoulder bandage was disgusting. All brown with dark spots.

He eased himself up, grimacing at the pain radiating mostly from the soles of his feet. His bag was still on his back, and Harry pet the straps to soothe himself as he inched toward the door that led further in to the building. He stood by the closed door and listened for several counts before he deemed it safe enough for further investigation. Harry eased open the door, and found himself in a cramped, dusty little hallway. Harry glanced down to the dust at his feet and pulled a face.

Well, he was going to do a thorough cleaning of his feet later. Nosing around, Harry discovered what he assumed was the kitchen of a small café of some sort. He had had to do some work in the past that involved him seeing the inner guts of a small café and this looked just like this (said work involved an attempted poisoning from a jilted lover—little to say, Harry learned a thing or two about how the inner workings of the food industry worked during that investigation). The front doors that led on to the street were boarded up with a ‘espace à vendre’ sign in the window.
Harry skipped close and peered out through the baby blue curtains—the sky was early dawn and darling pink. A brand new day. Harry rubbed at his chin, and then scratched at it with his finger nails. His fingers came away covered in rusty red flakes and white smudges.

Right. Priorities. He needed to be clean.

Second—get out of Paris. Get to Germany.

Thirdly, find a safe place that he could hunker down and pace through his memories.

Harry glanced around the abandoned café and decided that this place was safe enough to get clean in. In the kitchen area, he tested the taps and found the water dry. There was also no electricity. A bit of charm work had him a few candles that he lit up. And after making sure the drainage worked, he plugged up a large sink and filled it first with water, and then heated it.

There, a nice little bath. Harry set down his pack and deftly took out the aquarium. The little octopus was curled in a ball, floating around. It didn’t seem to notice Harry, so Harry set it down on a dusty counter and tapped the side. The octopus peeked out, and once it saw Harry it unfurled and attached itself to the side of the tank Harry was closest to.

Harry smiled, pressing a hand against his sternum as he watched the octopus relax. “We’ll be here for a little. It’ll be okay. I just need to clean up, and when it’s a bit lighter I’ll get some money, get some clothes… and perhaps a train ticket or something.” Harry rubbed the back of his head in faint agitation. Sure, it might be easier to keep to the magical side of things, but Harry didn’t really have an actual plan of where to go other than the remembrance that his other self had thought he was a muggle and stuck to muggle transport. Which worked out fine, even though Harry was a little rusty it wasn’t as if he forgot how public transport worked. The Dursleys hadn’t taken him much of anywhere really, but that didn’t include school sponsored trips.

Harry set his trunk down and enlarged it. A quick pop had him wrist deep in potions and salves. Once he had everything lined up, Harry dropped his rather filthy (and ripped, as the case of his shirt was) to the floor. He carefully undid his shoulder bandage and groaned at the mess that still was. It was okay, because he had the things to take care of it, but the fresh air did sting something fierce.

He made sure to scrub every inch as best as he could before using every potion and paste that could be useful. The shoebox contained a lot of items from Grimmauld Place that Harry swiftly made use of. A thorough cleaning of a curtain before he ripped it up for bandages for his shoulder and his feet. The rest he transfigured in to a clumsy pair of short pants. Harry really needed to research household spells, because one leg was slightly longer than the other.
Harry ended up cleaning the shirt he stole, ripping the sleeves off, and patching the hole with the extra material.

In the end, he looked pathetic.

It just had to last through the bank and a store visit.

Harry peeked out of the kitchen and noted that not much time had passed. So he went back to the trunk. He did find half a jar of scar reducer. He read the instructions, transfigured a mirror and stuck that on the side of the aquarium tank. So he kneeled on the ground in front of where he set the tank and went about rubbing the scar reducer in to the flesh of his face.

As he worked, he looked to the octopus that was crowding close. “I’ll get you some nice things for your home. Would you like that? Maybe something like a treasure chest… I can toss you a few galleons if you like.” Harry peered at his reflection, frowned at his unchanged face, and promptly checked the expiration date of the jar.

... and then realized he didn’t even know what the date was. Harry groaned to himself and continued on with it anyway. Maybe something minor would happen? It was going to be gradual, but still! He had thought he’d see some kind of lessening by now.

“But yeah. Decorations. I’ll get you some. In Germany.” Harry added, because he would rather not be in France just in case Mr. Chameleon was still on the chase. (He is, the voice in the back of Harry’s head grumbled. Nowhere in the world will be safe.)

Harry eventually tossed the now empty scar reducer back in to the trunk. He made himself some cloth shoes that were serviceable, and then set his bag in to the trunk. Wedging it in to the medical side. He hastily made some pockets and shoved his money in to them.

“Okay buddy. I’ll get us a hotel once we’re in Germany. Hopefully by the end of today. And we can stop this bag business. Just one more day.” Harry smiled and carefully placed the aquarium in his trunk. The octopus gave another sad wiggle and Harry closed it up and shrank it down.

Harry cleaned up after himself, put on his trunk necklace, and eased himself out of the abandoned café and into the alley. There were some cars in the street, and people on the path.
He almost stepped out in to the street before he paused and reached up to touch his face. Right, that was still a thing. Harry gave himself an aggravated sigh and attached a localized ‘notice me not’ on his face. He ruffled his purple hair, hopped out on the street, and moved on. He had considered self transfiguration, but it wasn’t something he had much practice in. The Auror corps used polyjuice due to ease of upkeep, and relative non-detectability while under the potion. Undercover work was rather rare for them, since Wizards were generally so straightforward. (But Harry had grown up with the idea, it being a common plot point amongst muggle story telling. And Harry could admit to himself that auror work had become tedious and a bit repetitive when that job from the unspeakables had come in to his hands—should have listened to the ‘no’ of his gut, rather than the ‘yes’ from his boredom…)

A stop by the bank had his British Pounds converted to Euros.

A quick stop at the closest clothing store that didn’t look terrifyingly overpriced had him the new owner of a few changes of jeans and long sleeved t-shirts. Harry wore a black long sleeved and blue jeans on the way out. A pair of white sneakers were added to his ensemble soon enough. It took longer than Harry would ever admit to, to find a leather jacket with matching gloves. (Why that was important, he couldn’t put a finger on it. But he had wanted it so he had hunted down a matching set and felt satisfied with himself covered up.)

About halfway through the day Harry dropped his face in to his hands and cursed at himself before he went and got himself a hat to stuff his bright purple hair inside. It helped, even if it didn’t cover all of it.

… he was certainly much more paranoid after that.

He didn’t feel entirely safe, either. But he wasn’t sure if that was the paranoia or his gut talking. So, he immediately went to the train station and booked himself a ticket. Paris to Munich—a nearly six hour train ride that he would be settling in, in about thirty minutes.

A nervous Harry picked up a few sandwiches from one of the little shops in the station and stashed them in the paper bag he had his jeans rolled up in. From there, he found a nice little corner to huddle in as he waited for his time. It was very relaxing to just watch the people walk by, and at the same time it eased his paranoia to see everyone that was within view. If he saw them before they noticed him, all the better.

… it still felt like there was an itch between his shoulder blades.
Harry ate one of his sandwiches to fight off the sleepiness. And to settle his stomach. He had been walking around for hours with just potions in there and it had given him a bit of indigestion. But he felt calmer after the bit of food, and once he noticed the time on the big clock, he was up and jogging for his train.

It was a relief to be on the train, settled in to his seat—and the train moving. Harry grinned to himself as he curled up and leaned against the window to watch the world go by. He felt very safe in this moving metal beast of a train. It had mediocre seats that had him shifting every so often. And it was a bit noisy. And a lot of people were in the train car.

But none of the bad offset the fact that he was moving—he was leaving those crazy people behind and moving to where he wanted to go. The seats were uncomfortable, yes. But Harry had also spent a considerable amount of his life being uncomfortable. His youth as a Dursley ‘undesirable’. His teens as a Ministry ‘undesirable’. And some years of his adult life as an Auror. All of it led to the fact that this was a mild discomfort that he had no problems with.

So much so that he…

He nodded off.

He jerked back to consciousness from the kiss of cool metal to his cheek. His eyes shot open and he locked eyes with dark orbs shadowed under a hat. It was Mr. Chameleon, looming over his curled body with a gun jabbed against his scarred cheek. Harry felt his breath rattle in his chest, his eyes tracking Mr. Chameleon’s finger as he drew back the hammer of his gun.

A mild click.

… it didn’t have the same pizazz of a normal hand pistol. Harry felt his budding panic still. What was this?

“Entschuldigen sie,” a light voice that didn’t match up with Mr. Chameleon’s face filled the air between them. It was like watching a moving photograph and hearing someone lip read the movements out loud. Mr. Chameleon was saying it—but the voice did not match up. Harry frowned, confused. “Entschuldigen sie bitte!” The voice was more insistent now. A tap—

Harry jerked in to a sitting position, eyes wide as he settled on to a woman in uniform. For a few dizzying moments he was thrumming in panic as he tried to spot Mr. Chameleon. A few deep
breaths and the woman’s concerned look had Harry focusing on her. It took a moment to realize what she was asking for, and he fumbled with his little paper book that held his ticket. Harry helpfully opened it up before he passed it over. She checked the time, the dates, and handed it back before scurrying away with speed.

Well, Harry couldn’t blame her. He prodded at his face and mentally sighed as he wiped at the drool. He uncurled from his seat, gently stretching his still exhausted body as he unfurled. The clock in his car stated that the final destination would be in about two hours. Harry slowly stretched his arms over his head and smiled as he heard the leather creak (that was a nice noise, good leather!). He pulled out a sandwich from his bag and pulled his hat lower as he hopped to his feet. Harry felt rather ravenous, and in his relaxed state he wouldn’t deny himself. The sandwich was finished in a few bites and he ambled out of the car to find one of the restrooms.

Urinate. Wash hands. Dry hands. Pull on gloves…

Harry glanced to the door he had locked and took a moment to peer closer in to the mirror of the little bathroom stall. The yellow lights made his skin have a hazy tinge he didn’t care for. But Harry was more focused on his scars as he prodded them and tilted this way and that. Harry wanted to say a few looked a little less awful, but maybe it was just him? Harry peered closer and took a moment to really inspect a dark spot.

A bit of poking and prodding and… “… do… Do I have a lip piercing?” Harry prodded at his lip, checked the inside and found that whatever it was, the hole didn’t go all the way through.

But if he had a lip piercing… Harry inspected his nostrils. His eyebrows (found another spot, although it looked like the hole was still viable?). His ears (left ear, the holes still looked good). Harry stared at his face, and mentally rolled his eyes at himself.

Really? Him? Piercings? It was preposterous.

He still checked his belly button. And his nipples. He sighed in relief to find everything unbothered. Harry didn’t know if he would die from humiliation or not, but was relieved that he wouldn’t have to think of it.

Harry tucked his shirt in and gave himself a once over before he paused.

… he had seen more than enough people today. And, well—a man having their shirt tucked in to
jeans, the way he had his own shirt? He hadn’t seen it, and he had been through so many crowds and stores today. Harry paused before he ran gloved fingers over his stomach. It was comfortable, and it was a fashion he was used to (old fashion—retro fashion, his mind supplied) and he squirmed at the thought of sticking out too much.

He zipped up the black leather of his jacket.

If no one could see it, no one could judge him for it.

A wand in his sleeve, the hat pulled low. He was ready to get that other sandwich from his bag.

Harry looked to himself in the bathroom mirror one last time. His family too green eyes paired with his ridiculous hair stuffed under his hat. Harry reached up and tugged on a few strands. Even though he was in this shoddy light, his hair was still ridiculously purple. Harry trailed leather fingers down, passing over the scar through his eyebrow. Down, down over the fine scar lines over his cheek—to the corner of his lip, where a thick scar had hooked on and bubbled thickly. That was one of the worst.

He missed his own face. He missed his hair, his tan—hell, he even missed the bags under his eyes from sleep deprivation from work. Harry sighed and pressed his leather covered hand against his reflection, blocking out his face as he took a moment to breathe.

Everything was going to be fine. Harry was going to sort himself out. Sort himself, and go on from there. Find all the missing pieces, and then he could pull himself together and be as he should be.

(Not broken. Don’t need to be fixed—just all together again. That’s it…)

He stepped out of the bathroom slowly, meandering down the little hall a ways. He could see the glass door that separated the seated area from the rest of the train. But the closer he got to the doors he had exited through such a short time ago, a curious sensation dug at him. Caused him to slow his steps until he stopped walking. The uneasiness was strong in his stomach, and he moved to the side of the hall before he inched along. Harry pressed his shoulder to the wall next to the door and peered in to the car.

… nothing looked off.
In fact, it looked the same really. Harry shifted from foot to foot as he eyed his surroundings. What was setting him off?

Harry mentally counted to ten before he pressed the button that opened the door and slipped in to the train car.

Ah. There. There was someone sitting in his row now. Harry had had the three seats to himself so far, so it struck him as off when he spotted the second figure. Harry lingered by the door for a second before he padded on over. The new person, a man, had taken up the end seat of the row. Harry didn’t think the man had snooped through his open bag, but he felt a little twitchy. Harry eyed the sprawled legs before he cleared his throat.

No reaction. The man was slumped with his chin on his chest and a hat pulled low.

“Hey… hey! Excuse me.” Harry snapped his fingers and tried to get the man’s attention. But nothing came of that. Harry warred with himself for a long moment before he rolled his eyes at himself. Harry reached out and held on to the headrest of the seat in front of his row and used it to haul himself over the sprawled out body of the person who took up the end of his row. Harry dropped his body in to his seat with a huff. He snatched a sandwich from his bag and choked it down.

He glanced to the man at the end of his row before he reached to his wrist. With careful digging under his sleeve he could just make out the bracelet. Harry eyed it for a long moment, and then his bouncing leg. This train couldn’t move fast enough.

When it finally pulled in to the station Harry wanted, he was eager to be gone. With the train stopped, Harry jumped to his feet, hauled his bag up, and was in the process of squeezing by the man again—when the man jerked. Harry yelled as he got tangled and spilled in to the aisle between seat rows. Harry groaned as he slowly rolled on to his side. His legs were free to move, and Harry pushed himself up so he was sitting. And so he could scowl at the stranger.

An Asian man—he reminded Harry of Cho, sheepishly waved at him. “Sorry,” the man murmured, his English was American accented. “My bad,” he added.

Harry kept the disgruntled face a moment longer before he sighed and let it go. The Chinese man was standing and offering a hand up. Harry didn’t feel wary for it, so he accepted the help up. “Is your head okay?” The man asked, and Harry automatically reached back to rub the back of his head. He didn’t remember if his head had hit anything on the way down. “Should I take a look?” The man offered.
Harry shook his head and ducked down to pick up his hat and his bag.

“My name is Longwei—what’s yours?” The man, Longwei, asked.

“Um—it’s Harry.” Harry blinked up at Longwei, before his eyes naturally followed the rather long braid of black hair back down to the Chinese man’s waist. “And my head is fine. Don’t feel a thing.” Harry shoved his hat back on and shuffled out of the way.

Longwei smoothly stepped out in to the aisle. “Are you visiting Germany as well?” The man asked, shifting to walk out of the car to head for the main doors. Harry cocked his head to the side, before he shrugged to himself and followed Longwei out of the train and on to the station platform.

“Yes, just for a bit. Till I figure out where I’m going next.” Harry hadn’t really thought too hard about it, but he supposed that it was what he would end up doing.

Longwei nodded, “being a traveler—at such a young age! That must be exciting.” He prompted Harry, reaching out to gently elbow Harry’s shoulder. He was certainly magnetic, Harry decided. Harry felt content to have the Chinese man in his space, which really didn’t happen too often (especially after the whole final battle with Voldemort and all the events that led up to it… and then Auror training—he was scarred. That was it really).

“I’m not that young…” Harry muttered.

“Oh? How old are you then?” Longwei cheerily asked as he made for one of the stairs. Harry, already meaning to go to the stairs he could leave, followed along.

It was a simple question, really. And Harry scrambled for an answer? His real age from birth to now? The years he had lived? Well, it didn’t take much thought to realize that one of those answers was going to be completely ridiculous.

“Twenty-eight, can’t you tell?” Harry wrinkled his nose and looked away from Longwei. The crowds weren’t so bad, especially as it was so late. All he could spot were exhausted looking business dressed people as they shuffled on.
A touch to the scar that crawled out of the corner of his mouth had Harry slapping the offending hand away the moment he felt it. (Bloodragedeathburnitburnit!) Harry turned to lock eyes with Longwei, who looked startled and apologetic and that was just enough to have Harry jerking himself back to control. Of stopping his intent to stomp the other in to the ground.

“Sorry—I’m told I’m, um… the English word might be ‘intrusive’?” He offered, rubbing at the hand that Harry had slapped away.

Harry didn’t apologize for the sting.

Longwei should appreciate the fact that Harry hadn’t followed through with a punch.

Longwei blinked down at Harry, gave Harry a little trembling smile, “I’m a bit nervous, you see. My German isn’t that good. And, well—never been to Europe before. So… I do apologize. I’m a bit out of sorts.” Harry inwardly squirmed, because he could just feel that shy awkwardness that was begging to shine through. This man reminded Harry of Neville.

“Forget about it. Anyway, do you know where you’re going?” Harry didn’t really accept the apology, but he was sure he could form something of a truce before shoving the man off.

Longwei was back to his infectious smile. “Would you mind sticking around till I stumble to my hotel? I’d appreciate. I’m a bit dead on my feet.”

Harry shrugged before he nodded. Might as well—he had nowhere else he rather needed to be. It would be his good deed of the day. Longwei looked rather pleased with the agreement and took point to lead Harry out of the train station, chatting about things to see in Germany. Apparently Longwei had a mild obsession with castles (Neuschwanstein castle, Linderhof palace, Schwetzingen castle…) and other such things.

“Come with me!” Longwei invited Harry.

Harry hedged a proper answer with a ‘maybe’, but that seemingly just invited Longwei to throw more invitations in Harry’s face to the point where, after a taxi ride (Longwei paid), Harry was about ready to crawl in to a bed and sleep.

Well, he had escorted Longwei to his hotel… might as well get a room since he was already here.
“This hotel serves breakfast, right?” Harry asked, rubbing at his eyes. When he lowered them and looked back to Longwei, he saw the expected beam that he knew was coming from his question and the other implied fact that he wanted to get a room here.

“Yes! I checked ahead. Breakfast served between six in the morning until nine in the morning.” Longwei played with the strap of his messenger bag, glancing over to Harry through his eyelashes before he looked away from Harry and down to his shoes as he shuffled in place.

The hotel was nice. It looked modest and clean. Which were bonus points for Harry.

“I’m not sure when I’ll be up. But if you’re around we could have breakfast together.” Harry mentally sighed. He felt a little obligated to keep the smile on this man’s face (so much like Neville—making Neville sad was like kicking a wounded Hippogriff).

(Or a dragon—)

Harry watched Longwei’s hand this time as the man reached over and gave Harry’s shoulder a brief squeeze. “I’d really like that. Thanks Harry! I have something to look forward to tomorrow.” Harry shuffled for a moment before he stepped away from Longwei’s warm hand.

“Yeah. Right. If we happen to be down at the same time. I’m really tired.” Harry couldn’t help but quirk a smile at Longwei’s enthusiastic goodnight before walking off to the elevators. Harry himself turned to the front desk. Harry blinked at the key that was already waiting out for him. The person—man, woman?—behind the desk had their dark hood up and their head pillowed on their arms. They held a hand out.

“One hundred and thirty euros a night—take the key.” The… man? Harry really couldn’t tell, muttered in to the arm his head was pillowed on.

“Um… how…?” Harry trailed off. How did the man know he needed a room?

“You’re loud.” The maybe man hissed, and open and closed a fist in Harry’s general direction.

Harry shrugged after a moment, counted out his notes, and pressed exact change in to the waiting
hand. “Thanks, um…?” Harry trailed off, hoping to prompt a name so that he could at least identity a gender.

“Don’t mention it.” The desk worker dropped his hand, and didn’t move.

Right… Harry stared before he reached out and picked up the key. He checked the tag—third floor, room fifteen. Harry glanced once more to the desk worker before he turned on his heel and moved to the elevator. Harry muffled a yawn in to his hand as he pressed the call button for the elevator with his knee. With that, he waited in a tired quiet that followed him into the elevator. He held the doors for a blond woman and together they started up for the third floor. Harry glanced to her out of the corner of his eye.

The woman stood ramrod straight, in what Harry could identify as a parade rest or some sort from the military. Her hair was blond, but upon closer look, it appeared to be a wig? She had brown eyes that were focused on the number displayed inside the elevator. She had on some kind of cloth doctor mask over her mouth and nose. The kind that people wore when they were feeling a little ill.

Harry realized he had been staring too long when her head started to turn to look at him.

Harry quickly looked away, and let out a little relieved sigh when it was his floor. Harry jogged out of the elevator, glad that the woman didn’t leave with him. He found his room easily enough and hurried inside. He felt itchy, standing outside in the hallway and was glad to shut and lock the door behind himself.

He took a deep breath and let it out slow, and then flicked on the lights. Harry eyed the little hallway, cautiously checking the small luggage closet. Harry peeked in to the bathroom across from the closet. It was a very cramped space with white tile and no natural light. Harry was already balking before he caught himself (when had he gotten so… like Draco Malfoy?) and shook his head at himself. Harry closed the bathroom door and walked in to the main space.

A quick glance over before Harry started to lay his protective enchantments down. Silencio. Notice me not. Colloportus on the door. Harry added a few more general wards that wouldn’t take much power before he considered it a job well done. It was nice being aware enough to actually ward and protect where he was going to sleep for the night.

It was certainly not like the last hotel he was in. The carpet was short and a dark blue, which did admittedly look nice compared to the white-peach of the walls. There was one piece of hotel art sitting above the twin sized bed that, if Harry squinted at the modern art, looked a bit like a river. There was also a television.
… Harry couldn’t help but be a bit disturbed by the television. He padded over to it and ran his hands over the edges. There was just so much… missing! The thick backing was gone. It was flat! “Dudley probably would have had tantrums for weeks just to get this…” And it was in a hotel room! That was a bit crazy. Harry paused and waved a hand behind the television, just to make sure it wasn’t an optical illusion.

Holding the controller in his hand felt forbidden.

He had to check with the little instruction card next to the television before he was able to get it on. The volume was nonexistent, but he fumbled around until he found the little ‘plus’ and ‘minus’ signs. He focused on button pressing until he could understand the words—English. Harry hummed, a little wondering at that and it didn’t take long to get the menu up. Apparently the last guest had left it on this setting then? Harry watched the movie for a moment longer (they sounded American) before he started to just press the channel changing button.

Harry didn’t know how long he just kept going. Nothing really catching his eye about it, but was a bit unwilling to just turn it off now that he had complete access to a television with no one to yell at him for it. It was a bit boring, Harry came to realize. Boring, but he still was determined to enjoy it.

Until he found a news station.

“…and the death toll continues to rise as the London fires spread. As it was covered earlier, it was 1666 the last time London faced such a crisis by fire. The narrow streets of London are ill suited for stopping fire. Evacuations have been thorough, but the initial surprise took hundreds of lives. Entire apartment buildings going up in rapid smoke. London burning has sparked an outcry against wooden homes—and against fire protection services the longer the blaze continues to ran rampant…” The woman at the desk spoke clearly with crisp English enunciation. Harry’s eyes trailed down watched the thin banner at the bottom of the screen as it started to list districts, the death toll and—

Harry felt his stomach heave. In seconds he was in front of the toilet, losing what little there was there to his gagging. His body trembled in the aftermath, and Harry didn’t bother to lift his head up as he reached up and pressed the full flush button.

He could still hear the news, even in here.

“… it is feared that this burning will last longer than the five day 1666 burning of London. City officials had requested emergency aid, and the UN has granted it…”
Harry took a shuddering breath, glad he hadn’t bothered with the bathroom light.

“… the origin of the blaze has been identified to have started in two places. One, being in Whitehall. The other….”

Families. He had ruined families in his rage. Harry shifted his head where it leaned against the edge of the toilet and stared down at his leather covered hands. His hands were covered in ashes and blood, now. The blood had been there previously, of course. The ashes were a new thing.

The rage that welled up was sudden, so sudden that Harry found himself choking on it.

The voice on the television warped—until a nice little pop rung through the air. Harry blinked around tears and lifted his head up. Did he smell… smoke? Harry took a moment to rinse out his mouth in the bathroom sink before he walked out of the bathroom to catch the television on fire.

“… shit.” Harry stared at it for a moment before he flicked his wand in to hand from his sleeve and smothered the flame in magic.

The television set was a little… melted.

“… maybe the Dursleys did me a service, here.” Harry mumbled to himself, still riding on the coattails of the horror of London burning to really ponder on what he was saying. Maybe he was just not allowed the nice muggle inventions of the future.

…. He was going to have to pay for that, wasn’t he? Harry sighed and dropped face first in to bed. A blind flick of his wand had the lights going out and the windows opening up to carry the small amount of smoke away before the fire alarms caught it. It would be just his luck if that alarm started to scream. Harry didn’t know how long he laid face down on the bed, because all he could focus on was the mental scream in his head as he chanted numbers to himself. Imagine the fiendfyre he had let loose in London as it ate away the walls of apartment buildings and gobbled up entire families. Imagined them screaming and screaming and screaming—

Ginny hadn’t screamed. Her face two dimensional flat and ever loving. The last seconds of his sight had been the fire arching around him in a dome, intent to swallow him whole as it licked its greedy fingers over the edges of Ginny’s portrait.
But she had only had eyed for him. Smiling and loving and wreathed in flames.

Harry squeezed his eyes shut, unable to make himself look away from the memory in front of his eyes. He could smell it—smell it, feel it, breathe it, and he was choking on it all. Ginny, his precious Ginny.

… she is dead.

Harry didn’t even know when she died. But her portrait was dead now, too.

If he had stayed his hand, he would have been able to keep her, at least for a little while. Enough to talk. To discuss the absent years between them. If only he had kept himself calm. If he had found another way! He didn’t need to set fire to the department of mysteries! There had to have been another way!

A sob ripped through him, and Harry clenched his teeth to stop the other one from coming out.

He had done this to himself.

Irrationally, all he could think about was the list. The one stapled to the front entrance of his home. It had started out as a bit of parchment that Luna had given them, of places she had seen that she told him he should take Ginny to. It had started off as five places. Spain. China. Australia… and two more. Two more, his reaching memory grasped at it. Hawaii was definitely one. And France (Harry choked a laugh and bit down on his leather encased hand). The list hadn’t stayed small for long, though. Over the years, whenever Harry or Ginny heard of a new place they would scribble on a new location. James and Albus gamely started to add to it as well when they were old enough. Lily had added animals she wanted to see rather than places and—

And none of that would ever happen.

Because Ginny was dead. His children old and dying.

And Harry as he was.
He and Ginny were supposed to travel together after she retired from quidditch. They were going to try for another child together. They were going to watch their children graduate Hogwarts together. They were going to see their children married off. They were going to travel the world together.

They were going to grow old.

Together.

The air burned on the way in, what little managed to squeeze past the clench of his throat. Harry wheezed, fighting to keep the sobs in as he ripped at his own hands. Desperately, he tried to claw his thoughts back in to place. It was too much, it was too much he was going to rip himself apart. He couldn’t breathe, he couldn’t breathe!

… that nameless child that would never be.

Harry wouldn’t want to make them the child of a mass murderer.

Harry didn’t know what did it, really. What tipped him over the edge. He came back to himself and his ripped hands and aching body and a damaged hotel room. Holes in the wall. The curtains ripped to shreds. He had trashed the place. Harry took a few shuddering breaths. The dawn was breaking outside his window and he felt—

Raw.

Harry shifted and dug his fingers in to the center of pain in his shoulder.

Everything slowly shifted back in to place. His thoughts crept back in to logical order. His throat loosened up. His body slowly relaxed and he blinked away the image of Ginny, wreathed in flames and consumed alive—

Harry felt the tears drip down his face. Hot and too heavy. He felt them on the outside, but his head was terribly clear and not feeling much of anything. Harry looked to his bloody hands once again. The room at large… and laid down on the bed again.
When he woke up once more, the afternoon sun was hot on his body. His face was sticky with things he’d rather not think about—and his hands burned. Harry glanced down to his hands and… found them bloody, but whole. Harry wiggled his fingers in front of his face and felt everything twinge. Harry didn’t move for a long moment before he had his wand in hand.

Windows shut. Curtains fixed and drawn.

Harry repaired the holes in the wall. The huge rips of the carpet. The shattered mirror and sink. He methodically paced through the hotel and fixed his small rampage. When done, he stood for a moment and took it all in.

Was this going to be his life now?

Wandering from hotel to hotel until he ran out of money? What then?

All of his future plans had been *(rippedburnedclawedconsumed)* taken away. There was nothing left there but the wake of his wife and children.

Harry dug his fingers in to the burn of his shoulder again, and let the pain center himself.

Pain was fine. Pain was good. It was familiar.

Harry fished in to his sleeve and pulled out the bracelet again. He silently enlarged it so it was more of a giant belt than a bracelet. Harry placed it on the bed and sat down on the floor. “Decades of life are here…” Harry ran his fingers over a cluster of stoppered vials. This was what he got, instead of his family. This is what he experienced instead of the plan he had made with Ginny.

This was all that was left.

Harry bit down on his lip, irritated at the sudden welling of tears as he focused on his memories. His body ached, and his stomach clenched. But over those physical demands, Harry felt like he needed this more. He needed to find out something. So he ignored his body and peered at all the vials and clusters. There were colored dots on the side of vials. In all the colors of the rainbow. Some vials had multiple dots. Some had single ones. There was even a vial or two with no dots.
Whatever system Frank had developed for this, Harry had a suspicious feeling that he would not be able to figure it out. Harry imagined that if things had gone to plan for Frank, Frank would have been spoon feeding him memories for years.

In the end, Harry had to pick again at random.

A cluster of ten. He disengaged it from the belt and unrolled all the vials until they were in a neat little row on his bed. Harry took the vial from the far left end and uncorked it. With his wand in hand, he scooped up the memory and pressed it back to his temple.

He didn’t relive his memory, per say.

It was more like suddenly remembering a moment of déjà vu. Of remembering something that hadn’t really been forgotten, but merely slipped a little to the left and out of direct thought. Harry set the vial down, closing his eyes as he really focused on the sensation He felt… wind—in his hair. The memory of it. The slight trembling of his body—a motorcycle. Just… driving. With intent. But whatever the intent was, it was missing from the vial.

Harry cracked a small smile, the feeling of freedom easing the clench of his body.

Another.

The beaches of Madrid. Harry had gone. Even though it was without Ginny, the blinding blue of the water made his heart tremble. He hoped Ginny had gone without him. Maybe had taken their children and gone together. She would have loved it.

Another.

Canada? Forests. So many forests. And moose. Moose were exciting. Lily would have adored that.

Another.
Harry’s heart leapt in to his throat as he remembered a motorcycle crash. The ramp—his tire had popped and he lost control and he had flown… in the air… and crashed with his motorcycle. His body shuddered and he eyed the vial in his hand as he remembered the distinct feeling of metal slamming him in to rock hard dirt and the roar of a crowd and the crack-crack-cracking of his helmet and—

Harry let out a slow breath.

… it wasn’t fear that was shaking his body.

Adrenalin.

He wanted on a motorbike. Harry shivered and tried to control himself over the sudden need to be on a motorbike and screaming through the streets on it.

Harry eyed the remaining vials. And then looked over his shoulder to the door. And then the vials.

… waiting a little bit wouldn’t hurt anyone.

The next vial had him in a café, Harry could barely recall strawberry milk and cake—and he promised himself he would find a café and try the meal again.

Another—it was Mr. Chameleon. Harry stared down at the plain duvet of the bed as the memory wormed itself back in to place and… and it was Mr. Chameleon. At a table with others. Harry felt his body doing a nervous clench. The man looked the same in his hazy memory as he had the day or so before. Sure, his suit was all black now instead of pinstripes. But the sunshine gold Mr. Chameleon used as an accent color was a bit… unmistakable. And it tickled at Harry’s memory.

At something that wasn’t there.

Harry frowned. “… am I missing something?” Was he missing something by just shoving them back in place? Harry raised his eyes and looked at the large unshrunken belt again. That was a lot of memories to go through. And Harry wondered if he was missing details.
“… maybe I should get a pensive?” He wondered. But those were rare.

The last one he knew about was the one Dumbledore used.

At Hogwarts.

Harry hummed. Quietly he picked up the last vial and uncorked it.

A few seconds later he wished he hadn’t. The whirl of violence in his mind was incomprehensible. People, looming over him and kicking him when he was down and—

Harry snarled, but jumped when the vial in his hand shattered (did he just shatter an unbreakable charm?) and his wand shot out warning sparks. Harry opened his hands and let everything fall out. He focused on breathing, opening and shutting his hands over and over again to calm himself down. Harry viciously scrubbed at the memory to try and find an identity. But everything was a muddled green of a helmet visor. He had obviously been attacked—it seemed by two figured. But without the magic of a pensive, he couldn’t exactly stand back and see everything from an objective view.

(It’s okay, it’s okay! It’s just play—Harry recoiled from the thought. Violence was not play!)

Harry waved his wand over the vial, and despondently watched it twitch and not repair itself. Harry ended up just banishing the mess. He rubbed at his face, and still found it disgusting. He packed up his memories and charmed them in to place. Although this time he lengthened it and cinched it in to place around his neck. He had marks on his wrist from the necklace, so hopefully this would be less pressure.

He needed to get out.

(Why did he have to escape everything all the time? Harry was not like this before, and he hated it. He hated himself. He hated everything with a burning—)

Harry sighed and ambled in to a shower, and fell in to some new clothes.

Okay. First some shoes (leather—to match the jacket and gloves). Then a café. And then he’d find
somewhere to unshrink his motorcycle and just go. Harry, freshly cleaned, shrank his paper bag of clothes and stuffed it in to a zipper pocket. He eyed the melted television and grimaced. He couldn’t exactly fix that with magic. Or at least, he couldn’t fix it.

He was going to…

…. The maybe man at the desk hadn’t taken his name or information. Only his money.

Harry stared at the television as a slow growing realization grew in the back of his mind. Wait. Wait—they were supposed to ask for a name, right? Didn’t hotel staff ask for that information in case of damages? Harry felt the storm inside of his head still down.

Back to survival mode.

Harry slowly glanced to the door. He edged closer and peered out of the peephole.


No… no…

Wait.

“Revelio—“ Nothing. The spell revealed nothing but his instincts just wouldn’t settle back down.

A trap—was it Frank? Then why… why…

Harry was at the window before he could even think. He slammed it up and was halfway out of the window before the world blurred and he was on his back in the middle of the hotel room. Harry groaned at the sudden weight on his middle. And the iron grasp on his wrists as they were forced to the ground above his head. Harry kicked out, wiggled—but he was rather pinned.

It was the crazy blond man.
“Skull—hey—seriously what the fuck is with the windows?” The man scowled. And Harry stilled when he noticed the rather large rifle strung over the man’s chest.

Harry refused to answer, and yanked at his arms and tried to squirm out of the blonde’s grasp. The man did have the advantage of weight and position, though. Harry was about to advance to another technique to get himself away when the blond cracked and—

“Did they pull your eyes out too?” The man’s face was bloodless and his eyes looked like they were filled with blue fire. Harry went still as he really took in the man.

And finally, “no, they did not.”

“But you know what they did. To the both of us?” The blond shifted, leaning forward and more directly over Harry. Harry felt the man’s thighs squeezing at his chest (inside, he was calm-calm and screaming) and noted that the man was shifting Harry’s wrists so that they were right next to Harry’s ears.

Why was he even responding to this man? “Yes…” Harry trailed off. He knew what they had done. They had drugged the blond. Tried to rip out his brain for some obscure experimentation that had been meant for Harry. And Harry had had his mind tampered with and stolen.

“Tell me.” The blond man’s voice was strangled.

(Tell him. Tell him—tell him—tell him tell him—)

“No!” Harry thrashed, refused the voice and the blond. He was not going to be bullied in to anything. Harry watched the small tremble of vulnerability fade. Watched the blond harden up and Harry could swear he heard the creak of his wrist bones.

“Why?” The man begged, his looming so far and face so close Harry couldn’t look away from the blue fire in the man’s true blue eyes.

So many reasons. So many.
(I don’t want to—Harry admitted that to himself. You can’t make me do anything.)

The silence spoke well enough.

“Please.” Somehow, this begging was worse. This man did not seem the type to say ‘please’. And it rubbed Harry the wrong way just to hear it. “I caught you, so you have to tell me.”

Harry had been warming up to the idea of telling until that last statement.

‘Catch me if you can’—the phrase echoed back to Harry, and he squinted up at the blond. Right, he had said that to Mr. Chameleon, hadn’t he? Which meant that Mr. Chameleon had informed the rest of his group about it. And that meant…

Harry grinned, and was a little gleeful at the startled look that crossed the blonde’s face.

“Well—you have got me pinned… but can you keep me?” Harry felt… excited.

This was familiar. This was safe. This was good. (Let’s play a game!)

“I bet you can’t.” Harry added as he tilted his head to the side.

Harry could feel the man drawing up.

Accio! Harry wiggled his fingers.

The man yelled when the half melted television set landed in his head. Harry huffed at the sudden crush of face in to his neck and he used the surprise to roll them so Harry was on top.

Harry head-butted the man. Harry didn’t hear the crunch of bone, but the man’s nose certainly started to bleed. Harry mentally cursed while the man started to shout obscenities—he hadn’t let go of Harry’s wrists!
The sound of a gun cocking.

Harry darted forward and bit a finger of the man’s hand—blondie yowled and clenched down harder with his hands. Honestly! (Harry had just a tiny smidgen of respect for this…) Harry got his feet under and jumped, rolling over blondie’s head and huffing when the bullet missed him and tore in to the television on the floor.

It shattered.

And sparked. The sparks landed on blondie in a shower, and Harry grinned when blondie finally let go. Harry rolled and dived for the door—and at the last minute remembered that he had charmed the door shut. Right. Well. Harry dived in to the bathroom to avoid the bullets that littered the door.

*Alohomora duo!*

Harry let a pleased huff as the lock clicked and he made another dive for the door, out of the bathroom. He had the door yanked open and was falling in to the hall when a hand clamped down on the collar of his leather jacket.

“Ack—!” Harry’s hands slammed in to the doorway, followed by a foot to prevent himself from being yanked back in.

“Lackey!” Mr. Chameleon’s snarl was the stuff of nightmares. Harry could feel the shudder his body did all the way down his bones as another arm snaked around his middle and actually picked him up—

Harry was an adult, damnit.

But if there were two hands on him, the asshole couldn’t sneak another sedative in to him. Harry clutched at the doorframe, and mentally shrieked at the inhuman strength the man had.

The doorframe was actually cracking.
Mr. Chameleon took in a sharp breath through his nose, Harry could hear the whistle of it by his ear. The hand near strangling Harry with his collar let go. Harry could see it approaching out of the corner of his eye toward the hand Harry had gripping the doorframe. Harry struck, letting go of the frame to blindly backhand the face behind his shoulder.

… that was a sound of pure rage that Harry received for that. (*Meep—not good!*)

Harry wasn’t done. His hands descended to the iron band around his middle that he was sure others would call an arm. Harry viciously jabbed his fingers hard in to Mr. Chameleon’s wrist and inner elbow even as Mr. Chameleon retaliated and slammed Harry’s head in to the door.

Hah. Harry was used to head slamming. He had hit harder things.

Harry fell forward and out of the weakened arm and he was sprinting down the hall—

The hall forked. To the left was the blond woman. The face mask from the night before gone and—that way was no good. Harry tumbled in to the stairwell and jumped over the railing and let himself drop.

He landed on the ground floor and rolled with it. He could hear the door slamming above his head, but he was already out in to the lobby. Which was insanely crowded. Harry had almost made it to the door when a hand clamped down on his shoulder and he shrieked, flailing and running face first in to the glass lobby doors.

“Harry!” Oh… it was Longwei.

Harry panted, cheek pressed to the door as he stared at Longwei, who stared at him.

“What—“ the man started. His eyes terribly calm for such a surprised and worried face.

“Gotta go. Nice meeting you!” Harry slipped away from the man’s grasping hand and call of ‘wait!’ and was out on the streets. Harry sprinted through five alleys, no less than six shops, and had charmed himself with a disillusionment charm and crouched between some garbage bins.
Harry pressed his face against his knees to hide the grin.

He needed that.

This would be a nice game. Who would win first? Harry, in his race to regain his memories. Or the… Arcobaleno? In their race to capture Harry?

And… and what was that on his knee?

Harry canceled the charm, and then started at the green chameleon on his knee. Both of its eyes were fixated on Harry.

Hey… wasn’t that…?

Harry felt the chill over the back of his neck and slowly looked to the open mouth of the alley as the black suited Mr. Chameleon appeared from around the corner, in his hand was what looked like… a small square? Electronics? Harry glanced down to the chameleon and to the little band around his neck. To the small red light that was blinking.

So tricky!

Harry scooped up the chameleon and ran.

Wait… why did he grab the chameleon?

Harry ran out of the alley and down the street. At his first chance he slowed enough to gently drop the chameleon on a low wall and continued on. He swore he felt the ghost of a hand at his back. Harry didn’t glance over his shoulder, but glancing to the side, to the mirrored walls of a business building, he could see Mr. Chameleon right behind him.

Right. No good.

Harry tried his tricks—throwing stuff in to the path. But whatever he threw, Mr. Chameleon would
jump over it. Even with the help of magic to throw stuff in the way. Harry eventually resorted to swan diving in to a thick crowd, knocking people down and ducking behind a flurry of bodies— oops, there goes the hat—and Harry weaved through the crowd of yelling and ducked around the corner and—

Slammed face first in to a brick wall.

Not pleasant.

Harry felt the burn of rough brick at his cheek. The body pressed against his back and the fingers around his throat and his wrist. Harry peered over his shoulder.

The chameleon peered back. And the black eyes of Mr. Chameleon was there too.

“… you’re rather good.” Harry admitted.

“I’m the best, you charlatan.” Mr. Chameleon hissed between controlled breaths.

“Not a charlatan—I don’t have any music to go with my insane luck.” Harry huffed a laugh, and hissed at the bend of his arm as Mr. Chameleon twisted it. “What’re you the best at?” Harry chattered, hoping to delay and distract as he scrambled for an escape plan.

“… do you really not remember…?” The words were soft, and Harry stilled, just to hear the man speak. “All that we went through… is it gone? Like your past?”

Harry wrinkled his nose, doing his best to crane his head to the side so he could see Mr. Chameleon’s blank face.

“My past isn’t gone,” Harry huffed. “Who are you to me?”

It was a miniscule realization Harry could see over the man’s face. So small that Harry didn’t even want to put a name to whatever had gone on behind those dark eyes.
… it was a trade then. The past for the future. Did you know those men, who spirited you and Colonnello away?" The man was so warm, like a fire pressed against his back. Harry hated the fact that it was relaxing him as much as it was making his skin crawl.

“No,” Harry huffed, and his breath hitched when his wrist was twisted to the near breaking point.

He man leaned forward until Harry couldn’t see his face, and breathed in to Harry’s ear, “I can smell lies.”

… with all the weird shit that happened to Harry, Harry wasn’t disinclined to believe that.

“… yes. In a way.” Harry admitted, a plan forming in his head. These people were so careful with him. Mr. Chameleon only pushed him to the point of near breaking, but never actually broke him.

“What do they want with you?” Mr. Chameleon continued on.

“Probably my life,” Harry humored, and jerked his arm—the hot paint of his wrist braking had him whimpering, and the hand on his wrist jerking away. Harry pushed off the wall with his other hand, slamming back in to Mr. Chameleon’s chest and then ducking away. Harry almost escaped the hand around his neck, but Mr. Chameleon lunged and took them down. Harry’s head was ringing from the collusion in to the ground.

That was enough head hits for the day.

“Skull—!”

“Not my name.” Harry hissed, and out of Mr. Chameleon’s sight Harry jabbed the tip of his wand in to Mr. Chameleon’s belly.

_Stupefy!_

The man flopped back in a small flash bang of scarlet light, eyes shut. The chameleon was scrambling from his home on the tie to Mr. Chameleon’s face. And Harry couldn’t help the guilty clench of his gut as he sat up, cradling his wrist to his chest. “It’s okay—he is just unconscious for a
“moment.” Harry added as he used his wand to set and immobilize his wrist. It was a manageable (and albeit familiar) pain. He broke this wrist pretty often actually… pain that had him up and crouched next to Mr. Chameleon. The Chameleon was curled around Mr. Chameleon’s neck and Harry checked to make sure there wasn’t any lasting damage.

…and he couldn’t help but tug on one of those ridiculous side burns and watch it spring back in to place.

There had to be magic or something with these side burns.

Harry rolled on to his feet and set up a mild protection ward around the prone figure before he continued on his way. Well, he was going to continue on his way before he spotted the ridiculous fedora that Mr. Chameleon had been wearing. The hat had flown off when Harry had spelled him. Harry paused, glanced to Mr. Chameleon… and stuck the hat on his own head. The spell will wear away in time, so Harry was content to leave the man behind (and if he was gleeful over the thieving of the hat, Harry wouldn’t deny that).

Harry moved a few blocks over before he found a nice, hidden spot. Hidden enough that he opened his trunk and fetched the motorcycle. Harry had the trunk small again and on his necklace before he slipped on to the motorcycle. It turned on. The paint job was all scratched, but it appeared to be working.

Harry revved the engine.

And took off.

The wind in his hair was soothing. The world blurring by was great.

Nothing could catch him now.

Chapter End Notes

So. Main question for you guys... do you want shipping? I'd rather it be unanimous amongst you guys before I do anything. I'm more than content to write without any shipping of anyone. But if you guys want it, go ahead and comment about it along with your preferred pairing. Even if it doesn't make it in to the story, I might do a one shot or
an AU or something in the future for it.

This chapter didn't want to be written, plus my insanely crazy week. So here if the chapter finally. I hope I caught any mistakes. And I hope it lives up to your expectations.

I didn't get to replying to all of the reviews. But I did read them all. Thank you. I loved each and every one of them.

And do you guys want to see more Potter Children?
And did you like Longwei? (Not an OC, FYI.)

And Reborn thinks he knows things. So let's see what the world's greatest does with his assumptions. Can you guys guess what he is thinking?

Thanks for reading!
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Two weeks later, and Harry follows his whims and memories. Having an Octopus isn't so bad as a pet. At least he has someone to talk to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 10

It had been exactly fourteen days since his last run in with the Arcobaleno. His shoulder was healed, although a little discolored. It had taken him seven days before he actually figured out some method to the memories. The vials with the most color codes to them held the most fractured and incomplete memories inside. Memories that had to be paired with other memories to become complete. Harry never even realized all the things that he did know, but couldn’t actively know—until he had returned all the topic relevant memories to his head.

So many languages.

Pro motorbike riding. (The idea of doing those jumps again made him dizzy and too excited for words.)

Lock picking.

… bombs. (Misslesrocketscannonsairship?)

(In any case—he now had all the skills and knowledge he needed to fix up his bike and keep it running.)

The more he had learned, the more unsure he became over everything that made up his future self. If Harry wasn’t so determined to realize every aspect of himself—if he had other things to focus on, he was sure he would have stopped.
The violence was almost normal now. The more he uncovered, the more... he didn’t feel one way or another about the violence. The violence others did to him. The violence he had showered on others. Harry wasn’t exactly blameless, and more often than not he couldn’t even call himself a victim when he instigated his own beat downs. Was he a masochist? Why did he do these things?

How could the others in that strange little group stand aside and let it happen?

(Didn’t they see a cry for help?)

It was such a headache, going through things out of order.

The most joy he got was realizing past meals that he loved, and then going out to try them again just to realize he did like it. He liked avocado on toast. He liked lentils. He adored cake. And the drinks—so many beverages that were region specific that he was just dying to really travel on. The whole world was literally just waiting for him.

Or it was... until...

Until he stumbled on to a future that never was. To a death that didn’t happen but it did. Harry didn’t know what led up to that moment of death. And neither did he know exactly what happened directly afterward. But the fighting for his life—

And that led to now. Harry morosely poked at the bag of fish he had. He had set himself up in a little apartment in Hamburg. He had meant to continue on, to continue to somewhere else. But this felt as good of a spot as any to stay for a little. He had set Oodako (precious, loving, with an initially hard to pronounce name that he had to actually practice before his natural accent finally lessened up a bit that it didn’t sound wrong—) up in the middle of the studio apartment that he had, and had spent his days reviewing memories and eating whatever he fancied.

This was now. Him living completely in the present. And it just felt pointless. Like he was festering. He didn’t much care for it. But he also didn’t much feel like leaving either. Harry shifted and dropped another fish in to the tank for Oodako. Harry closed up the top of the bag filled with water and fish with his fingers and shifted so he sat on his rear with his legs crossed.
He watched the octopus start a lively little chase after the fish. “Tomorrow, would you want some shrimp?” Harry looked away from the octopus and eyed the little home he had inevitably created. Harry had transfigured a little wooden chest, and as promised he had filled it with twenty shiny galleons. He had seen Oodako play with them from time to time, so he hoped that the little octopus was happy.

And hopefully happy with the glass jar he had tossed in once he had eaten all the caviar that was inside. He had eaten caviar and crackers with avocado for days (it was so damn good), and had the brilliant idea of cleaning out the jar and lid and settling it inside. Harry swore his smart little octopus actually used that jar to count his galleons, or perhaps was just using the jar to help with the counting. “I’d hate to eat the same thing over and over again, so hopefully a little change up would be nice, yeah… Oodako?” Harry smiled and wiggled his fingers at Oodako when the octopus slowed to look at Harry.

Harry watched those tentacles move in time with the wiggle of his fingers.

It had always puzzled him why Oodako had moved in time with his fingers. The memories hadn’t really cleared up the why, so much as the knowledge that the octopus used it as a command. So Harry cinched the bag closed once more with a proper tie and set it in to a bucket at his hip. He raised his hands and practiced. He would help Oodako catch this fish! Harry had fumbled through this a few times already, but now he had it a bit down to an art. They caught the fish together in five minutes, and Harry let his hands drop out of view so Oodako could eat in peace.

Harry had read through his octopus care book—started it two days after living here and no one had suddenly shown up to try and take him away. Harry hadn’t done much with his time other than memory absorption and caring for Oodako. There were some plus sides (finally starting through his memories, plus a happy octopus), as well as some down sides (learning that he had broken the law so thoroughly with illegal muggle substances that, as a muggle raised boy, he should have known—should have known—should have—should have—should have, at one point it made him sick (not withdrawals, not withdrawals nonono)).

And it all led to now.

To the memory from the morning.

“I died, Oodako. Again. Somehow? It seems like a constant thing for me. Dying for others...” Harry murmured, eyes watching the octopus push the half a fish in to its mouth. Although its eyes were focused on Harry, so Harry was rather sure that Oodako was listening. “Did they even appreciate it? Did they even care?” Because Harry might not have all of the information, but this memory had been startlingly clear behind his eyes. Burned in to place like the horror it was. Of course, it wasn’t completely crystal clear, with small swaths of blankness and jumps in the memory. Harry attributed it
to the trauma of fighting for his life and then actually dying again and again—

When Harry had finally admitted to Ron and Hermione what he had done (a whole year after the battle of Hogwarts and more than a bit hammered) after that first death, they had cried. Hell, it had made Harry cry, just watching them cry. Even now, Harry felt the tears pooling. Harry sniffled to himself, and when Oodako drifted to the glass closest to Harry and stuck himself, Harry reached out and pressed his hand against the glass. There might be a barrier between them, but Harry understood the sentiment.

“I guess I’ll find out soon enough. If they cared.” Harry let his hand drop, and leaned back on his hands as he took in the empty apartment. He had a small sleeping bag and mat off to the side with an inflatable pillow. A bit of foodstuff in the small kitchen. And a few cleaning things in the cupboard under the sink. It was empty, but he didn’t have the heart to dig through the pilfering of Grimmauld Place to decorate an apartment he wasn’t going to stay in. “I’ll find a lot of things out, eventually. Caring and forcing submission is different.” Harry was sure the first Death Eaters had learned that lesson quickly.

It was very different. Harry wondered how the other him had dealt under such a physical onslaught. With his body alternating between hyper sensitive and hyper dull.

“I’m going to get a… cell phone, today. A cheap one—just to see if it lasts. They have cameras in cell phones now. Even if the photos don’t move, I think it’d be nice…” Harry trailed off as he took one last look at his apartment before he stood up (superimposed over it was the living room of his home—stuffed full of cushy furniture, photographs—). Harry brushed off his jeans before he moved to the front door. There, hanging from the three hooks was his single leather jacket.

Harry shrugged it on and checked his pockets. His trunk was in hand, and the rest of his memories around his wrist. Less than half of the vials had been removed. And there were still so many questions that needed to be answered. How did he go from doing motorcycle stunts to… drugs? How was he brought back to life after he died a second time? Who were the Arcobaleno, really?

“I’ll be back,” Harry called absently as he shrugged on the jacket and wiggled in to his gloves. He pulled his medical mask out of his pocket (that had been a swell idea, taken from that one blond lady) and hooked it behind his ears. It had taken some time to get used to the feeling of the paper like disposable cloth against his nose and lips, but it was a small discomfort for anonymity. Harry traced his mouth and attached scar through the mask as he stepped out of his home and locked it behind himself.

He had had a memory of using a cell phone the night before. It had been rather similar to magic, and it had appeared to have some kind of game on it. It had looked fun, no matter how hazy the entire memory was.
Harry wanted one. It was also a good excuse to leave the house.

His German was accented, but he remembered being fluent without an accent at one point. It would just take time he supposed. Time and practice. The morning air was pleasant, and Harry found himself letting out a deep breath and his muscles loosening up.

It was rather peaceful here. The streets were clean, widely spaced, and almost rural. The buildings were a bit tall at times, but Harry had been in far more claustrophobic places. It was so easy to see the clouds and skies from his apartment, and the streets. Harry had spent some days waking with the dawn just to see it.

It was as if the world here was just... separate. From everything he knew. Slower.

It gave him time to think. Harry waved faintly to a passing man—he was the shop worker at the convenience store that Harry kept visiting. Harry got a wave in reply, and the two of them ignored each other from there. (Harry wasn’t going to be here forever, so it was best to not make friends. He would be gone soon, and that would be that.) That was the general outlook Harry had for everyone here. Until he found a good place where he would even want to stay, he would stay as he was (he had Oodako anyway).

He moved from residential to the shopping district at an easy clip. Harry could have biked, but he appreciated the exercise. He found a shop with big pictures of cell phones pressed to the windows. It was the first one Harry had found, although he knew more existed. But one should be as good as another, and he slipped in to the store and spent the next bit browsing.

He ended up practicing a lot of German with one of the saleswomen before he soon he had a cheap touch screen cell phone in hand. It was called a ‘cloud FX’. He rather liked the name, and it was a bit of a cloudy day so he figured it matched. And it had only cost about 40 euros! With the prepaid card he had to purchase to use it as it was intended, he might have gone a little crazy and dropped a hundred euros in to his account.

He had to take a glove off to use it, but Harry found himself absently walking around as he prodded around at the screen. He didn’t have an email, so he set one up as was prompted. An email would allow messages, right? It was rather fun, really. Harry felt the same forbidden feeling panging through him as he paged through the phone. The feeling was so similar to when he had been holding that television remote controller two weeks ago.
(As long as he didn’t think too hard about what he was doing, using his phone was easy enough…) 

Harry eventually found a café. A pastry and tea that he dimly remembered trying before and wanted to have again. Once he had a seat at one of the small two person metal tables outside, he settled and really focused on his phone. He had red as his background wallpaper, got his clock set up, and a few more things he finished up before a waiter came by with his order. He ate half of his apple pastry before he focused on his phone again. A bit more fiddling and, finally, he moved on to the internet. Harry could remember it being such a fledgling thing last he noted it. Hermione had been raving about it, how it could revolutionize everything. And it seemed it had… for muggles. Harry hummed as he slowly fumbled through a google search on octopi.

… Oodako was cuter.

One thing led to another.

And he wound up on a news site.

THE GREAT LONDON FIRE FINALLY CORRALLED!

It felt like the air was knocked out of his chest. The phone gave an alarming little chirp, and Harry let it clatter on to the glass top table before it could be damaged. Harry breathed out though his nose and used his fork to prod at his reaming pastry, easily giving in to his body’s demand to fiddle. His small shiftings hid the sudden shake to his hands, and the hard pit of guilt in his gut didn’t seem so bad as he focused on other things.

… maybe he should have helped.

But he couldn’t go back to England. Never to London. In the end, the British community had only have hurt him. Even from before he was born. He was loathe to return to it ever again—even when he had finally hurt it back so many more times than he had ever been hurt. Not even just the wizarding community, but the muggle one as well. It was his fault, all of it. And Harry…

Not going to think about it anymore.

Harry jabbed at his phone to get to a new page. Any page. Anything was better than this.
Harry stumbled on to a more local news page—programmed as the home button of his internet browser.

The first thing that caught his eye was, ‘DANGEROUS COMPETITION CONTINUED CONFIRMATION OUTSIDE HAMBURG RAISES CONCERNS!’

Harry stuffed the rest of his pastry in to his mouth and confidently clicked the title to get to yet another new page. If it was dangerous, it would be more than distracting for him than being stuck in his thoughts. And being stuck in his apartment for nearly two weeks—it would be a relief to get out of here. If only for a few hours.

‘A motorcross stunting competition was announced over half a year ago despite local protests. Construction of the dirt track was completed last month. And while safety of riders has been assured, the itinerary of stunts required of riders has been deemed exceedingly dangerous. Riders under the age of 17 have been banned from entering the competition…’ Harry skimmed over the local protests. There was going to be a competition… a biking competition!

His heart hammered in his chest, and Harry felt his body give an excited tremble. A single day competition. Already hundreds of applicants.

… today was the last day for entry!

The last competition he had entered had been against his will, and had nearly cost him his life. (And had taken away someone else’s life instead.) But Harry could remember the feeling of a stunt motorbike under him as he sailed through the air. And he ached for the feeling of flying. It would finally be him in control, and now he would be able to compare the temporary freedom from the ground against the total freedom of a broom and decide which would be better.

Harry grinned behind his mask and dialed the number provided at the end of the article.

(Was it just him, or was his self-control slowly slipping out of his hands day by day? But then again, did he have to contain himself? Who was even going to judge him? Harry could be a creature of his whims if he wanted!)

A harried voice picked up on the third ring.
“Hello, this is Richard, event organizer for—” the man started, but Harry didn’t bother to contain himself to wait it out.

“I want to enter the competition!” Harry was almost startled with how much he wanted to be in it. Harry couldn’t really remember the last thing that he wanted so bad outside of his own freedom. (Harry also had a suspicion that he was shouting…)

“… right. Settle down with the volume. Young man, are you over the age of seventeen?”

“I’m almost thirty.” Harry wrinkled his nose at the voice.

“Bring your identification for check in, then. We’ll verify it. Law enforcement will be there, so you better not be lying.” The man still sounded harried, and maybe a bit irritated now. “The fee for entering is four hundred,” Harry sucked in a breath at the cost, what! “—which has been raised from the initial two due to legal fees and the cost to have emergency services on the premise.”

… that made a terrible sense. Harry found himself using the end of his fork to tap at the table, irritated and antsy like hell. He couldn’t keep his feet still, either.

“Sure, sure. I agree. Whatever. As long as I’m in.” He would do anything for a ramp!

“Sure, kid. What’s your stage name?”

“… stage name?” Harry paused, hesitating at the question.

“You could use your real name if you prefer. But I need a name to put in the list to add you to a grouping.” The man shuffled some papers on the other end of the phone. Harry mulled over his real name (can’t be Harry Potter, not anymore), and he considered the terrible name Frank gave him for a second before dropping that. That would be a horror to be announced as ‘Wallowby’. What was the name Mr. Chameleon called him? Frank… Abagnale?

Harry would rather not be called ‘Frank.’ He rather disliked the name at the moment.
Another name… another…

“Skull. That’ll be me.” Harry decided—the Arcobaleno had been calling him that, he could use it as a stage name.

The man on the other end made a scornful little scoff. “Like the famous Skull DeMort? I’ve got another three dozen boys and girls with the same damn stage name. Pick another.”

(Skull DeMort—that sounded like a terrible name. Poor man, it was way too similar to Voldemort…)

“No. I want that one.” Harry immediately dug his heels in. He had thought rather hard over that name! Besides, it was a piece of the human body and no one had a claim to it. Richard gave a hissing breath, but was obviously too tired to even bother to dissuade Harry.

“Fine. Skull. What’s the name on your identification?”

Oh… well… Name. Name. He needed a name! A real one! “It’s—Harry… Abagnale.” Fuck! It just came out!

“… really.”

“Yeah. I know.” Harry rolled with it and worked on sounding genuine and Britishly apologetic.

“Whatever,” the man muttered under his breath, and Harry strained to hear the sound of pencil on paper. “Got a pencil?”

“… yeah.” Harry lied, and it came out heavy on his tongue.

The man rolled with it anyway. “You’re confirmation number is CB923R. You’ll be wearing it on your suit during your slots.” Harry used a finger dipped in tea to write it out on his pastry plate.

“Got it,” Harry couldn’t stop the wild grin even if he tried. This was better than even escaping Mr. Chameleon. (Although it seemed like a near thing.)
“Take care, son.” Richard the event organizer hung up.

Harry found his face was starting to hurt from the stretch of his grin. Harry took a picture of his number written in tea so he could remember it. As Harry was setting an alarm on his phone for competition day, Harry went to sip at his tea. But it was already on the cold side of lukewarm. Harry rolled his eyes and pulled his mask back on. He stacked his dishes and left the café.

On the way back to his apartment, it hit him that not only did he not have a stunt bike (as if he would use his own), he also didn’t have a suit or a helmet. “… talk about jumping the wand.” Harry rubbed at the back of his head, ruffling his hair as he loitered on the street. He would really need all of that.

And his face… he wouldn’t be able to wear a mask over his face.

…. And the identification card.

“I’m an idiot.” Harry groaned, “a troll brained idiot!”

A snort of a woman walking by him in the street had Harry shuffling off to the side. He needed to sort himself out. What was the easiest thing for him to do? Well, get all of his gear. Harry reached in to a zippered pocket and pulled out his wallet. Right.

… Harry ran all the way back to his apartment, raided his magical shoebox, ran to the bank (it took forever, a lot of apparition, before he found the German center for wizarding commerce and a bank —ran by what Harry assumed were moss folk and dwarves… he should probably refresh his fantastic beasts knowledge sometime soon… he accepted the handful of flowers graciously in any case. It was strange to get a gift along with his converted money, but that was fine…) and was soon swimming in euros again. Harry focused on what he wanted rather than the price tag. He found a plain padded motorcross suit with Kevlar guards on his elbows, knees, and shoulders. It was a nice white with red strips on the outside of the arms and legs. There was a purple striped one, but red was a superior color. The red was actually very much like the color of Oodako! And the white… it reminded him of Hedwig.

It was a perfect combination.

A suit and a white helmet—this was good progress. He ran home again to drop that off before he left for a stunt bike. Something good that he wouldn’t care if it broke or not. (And wasn’t his main mode
of transport that would ensure his escape when necessary…)

Too expensive. Even for Harry. Once Harry had found a shop that sold the motorbikes, he found everything marked up and the shop frothing with people! Everyone seemed to be around to make last minute purchases. And the more reasonably priced bikes had all been bought out! How offensive.

Harry wanted this one… even if it was Slytherin green! That was such an easy fix… Harry crouched down next to the Kawasaki KX450F and mentally whined to himself. It was almost eight thousand euros! There were four of these motorbikes right here. Would anyone really miss it if he took one—

No. Not a criminal. Not a drug enabler. Harry pressed the palms of his hands in to his eyes and took a few breaths where he was crouched down next to the bike. He had gotten a ridiculous amount of galleons from Frank, so perhaps if he returned to the bank tomorrow and did another exchange…

Well, it was really his only option at this point.

Harry left the shop dragging his feet.

He brought his rain cloud back to the apartment and laid down on the floor next to Oodako’s aquarium. Harry pulled his knees to his chest and watched the octopus do lazy little laps in the aquarium. “… I entered in to a biking competition. And I don’t have a bike.” Harry confessed, his voice thick and he could feel the frustration expand in his chest and his eyes sting a little.

(Harry felt like a little voice was laughing at him for the over exaggerated reaction to this recent roadblock—and he was more than sure it was himself.)

“This is stupid,” Harry grumbled to himself.

(“You’re stupid!”)

Harry grumbled to himself, before he sighed and pulled himself up from the floor. Harry hung up his jacket by the door and grumbled to himself as he unshrunk his memories and rolled them out on the floor.
More motorcycle stunts. Harry would definitely have to remember some of these for the competition. And he would need to practice… if possible. (He needed a bike he could afford to destroy!) Harry tossed the empty vials he made in to the shoebox with a grumble. This was a first that he wasn’t purely happy after a bit more remembrance of his past on a bike.

Harry took the next vial, idly glancing over the sides.

Oh. This was one of the few with no color coordination spots. Harry hadn’t added any of these back before. Harry, wand in hand, scooped up the glowing white wisps and put it to his temple.

*It burned. He was burning. He was on fire! White smoke surrounded everything. Skull couldn’t see, couldn’t breathe! He was choking! He was… Skull gasped for breath as the smoke dissipated in to nothing. The shine of the spring he was in front of blinded him and it took several blinks and a few tears to adjust even behind the safety of his helmet visor.*

Skull took some shuddering breaths as he rubbed his hands over his arms, rocking his body slightly as he raised his hear and looked to the others. He was trying to rub the fire out of his muscles and it seemed to be working. He exhaled hard and the fire sparkles of pain disappeared with each breath. Skull was coping, and the people stronger than him—

... babies?

Why were there babies?

Skull watched Verde as the scientist slowly looked down at his own tiny feet. And then his tiny hands. Skull watched the surprise bleed in to blankness as Verde focused on something else. Something ahead. Skull looked from his right to his left—to the back of the red clad Fon. Fon was pressing his face to the grass, hands in tiny fists as he made slow grooves in the weak dirt.

And ahead. Across. Reborn—

Skull looked down at his tiny toddler hands and—he took off his helmet. Even his helmet had shrunk with him! Skull giggled, because that was the most ridiculous thing of this all. More ridiculous than flames. More ridiculous than being surrounded by the mafia. Moremoremore—Skull choked on his giggles.
“What’re you laughing at, lackey.” Hissed Reborn. Gun up and pressed to Skull’s forehead and—

Harry gasped, heart hammering in his chest and vial shattered in his gloved hands once more. God… oh god, what?

Why was he small? How had he been small!

(“The Arcobaleno curse!” The voice in the back of his mind wailed, long and sad and wrecked—)

… “The curse…” Harry murmured. He vanished the glass and quietly repaired the rips in his gloves. He had been cursed? To be what, a child? How did that even work? Harry set his wand down by his vials and shuffled off to his tiny kitchen to… what was he going to even do? Harry set a kettle on and got it ready to boil. And from there, he paced.

Reborn… with the… Harry passed by the fedora next to Oodako’s aquarium and it was just like the one the toddler Reborn had worn in his memory. The crystal clear terrifying bringhimawayfromthepresent memory… Harry picked up the hat and twirled it on his finger.

Mr. Chameleon was called Reborn, then?

“That’s a worse name than Chris,” Harry snarked to himself, and it was bitter on his tongue. But it was just as fine, since apparently the man was so ill tempered. Harry obviously hadn’t been laughing at the man! Harry threw the hat like a Frisbee, and watched it bounce off a wall.

Reborn wasn’t the only name. Reborn. Verde (that creepy creepy doctor coat wearing horror!). And then Fon… he hadn’t seen Fon’s face. But… was that the lady he had seen? Harry felt like it had been a man, but he could have been wrong.

The kettle whistled.

… he didn’t have any more tea on hand.

Harry sullenly drank his hot water next to Oodako’s tank and eyed the memories that remained. So, he had been cursed to be toddler sized. And… and looking back—a lot of his memories seemed a
bit… clearer? Height and depth was better, for the strange memories where he antagonized Reborn and blondie, and they antagonized him. Not, all, but some.

How horrifying must it have been to have them all turned in to children when they were merely muggles?

Harry rubbed at his chin with his knuckles, biting at the plump muscle next to his thumb and tasting leather.

Well, the curse had obviously been lifted. Harry looked down at his fully formed and adult body and shivered. Harry was sure that if he had been awakened and had still been cursed… he would have raged from the start. He would have been scared and horrified and—and merlin knew what else. Harry kneeled down next to his imprisoned memories and methodically extracted each vial that didn’t have any kind of color identification added to it.

He had ten left.

Harry got up again and grabbed the fedora. He tossed it up and down in the air as he focused on thinking. It would appear that these were his most important memories deemed by Frank. And the one Harry had, had certainly shed an intense light over everything. The question was… should he take them all now? Or should he take them last?

“It cleared up some of my other memories, Oodako. But it left me with so many questions…” The biggest question of all of it was ‘WHY’. “If I take all the others first, then these memories would help cinch it all together.” Harry tossed the hat too high and it smashed in to the ceiling. Harry shuffled to the side and smiled faintly to himself when he got it to land on top of his head. Harry placed his hands on his hips and continued to circle around his apartment. The aquarium was his centerpiece, and he walked around it over and over to soothe himself.

If he waited, it would probably make more sense.

“… but… maybe just… one more?” The one that he had, it had been so clear and made so much sense.

One more couldn’t hurt.
Just one more.

Harry sat down on the floor and hovered his hand over the row of vials. Ten left. So Harry picked the two middle vials. A faint smile crawled on to his face. He remembered something that little Lily had adored. He held the two up, and glanced back and forth between the two vials as he spoke, “eeny, meeny, miny, moe—catch a werewolf by the toe. If he wiggles let him go. Eeny, meeny, miny, moe!” Harry held up his left hand and the vial within as he set down the one in his right hand. (Teddy had giggled helplessly over that one too… Ginny had introduced him to it, and Harry couldn’t help but share the little rhyme constantly. His heart gave a soft warble of pain before it settled. Harry only had a hitched breath for a moment before he was fine…)

He resolutely pulled out the cork and took up his wand.

_Don’t do it._

Harry blinked and hesitated. It was more of a feeling than anything else. A leaden weight in his gut and a heaviness to his limbs. Harry frowned as he really took stock of himself. He was shaking, just a little bit. So small that he hadn’t truly noticed it before. Harry rolled his shoulders and forced his body to relax.

He wasn’t scared of some memories. You can’t run from the past. He was going to have to face it sooner or later.

Harry scooped up the memory with his wand before he could decide otherwise and pressed it in close. It felt icy, letting this memory inside. His vision whited out—

*Chris was on fire! Everywhere! He screamed as he thrashed. He had been screaming for what felt like forever. But no one had come. No one was saving him from this monster. “Petrificus totalus!” a voice above him snarled. Chris’ arms and legs snapped together and he could no longer thrash.*

_The pain moved, everywhere, nowhere—and then it stopped. It actively stopped but he ached!*

*Chris couldn’t move, but his leaking eyes locked on to the man in the red robe above him. His face was shadowed, but his icy cold eyes… Chris tried to wail, but he couldn’t. He couldn’t move anything but his eyes. Couldn’t stop the tears even if he tried. Why was this man hurting him!*
“Seems we have to make a few… recalibrations. You’re a bit too much of a waste of space.” The man murmured, voice thick in his German as he crouched down next to Chris’ head. Chris struggled. He pushed on this invisible force that was around him. He stilled when he realized it was giving a little bit. And that there was a warmth happening in his body that was warm and friendly and as desperate as he was! In the corner of his eyes, he swore he saw a colored fire flicker to life. And…

And the cold press of the man’s murder stick dug in to the corner of his eye and—

Agony.

It didn’t end.

It felt like needles and nails shoved in to every pore. Chris watched the skin of his body peeled away like tape. He gagged and flailed and—and gave up—

Harry heaved, shuddering as he choked on bile. His body—he couldn’t move. The body bind! He was still in the body bind! He was.. he was… tentacles?

Harry stared down blankly at the tentacles as thick as his wrist for a moment before he looked up. “… Oodako?” Harry’s voice was wrecked, but it gained the attention of Oodako (who was somehow giant) and the octopus levered Harry’s limp body up so that it could nuzzle Harry’s cheek. Harry’s eyes automatically tracked around the apartment.

The aquarium was shattered. Late morning light filtered through the cracked windows (it had been nearly sunset last he checked) and his body was shaking like he had been running for his life and—

Don’t. Think.

Harry tried to talk to Oodako, to convince the creature to let him go. But the only thing that came out was babble as the tears poured out without his say so. Harry shuddered, and ignored Oodako’s silent croon as the octopus manipulated his body in to a fetal position and wrapped him up tight. Harry shivered, and eventually allowed it.

Being gently squeezed in a small space…
… it felt okay, for now. Harry hid his face against Oodako and sobbed.

His body chafed, even in his clothes that had been perfectly fine before. His skin, what had they done to him? They had pulled him apart!

Harry wished he had let Frank burn.

He wished he could have seen such a happy thing.

(How many more wizards and witches had been tortured like this? … how many more would never wake up from the memory modifications?)

Because that shadowy face that loomed over him…

That had been—

No.

No more.

Harry focused on his tears, on his body… and between one moment and the next, he let himself sleep. He woke up to darkness outside, still cradled against Oodako like a mother holding one’s child. Harry let out a long shuddering breath before he patted Oodako’s tentacle to get his attention.

“I’m… I need to get up.” Harry wasn’t fine. He didn’t think he’d ever be fine again.

Harry relaxed minutely as Oodako released him and gently pushed him upright and on to his feet. Harry smiled at the octopus as the large tentacles kept around his arms until they were both sure Harry would remain standing. Harry found his wand and fixed the windows of the apartment. The blinds shut. He flipped on the electric lights and rubbed his stomach.
He glanced to the stove and shuddered.

He couldn’t… he didn’t want to be around fire right now.

“… how did you get so big?” Harry murmured, knowing that Oodako couldn’t talk but wondering all the same. Oodako had been so small a little bit ago, and now the octopus was tall enough to reach his waist! Oodako’s tentacles gave a lazy wave as he moved and settled on to Harry’s sleeping bag. “Right… right…” Harry trailed off as he stared at the tank. It was ruined… And water was everywhere. Harry cleaned it up with a few waves of his wand, but that didn’t change the fact that that the tank was broken. Harry reached out for the little chest, jar, and galleons and placed them next to his sleeping bag in front of Oodako.

“Will you be okay without a tank?” Oodako’s lazy wiggle of his tentacles was as answer that Harry assumed was yes.

Harry checked the bucket that had held fish the day (the day?) before. The fish were gone.

“I’m going to go grab something to eat. I’ll bring you back some shrimp, okay?” Harry patted Oodako on the head, rubbing it with a smile as the octopus closed his eyes. Very much pleased.

Harry smiled to himself, didn’t bother to change his clothes, and only made sure he had on his jacket and his wand shoved in to his sleeve. With that, he locked the apartment behind himself before he ran. He didn’t know exactly where he was going for food, but he just needed to run. Run like he had been unable to do so in his memory.

Without access to his magic… he had been truly helpless.

(“I’m not weak!”)

Harry slowed down to a stop eventually. When he felt a bit better. When he didn’t feel like he’d die if he didn’t keep moving. He took a moment to put his hands on his knees and took a moment to breath. Straightening up he found himself in front of a pub. It was probably the nosiest and busiest place around Harry, and he had run straight to it.

His throat ached.
… just one drink.

(“Not the best idea… but sure. This is fine.”)

Harry took a moment to appreciate the fact that he was rather sure he was hearing voices (of the non-snake variety) and that was a bit not good. But at the same time, where could he even get help? As long as it didn’t tell him to kill indiscriminately he should be okay. (Did the fire count?)

Just one drink. Then he’d go and get the shrimp from somewhere. And then go to bed. If he was remembering right, then he had lost a day to his—not gunna name it—and had been unconscious and sleeping for an entire day. Which meant that tomorrow was the third day. The third day before the competition.

That would be okay. One day to go exchange his money. And then go throw it all at a bike shop…

And… and he should probably—was this why he wore the make up? To hide the scars—

The face looked above him. Holding strips of Chris’ flesh in front of his eyes. “My, I think this helps.” That was Chris’ face! It was his face! The world had tunneled and all Chris could see was the stick that could cut coming to the corner of his mouth and—

Harry gasped, his whole body shuddering as he leaned over and gagged.

Don’t think. Drown it out. Harry had more sorrows than he could deal with, and he would prefer them gone. Right now. Harry dived in to the crowds teaming outside the pub and made his way in. All of the tables were full, and while the food that he could see smelled appetizing, Harry didn’t have the will for anything except—

Anything to dull the senses.

The stronger. The better.
Harry elbowed his way to the bar. Even as he struggled to decide on what he wanted. Fire whiskey was obviously out of the question. And that was pretty much the only alcoholic beverage he had ever had. But Harry elbowed up and it wasn’t some magical mishap that spilled from his mouth. “A starry night!” Harry called out, his lips stretching widely in to something Harry knew was not a smile behind his cheap mask. The barkeep, a tattooed lady, merely nodded and went about to gather together the jagermeister and the goldschläger. Harry drummed his fingers against the bar to stop himself from bouncing in place.

When an elbow dug in to his side, Harry dug his own and added a little push back.

“Des tat weh!” A masculine voice at his elbow yelped, and Harry turned his head to curl his hidden lip at the stranger. How dare he invade his space! Harry wasn’t that short, and was actually rather average. But he found himself eye to shoulder with the man.

… with dyed purple hair, and make up that was far too familiar and Harry was recoiling before he could stop himself. Why did this man hold the same look as that strange identification card he had? “Wha…” Harry hissed even as the man drew himself up, thrusting his chest out.

“I see you have come to realize that it is I, the great stunt rider, Skull DeMort!” The man grinned widely, and Harry could feel the narcissism all the way down to his bones. His teeth ached at the bravado.

Wait… Skull DeMort?

Hadn’t Richard said that… people were picking the name ‘Skull’ because of some great rider Skull DeMort? Did that mean this man was actually good? He looked a bit older than Harry…

… did that mean Harry had borrowed the name of this pretentious ass and had the Arcobaleno call him by that name?

As if his level of self-disgust couldn’t get any higher.

“Let me guess, you’re going to be in the competition the day after tomorrow huh?” Harry drew himself up to, even knowing that they wouldn’t be eye to eye.

“Of course! I’ll be the one to win that ten thousand euro prize! No one will ever be able to defeat me,
Skull DeMort!” Merlin, the laugh that this chucklehead spewed had Harry leaning away, along with everyone within arm’s reach.

Wow. Just no.

Harry was distracted by the bartender passing him his starry night in a shot glass.

Harry downed it and slid the glass back. “Another!” The cinnamon burned more than the actual alcohol. He had hardly even tasted it, so he would take a moment to savor the next one. Till then he needed to cut this man down to size! (If only to make himself feel better about stealing a name, dammit…)

“I doubt you’ll win against me.” Harry tilted his chin up, and did his best to try and impersonate Malfoy. The side-eyed look he got from Skull told Harry that the man had definitely felt something of a challenge in that statement.

The man leaned forward, looming over Harry as he held out a hand and caught his beer as it was slid to him. “You’re puny. You don’t even look like you have a lick of muscle! All bones and no flesh does not make a great motorbike rider. You can’t even do any stunts with such a pathetic body!”

“Oh, like you judging my muscle tone will really change the fact that I can do more stunts than you.” Harry raised his voice and made it nasal high just so he could have another way to annoy Skull. Harry pulled his lips back in a hidden toothy not-smile at the way Skull winced at the vocal tone. Harry hadn’t known he could use his very voice to passive aggressively annoy others—but he was going to make sure to remember it for the future.

(Violence was not play after all. Didn’t mean he couldn’t use everything in his arsenal to drive people insane. Umbridge was a very good example of that. Hermione had certainly helped though.)

Skull flicked a long strand of purple hair out of his face, and the more Harry looked the more differences he could spot between them. Thank merlin Harry had never had the ridiculous idea of growing such long hair. It would just be in knots all the time (Ginny had sworn to never speak of that hair experiment). “I bet I could do better stunts than you.” Skull had loomed so close, and (killitkillitburnitwithfire!) Harry merely raised an eyebrow at the other.

“We’ll see on competition day.” Harry crossed his arms and sniffed, turning his head away to ignore Skull. It was such an easy manipulation, and Harry mentally cheered to himself when Skull quickly
scrambled to try to continue to assert his supposed superiority.

“I challenge you to an arm wrestling match!” Harry hated Skull. He was such an idiot.

“I got one better. I challenge you to a drinking contest! Loser pays the tab!” Harry wanted to get so drunk that he’d forget that he had stolen the name of this arrogant blockhead.

“You’re on! You… you… hey, what’s your name?” Skull started incensed, and cooled down to a lost little voice as he realized that there was no name for his opponent.

Well, Skull was a stupid name. Might as well stick to stupid names!

“You can call me Reborn!”

(“Not the best idea… could be worse.” Augh, that judging voice in the back of his head.)

Skull laughed too loud and too annoying and Harry knocked a foot back and kicked the other in the shin. It wasn’t like it was hard, but the man was soon howling. “Jägermeister shots!” Harry called from the barkeep and jerked Skull to stand at his side in front of the bar.

“I’m going to drink you under you little shit,” Skull hissed. “You better have a fat bank account.”

Harry smirked and yanked off his face mask—gleeful at Skull’s recoil of horror. “You better be able to back up your words else you’re going to have to give the nice bartender your motorbike.” Harry laughed at Skull’s face at the full body shudder the older purple haired man did in response to seeing a grin on Harry’s face.

The jägermeister shots were first. Then three shots of liquid heroin.

Harry was going to drink like he was dying of thirst.

It still felt like his face was being peeled off—

More and more and more—

Harry couldn’t help the hysterical giggle that came out when Skull dropped to the floor and at the groaning feet of his companions. “Reborn wins,” Harry giggled out, pressing his face against the bar. Wow, he was still sober enough to remember what false name he was currently borrowing.

Of course, that meant that he still hadn’t had enough to drink.

Harry flagged down the bartender, pointed to the drunk to the point of stupor Skull and promptly told the woman to put everything on the man’s tab… and then he drank more! Anything he could think of. Copying the drinks of the people around him. He avoided the beer, because as the saying went—beer before liquor, never been sicker. And Harry was all for the liquor right now.

And… and he was sure he called someone… on his phone.

And… and took pictures. He got a marker at one point?

It was all…

Black.

When Harry cracked open his eyes, he found himself sprawled out in his sleeping bag, being squished by Oodako and rather almost naked. His head was pounding and his eyes were just too sore. Harry squinted his eyes and croaked. Wow, he felt ill.

Oodako lifted himself up and used a tentacle to push sticky hair away from Harry’s face.

“… How?” Harry groaned and sat up slowly. He very much appreciated Oodako’s help with this. A faint stirring of panic was being born in the back of Harry’s head as he slowly started to scramble to find his things. There! The afternoon light showed his jacket was hanging by the door. Harry clawed
himself to his feet and over to his jacket. He rummaged through his pockets and found his wand hidden up the sleeve. And his trunk was on a necklace around his neck… and his unshrunk vial of memories was hiding under a dirty shirt and pants set.

… there was literally no money in his wallet.

“… what the fuck.” No, that asshole Skull lost the drinking bet! Harry should still have his money!

Harry groaned, head throbbing and his body more than willing to topple over. Well, buying that motorbike was going to be so painful when he got to that. But it will be so satisfying to win against that annoying man not only for drinks, but also in the competition that they were both in.

… what was that?

There was a big… tarp? “… Oodako, did I go out and buy furniture last night?” Harry croaked, eyeing the new shape that was almost too big for his apartment dubiously. Harry had gotten his wish, and had gotten black out drunk.

Yeah, the little voice was right. Not the best of his ideas.

Just another one to add to the pile.

Harry sighed and wobbled over to his sleeping bag once he had his wand in hand. Harry couldn’t even bother to remove the tarp himself. So he, from his sleeping bag, he flicked his wand and banished the tarp to the wall.

It was not furniture.

…. It was the green bike. The expensive green bike from the shop!

“… what. The. *Fuck*.” Harry groaned and rolled over to hide his face in to his inflatble pillow.

“Oodako! Did I buy that? How the hell did I buy that—“ Harry whined in to his pillow, but jerked at
the sudden cry of a bird of prey coming from the open window. Harry slowly turned his head and stared at the hawk.

“… I give up. Too many strange things. Oodako, you’re in charge of the apartment.” Harry did not care that he whined like he had never before done in his life. He was allowed the ability to complain, right? His head hurt! His stomach hurt! And it wasn’t as if there was anyone here that could judge him for it. Harry felt Oodako settle on top of his back as he laid out on his stomach. The weight felt nice, even though Oodako was kind of cool to the couch. It worked out, because Harry felt a bit too hot. Harry took several deep breaths and tried to get himself to relax back in to sleep.

Harry almost made it back to the realm of sleep before he sighed and stood. Common sense told him not to remain dehydrated. He ignored the way that Oodako attached himself to his back with his tentacles and suckers. Harry dragged himself to the kitchen and drank a big glass of water.

And then finally looked at the hawk.

It was a fairly large creature, even with its wings shut. It was a pretty white bird (not Hedwig, she was long gone and Harry did not see her every time some white avian spot moved in the corner of his vision) tipped with black feathers and decorated in golden yellow beak and feet. So, somehow he had gathered up a motorbike and a hawk over the course of the night.

“… did I get you shrimp?” Harry asked Oodako, a little resigned to that being a negative.

Oodako dropped from Harry’s back and moved over to the bright orange food bucket, and helpfully pulled a mostly empty bag of uncooked shrimp out for show.

“Good…” Harry murmured, before he looked to the hawk. “You wouldn’t happen to be a shrimp eater?” Harry didn’t expect the best, but he could hope. The hawk opened its mouth like it was yawning. But it held it open.

… did the hawk want Harry to feed it?

… spoiled.

Harry also recognized that he was going to spoil it regardless. Harry gathered a handful of shrimp from the bucket, found a small bowl, and set it in front of the hawk. Harry backed away and watched
the hawk inspect the offering that Harry had set in the windowsill and then focus judging eyes on Harry. “You can feed yourself,” Harry grumbled before he turned away.

And then his phone started to go crazy. Screaming like a banshee. Harry hissed as he clapped his hands over his ears and stomped over to where his phone was sitting. Which was on the floor under his jacket by the front door. Harry used a naked toe to swipe to the left to stop the alarm before he pulled his hands off of his ears. Harry fished his phone up carefully and peered at the screen, squinting at the rather bright light.

‘GAME DAY!’ The screen was stating. But what did that…

…. Oh.

Oh no.

“Did I lose a whole day?” Harry breathed, eyes going to the top right corner of his phone. Yes… yes he had! He had slept a whole day in a drunken stupor! Of course… Harry paused and slowly looked over to the bicycle. Perhaps he hadn’t even gone to bed that night, and had gone off… shopping.

He hoped that the bank would allow him back.

Harry paused and slowly got his magical shoe box from the trunk. Inside of it… inside of it, he couldn’t see any more galleons.

“… uh oh.” Harry dug around the box, shoving things around. Perhaps there was some galleons under all of the Grimmauld Place junk? Harry’s movements became a bit jerkier, a bit more panicked the longer he went without finding any other cash.

His stomach felt twisted, and a sour aftertaste lingered in the back of his mouth as his hands eventually stilled.

His phone started screaming again.

Shit… shit, shit, shit! He needed to start moving if he wanted to get to the competition. Harry spun in
a circle, trying to calm himself down from his panic. Harry wanted to go to the competition, but there was so much happening he didn’t know what to do with himself!

His phone pinged.

That was a new sound.

Harry raised his phone and checked the screen.

I new message.

Harry pressed the letter symbol, and watched the phone screen take him to… a texting conversation? Harry slowly scrolled up to the top of the conversation. To the first text. Which is from him.

“Hey Reborn! This is Reborn! We won a drinking contest!” Well, that did sound like him. As a drunkard.

“Who is this?”

“I said iz Reborn! Talking 2 Reb0rn!” Wow, this message was sent two hours after Reborn’s reply. And Harry could only imagine what he had been drinking in the meantime. Harry checked the time stamp under the message and stared at the one in the morning time.

“Tell me who this is. If I have to track you down you will regret it.” 1:01 AM.

“Catch me if U canz!” 2:10 AM. Oh Merlin, Harry didn’t remember any of this at all.

And the last message from Reborn, the one that Harry had just gotten.

“World’s. Greatest.” 11:24 AM.
Merlin, that man was insane. And Harry doubted he was any better. This was why Harry had trouble blaming Reborn entirely for the curb stomping his memories said he had gained. Kingsley had mentioned on more than one occasion that Harry could be rather… antagonistic was putting it lightly.

Still didn’t make it better that Reborn always kicked him when he was down.

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose and stumbled in to his driving suit. He took a moment to brush his teeth and quickly rinse his purple hair in shampoo in the bathroom sink. A bit of magic to dry it and he shoved his helmet on to his head.

Time to go and get in to that competition!

… he rather needed the money now, apparently.

Harry grabbed his keys, a bagel, and his wallet and shoved everything in the pockets of his new suit. He even took a moment to check and see if he had gas in the motorbike.

Thank goodness that drunk Harry was apparently reliable.

“Oodako, you’re still in charge!” Harry called, made sure a tentacle wiggled at him in response, and shoved the bike out of his apartment. Thank goodness his floor was tile, and he wasn’t on the second floor. Harry rolled the bike out to the street before he slipped on. He was a bit dizzy, so he shoved half of his bagel in to his mouth before he shoved the visor of his helmet down.

Keys to the ignition—and Harry was off.

Chapter End Notes

... I think Harry might be going a bit insane.

Side note, please don’t ever get black out drunk. Stuffs happens. And stuff happened, but Harry doesn't know what went down.

I'm sorry I haven't gotten to all the reviews. A lot of what I can reply to I figured was best to reply here so everyone could see. I've decided to keep this fic GEN. A lot of good arguments were made for both sides. But I decided that if it wasn't a unanimous
thing I would do without. And another reviewer mentioned I should probably finish this
fix first before I do the Arcobaleno one shots, which I think I will follow along and do
that. Else I'll never get this finished. So, when I start doing the one shots, maybe I'll do
an AU with pairings or just separate stories where I make a pairing just to bring a little
bit of joy to those who want to read it. It won't be important to the main story or the
Arcobaleno oneshots, but if you want to read it it could be fun.

The chapter was running too long and I didn't feel like I should add the competition and
other points I had ready for this chapter. So they'll be shifted to the next one. I plan to
end this story at about 20 chapters (which means that this is the halfway point yay!). It's
not going to go on for forever. I hope you all liked this chapter! If you have any
questions I'll do my best to answer them.

Did you guys like the fake!skull? (I thought it was funny...)
Harry is rather antagonistic if you think about it. Sure, I believe he is more passive-
aggressive without initially meaning to... but, Harry and Skull are starting to blend now.
Let's see what kind of hybrid this creates.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Harry learns about his black out day, and decides that he doesn't have to feel guilty about slowly starting to move on.

And the competition is a thing as well.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 11

The stadium was obviously new, and did not belong in its environment. Harry drummed his fingers on his bikes’ handlebars mindlessly as he stared at the building. He had rolled on it, and now that he could be stationary he raised up the visor of his helmet and brushed out the crumbs of his bagel. Eventually he tugged off the helmet and pulled on the medical mask that would cover up his lower face.

Well, there was still the problem of the fact that he had no money, no proper identification for ‘Harry Abagnale’, and… Harry checked his phone for the picture of his code that would identify him during the competition.

Harry pulled the keys out of the ignition and left the bike amongst all the others out front. There were other men and women in similar suits with similar bikes milling around. They were all conveying in to one area where there were rows of people at tables handing out papers that people were pinning to their suits. Harry brought his helmet with him, swinging the helmet idly as he shuffled closer.

He literally had no plan—maybe it was because it wasn’t a life and death situation he couldn’t think of what to do?

Roll with it. Things could be fine? Perhaps Harry could swear that he would win and would use the prize money to pay the fee? All the same, Harry got in line and slowly inched forward amongst all the nervous and excited riders. Harry didn’t know how he survived the slow crawl of the line, but eventually he made it to the front, to the short balding man in the suit.

“Um, hello—“
“Harry!” The man greeted with a grin, yanking Harry in to a hug before he released Harry so quick that Harry didn’t know if the man had super speed, or if Harry was suddenly feeling dizzy again. “Great to see you! A little later than you said you’d be.” The man was all smiles.

It was making Harry paranoid. He prayed that this wasn’t going to be the wizarding world all over again. Harry was lacking of a Hagrid to intimidate the crazy away. “Y..yeah. I was a bit slow to wake up…” Harry eventually decided on the most neutral statement that came to mind after the initial sass of demanding who this man was. The man looked obscenely happy still, even as he turned.

“Hey Derrick, get Harry here his number!” The short man yelled loudly, and the chattering crowds around them briefly silenced and didn’t pick up again until an almost quiet, ‘yes Mr. Richard’ warbled back. Harry blinked—this was the man from the phone? The organizer? Well, that made sense he supposed. But how did he recognize Harry on sight?

Well, time to use light interrogation techniques.

Harry smiled and gave a cheery wave to catch Richard’s attention, and with Richard’s eyes on him Harry spoke. “So, were you waiting out here for me?”

“You bet! When you came by the day before and made such a huge bet,” the man leaned forward, words going in to a whisper even as the few riders behind Harry in line were enticed to other areas to get their numbers. “By golly, I was going to make sure you arrived after I bet on you myself.” The man gave a large belly shaking laugh and Harry got a rather bad feeling of where his money had gone.

“As it is, your little friend arrived at the start of check in looking for you. I was a bit worried.” Richard leaned back and accepted a paper with CB923R printed on it in thick black letters. Richard jerked Harry by the arm and spun him around. Harry allowed it, head twisted to the side so he could watch Richard use safety pins to pin the paper in to place. Richard motioned for Harry to twirl back around, and Harry placidly watched the man pin a second paper to his front.

When Richard pulled back, Harry took a moment to poke at the paper just to hear it crinkle. “… my friend?” Harry eventually settled on asking that.

“No, the thin little Asian fellow you came in with yesterday. He’s waiting in your area inside. Go win me some money!” Richard gave another laugh and Harry almost fell over from the swift spin Richard did to send Harry on his way.
Asian fellow?

Harry rubbed the back of his neck as he jogged out of the way. He took a moment to inspect his number. It listed his ‘name’ of ‘SKULL’ in smaller words under his number. Along with that was the identification of his bike (including color and model).

Harry had definitely been here before. In the day he lost due to drinking.

Harry took a deep breath and let it out with a slow sigh. Harry hadn’t noticed when his body had calmed, but it had. He had a mystery to solve now, and it was easy to focus on it rather than on the immense unknown of the future. Harry widened his stance before he stuck his helmet between his knees. He took a moment to press the heels of hands against his eyes.

Okay. He had been here yesterday.

And had apparently made a bet on himself for the rest of his money? (Isn’t betting like this illegal? It was before… maybe not now?)

He had met, made friends with, and somehow he had proven his identity to Richard. And had obviously become something of a ‘buddy’ to the man, Harry could tell if only because of how familiar the other man had acted toward his person.

Harry had brought a friend with him. An ‘Asian’ as Richard described him. And he was inside.

Harry pulled his hands back and stared down at his boots from between his fingers blankly for a moment before he reached down and snagged up his helmet. Right. He looked to the parking lot and saw that many of the drivers with their numbers on were moving their bikes. Walking them to a dirt lot behind some large doors and parking them. Harry shoved his helmet back on before he followed along. In the dirt lot, he noticed that there were parking spots with their numbers written in chalk on the dirt. Harry’s number was near the large doors directly against the building. His row was titled ‘M1/2’.

All of the other rows had ‘G’ next to them. Why was this one ‘M’?
There was a man at the end of the ‘M’ row, so Harry turned and jogged over to him. Harry needed to get as much information as he could about the area and why there was a difference between ‘G’ and ‘M’ before he continued on. The man had just parked his bike and was slipping off of it, so Harry deemed it a good time to infiltrate and buddy up. Harry shuffled to a stop and cleared his throat, “hey, um.” Harry raised a hand, two fingers raised when the other man pulled off his helmet and turned to look at him.

It was Skull! From the bar!

There were some deep bags under his eyes, and he looked rather irritated. “What?” He ground out, voice low.

Harry raised his hands and took two steps back, “ah, sorry. Thought you were someone else.” Harry felt immensely glad for his helmet and his reflective visor now as he turned and quickly moved in the opposite direction. He heard a grumbled ‘whatever’ from over his shoulder, but Harry would rather not go near that person. Because that was not one of his finer moments. Harry jogged in to the building, following the flow of people as he entered a giant labyrinth full of cubicles. Curtains gave privacy to the little ‘rooms’ through their doorways. And next to the little doorways were names printed on paper and stapled in to place.

It didn’t take long for Harry to realize that the names were alphabetical according to last name.

He eventually found ‘Abagnale, Harry’.

… why were his curtains purple? All the others were a strange not-exactly beige.

He heard… Chinese? Coming out from the cubical?

Well, Richard said that Harry’s ‘Asian friend’ was waiting. Harry felt certain now that he had run in to somebody the day before if they were here. Of course, considering the location, the type of people, and his mindset—did he get himself a manager?

Was that a stereotype?

… was he even good enough for a manager?
It couldn’t be the wizards in any case. They weren’t this muggle savvy.

It couldn’t be the Arcobaleno—from the few memories that Harry had slowly been gaining of them, they wouldn’t bother with an elaborate cat-mouse game like this. They had seemed to actively avoid Harry for the most part. So, to Harry, out of over a hundred memories, had only had roughly ten to fifteen with the Arcobaleno starring a role. Perhaps Harry just hadn’t found the memories of them, but Harry also felt that he just didn’t interact with them much.

(Or if he did—it was that masochistic self-induced beat down—something he’d rather not think too hard on…)

So… it was someone he met when he was drunk.

Harry pushed the curtains to the side and stuck his head in.

A little cot had been set up with a serviceable green sheet and pillow. There was a small fridge tucked to the far side. A folding chair and small folding table set. All crammed together in to a space really only met for one person. It made Harry itchy, just looking inside the cubical that he was supposed to wait in.

It was the person inside, though… who was swiftly ending the call and shoving his phone in to a bright red sleeve that drew Harry’s focus.

“… Longwei?” Harry had met Longwei yesterday?

“Harry! I was worried when you didn’t show up when you promised. Especially after the fall you took yesterday.” Longwei’s lips were pressed in to a thin line as he reached out and pulled Harry the rest of the way in to the cubicle by a wrist.

“Here, let me check your head. Hold still,” Harry blinked and the helmet was off. The mask was soon yanked off and followed the helmet on the bed. Fingers—chilled—prodded around Harry’s cranium as the taller man crowded in close and peered through the strands of his hair.

... what?
“I fell?” Harry croaked.

Longwei hummed his confirmation as his fingers raked through Harry’s hair, and eventually found a sore spot on the back of Harry’s head. Harry hissed on contact, and arched his head back to take it out of view of the Chinese man.

Longwei blinked, dark eyes puzzled as he tilted his head to the side in question.

What had Longwei called himself when they had first met? … intrusive, right?

“Do you not remember? You do know that memory loss is a very bad sign!” Harry watched panic stretch across Longwei’s features. Could hear it in his voice. But for some reason, Longwei felt far more calm than panicked.

“Um… I was pretty sloshed. So…” He wasn’t losing memories. He just forgot this one. There was probably a science about why alcohol did this to people—Hermione would know.

(… Hermione would have known.)

Longwei squinted and leaned in close till they were almost nose to nose.

“You smelled a bit like alcohol yesterday. If I knew you were so drunk I wouldn’t have let you do all those things!” Longwei’s voice twisted high in complaint as he immediately started to chatter fast. A hand on Harry’s elbow tugged him in to the cubical until Harry was sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Let me…?” Harry frowned, instantly drawing up and shoulders tense. As if he would ‘let’ anyone stop him from doing anything. Especially a stranger!

Longwei’s hands were already up and a disarming smile on his face, “well, not so much ‘let’ as ‘help’. I mean, I know a bit about bikes and stunts—it seemed you just needed validation to make your purchases.” Longwei snagged Harry’s sleeve and raised Harry’s arm up high in demonstration. Longwei did one long stroke down the sleeve as a silent ‘showing off’. “I convinced you to get a different suit after all. The other one was fine for practice, but this one is best for competition. Stage lights are hot!”
Harry stared for a moment before he mentally sighed and yanked his hand back. The hand came back easily, even as Longwei wiggled in to a seat next to him on the small cot.

“Anyway, are you still coming with me afterward?” Longwei asked.

“… why would I come with you?” Harry asked, eyebrows down and close together.

“Maa, you really forgot everything! To, like, join the circus of course! I’ve decided to be an acrobat, and you expressed such interest yesterday when I spoke to you about it that I called the ring master last night and he expressed an interest in you and your stunt driving!” Longwei really did easily fill in the silence, or so Harry thought dazedly.

Still, to join a circus? Had Harry really agreed to that?

… well, he had tried to ‘run away to the circus’ as a child after the Dursleys took Dudley and not him to some fun event that children would adore. He had spent a day with Mrs Figg. He hadn’t gotten far from running away from her house before a neighbor had brought him back, but it was really the thought that counts.

“I’ve never been to a circus before,” Harry mumbled, not really intending for Longwei to hear. But the Chinese man did, and he merely grinned and launched in to the longest tirade about the circus, compared European and Chinese tastes… and it eventually moved to festivals. And carnivals. And… And Harry didn’t really realize when they had both squeezed on to the tiny cot with their backs to the cubical wall. But he was knocked out of his listening (and replying. They were chatting—he was actually in a conversation and he felt like he was making a new friend and wasn’t that just terrifying scary what—) when a loud speaker screech occurred.

“Racers in the G1, G2, and G3 categories are now allowed out for warm ups. First wave will begin in an hour.” The speakers gave one more screech and then music replaced it. Loud, rather obnoxious metal music.

Harry jumped at the hand on his knee.

“Hey, did you eat breakfast? I brought a meal. Mr. Richard mentioned you’ll be one of the last groups up. And they don’t start until six at night!” Longwei didn’t need to be so cheery all the time, but Harry was loathe to actually tell the man to be sad. Harry’s stomach gave a little lurch, and…
… and Longwei was so nice. Harry didn’t want to even imagine the man trying to poison him.

“Um, I had a bagel. But I could eat.” Harry wanted to trust. And it wasn’t as if he couldn’t do a subtle check with his wand. Harry shifted a little to give Longwei room to shuffle off the bed to the little fridge. “Do all the rooms have an ice box?” Harry asked, even as he dug his fingers in to his left sleeve to fish at his wand.

… it wasn’t in there.

Harry switched to check inside his other sleeve.

“Nope! I brought it.” Longwei laughed as he placed two water bottles on top, as well as grabbed a lacquered black box. Harry nodded (it was strange. It was strange to go to so much effort for food) but was distracted on the fact that he just couldn’t find his wand in either sleeve. Harry leaned forward and checked inside his boots.

There was no room in his actual suit for his wand, so where…?

…. The bathroom sink. When he had been drying his hair. He had set it down and had forgotten it in his rush to get out of the apartment!

Keys. Wallet. He had left his memories with Oodako as well.

He wouldn’t be able to check for poison. Or do much of anything… oh merlin. Oh merlin!

“Here,” Longwei folded his legs criss-cross on the cot, facing Harry with an easy smile. Harry numbly accepted the open box from the man. “I brought a fork for you,” he added, and Harry accepted the fork with the same numbness as the box.

Still, a quick look to Harry’s face and Longwei frowned. “Are you alright?”

“Um, well… I just realized I, um, forgot something at home…” Harry trailed off. Longwei’s eyes
were still so calm, and Harry could feel the pressure at the back of his own neck ease a little. “It doesn’t matter—let’s share?” Harry offered—because no matter how much he did want to trust this person he was tentatively starting to label as a friend in his strange life, he had also lived a life where he had to be wary of mind altering potions. He knew there were muggle drugs that worked to the same effect.

He waited, watching Longwei’s face—the man smiled and held up his own fork, “I planned to—I’m glad you offered before I had to ask.” Harry nodded, not embarrassed at all (perhaps pleased would be a better description) as he tilted the box in Longwei’s direction, even as Harry looked down to really take in what was there.

The left half of the box were sandwiches stacked neatly. Then there were some yellow circles, a big spot of bright green noodle shaped things—which Longwei stuck his work in and swirled some up. Harry silently copied the man, even as Longwei chatted before his bite. “I’ve always appreciated vegetables. Did you know that seaweed is considered, like, a miracle vegetable?” Longwei’s lips curled in the corner before he put his swirl of seaweed to his mouth.

Harry turned his eyes to his own forkful of apparently seaweed with some dubiousness. On closer look he didn’t doubt what it was. “Why’s that?” He asked instead.

Longwei’s fork went to one of the yellow circles, and promptly sectioned off a piece for himself as he spoke, “well, it’s been studied to have more concentrated nutrition than land vegetables. Lots of minerals.” Longwei reached out and nudged Harry’s still raised fork closer. Harry huffed and promptly ate the seaweed. Although with it in his mouth, he didn’t really know how to feel about it as he chewed and swallowed. He had been expecting slime from the look, but it wasn’t really slimy. Not the worst thing he had ever eaten (and considering what he had eaten in the past, didn’t really mean much. Gillyweed what?), but he wasn’t really raving about it.

Harry went to the yellow circle next. It was fluffy, springing back when he poked it.

“It’s egg. It has brown sugar and soy sauce in it,” Longwei supplied, even as he set his fork on his knee and took one of the four sandwiches.

“… It’s good,” Harry supplied in response after he ate the egg. It was sweet, and he found that he rather appreciated the sweetness of his food now.

They had a moment of silence before Longwei perked up, “oh! You mentioned yesterday that you would send me the pictures from your phone. You haven’t done it yet,” Longwei gently chided with a long fingered poke to Harry’s shoulder.
“… I took pictures?” Harry already had his phone out and a sandwich in hand as he unlocked his phone. His fingers moved on autopilot mostly to the icon with ‘photos’ listed under it. Harry tapped the toes of his left foot to the air as he waited. And continued tapping the air as a wall of photos appeared. Harry paused before he scrolled all the way to the right and selected the first one.

There was that annoying Skull DeMort from the bar. With black marker all over his face. Mostly drunk looking swirls and a black eye. Harry felt Longwei lean in close to look as well, but Harry was mostly just fascinated by actual evidence of what he had been doing during his black out. Cell phones were the most ingenious invention (from muggles) that documented everything so well! The images were so crystal clear too. Although apparently Harry was taking too long, and Longwei reached out with a finger and swiped the picture.

Harry stared at himself. Him—purple hair mused, green eyes bright, and scars white against his pinked face amongst a bunch of men and women together. They were all grinning in front of a table littered in empty glasses.

Pictures of all the drinks Harry had probably consumed.

It was so weird. There was something about seeing himself in these pictures that was so off. Harry didn’t know if it was the hair. Or the scars. It was something little, so little that he couldn’t exactly pinpoint what it was that was wrong. Harry pushed the last of his sandwich in to his mouth, frowning at himself. He used his now free hand to gently scratch a nail over the sensitive scar butting from the corner of his mouth. He hated this one the most.

“I brought the make-up you mentioned yesterday. We forgot to buy it together, but I saw it on my way to my hotel.” Longwei offered, second sandwich mostly done in his hand. The Chinese man shifted, smoothly sliding off the bed without even shifting the coarse blanket out of place. There was a little bag tucked next to the small table that he pulled out of. Longwei soon produced four jars of different sizes, a brush, and a sponge.

Those were, for him? “Um, how much do you want for that?” Harry didn’t actually have money on himself right now (since he betted it all on himself—talk about toxic confidence), but Longwei seemed the type to be accepting of a ‘pay you later’ kind of thing.

“Let me put it on when you finish eating,” Longwei said with a smile. Harry immediately wrinkled his nose at the demand. That was way too close to his face.
But at the same time... well...

The good part about the situation would be that his face would be covered.

He’d look less like himself. People wouldn’t stare at him like he was a freak (Harry shuddered a little bit at the mental use of the word, and shifted a little when Longwei continued to stare as the silence stretched on and on and—).

“Yeah, that sounds good.” Harry eventually conceded. Because there were four jars and Harry had hardly even watched Ginny do her applications when she felt up to it. Longwei hummed and left it all at the table and returned to the cot. Harry finished off the second sandwich and the box was soon empty. Although Longwei soon shoved a bottled smoothie in to his hands. It was... green.

Harry mentally shrugged, broke the safety seal, and found it tolerable.

There was a picture of himself with Oodako (it was cute, there were three of them. One where he wore Reborn’s hat, one where it was on Oodako’s head, and one with the hat all curled up in Oodako’s tentacles and it was just so cute). And shrimp. And Harry skipped a few pictures and—

Yeah, he had definitely gone and converted his money while in his own stupor. A ‘selfie’ in front of the bank by himself showed at least that much. Why did he have two fingers up?

(Peace!)

The next photo had him and Longwei in it. Harry didn’t have the phone in his hands, and in fact, both of his hands were on Longwei’s cheeks as Harry smashed the sides of their faces together so they could grin up at the cell phone together. “You’re surprisingly strong for being so skinny,” Longwei added. Harry mumbled an apology even as he skipped to the next one. Them at a café. A picture of a cake slice. They went to a pub and drank more. Longwei’s face was a bit red in these pictures.

They went to a bike shop—and eventually found the bike that Harry had driven to this event. And the new suit that was just like his other one. More food and drink. Overall, Harry supposed that he had taken twelve pictures with Longwei. It didn’t explain all the time, but it gave a picture of the relatively easy day he had spending all of his money.
Harry handed his phone to Longwei, “go ahead and email yourself which ones you like.” Harry leaned back against the cubical wall the cot was stationed against and sipped at his smoothie.

He definitely felt more at ease. Not as crazed.

The calm that Longwei had seemed to seep in to the air. And Harry found himself content. It had been a long time since he had been ‘content’. Ever since he woke up to Frank spewing lies and the wizarding world sullied. Perhaps even before then. Maybe.

Did he need magic? Harry considered this as he swirled the smoothie to stop it from settling as he slowly worked at it. Harry was magic, just as all wizards and witches were. It was in his body, it came from him. He was magic—but did he need it? Did he need to do magic every day to be magic?

(His whole body tingled, like a limb that had been asleep from lack of adequate blood flow suddenly getting a rush of brand new blood—the tingling felt strongest when his thoughts focused on magic. In particular, his hands tingled almost to the point of burning—)

Sure, he cleaned sometimes with magic. Dried his hair off quicker—but that was the result of laziness, rather than an actual need. Harry could always just do such things by hand. Harry had even left his temporary home without his wand, it hadn’t even crossed his mind as he had run out the door. That had never happened before (and he was still having a bit of a small panic over the fact that it was gone, it made his muscles ache).

In the end, it all boiled down to need—and did Harry need it?

Longwei tapped Harry on the shoulder and quirked a smile. “It looks like you’re thinking heavy thoughts,” Longwei raised an eyebrow, but didn’t press further. Longwei merely shifted to settle down in to place next to Harry once more.

There was no pressure to answer. And Harry only had to look over to see that Longwei had closed his eyes, hands peacefully on his knees and leaning back against the cubical wall.

This reminded Harry of Luna—a little strange, but kind. Not pressing, but merely existing alongside each other. Harry felt his body slowly let go, the tense to the point of pain muscles finally releasing so that they could lean against the wall together. It was nice—nice in a familiar sense. He and Ginny had gotten like this at times as well. But they had been so pointedly focused on each other it wasn’t that they existed alongside each other, but existed on the same road going to a fixed destination.
Right now there was no destination.

“…maybe we’ll talk about it later.” Harry eventually mumbled in to his smoothie. Longwei gave a vague hum of agreement, and Harry focused on the drink more than anything else.

Between one moment and the next… he fell asleep.

Harry woke up to someone tapping his arm with a finger, and his face pressed in to someone’s shoulder. He blinked to himself for a moment before he slowly sat up, grimacing at the tight tug in his lower back as he straightened out. He looked up and found that Longwei was the owner of the shoulder, and the finger that poked him back in to consciousness. “We should apply your war paint now,” Longwei offered with a grin.

Harry blinked, before he grinned as well, “war paint—I like that.” It sounded infinitely better than ‘make up’.

“… did you sit here the whole time? How long was I sleeping?” Harry frowned as he wiggled forward and eased himself to his feet.

“Yes, and not so long it was intolerable.” Longwei answered as he rolled to his feet and moved toward the table. Longwei patted the table, “sit here.”

“… um. There?” It didn’t look the most stable, but if he fell Harry doubted it would hurt much at all. The distance to the floor was negligible from that height. So Harry perched on the edge of the table and focused on Longwei as the man unscrewed the jars and pulled off the safety seals. “… I apologize for making you sit so long.”

“It’s fine, you seemed tired.” Longwei said as he produced a cloth, dabbed the cream on, and reached out for Harry’s chin. Harry watched the hand come close, but only grimaced at contact rather than pull away from Longwei. Harry had figured this would be the easiest way to fly under the radar, so this was fine. And he got someone else to do it for him. It took more willpower than Harry thought was really necessary to just stay still and let the cold not liquid be patted in to his face.

Harry was a bit hesitant to call this a friendship—but it was really only friendship that would have him let someone keep touching his face. He had always been leery about people touching his face (lack of contact with his Aunt and her family, and that one mistake the first night of being a
Gryffindor before he had put his foot down—), and it had always really been his forehead that he had not let anyone touch.

(Ginny had always asked permission to do so. Never mind that they had been married for a decade and he really enjoyed facial massages, she would always pause and ask. Just like he always asked for her hands to hold rather than just reach out to grab. His forehead and her hand—they had been points of contact to a once-man known as Riddle…)

His forehead and that thick, terrible scar next to his mouth that gave just the tiniest bit of a Glasgow grin…

Longwei fingers were covered in thick white now. “Harry, could you hold your bangs back?” Longwei asked, and Harry complied. “Also, you might want to close your eyes for this. If I don’t get the lids it will be a bit… strange.” Longwei quirked a smile, and Harry’s stomach churned just a little at the idea of closing his eyes.

… but Longwei hadn’t tried to poison him. Hadn’t tried to kill him in his sleep.

Harry closed his eyes.

“I’ll start with your left cheek,” Longwei murmured, and a second later Harry felt the lukewarm sensation on his left cheek. Harry surprised himself by not flinching. Longwei moved swiftly. Cheeks, nose, eyes, forehead—Harry was surprised at the speed really.

It was a pleasant surprise, really, “you seem rather good at this,” Harry said when the fingers were tracing his hairline. Small mercies for the fact that Longwei hadn’t lingered over that lightning bolt. Although compared to the rest of his scars that one only looked like a beauty blemish. Smooth and light.

(Faded—all things must fade eventually. Harry half hoped that the lightning bolt would finally fade completely. It represented so much, but Harry… after so long it just felt like a chain.)

“I’ve become rather good at applying make up to others. Family—I’ve had nieces and younger cousins.” Longwei hummed, and Harry could imagine the good natured smile the other was probably wearing.
“No children?” Harry asked, because he could see Longwei married with kids. Or just with kids. He
didn’t remember a ring, but then again some people didn’t use rings. Longwei’s fingers were on his
eyes, gently rubbing circles to keep the makeup even.

Still, Longwei answered, “no children. You?”

Harry meant to lie.

But, “yes,” slipped out before he realized it.

The fingers stilled on Harry’s jaw line before pulling away. “You do? You look way too young,”
Longwei commented, ever calm.

Harry’s fingers clenched in his hair. “I… I’m 28. My wife and I… we had our first child earlier than
planned. And it just went from there.” He and Ginny had been drawn together after the final battle.
Protection and prevention hadn’t really been on anyone’s minds in the weeks following that final
battle. It wasn’t just Ginny that had been pregnant, but neither of them had really planned on it then
(it hadn’t even really been a thought). It was good that Ginny’s family had been so accepting and
practically eager to help.

“Wife?” Longwei asked, before he added, “I’m going to apply the paint to your neck. Then I’m
going to mist it to lock it in. And then some powder…” Longwei trailed off in a little mumble.

“Y.. yeah, wife.” Harry said, going still when fingers touched his neck. The paste was colder now,
having not warmed up in Longwei’s hands. Harry kept quiet, and Longwei didn’t press and he
swiftly and methodically applied everything. Shortly, a misting was adding. And then a powdery
something added (Longwei asked him to hold his breath). It was a comfortable silence that came
upon them. Longwei didn’t ask any more questions, and Harry took the time to ponder their current
predicament.

They had met on a train just a short time ago. Had barely known each other for a day—and then
Harry had met Longwei for some drunk shopping. And Harry had invited the other here. And… and
it lead to this.

Longwei called a quiet ‘finished’, and Harry opened his eyes.
“Longwei, are we friends?” Harry asked before he could think better of it.

Longwei, as he was wiping his hands on a tissue, merely smiled. “I count you as my friend.” And Harry could read between the lines. It was simple, really. What Longwei was saying was ‘I will be your friend if you wish it’, with a ‘I want to be your friend’ added in there as well.

They had met on a train. Done some drunk shopping. And Longwei had invited Harry to the circus. As a stunt driver.

And here they were.

It was crazy.

It was like Ron—inviting Harry over to his home for the holidays for the first time. Asking nothing in return.

Harry didn’t want to replace Ron. That would be impossible. And a terrible thing to do to the memory of Ron.

… but Harry didn’t have to be lonely forever.

(He had lived a life with friends and family… he deserved the chance to make new ones too. With his previous connections gone… Harry hadn’t been there to save them—but he couldn’t save everyone. He had learned that lesson the hard way in the aftermath of the last battle of Hogwarts. And even if it hurt (and it did, so much), he knew that life would move on anyway.)

“… yes. I count you as a friend as well.” Harry added, offering a hand to shake.

Longwei reached out, and they shook.

“So, you have a child?” Longwei asked, letting go and settling down in the chair. Harry, comfortable perched on the table stayed put.
Harry could have lied about that. About Ginny. But if they were going to have some weird friendship, Harry would rather not base it on lies. So he nodded, “yes. Three. Two boys and a girl.” Harry smiled to himself, imagining their youthful little faces.

“Are they home with your wife?” Longwei asked, and Harry felt like someone had punched him in the gut at the thought. His hands shifted from his knees to a white knuckled grip on the table.

Longwei’s eyes had tracked his hands. And Harry watched Longwei’s dark eyes flicker from Harry’s hands to his face.

He didn’t press.

“They’re not... they’re...” Harry wheezed before he was on his feet and pacing.

They’re old and dying. They had buried Harry a long time ago. They were as good as dead to each other. In both directions. Harry felt dizzy. Dizzy and hot and wheezy and off-footed and—

“Harry—!” Longwei called, his voice snapping Harry out of his spiral.

There was blood in Harry’s mouth. And he found the meat of his hand, the space between his thumb and index finger, in his mouth with his teeth deep in the flesh and—

Harry froze. His hand stung. Longwei slowly got up from the chair and approached. Harry watched him... and made himself stay still. Made himself not jerk away as Longwei’s hands came up, and made himself watch as Longwei quietly separated Harry’s hand from his teeth.

Suddenly, Harry couldn’t feel his body. He felt numb.

Longwei reached in to a pocket and pulled out a cloth handkerchief. He quietly wiped away at the sluggish blood before he pressed the bit of cloth down and held the pressure on to Harry’s hand.

“You don’t have to force yourself to talk. I can understand keeping things to yourself. You can just tell me you don’t want to talk about it anymore.” Longwei quietly, seriously, explained. And Harry felt the metal band around his ribs loosen.
There was no take here. No obligation. Only give what you wanted to. And that was fine.

“I don’t… want to talk. Right now.” Harry eventually broke the silence.

Longwei nodded, and changed the subject with a smile. “You’ll be doing warm ups in thirty minutes by the way. Maybe you should go get your bike?”

“… wait, how long was I sleeping?” Harry stared at Longwei as he mentally computed the hours of time he had obviously missed.

Longwei smiled and pulled away the cloth from Harry’s hand. The small wound had clotted, and Harry numbly pulled on his gloves when Longwei pressed them in to his hands. Longwei smiled but didn’t answer Harry, and said instead, “it wasn’t intolerable. Besides, you looked like you needed some more rest!”

Harry sighed, but he couldn’t help but smile.

Longwei was… a strange mix of Ron-Hermione-Neville and… and Harry couldn’t have asked for better from a new friend.

With his helmet in hand, Harry waved a goodbye to Longwei and exited the cubical. Harry took a quick detour to the bathroom before he went out and located his bike. There was a considerable amount of missing bikes from the parking lot that Harry had stored his bike in. Harry gave his bike a quick check over (tire pressure was good. Seat was still firmly in place, and overall he checked for any tampering that could have occurred while he had been away) before he took his bike off the kick stand and started to walk it toward a double door set. A set of doors he had seen another bike rider walk his bike through. Harry flicked his visor down, letting the reflective coating muffle the bright interior lights as he followed the biker in the suit that was loaded with what looked like advertisers everywhere on the chest jacket.

In fact, Harry could remember that there had been a lot of people with such patches and advertiser design on their sleeves and torsos. Harry looked down at his blank white suit. The simple red stripe down the sides were enough for him. He felt that, if he had anything more—it would be too similar to being branded. Like he would be owned.

(His lightning bolt, in a way, had been a brand.)
Following the flow of bikers, and Harry soon found the warm up area. It was a small dirt track, with men and women on bikes doing lazy circles and going over small bumps. Harry dragged his feet a little, walking toward the entrance of the track. He kicked his bike stand in to place and trailed over to watch his competition.

The air felt electric, here. Far more lively. The lights were still florescent, there was still dirt from the track everywhere, that horrible metal music, and too many bodies. Harry gently knocked at the knee high wall of sandbags that lined the oval track with his shoe. A warm up would be nice, but Harry felt confident enough in himself that he could go out cold.

“Aren’t you going to warm up?” A voice sounded at his side, and Harry turned his head to see who was speaking to him. It was a man, roughly the same height as himself—and Asian, Harry noted that, even as he felt something off about the thought. Cho had been the only Asian person he had noticed at Hogwarts. There had probably been more, but Harry had never noticed them.

Black hair, grey eyes, pale skin—with a pinched face. Those details came next to Harry after the initial evaluation of race. His bike suit was all black with no sponsors. Harry glanced briefly around, and didn’t see a bike anywhere nearby. Nor a helmet. “What’s it to you?” Harry asked, squaring his shoulders as he turned to fully face the man.

The steely eyed man merely placed his hands on his hips and leaned back—he had a youthful face, and on second thought Harry was reluctant to call him a man. Perhaps teenager or young adult?

“Oh,” the young man murmured, eyes drifting from Harry to look at the other bikers circling the track. Harry crossed his arms over his chest for a moment and waited for an inevitable continuation. There was always a ‘but’, wasn’t there?

… the young man didn’t reply.

“… um, it’s really nothing?” Harry hated to ask, but he did.

Those grey eyes looked back to Harry, before dismissively looking away. Harry couldn’t help but stare at the young man, because if that hadn’t been the most dismissive look ever then Harry would need to get his eyes checked.

Harry dropped his hands, letting them hang at his side as he observed the young man that had
walked up to him. The line of his shoulders was relaxed. His feet were shoulder width apart and knees just slightly bent. It was a very loose, relaxed stance. Harry almost wanted to say that it was a resting military stance, but not exactly. Harry took a step to the side, away from the young man.

He took another step—no reaction.

Harry stood next to his motorbike, and wondered if this new, mysterious person cared that he had just up and left the sphere of conversation.

Harry watched the young man watch the racers on the track. All the way until the intercom welcomed the riders of the G-10 group. There was a general cheering as men and women rushed out of the warm up area. Harry tracked them, and when he looked back to the young man, the black suited man was gone.

He wasn’t weirded out. Harry glanced to his bike and then to the track.

Altogether, weird. But not the strangest thing of his life. Harry slid in to place on top of his bike and turned it on.

“M group, please warm up. Thirty minutes until your event.”

Harry rolled on to the track, going easy as he did a few smooth laps around the inner edges of the oval. There were perhaps five others on the track. And two off. On one go around, Harry noticed that one of the two men at the edge of the track was that Skull from the bar. Harry grimaced, recalling the irritated face of the man from a few hours ago.

It figured that they would be in the same group.

Still, Harry had gotten in some loops and rolled out of the track.

He parked as far away from Skull as possible.

Harry recalled the picture he had of the man’s face—he didn’t doubt that the marker had been hard to get off. (He only felt a little bit guilty about the lack of ease about cleaning up—but otherwise Skull
was a consenting adult and there were worse things than getting a marker to the face after one woke up after a blackout. Like learning one bet all the money they owned on a stunt competition.) It would really just be best that they never met again.

There was still at least twenty minutes left of his ‘warm up’ time though. Harry tapped at his helmet and was glad to have it on, although he did nudge up the visor so he could see without the dark tinge of the visor.

His pocket buzzed.

A moment later and Harry had a glove off and his phone in hand. It was a text.

FROM: LONGWEI

Hi Harry! I’m in my seat!

(attachment 12kb)

Harry squinted at the blurry picture of a stadium. In the middle there was a large mound of dirt with paths that led up the side made from the constant compression of tires. There were other ramps in other places which would allow higher stunts.

If Harry wanted to win, he would need to do the hardest flips he could think of.

… which wasn’t much.

Harry sighed to himself and glumly brought himself to google to search out a good lineup. It inevitably brought him to youtube.

Inevitably brought him to stunt videos.

There really were no coincidences in this world, Harry decided as he watched Skull-from-the-bar do a shaolin backflip in a competition video. The man was good, but that first impression at the bar had really ruined any potential admiration Harry could have. Harry still paged through youtube, and by
the time the voice on the intercom called his group (the last group), Harry had a set idea of what he wanted to do.

FROM: LONGWEI:

GOOD LUCK!

Harry tucked his phone back in to his zippered pocket and followed the rest of his group over and in to a small waiting area. Harry lined up, unfortunately, right next to Skull upon direction of one of the officials in a yellow-black uniform. Harry felt something itch in the back of his mind as he focused in on the official after he was parked, but—

A hand roughly grabbed his helmet and jerked Harry’s head to the side—

“Hello,” Harry reached up and swatted the hand away and focused in on Skull’s gaping face.

“It is you!” The man practically spat. Harry nudged down his visor and grimaced to himself. Skull was parked next to him, and would remain so until they went out for their runs. The official was talking to them, but Harry couldn’t really focus on the man that made his brain itch when Skull kept talking to him in a lowered voice.

Skull’s body was tense, “that bar bill was over three hundred euros! What did you do, bath in it?” Skull’s face was twisted in a scowl, the lines running from the sides of his nose down his face had deepened with the twist. It was rather comical looking, and Harry didn’t know if his own face was grimacing or similing in response to the ridiculous picture the other painted.

Harry gave a little shrug, “I was a bit thirsty.”

“… A bit? Sohn einer hündin! Unbelievable.” Skull grumbled, slurring his German as he reached up and ran his fingers through his vibrantly purple hair.

Harry leaned back on his bike as he watched Skull—and eventually deemed the other harmless. Oh, sure, the other probably had a nasty streak in there somewhere. But of the non-violent kind. The man could swear at Harry all he liked, but in the end they were just words, and Harry didn’t have to listen to them.
The chatter around them picked up, and Harry grimaced when he noticed that the official was gone.

“… so, want to bet on who is going to win the competition?” Skull asked after a moment.

Harry glanced to Skull, finding that the man’s face was composed and intent on Harry’s face.

Harry tilted his head to the side, and Skull took that as a silent sign to continue. “Three hundred euros says I win, you lose.” Skull’s mouth crawled in to a curling smile. His chin angled up and his spine straight. Very confident, this one. But then again Harry had seen the videos of the other on the internet. It was apparently an arrogance well earned.

“No, I’m good.” Harry resisted laughing at the inevitable fall of Skull’s face.

“How am I supposed to scheme my lost money out of you if you don’t take the bet!” That was definitely a whine right there, and Harry rolled his eyes and swatted away the hand that approached from the side. Skull retracted and rubbed at his hand.

“Reborn, come on! You know you want to make a little tiny itsy bitsy bet with me, right?” Skull asked, doing his best to widen his eyes and smile pretty.

Reborn? Harry glanced around, paused, and then felt like smacking himself.

Right—that’s what he had called himself.

“My money is tied up in other things.” Harry replied, firming his spine and trying to sound older and firmer as he did so.

It was amusing, seeing the man’s face twist in disappointment.

Harry reached out and patted Skull’s shoulder, “you’ll get over it. And if you win, it’ll be all the sweeter.”

“When I win—not if,” the man murmured crossly.
(I should be saying that—Harry thought to himself, not this arschgeige.)

Harry ignored the man next to him as he continued to talk. Skull seemed content to talk and talk and talk. Even without any input. It was a relief that an official called him away, and Harry could watch one of the TV monitors in peace. Or he thought so, an official in a uniform waved at him. Harry pointed to his own chest and got a nod from the official. Harry slid off his bike, taking the key with him as he went over to where the woman is standing.

“I need to check and make sure it’s all pinned correctly!” The woman spoke loudly—British English. Harry nodded, and watched her as she checked the pins keeping his number pinned to his chest and back. When finished, she gave him a thumbs up, and Harry returned to his bike. Although shortly after sitting, the crowd roared, and an official motioned for him to roll in to the starting point.

Right. This should be fine.

The crowd quieted. Harry could hear his intro (As ‘Skull’ rather than ‘Skull DeMort’ as Skull had previously been introduced before him… and the Skull before him. And the Skull before him—no wonder Richard had sounded so annoyed by that first phone call.) There was a lackluster cheer at the name, and Harry was glad he was technically out of sight of the crowd because he was sure he would have followed in the actions of his wife if he had gotten such a lukewarm greeting.

(Ginny had, famously, as a Quidditch player in France, did a few rude gestures in the sky that had gotten her carded…)

Harry sighed, revved his engine—and waited.

5.
4.
3.
2.
1—

Harry smiled to himself. And soared.
First jump—cliffhanger flip.

Harry roared up the ramp, and once in the air—once his ascent stopped and before gravity really took a hold of him—it was everything he remembered. His heart stilled in his chest, all of his anticipatory shakes gone—this was everything he needed. His face hurt from grinning even as he yanked his body in to the backflip-cliffhanger combo.

Perfect landing. Harry used the speed to swerve around (quicker than he should) to do a quick climb up the mound to do a small trick before rolling on to a track that would bring him to the big ramp.

It seemed easier, this time—ascending. Harry picked a tsunami this time. It was almost tricky keeping the bike horizontal and level.

Harry had two more minutes.

He filled it expertly with tricks.

The cordova flip. The crowd had cheered for that.

The dead body was one of Harry’s favorites. Perfect landing.

The rock solid he did—that was so close to flying that Harry almost didn’t want to catch his bike.

The lookback Hart Attack, Harry almost didn’t scramble in time to land nicely.

Harry had time for one more, or so said the glance to the digital screens around the sides of the arena. Harry didn’t really notice much outside of the dirt and the screens. But that was all he needed really. Harry rolled in to position, and he knew exactly what he was going to do for the last one.

Kiss of Death flip.
Harry laughed to himself as he lined up, and then let the bike come to life.

… before he even hit the ramp, he knew something shifted.

Something was wrong. And he didn’t know what.

But he was at the bottom of the ramp and going too fast to stop now. Harry knew that stopping now would only hurt him. So he focused, let the engine max out—and launched himself in the air. When at the right height, he backflipped. Backflip. Handstand and knock his helmet in to a ‘kiss’ with the front fender while still upside down.

And down—down—down—

Harry secured his body seconds before the ground came up.

The moment his front tire touched the hard packed dirt, he knew what was going to happen. The bike didn’t feel right, and he watched as the front tire, the metal frame of it… crumbled. Harry lost control as he bike flipped. The world blurred. Harry saw the ground rise up to meet him. And went face first in to the dirt.

The bike followed him—slammed in to him in a dizzying blur and—

And Harry blinked up at the ceiling of the stadium through the twisted mess of his bike.

It was too loud, but the ringing in his head only hurt for a minute. Harry groaned and wiggled—and nothing hurt. Once the ringing was gone, he felt fine. Harry pushed at his bike, and found that it wasn’t budging. He shifted himself to try again, but the bike moved on its own.

Well, he thought it was on its own. But it was really just the paramedics.

“Sir! Participant is conscious.” The female paramedic to his left said as she crouched down next to Harry’s head.
“Hey, hey! Skull—don’t move, okay. We’ll stabilize—“ One of the paramedics at his elbow started to run off.

“I’m fine,” Harry blinked at them, and realized his helmet was gone. He sat up in a lurch, and ignored the horrified gasps of all the paramedics. Harry raised a hand and rubbed at his neck. A look to the left and he grimaced at the twisted remains of his bike. That had been expensive!

And the shattered remains of his helmet littered the dirt. Literally shattered. It was shrapnel.

Harry ignored the squawking of the paramedics as he rose to his feet. Of course, as he rose, the noise of the crowd died. It was literally silent in the stadium. It was eerie, really, that all the noise just went away. Harry turned and moved toward his bike, but paused when he felt a breeze. He looked down at the shredded remains of the upper half of his jump suit.

Wait, was he actually injured?

Harry patted himself down in a quick panic. But nothing hurt. There was no blood. And Harry didn’t see any swelling or bruises.

“Well… huh.” Harry glanced to the bike, toward the indent his body had made in the dirt, and then to the helmet.

And then a news crew shoved a camera in his face. The words of the lady with the microphone slurred together in incomprehension. Harry stared blankly. “… what?”

Longwei dropped a hand in front of the camera lens, his other arm wrapping around Harry’s shoulder. Longwei shouted a quick “no comment!” at the camera, using his hand to shove it down even as he shifted and dragged Harry toward one of the staff entrances/exits of the arena.

“Wait—Longwei—“ Harry tried to catch the other’s attention, but Longwei shook his head, and pulled Harry out of sight of the suddenly screaming crowds and in to the back waiting area. Harry just caught Skull out of the corner of his eye before Longwei stepped back, pale faced and eyes widen in front of Harry.

“Are you hurt?” Longwei whispered.
Harry shook his head, he actually felt rather good.

Longwei let out one long, bone weary sigh even as his hands landed on Harry’s shoulder. Longwei leaned forward until his forehead found a place against one of Harry’s shoulders as well.

Harry patted the other on the back.

Some flashing out of the corner of his eye, and Harry turned his head to watch one of the screens in the waiting area do a ‘replay’ of the crash. Harry watched his front wheel crumble. Watched his body get launched over the handlebars.

Watched out his motorbike landed on him—his body, his head, and how the ball of machine-human spilled to a stop next to the ply board walls of the active arena. Harry felt a little sick to his stomach, watching that.

Harry gave Longwei another pat on the back, but didn’t dislodge the other.

No one came near them, and Harry was reluctant to move Longwei.

It didn’t take long before a wide eyed Richard joined them.

“… not a scratch on you,” was the first thing Richard said to Harry. And Harry paused and did a quick check down. Harry observed his body for a moment.

“Yeah, seems so.” Not a scratch indeed.

“That’s good… I hired the emergency team, but I’m glad that there wasn’t really a need for them…” Richard shook his head before he gave a long sigh and held up a business card to Harry. Harry stared at it for a moment before he reached out and accepted it.

“In any case—you’re one of the best damn stuntmen that I’ve ever seen. Pity I have to disqualify you.” Richard looked rather wretched at the thought. Harry, for a second, wondered how much the
man had bet on him and now lost before the words really sunk in.

Indignant, “disqualify me?” Harry’s throat tightened, and his words came out more of a hiss.

“It’s unfortunate. But we’re taking the best from each group and having them do one last stunt drive to declare one the winner. Your bike is trash. You didn’t finish your round and you were not standing in the designated end point when your time was up. Disqualified.” Richard didn’t even look apologetic.

And Harry couldn’t use logic against the man.

The business card crumpled in Harry’s tight grip.

“If you ever want to do more stuntwork, give me a call!” Richard gave a simple wave as he turned and walked off.

And then it really hit—Harry had lost.

Lost the competition.

And all his money.

“… fuck.” Harry hated the burn in his eyes at that point. It was pointless crying, but he really wanted to anyway. Damn his drunk self for betting on this stupid competition.

Longwei pulled back, hand on his forehead and looking less pale faced and wild as he did so.

“… shall we leave?” Longwei spoke quietly.

“… yeah.” Harry sighed. He had nothing to collect here after all.
Of course, before they could really leave, Harry was accosted by the paramedics and got a full physical check over. Harry couldn’t even tell how many people looked at his unmarked body. In the end, he got some hospital scrubs to change in to, and it was insanely late at night.

Longwei paid for the cab back to Harry’s apartment. And Harry really didn’t have the energy to tell Longwei to go away when the man followed him out of the cab. Harry merely sighed, used a key to open his apartment, and smiled wearily at Oodako as the octopus rose from Harry’s bed area.

Harry let himself in first and heard Longwei close the door. Harry ignored the bird in the window. He ignored the mess of his things. And he went straight to Oodako. Harry reached down, and smiled when Oodako wrapped his tentacles around Harry’s arms, and used that to eventually wrap himself around Harry’s torso.

The soft pressure of the cling let something in the back of Harry’s mind ease. And he relaxed.

Until a too familiar chameleon popped up on top of Oodako’s head.

It was Mr. Chameleon’s chameleon.

Harry swallowed.

This was a terrible end to a terrible day. Harry raised his eyes and looked around his apartment. The tarp was still inside, but it was flat and with no way for anyone to hide in there. Harry wearily looked to the kitchen, but that was empty too. He silently walked to the kitchen where the bird was crowding the window. Harry stuck his head out, and noticed no one crouched around his window on the other side.

“Harry, what are you doing?” Longwei asked, even as the man moved to Harry’s kitchen and moved to the kettle.

“Um… nothing.” Harry lied through his teeth, and grimaced at the little chameleon crawled to his neck and settled in against Harry’s collar.

That only left the bathroom. Harry edged to it, and ignored the quizzical look Longwei gave him as Harry approached the bathroom. The door was shut. Harry held his breath for a moment before he burst in to action and yanked the bathroom door open.
He slapped his hand against the light switch, and when the florescent lights flared…

… no one was in there.

… But there was his wand. Harry shoved it in to his waistband and dropped his shirt over the handle.

That didn’t explain the chameleon and the lack of Reborn, though. Harry flicked off the light and dragged his feet over to Longwei. Longwei looked a bit frazzled, but overall the man seemed calm again. Harry felt calmer just having the man there.

(If Reborn actually tried to spirit him away, Harry actually felt like he could trust Longwei to help stop him.)

“So, it seems like you don’t own much. Which is great! We can leave any time for the circus!” Longwei cheerily added.

Oh. Right. Circus.

…it wasn’t as if Harry had any money left to support himself or Oodako now.

(Harry was still in disbelief that he had actually lost… let alone that a bike had been able to crumble like that!)

(Tampered, a voice in the back of his head hissed. And Harry’s gut agreed.)

Harry rubbed at his face.

“Yes… yeah… I’ll tell the landlord tomorrow.” Harry… gave in.

Longwei patted the other on the shoulder. Spotted the chameleon, and promptly started to coo at it.
It was a long night before Longwei left to go get a room at a hostel.

... And Harry realized that the fedora was nowhere in sight.

He was not going to be getting any sleep now, was he?

Chapter End Notes

... I am sorry for the lateness. And I hope that the quality of the chapter hasn't dropped. April has literally been the worst month of my life. The exam. (I failed horrendously there is no redemption.) My dad had to get taken to the emergency room. I was struggling with work...

And then during an annual test for my work, I tested positive for TB. Who the fork even gets a positive result from that? I had to get a chest x-ray, have been banned from work until the result comes in, and if I don't work I don't get paid. I was recently told I have been demoted from part time thirty to just part time and no longer qualify for healthcare and... It's all been so bad. I believe the only reason this chapter came out is because it was mostly done at the start of the month, and I just finished it up now. ... and that's my complaining. And freaking out. And general well-being.

I hope you guys liked Longwei! He is really playing the long game right now. And even though there is some evidence about what happened during the blackout, Harry still doesn't remember it. And there really is no way to check if Longwei is telling the truth. I love Leon. The cute little thing.

Side note-anyone want to make a guess on who Mr. black suit and steely eyes is? Fun little showing up of another character.

I should put manipulation as a tag...

Next chapter will be Harry joining the circus! Getting some money. And more memories. Some nice twists will be coming up! .... I can't promise when another chapter will come up. But I'll do my best. Anything you guys would want to see during this circus arc? (It's only going to be a chapter long. I will probably actually employ time skips in chapter.) Who would you want to see there?

And who wants to guess about the upcoming plot twists? (As in multiples.) There is a twist about the memories, a twist about Longwei (I'm sure a lot of you can guess this one), and a twist about the squibs!

I know I haven't responded to most of the reviews from the last chapter. I just want to say that I've read them all, and I really, really appreciate them. They made me feel better when I was feeling so low.
And someone made a giftfic for this fic! I have no clue on how to link it here, but it's called "Wayward soul" by Firehedgehog. If you like, go take a look? (I'll leave a review there soon enough. <3)

(Wow this note was long... thanks for reading everyone!)
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Something is going wrong inside. And Harry might be a little too compromised to fully wrap his head around it. Harry was beginning to miss Ron and Hermione enough to contemplate homicide.

Chapter Notes

This chapter unexpectedly wrote itself outside of what I planned. We might be pushing a little past my ideal 20 chapter story... we'll see.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 12

Harry grimly observed the chameleon from his seat in the dry bathtub. He had darkened his apartment shortly after Longwei had left, and had dragged his sleeping roll in to the bathroom before he had shut the door. In the end, he ended up lining the tub with the soft materials and curling up with Oodako.

The bird had squawked for a time, but Harry had ignored that thing. It had gotten quiet when a resident above had started to yell.

It was eerie, how still the chameleon could be.

… it had also now taken Harry’s toothbrush and was brushing against it like a cat.

Harry hadn’t even taken off his boots. He remembered how much the sprint through France had torn up his feet and he would rather not do that again. Harry had packed away all of his important things in to the trunk necklace. He had thrown in the shreds of his racing suit and scrubs in to the backpack, along with a spare pair of shoes and a few other things he could show off if needed that he had things that weren’t just appearing from nowhere.

It led him to now. To watching the damn chameleon, all the while his fingers toying with the
unshrunken memory vials. He was trying not to remember the events that led him to where he was now. “Oodako, remind me to transfigure a new toothbrush tomorrow,” Harry sighed, twitching slightly over the heavy footsteps above his head. It was increasingly becoming closer to dawn and the busy-bodies above were getting ready for their early morning work.

Harry hadn’t slept. He couldn’t sleep.

He wanted to not think about what had led him to here. But Harry literally could not do anything but think about it.

He had had that competition in the bag! How could it have gone wrong?

Harry let his chin rest on the edge of the bathtub, and watched the slow rub the chameleon did as he rubbed his belly over the toothbrush bristles. It was only vaguely annoying. It was just a twitch that made him want to set the chameleon on the window seal with the bird and wait for Reborn to pick him up (because he was obviously around).

The motorbike, though.

That was something he could obsess over.

The bike had been fine when he had picked it up from the lot.

Between then, and that jump… he had only been off it two times. Inevitably—that led to only two variables. The black suited Asian kid, and the British woman. Either the two were in on it, or they had been unfortunate distractors that had given a chance for someone to step in and tamper. Harry grimaced and shifted so he could press his forehead against the cool side of the tub.

Harry ignored Oodako’s suckers as they attached to his jaw line. Somehow it had been easy to accept the large octopus that could change size at will. Although Harry had yet to personally see it change its main core body bigger than a basketball. He had a few memories of it being bigger.

“This is a headache,” Harry muttered to himself. The soft brushing noise from the chameleon was only making it worse. “I wish Ron was here…” Harry sighed—Ron and Hermione often came as a duo. The smarts and the planning. Somehow it worked, even when they were clashing. Hermione was a bit too rigid with her plans, but she had the smarts to support her reasoning of why things
should be done a certain way. Ron, however, was supremely great at reading situations and reacting accordingly. A great intuition that could pick out the motives of other people and prepare for them. Harry had relied on that more than once.

In the end, his brooding led down to one problem.

The bike. And it’s missing status. Harry fished out his phone and tapped the power button to bring the screen back to life under his touch. Harry pressed on the voicemail that would lead back to Richard.

“Hello Harry, my condolences once again. But thank you for your participation! Upon your approval, I would like to request using video from your jumps in promotional video for next year’s competition. The papers releasing your videos wasn’t signed, if you have the time to come back in the next few days to sign, or have an email I can send the forms to, we can get this worked out. Royalties will be included. Thank you for your time, and thank you for sending a team to pick up the wreck!” Click.

Harry couldn’t even bother to open his eyes.

Sabotage. It had to have been sabotage. But who could find him here? He had been in a damn helmet the other time. Amongst a swarm of other ‘skulls’ and he was the only one who wrecked? What were the chances of that?

He should just leave. Unshrink the other bike and leave.

(… Longwei expected him at the circus, though?)

Harry frowned at the sinking feeling in his gut. He was rather familiar with the feeling of being afraid to cause disappointment in others. But even then, Longwei shouldn’t matter that much to him. He was a vague, new friend. One that Harry should be able to drop faster than a hot coal if he was detrimental to Harry’s wellbeing.

So why did he feel this way?

The chameleon stopped making noise.
Have raised his head and blearily peered at the silly thing. It had climbed on top of the sink tap and seemed to be perching for the night. Well, the early morning.

“I need to leave, Oodako.” Harry might have thought himself insane for continuing to talk to the octopus, but he had done the same to Hedwig. And the gentle squeeze of tentacles was enough of a response as any hoot from Hedwig. Harry shifted and sat up properly.

But he didn’t want to disappoint Longwei.

Harry groaned, hands coming up to roughly scrub at his hair. He hated this feeling! It was like playing games all night with Ron, and then trudging to breakfast to face Hermione’s disappointment after she had taken the time to make study notes for the exam after breakfast. It was terrible.

“Longwei isn’t important. Making him upset shouldn’t matter to me.” Harry said to himself, watching Oodako shift around and sprawl over Harry’s suddenly available lap space now that he was sitting up. “It shouldn’t.” Harry added, before he pressed his lips together to make himself stop. Oodako reached up and patted Harry’s face with a tentacle.

It was nice comfort.

Although ultimately it didn’t solve anything.

“… Maybe it will work out,” Harry offered Oodako. The circus could be great. Maybe he’d make an awesome life there? A wizard in a circus tent. Doing tricks and stunts on the side? It wouldn’t require much thinking. And from his understanding, Harry would be able to travel to many places. Plenty of adventure.

… but did he want to?

Harry fished up the memory bracelet from his bedding and held it up. This was his key to everything, really. Harry knew that if he could solve the past, then the present would be easier to navigate. “The only people that have shown their faces are the Arcobaleno… are they the only ones I had?” Harry shifted and raised his legs so that he could lean back against the tub side facing the wall, and his legs could dangle out and in to the bathroom over the side.
“Oodako… we need to find the beginning. The unspeakables placed me in Germany. That’s where this faux mission started. I can’t go and play circus until I know where this started.” The memory of the horror that had been done to his face still made his stomach churn, but it hadn’t been the start.

Harry picked up another cluster of memories and held them in a fist as he dropped the belt to the side. Methodically, Harry straightened out the cluster and levitated them in to place at his elbow.

His chest gave a twinge, and it was enough to make Harry pause and press a hand to the center of his chest. The feeling was gone, and Harry couldn’t place exactly where it happened. Oodako’s main tentacle fell in to place on top of Harry’s hand, and Harry placed the handle of his wand between his teeth to free up his wand hand long enough to give a soothing pat to Oodako’s head.

Petting Oodako reminded him of his children. Freshly born and so soft he had to moderate all his strength so that they didn’t break under his touch. Soft hair and still forming skulls.

Harry took his wand and selected his first memory.

(... Mafia… island?)

Harry dropped the empty vial and collected another.

(Russia—the cold was biting. But his flames buffered the worst of it away. Skull always ran hot. Hotter than most. Skull grinned all the same, crouched as he was in front of Viktor and Kirill. “Well,” Skull murmured as Russian and blood slipped out, “this has been fun. But I need to go!”)

Another vial.

(“Wow, what is this called again? Green tea flavor? It’s bitter but good!”)

Another.

(“Oodako, let’s go swimming in the East China sea!”)
(…Senpai, I seem to have come across some, uh, pirates…) Another.

(…their mission hadn’t gone smoothly. It had been terrible from the start. Skull had been regulated to lackey and was considered incompetent. Skull wasn’t incompetent! So what if he had just done everything for movies instead? Skull knew martial arts, even if they were stages. And when the three suited men had jumped over the wall of the estate that Skull had been ordered to ‘guard’, he was easily able to take them down. He had them bound in twine and unconscious—and was terribly proud of himself when he produced the three to Reborn and Colonello. Skull hadn’t been prepared for the gun, or how dark real blood looked in the moonlight.)

Harry stared down at his hands after dropping the last vial of his current line up to the side. Slowly he reached up and pressed his hands against his eyes and breathed.

Brain and blood and the winking sight of bone shards—

(“Bone of the father, unknowingly given…”)

Harry pulled his hands away and found his hands dry. His face was dry, but his soul felt wet. He hadn’t even known them, but those three men had had their lives wasted away. Harry, unfortunately, had been more than willing to give people second chances as he grew older. There had been stipulations, of course. But he had never been able to abide by lives cut short as long as their crimes weren’t too heinous.

(“…blood of the enemy…”)

Harry rubbed the crook of his arm, folding in on himself as he tilted his head back and closed his eyes.

(The fiendfyre roared as it charged at the unspeakables. Harry noted the whites of their eyes even as he slammed the door shut. They were as good as dead, and he didn’t have the time to feel guilt until he was long gone and still alive—–)
“What was it Hermione said about second chances?” Harry asked himself, because he knew that Oodako wouldn’t know this. “… only the strong give second chances?” Hermione had never been one for second chances after the war. Harry didn’t really know what they would say about Hermione, since she was one of the strongest people that he knew. Even more so than Ginny, and Ginny was strong enough that Harry felt weak.

Harry hadn’t felt strong in the department of mysteries.

… he had been angry. And terrified.

Which seemed to be his constant state of living. Now. In the future.

Harry grimly took out another cluster of memories. Harry levitated them up and made another line in the air. Harry took a moment to pause and check his cell phone. The power was almost gone and he needed to charge it. But he didn’t have the mind to get up and find the charger. Still, it was four in the morning.

He was tempted… oh so tempted.

He picked up his phone and moved to his messages. He clicked on the number he knew would give him a direct line to Reborn. Harry glanced to the man’s last reply, and quietly composed a message to the man.

“Why did you become a hitman?” (Because it echoed in Harry’s head. Reborn. The world’s greatest hitman…. But children didn’t start out wanting to be Hitman. What led this man to here?)

… Albus Dumbledore was a great man, who had left a mark on the world and on other people. And this was his mark on Harry. When Harry was unclouded and not in a rage, he was more open to second chances. Because everyone had a purpose in life. Even if, ultimately, it was to repent for their sins. (Snape… Pettigrew… They had been terrible in their own different ways. But they had died serving a purpose. All of which, revolved around Harry.)

Harry debated with himself, before he pressed the ‘send’ button.
Harry remembered the cursed Reborn waving around such a title like a shield against the curse. Harry was gathering more pieces of the puzzle, and his memories seemed to be slowly slotting in to place the more he returned to his head.

He set the phone face down at his hip and gathered another vial.

(Luce was cold and kind in equal measures. An easy smile on hand, looking angelic with her white dress and easy recline in the comfortable chair. The cookies from her hand tasted bitter, and Skull itched to run as much as he wanted to sit at her feet and beg her to take him home. The baby bump made him want to throw himself in front of any bullet that would come her way. Out of all of the Arcobaleno, she was the one that sat him down and calmly explained what he lacked without a demand for anything in return...)

The warmth in his chest hurt.

Harry ignored the quiet buzzing on his phone.

(Luce reached across the kitchen nook table and placed a hand on top of Skull’s scarred hands. The smile was easy on her face, and her touch was so warm against the chill that seemed to be coming inside. “We’re not a great fit, in the future. But we’re okay to exist as we are now. In the same sphere. Fate... has other plans for you, Skull.” But Skull didn’t want that. He wanted what was in front of him. For the first time in his short, short life he wanted something like a family. He could build himself around Luce. He could make her the center of his world. Not a wife. Not a lover. But as family. A brother to a sister. “That future is not for you.” Luce murmured, smile sliding away as if she could read his very thoughts. “Not for you, and not for me.”)

The phone was still buzzing.

Agitated (disappointed—annoyed—humiliated at rejection for what-could-have-been), Harry snatched up his phone and slid the green button to the side. “What?” Harry hated how wrecked he sounded, but he wouldn’t take it back.

“Are you remembering?” Reborn’s voice was soft over the line, and it made the echo of the bathroom seem all the more claustrophobic.

“... yes.” Harry barely bit off the ‘senpai’ that wanted to fall from his mouth. It burned in his gut.
Harry pressed the phone against his eat, and heard the quiet shifting of cloth.

“What have you remembered?” These questions were leading to something, and Harry did not want to play any games with the man.

“I’m remembering enough. Enough to know that the Arcobaleno are not people I want to be associated with.” Harry had goosebumps from memory flashes of black blood and moon washed grey brain.

Harry heard the quiet inhale of a breath through the nose, and wondered if such a comment had hurt the other. And then Harry wondered if he even cared about such a thing. “Murder. You’re a murderer. Are all of you the same?” Harry’s voice trailed off.

“It’s part of the job description. Mafioso.” Reborn spoke evenly, and if the other could even feel hurt Harry wouldn’t even be able to tell by the man’s voice.

“That’s not me,” Harry replied instead. He was a murderer, yes. But was he a murderer for hire? No. That was a big, resounding, no.

Reborn hummed, “are you sure? You got over your aversion eventually.”

“Lies—“ Harry hissed before he could think better of it. The memory of Luce’s denial for family still burning, and he would not let someone manipulate him right now.

“How do you know? Do you remember our history?” Reborn’s tone and voice were not changing, but Harry felt the dig of intent shift.

Harry folded his legs and sat up straight, a hand coming up to hold on to the edge of the tub. “I wouldn’t change that much,” Harry was sure that he, at the core of himself, couldn’t have changed that much.

“It appears that we have a difference of opinion,” Reborn’s snark was showing.

“It appears so.” Harry sneered, and hung up the phone and dropped it to his side.
Harry sighed—and that was what he meant when he couldn’t even see himself as the victim at times. He had been the cause. And he had retaliated against actions taken against his person that he had instigated in the first place.

He was slowly gaining a little mountain of empty memory vials.

Harry snorted, pressed the back of his hand against his mouth as he laughed at himself. This ‘Viper’
didn’t seem so bad? It seemed that Harry, as Skull, respected their space. Although Harry himself was curious now, was Viper a man or a woman? Were those marks on their cheeks scars, paint, or tattoos? It was all very… purple.

Harry glanced to the vial of memories he had charmed to float. Three more. And he didn’t really have anything substantial other than the fact that the Arcobaleno were very bad news. And that Reborn had admitted that they had crime connections.

…and Harry was involved with murder. (His kill count was certainly rising.)

Two memories of Italy’s lovely countryside, and then the last memory brought something, altogether, more important.

(His eyes opened, cracking and squinting against the white of the room. It took a moment before he opened his eyes all the way. He looked left, and right—and found himself in a long room with a few other beds. His eyes tracked the room once more. There was no one else there. There was something heavy on his face. It took ages before he raised a skinny arm to flip a hand over the plastic thing over his mouth. He curled his fingers and jerked the thing away.

The hot air he had been breathing disappeared. And it was like cold hands were smothering his face. He choked, and something was beeping. There was some yelling and his vision went dark before it lightened up. The warmth was back on his face, and there were fleshy, pink-brown-blue-white moving things around his bed. Holes opening and shutting on their circular tops—

“Sir, we’re glad you’re awake. You’re at University Medical Center, in Hamburg. You’ve been in a coma for some time...”

Harry wheezed slightly as he came back to himself, his phone blessedly silent.

Well… that was a start.

Harry shrunk the rest of the vials and stuck the bracelet around his wrist. Harry banished the other vials. He hauled himself to his feet, and with a bit of magic and work, he had packed everything up and in to the one bag. He looked to Oodako, a hand coming down to cradle the octopus’ body. Without having to say a word, the octopus gave a shiver and shrank enough to be more travel capable. Harry shrugged his leather jacket on over his body, and Oodako made himself at home wrapped around Harry’s torso, hidden.
He held on to the straps in his hand. He didn’t want to squish Oodako, so he kept the bag there. Harry checked his trunk necklace. And then double checked his memory bracelet. His trunk. His memory. His wand. That was everything he needed. Everything else was replaceable.

With a sigh, Harry gently picked up the chameleon as he exited the bathroom in to the dim morning light of the apartment. The window was still open. And the bird was still there. Not sleeping, either. Harry walked over to the window and set the chameleon down next to the bird. Harry eyed the bird for a moment, before he decided that it was fine. They both seemed terribly intelligent.

Harry checked his phone. It was on its last leg.

He sent a text to Longwei.

’Something came up. I have to settle a few things. Text me an address to meet you at the circus in three days. Phone is dying, will charge when able.’

There, that settled something in his stomach.

To Reborn, ’come get your chameleon.’

Harry rubbed at his face before he turned to the kitchen counter. He had a pen and notepad here, and he scrawled a quick message to the landlord. The lease was supposed to end in two weeks, but Harry didn’t see a point in staying here. So he wrote down his plans, signed the name that the landlord knew him by, and folded the letter in to his pocket. He’d stick it in the mailbox on the way out.

There. An easy wrap.

Harry checked to make sure the motorbike was in his jacket pocket and that nothing around the apartment was anything he would miss. He checked the bird and Chameleon, and found that they were fine.

…the calm was nice, while it lasted.
Harry opened the front door with tug, and stepped in to a body. That didn’t move—Harry found himself bouncing back slightly before he found his feet. Harry blinked down at the shiny black shoes before he raised his eyes. It was that stupid sunny shirt—and the fedora.

“… Reborn.” Harry forced himself to not take a step back.

The man tilted his head slightly to the side and nodded, “me.” The man slipped his cell phone in to his front pocket.

“What do you want?” Harry questioned, tightening his grip on the handle of the door he still had, as well as shifting his weight to his toes.

Reborn shifted, foot subtly moving forward to block any attempt for door clamping, even as an arm came up to rest against the door frame. He minutely leaned forward a little bit, using his slightly superior height to loom. “Many things, really. Answers—for one. And your compliance.” The man’s dark eyes swept over Harry’s body, lingering on Harry’s empty hands and on the bulge Oodako made under his coat.

It was easy to slip in to English when Reborn was responding in kind. Italian accent twisted the words, but Harry found the accent familiar and altogether easy to understand.

“Why would I give you my compliance?” Harry frowned.

“You desire answers, no?” Reborn was slowly shifting his weight forward. But Harry wouldn’t be cowed back. He refused to lean back against the looming. He refused to be the first to give.

Harry firmed up his shoulders, “I can get my own answers.”

“Yes—but is the world stationary? You have holes in your knowledge, and enemies at your back. You claim no friends. How will you survive.” The end was less a question and more of a musing as the arm leaning against the doorframe slid down, Reborn’s hand lingering on the frame above Harry’s own. Reborn was in the perfect position to launch himself forward.
Not good—the challenge that Harry had issued thrummed in the back of his mind. “… What’s it to you?” The remembrance of the sabotage was not far from thought.

“Skull.” Reborn spoke, and Harry swallowed his immediate denial (notmynamenotmyname) and was sure that Reborn caught the action all the same even as the hitman moved to speak, “you are Arcobaleno. You don’t stop being Arcobaleno from wishful thinking.”

“I’m not mafia,” Harry flashed his teeth, as if that would help cement his denial.

“You don’t remember it. But you are. We trained the civilian out of you—we can do so again.” Reborn was horribly calm, and Harry could see a weaker version of himself being swayed by such a thing in the face of uncertainty.

“Not a civilian.” Harry just wanted to refute everything Reborn spoke, to find some way to get some small victory.

“Ho?” Reborn shifted again, and they were so close that Harry could practically feel the movement of Reborn’s breath.

(I’m the best! The immortal—!)

“As a police officer, I’ve caught more terrible people that you’ll ever—“ Harry hissed as the hand on the doorframe slammed down on to his wrist in an iron grip. The grip jerked him forward, and then Harry found himself off balance and being pushed back. The door to the apartment slammed shut. And the bag looped over the wrist that Reborn had captured slammed back and forth.

It actually hurt.

“Police officer?” Reborn’s voice was so flat.

Well, perhaps not the smartest thing to say to a hitman.

“Let me go,” as soon as the words spilled out, Harry felt the déjà vu for it. Reborn’s grip tightened, and Harry didn’t doubt that he felt the same.
“Not so hard this time—“ the voice at Harry’s shoulder made him jump, and his eyes left Reborn to find Colonnello in the room. When…? Right, the window. The window that had remained open for the bird.


The grip eased minutely, not enough to stop hurting. It took a moment before Harry realized that this was the wrist that Harry had broken in Reborn’s grip to get away. And the way that the fingers were minutely shifting, Reborn was checking for a break. Checking the level of pain.

“We’ve captured you,” Reborn taunted with a raising of the captured wrist.

That was a challenge.

Harry lashed out, kicking a leg back toward Colonnello. The blond let out a ‘whoa!’ even as Harry let his weight drop. Reborn grunted, but appeared strong enough to stand on his own. But Harry lashed out with his foot, kicking in the side of Reborn’s knee.

Reborn’s knee buckled. But the grip on his wrist creaked in force.

Two arms came up under his own—the taller Colonnello lifted him up. Harry found his feet leaving the floor. Reborn let go of his wrist, now that Harry was contained somewhere higher. Harry straightened his arms in one last desperate bid to get out. But Colonnello’s hands laced together behind Harry’s head, and he found himself a bit… trapped.

Harry would kill to have Ron at his side. (And considering his record now, well… not a statement to take lightly.)

“… shit…” Harry grumbled, kicking out a foot and watching Reborn easily slap it down.

Not good.
He should have ran the moment he saw the chameleon. (But… Longwei
—NOTIMPORTANTWHYWHYWHY—)

“Skull, we have some questions for you,” Reborn responded easily as he circled around. And then out of Harry’s vision. Harry grimaced at the interrogation tactic that Reborn was using. Harry still jumped when he felt fingers weasel in to his sleeve over his obviously not broken wrist. The touch was there, and then it was gone.

“Where were you and Colonnello being held?” Reborn circled back in to view, and kept walking.

Harry pressed his lips together, in stubborn silence.

“Are you siding with them?” Reborn asked, from somewhere behind Harry’s head. And Colonnello shifted, obviously uncomfortable with the idea.

“No…” Harry murmured. He wouldn’t side with Frank.

“Then why not give me the information I want? What are they to you?” Reborn continued on. And it was the worst thing ever, being captured by this man. Harry had a feeling that this interrogation was going to go exactly as Reborn wanted it to go.

Harry squirmed. Yep, Colonnello hadn’t let up at all.

“I’m not letting you go,” Colonnello added, not even adjusting the grip he had locked Harry’s arms in. Colonnello didn’t even need to emphasis how stuck Harry was. Harry flailed a leg out, and watched a prowling Reborn smack it down again with a painless shove.

“What are they to you?” Reborn asked again, from somewhere just out of sight.

Harry’s eyes caught a blue haired woman with a red mark on her cheek, could see her setting down the bag that had gotten lost in the scuffle and pawing through it. Through his ripped suit and little odds and ends. Harry frowned, but didn’t bother to tell her off as he connected her image with the mental picture of the toddler from his memories.
Reborn rudely captured his jaw and angled his face back to the current interrogation.

“Lackey…” Reborn started, voice low.

“I don’t answer to you. I don’t have to do anything I don’t want to do.” Harry pressed his mouth together tight as he tugged at his arms. Shifting as much as he could, looking for some give.

Reborn crowded in close, pushing down the knee Harry brought up to keep them separate. Reborn’s grip on his jaw never abated, and Harry held his breath and stayed still as their foreheads touched. They were eye to eye now, and Harry wanted to be defiant, but didn’t dare actually close his eyes. That just seemed like a stupid move, and Harry made more than enough accidentally to deliberately do a stupid move.

“And what is it that you want to do? Hm?” Reborn’s voice was silky low, and Harry gagged a little in the back of his mind as it reminded him of Snape. Snape had had a deep, dangerous voice like this and it had terrorized Harry when he was young. It was a voice that promised painful things should Harry fail to perform as expected. And Harry did not plan on moving to Reborn’s dance. He just had… to… get out.

The silence crawled, and Reborn eventually spoke up again, “anything Lal?”

“Nothing. Clothes. Shoes. No papers or tickets.” The woman concluded calmly as she neatly rolled and folded everything neatly back in to the bag she had pulled everything out of. Harry glanced to the side, trying to see past Reborn’s face. But the other was too close.

Reborn never took his eyes off Harry. It was eerie.

All of these people were terrible.

“You were always horrible, weren’t you?” Harry observed, trying to crane his head back but unable to with the grip. “That’s just how you are.”

Reborn’s dark eyebrows raised up. But his silence prompted more.
“You shot at me. You beat me. All I wanted was help—did you ever help me?” Harry asked, pulling at his memories as he scrambled to find something to off balance everything. There was that calculating light in Reborn’s eyes, and Harry heard Colonnello’s sharp breath in his ear. One of these two had to give, and Harry was setting his hopes on Colonnello as the weak link.

He just needed to find the right verbal trigger.

Harry would not lie—he had suffered lies before. But the truth… well, he could do that.

“I’m too old to take this shit from anyone. I refuse. I’m not your lackey. I’m not this strange Skull. I’m Harry—I will not bend to your perception of me.” Harry refused to change himself to be some kind of facsimile of a person.

“I am sorry, Colonnello, that you got caught up in my mess. What they did to you, no one deserves that. But you have new eyes, now. With vision better than you’ve ever had before—“ Harry was looking to Reborn, but he was talking to Colonnello, now. Harry could feel the fact that the man was holding his breath. Reborn obviously noticed the change. Harry could see the man shifting, the hand rising to silence him.

Now or never.

Now or never.

“They wanted you to die—I didn’t know you then, but I wouldn’t let an innocent man die in my place. They ripped out your eyes, and you felt every second of it. They wouldn’t give you anything to block the pain because they’re terrible human beings. But they ripped them out, because they were going to use the space to cut you away, until they could pull out your brain in one, whole piece—“ Harry was rambling, trying to induce a flash back. Anything. Anything to make the grip weaken.

Harry jerked his body, tugging at his arms.

Nothing budged.

The hand sealed over his mouth.
“… you’re certainly more conniving, now. I’m not sure I like it.” Reborn murmured.

Harry glared—if his mouth wasn’t blocked, he would have had a nice come back of, ‘I don’t exist to please you’ because Harry thought that it had a nice ring to it. But the opportunity was lost, and the hand didn’t move.

Colonnello let out a shaky breath and shook his head.

“What would a mafia family even want a brain for?” Colonnello murmured.

“Biological research,” Reborn offered easily.

Harry snorted—they thought the mafia was responsible for them? Harry mentally rolled his eyes. And remembered last second that Reborn was still so close and watching so intently.

“Oh, not mafia then?” Reborn humored, amused that he was getting answers so easily, as much as Harry mentally raged that the man was still getting answers from his silenced actions. Harry put more energy in to squirming.

“So, not mafia… and it’s a group of people with connections to you… who were after you. Not the Arcobaleno. Not Colonnello.” Reborn mused, and Harry heard rather than saw Lal walk over to their little gathering.

Her voice was more of a surprise just because of the rarity that Harry remembered it coming from her adult mouth rather than her toddler mouth—“they were efficient in their take down, as Colonnello described of their capture. Must have been a militant force.” Harry tried to stop his grimace, because that was a crude but true description of the Aurors. Not exactly normal police, and similar to military police.

Harry hated the fact, right now more than ever, that he had never gone back and mastered mind magics of the protective kind right then and there. Slack faced Snape had had the protection from interrogation by having a face he could control. Harry deeply, deeply wished he had the same thing.

“So, they wanted our Skull for his brain,” Reborn snorted, and the hand pressed harder against Harry’s mouth, pushing his head back as far as it would go. It didn’t hurt, but it was putting some strain on his body to contort at such a strange back bending angle.
“They sealed his flame and then wanted the brain? As an experiment?” Colonnello brought up.

“Skull told me, a few weeks before you were taken—that he thought he was being followed…” Reborn trailed off, and Harry wondered how that had gone. How, or why, the other Harry had even approached Reborn with such a thing. But the silent, quick breath of Colonnello behind his head spoke volumes of the fact that Reborn hadn’t released such information before.

Which meant that communication was poor. Mismanaged trust?

Harry gave a mighty jerk of his arms, and felt the slightly weakened hands slip on his arm. Harry grinned as he felt the give, but choked when Reborn’s hands clamped down on his neck. Harry’s feet dropped to the ground, and Colonnello let go entirely as Reborn’s hands caged Harry in.

Harry dug his nails in to Reborn’s hands—and Harry scowled at the leather his hands met. It was skin warm and skin soft—he hadn’t even noticed Reborn was wearing gloves because the color matched the man’s flesh in the dim morning light.

“Why are they after you?” Reborn’s fingers flexed on Harry’s throat. Enough pressure to always remind Harry that they were there. But not enough to choke, yet. Harry hated the fact that this sensation felt familiar. “You spent decades not remembering any of this—and one visit from this group and you completely lost everything you built up… for a time.” Reborn conceded the last part.

“You know who they are. And admitted that they’re after your life. They wanted to experiment on you. And they have.” Reborn added. Harry dug his heels in to the ground and tried to lean away. But those hands were like iron, and Reborn’s arms weren’t even shaking. Instead, he merely gave Harry’s neck a squeeze when he felt that Harry had leaned too far, and Harry minutely let his body return to how it was before. Harry could see Colonnello to his left, and Lal to the right.

“The only question remains—is where to put you. We need to hunt down the other group…. They’re not dead, like Skull bragged.” Reborn had been watching Harry’s face, reading minute tells. Harry tried to settle on one feeling—but he was just so jumbled. He didn’t need to deal with this shit. He didn’t want to. These people were all insane criminals (and so am I…) and Harry was being coerced in to a cage—

It was everything he hated. Everything.
“You made my motorbike crash, didn’t you?” Harry accused. Because it seemed like something Reborn would do.

Reborn didn’t look guilty. Or sad. Or repentant. He had a better poker face than Harry ever would.

“If I did?” Reborn challenged.

“Then you’re the absolute worst.” Harry barred his teeth, trying to focus his scattered will to do something. Anything to get away from these assholes!

Reborn gave a shrug, “I could live with that.”

Harry refused to live with it.

‘Fiendfyre’ burned on his tongue. And Harry pressed his lips together. Trying to contain himself even as he started to haze around the sides. He refused to be caged and manipulated.

(They’re just trying to help!)

(Albus Dumbledore just wanted to help too—that doesn’t absolve him of his sins.)

Come on! Think! Thinkthinkthink—I don’t want this anythingfreefreefree!

Harry’s hands burned first. A spasm of pain wracked through his body—and Harry squeezed his eyes against the sudden onslaught and the roaring in his ears. If he made a noise, he couldn’t hear it as the pain burned up his arms and in to his body. Why did it hurt? He gave a full body shudder, his legs feeling weak.

… what was happening?

The hands around his neck were gone. Instead, when sensation returned, Harry found himself on his back with two fingers pressed against his pulse point. Harry was still burning, though. The burning centered in his chest. It hurt, like a crucio just expired.
Harry sluggishly opened an eye to blank faced Reborn. And white faced Colonnello at his elbow.

“Where is Verde?” Colonnello’s voice was tense. “He and Viper should be here.”

Lal murmured back something, but Harry was more caught up in the déjà vu of being on his back when Reborn hovering above. With Reborn and Colonnello above him.

“Wow—our relationship was so shitty that it took me being in pain and on the floor for everything to feel like normal,” Harry dug in, focused on making it hurt. Harry saw Colonnello draw back slightly with a grimace. Reborn was unfortunately unmoved.

Until Oodako launched himself from his not so hidden spot partially under Harry’s coat and aimed right for Reborn’s face. Reborn got an arm up in time to stop the face grab, but it removed the hand from Harry’s pulse point.

This was the only opening he was going to get.

Harry let the world tunnel.

The pain isn’t there. Not really.

Harry rolled in to Reborn, knocking against Reborn’s crouched knees and pushing the hitman off balance even as Colonnello scrambled forward. Harry’s wild kick to the side glanced against Colonnello’s side, but it was enough to throw the other off balance, and for Harry to slide back. Harry felt Oodako’s tentacles wrap tight around his arm, and as Harry scrambled to his feet he kicked Reborn’s side, sending the other sprawling.

And losing the shoe on that foot as Reborn grabbed it and took it down.

Lal had already moved to block the front door.

Harry rolled backwards until his back hit the wall. Oodako was firmly attached to his shoulder, and
holding on tight. Reborn was rolling to his feet, and Colonello was already charging.

… they really needed to stop meeting like this.

Harry, with a body ever used to split second decisions and running for his life, dropped low and barreled in to the kitchen and promptly dived out of the open window. If anyone was close to catching him, he didn’t even feel it as he went. The air burned as he sprinted hard, the uneven gait of his lack of shoe a terror to his coordination as he ducked left in to an alley way to another street. And down to the right. To the left.

“We’ll be okay,” Harry panted, comforting himself and a clinging Oodako.

Moving hurt. And Harry didn’t understand why. His body oscillated between numb and pain free…and burning.

(“Harry Potter burns.”)

Harry mentally shouted some choice swears at the remembrance of that prophecy. If this was what that prophecy was talking about, Harry certainly had a bone to pick with seers as a whole. They were just a pain in the ass. All the same, Harry didn’t dare look behind himself as he ran. There was hardly a soul around at the moment, it being so early.

Which was good. Harry probably made a terrible sight.

He shoved a hand in to his jacket and pulled out his shrunken motorcycle.

He was running through a residential when he spotted a car driving away…and a closing garage door.

A sprint, slide, and roll—and Harry was inside a sealed garage. Harry took a few deep breaths and looked around the garage for cameras. He didn’t see any, and he wasted no time in unshrinking the motorbike. He gave it a look over (mentally lamented over the paint he scratched back in the ministry of magic), before he seated himself and turned it on. A bit of magic to push the button of the garage opener, and Harry drove out of the garage once the door cleared enough for him to duck out.
It took ten minutes of fast driving before he eased himself a bit. It took twenty minutes before he turned on the emergency lights and ducked to the side of the road. He carefully took out his wand and sent out a pulse of magic around his body. He heard the sharp whine of something fizzing out—and eventually fished out a black chip from the pocket of his pants.

Harry dropped it with a grimace, and continued on his merry way.

It was only a few hours later that Harry realized he had fried the battery of his phone as well. (He had stopped to look at the time... and to transfigure himself a new boot to make up for the missing one...)

As Harry approached Hamburg, he resolved to finish his business and gather a new battery for his phone. If only so he could open the line of communication with Longwei. (Already, Harry felt a bit nervous about getting back to his friend... but there were bigger fish to fry at the moment, and Harry intended to be the one to catch the big fish.)

Harry was still pushing against the last lingering tingles of pain when he arrived at the hospital. Well, it was the Universitätsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf. A teaching hospital. The red brick of the front entrance, once Harry found the entrance, was intimidatingly beautiful. The dark ivy climbing the sides of the building, the perfectly cut green grass...

“How serendipitous...” Harry murmured, skin crawling as he read one of the banners pinned up for view.

‘DAY OF THE OPEN HERITAGE SITES’ was what Harry translated the German words in to as he zipped up his jacket. Oodako had firmly wrapped himself around Harry’s torso, his body smaller and settled. Harry glanced around at all of the milling people, and was glad that he hadn’t washed off the ‘war paint’ that Longwei had painted on, because it hid the thick scars.

He had woken up here after a coma of some sort.

… the memory was fuzzy, in a strange way. And a little nonsensical as a brain wiped empty tried to come to terms with the world. But Harry knew that this muggle hospital would have records. Perhaps they were digital records now, but he would find them. Of course as Harry stepped in to the hospital, he found that while the entrance felt familiar, it was still considered the ‘former main entrance’. 
Didn’t matter.

Harry kept himself loose, eyes curious and not lingering on anything too long as he followed the pull of the crowds.

It was way too easy, infiltrating the paper record hall. And upon discovering that the dark archives only went back fifty years, Harry found an ancient looking computer terminal (closer to what he was used to) and eventually located the digital records of his person. Harry had to take the time to sort through patients by time period, general characteristics, and by his more iconic lightning bolt scar before he located himself. At least hospitals were well documented machines even back then.

Apparently the hospital staff named him ‘Max Mustermann’ for lack of anything better. Harry printed off the considerable file before deleting it. After he scrubbed the digital file clean, Harry cursed the fact that the terminal wasn’t hooked to the internet and he couldn’t go and get a virus to take care of the rest.

Once his file was printed and tucked in to his shirt, Harry murmured a curse to the computer that had it imploding in to a miss of shards.

Harry left as smoothly as he came in.

(That was all the more reason to be super twitchy. He wanted to scream every time he saw a flash of green out of the corner of his eye. The back of his neck felt chilled from the cold sweat he had.)

The sun was going down when Harry settled down in a public park. He pulled out his file and eyed the black and white printed photos of an emaciated and scarred body that Harry felt was his own. Harry had been admitted as a ‘John Doe’ after his body was stabilized at an emergency unit in a non-teaching hospital. When he had stabilized, they had brought him to a teaching hospital.

The reason was listed as funding. And research on trauma related coma. His brain wave had apparently been very low in their readings. But Harry couldn’t make heads or tails of the print out.

Harry was more interested in the parts of his file related to waking up. He dug through the doctor lingo as much as he could. And supposed that all of the mentioned physical therapy was ultimately helpful in the end. Harry had lived at the teaching hospital for nearly six months, and his astronomical recovery after a nearly two year coma had been documented extensively.

Well… Harry had information. At least somewhat.
He had a start from when ‘Skull’ had been born.

“It’s a start, Oodako…” Harry yawned, patting the bulge over his stomach where Oodako was tucked away.

The cold press of the muzzle of a pistol pressed against the nape of his neck. Harry let out an aggravated sigh. “Really?” Why did Reborn have to keep doing this to him? Harry was so hopeful that the man would just give up already.

A female voice spoke up, “raise your hands.” The voice was calm, and it had Harry pause before he slowly raised his hands.

“Higher.” The woman ordered, and Harry complied.

His left wrist was hooked in to handcuffs, and the right wrist soon followed.

Not impossible to get out of. The gun lowered, and Harry lowered his now handcuffed hands and twisted around to see what he was dealing with now.

A woman in a biker suit and helmet.

… wearing *a lot of purple*.

Harry was really starting to hate the color. It just seemed to be a continual sign of ill omens.

“You’ll be coming with me, Skull DeMort.” The woman stated, gun in her pocket and Harry knew from the indent that it was pointed right at him. Harry let out a big sigh and jammed the papers in to his shirt as he ambled to his feet.

Somehow, he had a feeling that this was related to the mafia.
(He wouldn’t make a bet on that, because even Harry could recognize a sucker’s bet. If he wasn’t so used to similar bullshit events happening in his daily life before being lost in time, Harry would have been one angry scream at this point. But really, right now… well, Harry just rolled with the punches.)

Harry placidly walked as the woman indicated. Moving toward the parking lot.

… this woman was a bit incompetent wasn’t she?

Harry had his cuffed hands in front of his body. And he easily slipped a hand out with minimal movements. One hand, then the other. Who knew his hands could bend that way? And apparently she hadn’t put the cuffs on completely. In fact, Harry could recognize that she had been extremely gentle with the gesture.

Harry shoved the cuffs up a sleeve (that didn’t hold his wand) and kept his wrists together and in front of his body to give the illusion that he was still cuffed, but the sleeves dipping just enough to make it seem believable.

A creepy white van was the only vehicle parked next to his bike. The door slid open as he approached.

One man in the driver’s seat. Looking bored. One man in the back, looking bored and also ready to receive them. The black haired man shuffled forward, one hand out and reaching toward Harry’s elbow as Harry stopped in front of the door.

Harry turned his head minutely to look at the woman.

“Whoops!” Harry pretended to trip, dropping down to catch his hands on the edge of the open side of the van. His weight shifted to one knee where he had ‘fallen’.

The woman and man both gave a sigh, and Harry reached out with a hand to catch the van man’s ankles, and a foot reaching back to catch the woman by the knee. Harry lashed out and downed them both. He heard van man’s head crack on something, even as he whirled in to a standing stance and gave the woman a firm punch to the throat.

She went down gasping and clutching her throat.
“If you hadn’t been wearing the helmet, I would have punched your nose instead!” Harry called as he scrambled on to his bike and turned it on.

An easy kick to the approaching driver had him falling away.

Harry drove forward and through the park, rather than backing out and taking to the street as the weirdly dressed fail mafiosos scrambled to adjust.

“As if I would be such an easy target,” Harry murmured to himself, eyes squinting against the wind and jaw still smarting from the pressure Reborn had exerted on it.

He was getting increasingly closer calls as time went on.

… perhaps Reborn was right.

*Holes in his knowledge. Enemies at his back.*

“Skull... what a pain.” Even the other him that had existed in the absence of Harry was turning out to be more of a pain than Harry wanted to deal with.

… well, no time like the present to lay low in the circus.

Perhaps he should bleach his hair?

Before Harry could go in to phone store, Harry remembered that he actually had no money to his name. And after a moment dropped his non helmeted head on to the handlebars of his bike.

He couldn’t actually just go in and buy a replacement battery!

Well, this was going to be a problem.
.. it was a good thing Harry was such a problem solver.

Well, he could at least problem solve—Harry decided this a few hours after he walked out of a pub, having swindled many a drunk person out of a few euros. Never too much from one person. Some people, he just asked for some change. Others, he had stolen the wallet, wished out a handful of bills, before throwing it under the victim’s feet as he absconded.

Three pubs.

He got more than enough free drinks.

His chest ached more than he felt tipsy. He felt terribly normal, even as he walked in to a phone store right before closing and got a replacement battery. With the phone on, Harry wandered away. He paged through Longwei’s several texts of worry and located a longitude-latitude coordinates that led him to a city near the border of Germany to France.

Harry typed in a simple ‘see you soon,’ and got himself ready to head south. Might as well head this way, since going north seemed to bring him nothing but trouble.

Harry, before he shuffled his phone in to a pocket, took a moment to bring up a news site. Reluctantly, he typed in the words 'LONDON FIRE' in to a search engine, and waited for the result.

'LONDON FIRE EXTINGUISHED!' The first link claimed. There were more articles attached to this one, which would no doubt explain in depth property damage and lives lost and the plan to rebuild. But Harry could only stare at the title before letting the screen go dark.

... if Frank survived, he was going to have a lot more free time to plan and extract revenge from Harry.

This was perhaps the first time Harry was going to be treated like a bad guy and actually deserve it. (A part of him hoped that Frank would just let things be. But the part of Harry that always expected the worst merely shifted and Harry started to make some plans to get ready for the worst to happen.)

Harry revved his engine and pointed himself south.
Roll with the punches. Harry could do that.

Chapter End Notes

No TB detected in my chest x-ray, yay? Still out of nearly a week's worth of pay.

On another note. School still sucks. My job in killing me as I realize I'm going to be pushing 40 hours a week for at least a month. And I'm ever on a job hunt. Cheers. I'll achieve a job with healthcare eventually, so I don't have to buy it on my own.

Here is another chapter. I really didn't think this was going to happen, but the scene just wrote itself. Harry was always going to do a swipe at his hospital of origin. But it's only a small piece in the puzzle that is his life. More things happening. More reveals. Reborn is really getting tired of this shit, and swears that Skull is only getting away because he lets him. (And who honestly expects a damn octopus to the face when Skull isn't waggling his fingers?)

The Longwei mystery deepens for Harry (and with distance he can identify that something is NOT RIGHT with the feelings he currently has. It's driving him crazy). Harry also went out the window again. It's just a running gag at this point, although it will perhaps be the last time.

It just makes sense to me that Harry would be able to easily do petty thieving at this point. His crazy life and training as auror did not make the most upstanding citizen and if Harry denies it he is delusional.

So yes, circus next chapter rather than this chapter.

... I typed this instead of sleeping. ahaha...

If you have any questions, I'll try to answer them in the comments below. As much as I can without spoiling the story itself. Anything you'd like to see, go ahead and write it out! I'm very partial to magician Harry now due to a comment. If I've made some grievous error due to sleep deprivation, please point it out so that I might edit and scrub my shame from the internet.

Any guesses on who the people who tried to kidnap Skull were? Fun times, aha...

(Is it just me, or is my Reborn kind of mean? Or is he just playing the villain to get answers? Harry POV is kind of annoying, isn't it...) WHERE DOES THE MANIPULATION AND LIES END AHAHA... (...) I feel like it's really obvious how sleep deprived I am...

Thanks for reading and sticking with me!
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Longwei is not to be trusted. But Harry had learned a long time ago that ignoring a threat never made it go away.
Where does reality end and illusion begin?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Harry did not feel guilty as he dropped the letter in to the mailbox—pleased that he had the idea beforehand to write his landlord’s name and address before this whole mess began. With so much that kept happening to him, his former address wasn’t coming to mind. The letter heavily dropped in to the slot, and with a heavy sigh Harry ambled away to the café where Longwei was waiting. Harry had texted the man a few hours ago, and this is where they settled on. Apparently the circus crew wasn’t… ‘traditional’, as Longwei had explained through the voicemail.

Harry hadn’t exactly been the most accommodating, when picking up Longwei’s calls. Harry had picked up the first one—and it had freaked him out. His body had had a visceral reaction to Longwei’s voice. His chest had throbbed, his hands hadn’t stopped their shaking for the entire phone conversation. (It was like his very soul had screamed at him to go find Longwei and stay at his side—and Harry ached—)

All his thoughts had slowly descended in to ‘I’ll be back I’ll be home soon’ and Harry hadn’t appreciated it one bit. It had taken hours and a bit of meditative driving before he had gone back to normal.

As normal as normal was for Harry, and he was starting to think his current normal was not quite right at the moment either.

“Oodako, I think he drugged me.” Harry murmured in to his coat. Although when Harry thought logically, such a dosage should have worn off by now. Harry, in ignorant hindsight, really blamed the food that the Chinese man had fed him. Harry felt the tightening of tentacles around his chest and grimaced to himself about Longwei.

At this point… well, there were really only few reasons to come back here and follow through with the circus shenanigans. The first of which, he really did need the money. He had recently charmed a petrol pump to give him some much necessary petrol. The second of reasons was the fact that Harry would get to meet the ‘circus crew’ and find out if Longwei was part of the wizarding world or the
mafia world.

He couldn’t possibly be a normal bystander. Harry was not that lucky.

Besides… it was…

It was creepy—the longer he thought about it with an unclouded head—how much the other man had kept touching him. And even creepier was how much Harry had allowed it.

Which gave credence to the idea that Longwei was wizard backed and had fed Harry some kind of potion.

It wasn’t a demented love potion—Harry didn’t suddenly love the man. But he did want to follow his every command. And it made his skin crawl.

So, in the end, for Harry it was a bit of an espionage self-appointed mission that he was going to do. Harry itched at his wrist and felt his wand there. His bike was parked in front of the café, and he had transfigured a new bag to make up for the one he had lost to the arcobaleno. It was a lot nicer than his other attempt. But then again Harry had just powered more magic in to the transfiguration and that had worked things out rather well.

“Sir,” the lady at the register waved a hand to get his attention. Harry startled slightly, and grinned sheepishly at the woman when he noticed that he had spaced out rather spectacularly all the way to the front of the café line. Harry quietly ordered a plain coffee and (after checking his bills) an apple tart. When he had his goods in hand, he walked to where Longwei was flagging him down and dropped in to the saved seat at a tiny round table.

Harry found his mouth tasted like copper. And his hands didn’t shake.

Longwei’s face had a pleasant little smile, “got some heavy thoughts in there?” And Harry found his body slowly relaxing from a tenseness that he hadn’t even noticed. No, this wasn’t normal at all (but his thoughts on the subject slowly, slowly started to cloud over and… drift.)

“Not really,” Harry shrugged, lowered his mouth cover, and took a bite of his apple tart.
“Great,” Longwei murmured, even as he opened up a file on the table. “Anyway—Tsuna had me bring these to you. Just some forms that you need to fill out before we do the whole ‘good fit’ interview. Basic information and things like that.” Longwei pulled a pen from his pocket and added it to the table. Although he lifted his dark eyes and focused on the sugar-sticky tart in Harry’s hands and promptly offered a “why don’t I write it for you?”

“Ah, sure.” Harry agreed before he took a sip of coffee. “The internet was right, by the way—this café does have phenomenal apple products.” Harry eyed the tea that Longwei had, “want me to pick you up something to nibble on?”

“No, I’m fine… anyway—full name?” Longwei asked, clicked the pen to make it active.

“H-A-R-R-Y, A-B-A-G-N-A-L-E.” Harry patiently spelled out his currently chosen name. It was the one he had used for the contest, and he might as well stick with it until someone directly confronts him about that.

“Country of origin?” Longwei continued, moving to the next line.

“… The UK? Britain?” As if they couldn’t hear it in his accent. Longwei gave a very American thumbs up and scribbled something down.

“Age? 28, right?” Longwei asked with a grin.

*Harry frowned, “ah, no. It’s 24.”*

*Longwei’s pen paused above the paper, and he gave a slow blink. “I… am pretty sure you said 28 last time.”*

*“Maybe you need to get your ears checked mate. I’m pretty sure I’d remember being that old.” Harry added before he nibbled at the last chunk of his tart. Well, what had he told Longwei in the past? Well, he had talked about his children and wife, so when the question about being married popped up, Harry quietly asked Longwei to put down ‘separated’ and left it at that.*

Half of Harry’s coffee had gone cold by the time the paperwork had finished.
“Anyway—time for the interview. And if we’re golden—straight to a physical and rooming.”
Longwei added, an absent minded peace sign flicking through his fingers even as his eyes remained on the papers.

“Great. Sounds lovely. Let’s, um, get moving I suppose.” Harry glanced around the busy café and at the group of four young adults that were blatantly staring at their table. Three boys and a girl. Harry’s eyes would have drifted away, but his eyes not locked with the girl’s electric green and he couldn’t help but still under her gaze. She was young and Harry could see that in the smoothness around her eyes and mouth. But the twist of displeasure to her lips and the slow near lack of blinking showed that she wasn’t missing a thing. The boys were staring at the table and their surroundings, obviously hoping to poach the table.

But the girl was staring at him. Not at the table. Or her surroundings.

Her mouth moved. Mouthing words.

‘COME’ – Harry squinted. ‘COME PLITH HE’?

Was that English? Harry had defaulted to English lip reading, he couldn’t read lips in any other language (as far as he knew).

In the corner of his eye, Harry saw Longwei tilted his head to the side, “hm?” He asked, head turning to look at what Harry was looking at.

(Don’t let him look—) Harry’s gut lurched.

Harry reached out and let a heavy hand drop on Longwei’s forearm with a smile, easily gaining the man’s attention as he tugged Longwei’s arm closer to insure maximum attention, “let’s go. You mentioned, uh, physical?”

“Yes. New hires have to pop through it. We’ll be doing a show in about five days, so Tsuna would rather you be healthy and do something appropriate to your newness.” Longwei helped clean the table and the two of them exited the shop without a problem.
“So… how are you getting there?” Harry asked after the trash was thrown away and they stood together in front of the café.

“Well—could I hitch a ride with you, instead of a taxi?” Longwei asked, hands coming up in a praying gesture he directed at Harry, a guileless shrug soon following.

Harry mentally swooned and his stomach gave a tepid squeeze.

“Yes, I can. Just… have you ever been on a motorbike before?” Harry asked, even as he brought Longwei over to his own bike.

“Um…” Longwei trailed off, smile still firmly in place.

Harry mentally winced, even as he reached out and dropped his helmet over Longwei’s head. Longwei jumped slightly upon contact, his hands flying up to take a hold of the bottom rim of the helmet. “Buckle it under your chin,” Harry added, even as he swiftly used the helmet distraction to throw a few charms from his wand on to Longwei and the bike to prevent slippage. Four spells and Harry nudged the visor up so he could look Longwei in the eyes.

Like a hippogriff. Something dark and regal. Not a dragon, like Harry first thought. Longwei was more like a hippogriff.

“Just lean with me, alright? I won’t go crazy fast.” Harry promised, before he threw a leg over his bike and waited for Longwei to slide in behind him. Harry ruffled his hair and could only hope that his lack of helmet wasn’t an issue. Hopefully it wasn’t a law he was breaking in this country.

Unfounded worry, in the end.

The hotel hadn’t been too far from the café, and they zipped through traffic without much further ado. The parking lot was fairly large and mostly filled. Harry coasted by more than a few cars that looked like the kind Uncle Vernon had coveted during Harry’s childhood—although would they be considered classics now, rather than the future?

“So, you’re all currently in a hotel?” Harry asked once at a firm stop in the parking lot. There weren’t any motorcycle spots, so Harry just found a whole spot to take over.
“Yeah—we’ve got a rented field near here. We’ll set up for a three day thing and then have a single day take down,” Longwei explained, sliding off first so that Harry could pop off next. Harry made sure the stand was down and the key was in his hand before he got off. Harry retrieved his bag from the compartment under the seat. His most precious things were in his pockets, but he had to keep up the muggle appearance. A few things in a bag just to give it the appearance of weight and he was golden.

Harry did one last glance to his bike.

… he could always get on and just leave.

Longwei nudged Harry’s helmet against Harry’s arm, and Harry quietly took it. He tucked it under his arm and turned to face Longwei. The center of his chest squeezed hard and Harry took a shallow breath through his nose.

… it couldn’t be drugs. This had to be something else. It had to be a potion.

It had to be wizards.

(Yeah—wizards. But… but what if things are sideways? Not what we assume? – the little voice in the back of Harry’s head rumbled. Something thick and confusing and ultimately a voice that was lost in the mess of things.)

Harry motioned for Longwei to lead the way, and once the man’s back was to Harry, Harry quickly dropped a few anti-theft charms over his motorcycle. A proximity ward. And a soft muggle repellant ward. Harry shoved the wand up his sleeve and spun to follow Longwei. Harry finished his turn to follow, and stumbled when the world kept spinning for a second even after he stopped.

Okay. Strange. What—Longwei stole Harry’s attention with a casual look over his shoulder, and Harry trotted after.

“So… this Tsuna—how would you describe him?” Harry fished for information as Longwei waved Harry to follow after. The hotel they were at—Harry didn’t catch the name but it was fairly swarming with people once they trotted through the large glass doors. Business casual and full suited.
“Fluffy—like a cloud.” Harry could practically hear a chortle in Longwei’s voice.

“Uh… that sounds like an inside joke.” Harry pointed out, falling in to step with Longwei.

“He is a bit young, but his grandfather had him tutored in business practices. His main tutor recently inherited a circus, so Tsuna wanted to fix it up a bit and make it more profitable as a thank you for all the hard work over the years.” Longwei chattered, and Harry let his eyes rove around the halls as they moved toward rented out business meeting rooms. It was interesting. The front of the hotel looked pretty normal as far as hotels went.

There was a nice hall to the left that led to several glass walled rooms full of suited people. There was even a pleasant mosaic pattern midway through the glass that allowed privacy to some presentations. Harry reached out and ran his fingers along the glass as they walked by. Glass cool to the touch—not magic warm nor bitter chilled.

Points toward Longwei being mafia influenced. And not Wizard.

(Not lucky at all—someone is always pulling a string to somewhere… Where do the lies end? Where does reality start?)

“So, teenage or close to my age?” Harry asked, because age in the business world did speak of experience.

“Maa, a bit between,” Longwei took the end of his braid between his fingers, rubbing the end against his jaw.

“Will anyone else be there for this… interview?” Was there even a circus?

(Fon wouldn’t lie to us—shut it!)

Harry rubbed a thumb over his left eye. He felt a headache thrumming behind his eyes, and they felt hot and swollen to the touch. In fact, he was rather feeling hot everywhere but where Oodako was squished against his side inside of his jacket.
“Hm, maybe our circus doctor will be in? Some personal aids?” Longwei gave a shrug, and Harry rolled his eyes.

“What will the physical entail? I don’t much like doctors.” Harry nonchalantly put out there as he looked to the side. Harry could always back out (but if Longwei insisted, Harry’s skin crawled with the faint idea that if Longwei said to do it, he would oblige. Not normal not normal should have run awayawayaway when he had the chance—) and leave if he didn’t like how things were folding out before him.

Longwei’s eyes drifted up to the left, “I’m not too sure. I had my latest physical on hand. Took one before I started to travel. So…” The man gave a shrug, a peaceful smile on his face and his eyes sedately calm.

Harry’s brain itched.

(I’ve seen this before…)

Harry felt his body chill as his feet stuttered to a brief stop. Longwei stopped with him—ever calm and at ease. And for one moment Harry tasted copper, his knees ached, and the spaces between his fingers itched and burned.

(The at peace smile—the blankdeadblank eyes—the arch of jaw and cheek and—)

(Move—his mind begged. MOVE.)

Harry shuffled his feet and watched Longwei walk to one of the glass doors and held it open. With a sweeping gesture, Longwei smoothly gestured for Harry to step inside as he spoke. “Hey Tsuna, I brought him and the pre-made papers.”

Harry dragged his feet all the same, eyes to the blurred glass—there were definitely more than two people shapes in there. Harry held his breath, shoving his fists in to his pockets. Because now was the moment of truth. He shifted his hand, launching his wand from his sleeve in to the hand in his pocket. The room was limited—but this detection spell only needed a quick jab.
Human shaped soft white light minutely sparked across his vision—five shapes—that disappeared after two hard blinks. And just two steps in to the room Harry dug his heels in and felt Longwei walk in to his back.

(RUNRUNRUNRUNRUN)

Harry took a deep breath and dug in his mental heels as well against the wrenching reaction of his body. His chest hurt from the thrumming of his heart.

(I want to go home—!)

Harry blinked hard again, watching the amicable gazes focused on him turn sharp and—

(But where is that? Home? ... home is family, and my family is...?)

Longwei’s hand spread across Harry’s back, and Harry felt Oodako squirm with unease. Longwei jerked his hand away at the feeling of shifting tentacles under Harry’s coat. Longwei’s hand soon landed on Harry’s shoulder, and the Chinese man continued on as if nothing had happened. “Come, let’s take a seat and introduce ourself, yes?”

(That’s not a question—that’s an order. He is ordering us around! RUIN HIM—!) Harry’s mind was screaming against the other part. His entire being was screaming to RIPTEARKILL and to JUSTDOITALREADY and PLEASEPLEASEWHEREISHOME—)

Harry picked out a seat and noted that Longwei took a seat next to him. Harry smiled to the lot of them—he really did need the money. And Longwei wanted him here, so that was reason enough to make himself seem as presentable as possible.

“Hello, I’m Harry. I, uh, do stunt riding for fun. And I have really strange luck.” Harry tried to tack on something rather interesting just to make himself seem more likeable. Because what if they turned him away? It would be such a waste of time especially for all of the investment that he had already placed on to this meeting and getting this job.

“I’m Tsuna,” the young man with the baby face introduced himself, threading his fingers together on top of a smile pile of paperwork.
“I’m Dino,” a blond man with the slender jaw spoke, not even bothering to look to Harry as he motioned toward Longwei. Longwei provided the file of paperwork that they had concluded at the café. Harry’s eyes tracked the slim folder for a moment before he focused on Tsuna again, because Tsuna was motioning to the man at his own side.

“This is Gokudera—he is my right hand man, ah… I guess in English it is an ‘aid?’” The disarming face that Tsuna was making would have looked smarmy on anyone else. But Harry could just feel that the young man was completely genuine about the feelings he was showing on his face. Harry would trust his gut on that. This man here wore his heart on his sleeve and Harry would trust in that.

Would trust all the tiny micro expressions that Tsuna was casting—a soft joy, tiny fringes of guilt and a space or two full of self-loathing. A body relaxed with trust. All of this came together and formed up the man that called himself Tsuna. “You’re a business man, right? What business do you do?” Harry asked, if only so he could have a lead in to asking about the circus.

“I am currently acting CEO of my grandfather’s corporation. We do a little bit of everything. Insurance. Investments. Italian non-profits, as well as Italian real estate.” Tsuna listed off, eyes going up and to the right as he flicked up a finger for each point that he brought up.

“Don’t forget regional grants and vineyards. Plus rural factories and other such similar investments in Germany, France, and the Ukraine.” Gokudera gravelly assisted Tsuna, fingering through a thick stack of his own paperwork. Harry couldn’t tell what color the other’s eyes were, since they were lowered and focused on the papers. All Harry could see were silver eyelashes.

Harry looked to the man in the doctor’s coat—and blundered on, “and you’re the, ah, circus doctor?”

“No, I just had a free day… and I owed Tsuna a favor.” The man drummed two fingers against the top of the table. Tap-tap-tap, tap-tap-tap—on a continuous repeat. There was a faint line of sweat clinging to the doctor’s hair line. The corners of his mouth were taunt and his lips thin. A little hunched in his body posture. Harry shifted, and was about to speak up when Tsuna spoke.

“This is Shamal. Family friend. And friend to my old tutor—Shamal is very invested in making sure things run smoothly.” Tsuna added cheerfully to their conversation, and Harry mentally
applauded the young boy’s conversational intuition, to guess what Harry was going to ask before Harry had even fully made the thought.

Harry turned to Dino and the black haired glasses man standing behind him. Dino glanced to Harry from the files, up to the man hovering at his shoulder, before he politely smiled. “My associate. I’m Tsuna’s senior in our business circle. I’m here to make sure things run smoothly.”

“Ah, so you’re having on the job training?” Harry asked Tsuna, because he could understand that.

Tsuna gave a little shrug, “not really on the job training, so much as a failsafe when I try new things.”

Harry hummed, and allowed himself to be drawn in to a thorough questioning of his driving history, skills, acrobatics, and what not. Longwei presented video clips from Harry’s competition as proof of his claims.

“Well… it is impressive. But this business doesn’t really have room, nor the agenda, for that type of show. You seem impressive enough with your acrobatics?” Tsuna led on with a smile.

“Yeah. I have quick reactions. Never a formal study, but I’ve been told I’m a natural in sports.” Harry grinned and fondly thought of Wood.

Tsuna nodded minutely, “well, maybe we can see if you have the aptitude for it?”

“Sure…” Harry trailed off, and pondered over what else he could bring to the table. “You wouldn’t happen to have a magic act, would you?” Really, magic was pretty much the only other thing he could think of to bring to a circus outside of cooking and cleaning or being security.

Tsuna gave an excited smile, “you can do magic?”

“I consider myself a professional magician,” Harry grinned, laughing a little bit to himself on the inside.
Dino had finally focused on Harry and their conversation rather than the papers. The man put his elbow on the table and chin in his hand. “Can you turn water to wine?” The man asked, looking a little chuffed at his joke.

Well, jokes on him—Harry technically could. Harry pulled a bit of string from his pocket in to the palm of his right hand, held in place with his thumb loosely “Well, that might be asking a bit too much. But how about…” Harry trailed off as he reached over to Longwei and reached for the back of Longwei’s silk collar. Longwei raised an eyebrow, and Harry merely grinned. It was his right hand, and with a bit of willpower and practice, silently transfigured the string in to a fistful of forget-me-nots from the back of Longwei’s collar.

Longwei’s body physically jumped, hands flying back to clamp down on his collar even as Harry presented the flowers to Tsuna with a flourish. Tsuna blinked before he leaned forward and sniffed (Gokudera looked properly horrified and glared at Harry as if Harry had tried to poison Tsuna) before Harry took the flowers back. He squished the flowers in to a ball in his hands, and once it was all sealed from sight…

A bit of wandless magic, paired with silent casting—and he opened his hands to drop ten paper flowers, each a different color of the rainbow.

Dino looked a little stunned, and Harry playfully flicked a paper flower toward the blond. And a few toward Tsuna and Longwei just for kicks. Harry laughed at their awed looks. Even Gokudera’s tense face had relaxed, a slack open mouth as he stared at the flowers.

“How did he do that!” Gokudera near shrieked, and Harry mentally cackled at the one up.

Dino slowly shook his head before he turned to look to Tsuna, and then back down at the paperwork.

Harry blinked—and between blinks and fighting with himself, Harry was sitting at the oval table with a half drunk cup of tea in front of himself, and his magic tingling in his hand from a left over detection spell.

It took him as moment to realize someone was talking to him—a blond haired man, his pointed hair
shaggy and thick around his head. Prominent cheekbones paired with a slender jaw made for an interesting face that seemed stuck in a ‘serious business’ expression. Harry listened, even as his eyes focused beyond the speaking blond to the man behind him.

“—your records state that you’re 24—”, Harry heard even as his eyes focused on the glasses that the black haired older man with the black mustache was wearing. Harry’s nose bridge ached in sympathy over the lost weight of his own glasses before the words that the blond was saying caught up to him.

“I’m not 24—I’m 30.” Harry frowned, and clenched his hands in to fists from where they were perched on his knees as the blond man paused and eyed the papers of the file in front of him.

Where had the blond gotten a file… of Harry’s information?

“Harry, you told me you were 24 earlier—“ A voice came to him from the right, and Harry turned to look. The man was sitting close to him, a pleasant face with slanted eyes. A neat braid casually tossed over his shoulder and—

(I know this man. I KNOW THIS MAN! FON—! Everything scrambled for a moment—his vision scrambling with white as the murderous intent rose up before being smothered under a blanket of black that SUCKED EVERYTHING AWAY. EVERY THOUGHT EVERY FEELING NOTHING IS LEFT—)

Harry blinked at Longwei, “I did…? That’s odd…” Harry trailed off awkwardly, and glanced around the room. There was a young man with a baby face, brown hair, and eerie orange eyes (SKYSKYSKYNOTHOMEWRONG). Most of the paperwork piles on the table were in front of him, so Harry assumed that this was Tsuna.

Sitting casually to Tsuna’s left was another man—with silver hair, despite the young face. That face was rather pinched and had a hefty frown as the young man glared at his own fistful of papers.

“You’ll get wrinkles like that, you know.” Harry slipped without thinking much on it, and Harry automatically (defensively) smiled when squinted green eyes focused on to him. Harry didn’t even have to speak a name (did they do introductions already? Harry couldn’t remember. He must have spaced…) for the direction of his comment to catch the silver haired man’s attention.

“What.” It wasn’t even a question, the way that the accented English strung out that single word
spoke of near murderous hostility.

The orange eyed young man slumped a little, “don’t worry Gokudera, it’s only a short meeting…” His voice was soft and soothing (and gratingGRATINGGRATING Harry was going to get up and MAKE THE VOICE STOP—) and Harry didn’t want to hear it anymore as he focused on the last many if the room he had yet to observe.

Nervous was the first thing that came to mind.

He doesn’t want to be here, Harry could tell. The man in the white coat (the doctor!) was drumming his fingers on the table. His breaths were deep in a forced calm and overall, Harry could only imagine that there was probably some worse consequence elsewhere if the man wasn’t here as he was not.

The doctor had to be some kind of dangerous. Because Harry had only been staring for a moment before they locked eyes. The brown hair and eyes were easy to overlook. The doctor man was plain compared to silver hair and orange eyes—but the stubble made him look unkempt and therefore memorable.

“So, Harry… you were in a motorbike accident?” The man pointed out, sitting directly across from Harry at the table allowed him to lean forward. Harry glanced to the side, where Longwei was talking with the blond man and the glasses man about paperwork. And orange eyes—Tsuna—was calming down the agitated Gokudera (the pointed stabbing of Gokudera’s finger to something on his fistful of papers seemed important), which made the little room seem rather tense.

Harry had thought it was a pretty large meeting room for a group of seven—they had at least ten extra seats.

It didn’t feel like he could breathe.

“Yeah—not a scratch on me though.” Harry slouched in his seat, knee bouncing quickly under the black glass of the table.

The man threaded his fingers together as he leaned back. (Smart move, the threading hides the nerves in the worried…) He raised an eyebrow, “I’m going to insist on a full physical then.”
Harry frowned, “… and what does that entail?”

The man raised an eyebrow, “stripping down so I can visually see that you’re in good health.”

That was not going to happen. Harry’s skin itched at the thought.

“Not gunna happen—no.” Harry bit back, because his gut told him not to. It would not be a good thing to have his body in the hands of strangers. He had had so little control for so long that he refused to put himself somewhere where he didn’t want to be.

The doctor’s face pinched, “then I see we’re at a disagreement. I insist—“

“Don’t be so stiff, Shamal,” orange eyes murmured softly as he focused in on Harry. The huffing Gokudera wasn’t even listening anymore. “Longwei stated that he is an accomplished motorist. If he was hurt, he would have the smarts to see professional help.” Orange eyes had continued, and Harry watched the older doctor slump, loudly sucking on his teeth to show his displeasure but not putting it to words.

Well… that was convenient, Harry thought this as he focused on orange eyes.

Harry wanted to punch them all till his knuckles bled. This was entrapment. Definitely mafia. Harry could practically taste the sky flames that saturated the room. And instead of calming Harry, he just felt a simmering kind of fury building behind his eyes—

Wait—sky flames? Harry blinked to himself, listing a little as he focused on that thought. Sky flames… it was a common thought. Or at least it seemed common now. But when had Harry thought of it before?

.. wait, is this what he called the flames, from his memories? The fires that… that he remembered? Wait…

Longwei touched Harry’s shoulder and gathered Harry’s wandering attention.

“Hey—you’ve been quiet for a bit. Did you change your mind?” Longwei’s voice was soft and
concerned—

*(Don’t trust him—Harry’s gut shrieked. So Harry shrugged his shoulder out of Longwei’s grip and—trusted him—)*

“Dunno. I kind of need the money and…” Harry trailed off.

Tsuna smiled and clapped his hands, “it’s settled then. Here is a schedule of duties. We’ll see how well of a fit you are with the group the first two nights. And if all goes well, we’ll give you a time slot on the third to do acrobatic tricks.” Gokudera didn’t even have to look up at Tsuna’s gesture before sliding a paper toward Harry. Longwei reached out and slid the paper the rest of the way in to Harry’s hands.

It was a hand written… ‘chore list’, pretty much. It was pretty extensive, too.

“Right…” Harry murmured, fingers delicately cradling the richly thick muggle stationary. It reminded him of Vernon’s business letters the few times that Harry was given the chance to handle them as he delivered them to the breakfast table. The English was block lettered and easy to read, if nothing else. Harry carefully folded the buttery smooth paper and stuck it in to a pocket, smiling at Gokudera’s irritated gaze at the casual regard for the hand written list.

(Harry absently wondered why he was going out of his way to irritate—but maybe it was just his passive-aggressive tendencies rearing their head again as he forced himself in to a situation that really was rather distasteful for his soul.)

“As it is… that was certainly impressive. I think we’ll have to stage a show on the first night. Give you a… ten minute slot?” Tsuna inquired. And Harry paused as he tried to bring to mind what exactly, Tsuna was talking about.

“… sure.” Harry murmured. If nothing else, Longwei would remind him wouldn’t he?

“Thank you, for your time. I’m glad this turned out for the best.” Harry trailed off, and got a series of well wishes from the lot of them.

Harry turned to Longwei. “So, um…” Harry paused and trailed off, and Longwei soon had a hand wrapped around Harry’s elbow and the two left the room. Harry listened to Longwei’s chatter—from
the gist of it, he understood that Longwei’s room was a double single and Harry had agreed to share, so they could talk about the list. The list felt heavy in his pocket, and the wand in his hand, hidden in Harry’s deep jacket pocket tingled as he kept casting detection spell after spell.

Ultimately—there was nothing even remotely magical here.

Harry was the most magical thing around.

Harry didn’t know how to feel about this.

In fact, Harry supposed he was feeling a bit… dizzy.

The feeling remained, intermittent between feeling disturbed and terribly pleased with Longwei’s attention (all the while knowing that that was not right, not one bit—something was causing it but WHATWHATWHAT—be patient, all is always revealed in time). Harry felt too much but not enough—and about an hour in to settling in to the hotel room, Harry was viciously sick and throwing up in the bathroom under Longwei’s concerned gaze.

Harry blearily looked around the bathroom from where he was tucked between dark wood cabinetry and chills white porcelain. Longwei had called for the doctor, and Harry closed his eyes and tilted his head back and wondered how he got here.

Time stretched and shortened—

Harry jerked in to wakefulness at a soft kick to his leg and he squinted up at the doctor from before.—… .Doctor Shark?

The man’s hands didn’t shake as he pressed the back of his hand to Harry’s sweaty forehead.

“You’re burning up—come on. Off with that jacket. No wonder you’re sweating.” The doctor murmured, hands going down to Harry’s jacket and swiftly undoing the zipper.

Harry’s body felt… too heavy. And too light at the same time. His left leg gave a feeble little jerk, and Oodako, once revealed, struck out with three tentacles and gave Doctor Shark a mighty slap to
the hand. A not wet ‘SMACK’ rang through the room, and the doctor drew back with a hiss, immediately sticking the struck part of the back of his head in his mouth.

“… ew—was that the hand that touched my sweaty forehead?” Harry gagged, just a little.

It was amusing watching the doctor pale with disgust. A snort from Longwei, hovering in the doorway, had Harry grinning. “He got you, Shamal.” Longwei was constant cheer, despite the line of worry between his eyebrows.

“You’re both such a little shits…” Mumbled Shamal, probably thinking that Harry wouldn’t hear the words that he hissed to the back of his hand. Well, Harry had heard. But this was a spying mission, it was best to play the idiot and let everyone just assume incompetence.

(That wasn’t really a way to live, but the thought process was rather familiar…)

Harry shrugged out of his jacket and shoved it in to the small space behind himself. Between his body and the wall. Oodako squirmed himself under his shirt and wrapped himself around Harry’s chest, skin to skin. The motion was wonderfully cooling, Harry sighed as he relaxed in his small space. Shamal cautiously reached out again and wrapped a hand around the back of Harry’s neck to feel the heat like one would a small child.

Harry didn’t dare look away, and watched the man through his eye lashes.

“Ice,” Shamal snapped his fingers at Longwei, causing the Chinese man to disappear. Shamal unlaced Harry’s boots and Harry helpfully slipped out of them, and let the man take his socks. Harry soon had several ice bags under his feet, under his left armpit, and on his groin. A bit strange, but it quickly cooled him down enough that the heat shakes disappeared. And the soft, reoccurring gagging stopped as well.

It took less than an hour, but Harry felt wretchedly tired by the time Shamal declared that the ice could be removed. Harry complied under Longwei’s watchful gaze as the doctor took his heart rate, listening to his lungs, and chuckled when Oodako gave the man another slap for staring too long at the Basilisk scar on his arm.

The dizziness was gone. The air had the aftertaste of regurgitated apple tart.
Once declared eerily healthy, Harry rolled in to bed and closed his eyes... he must have feigned sleep long enough, because Longwei eventually wandered out with the doctor Shamal at his heels. A discussion in hushed Chinese proverbs between them as they left.

Harry rolled from his side to his stomach, pulling his cell phone out of his back pocket of his pants as he peered out of his blanket cocoon.

He was feeling very... vulnerable.

I need... someone to trust.

He itched to grab some of his vials... but if he was having some kind of illness, he should hold off.

Longwei is not to be trusted.

(Maybe just a bit?)

(NO!)

Harry blearily stared at the phone number that he used to contact Reborn. Because the sad of it was—he had Reborn’s number, and Longwei’s number. And no matter how much his body relaxed and turned to malleable goo around Longwei, of the two of them... Longwei was the more distasteful. The feeling only grew stronger the longer the braided man was away.

Harry pressed the little phone icon before he could think too hard of it. One of his fingers shifting to tap ‘speaker mode’. Harry counted three rings before the phone’s words of ‘CALLING’ shifted to ‘CONNECTED’ and Harry heard... silence.

The silence continued before Harry heard a sigh, “yes?” Reborn’s voice rumbled high pitched over the phone.

“... I called you a lot—in the past. Didn’t I? You always pick up.” Harry murmured.
“… we’ve conversed.” Reborn mutedly agreed.

Harry hummed to himself, eyes drifting shut as he thought for a moment he could taste a lie in that, but at the same time exhaustion was tugging at him too hard for him to really care. Harry tugged out his wand from his back jeans pocket and, while hidden under the blankets, extinguished all of the lights still on in the room.

Even before Harry could settle his wand back in to place, a bitter hot swell swept through his body, and he gave a shudder. Suddenly feeling a bit too hot.

“Reborn,” Harry cleared his throat, “… I have… I have this feeling—I need to go home and there isn’t a lot of time to get there, but—“

—Harry blinked the water out of his eyes, a bar of soap in his hands and cold water blasting his body. Harry blinked at Oodako’s red body clinging safely from the showerhead. The cold water didn’t really affect his body, but all the same wasn’t he… just on the phone? Harry felt clean enough, and quietly set the bar of soap down to a molded spot in the shower and let the water raining down wash away the soap from his hands. Harry mutely turned off the shower and held out an arm for Oodako to climb on.

“… I’m in trouble.” He could feel it in his bones.

A heavy knock on the door, “Hurry up Harry! We have to be to the tents soon!” That was Longwei.

… wasn’t the circus event in… five days?

Have rubbed at his throbbing eyes. His face felt hot, despite the icy shower that he had just taken. Oodako’s tentacles massaged at his arm, and Harry placidly stared at the back of the bathroom door.

What… what was happening?

He was in trouble, and he wasn’t sure what to do.

His phone was on the counter. Harry reached for it and unlocked the phone. The screen wasn’t the
phonebook, or his texts. It was the memos. There was one saved memo. Harry didn’t hesitate to click on it.

It was a simple sentence.

‘DO YOU REMEMBER WRITING THIS?’

‘… No, I don’t.’ Harry murmured to himself as he let the screen go dark.

Between blinks, Harry was dressed professionally in an all-black outfit, a logo printed on the back in neon yellow, his face smoothly painted on with thick purple rings of eye shadow and dark lips. The him in the mirror wasn’t someone that Harry could recognize as himself anymore (who is that in the mirror, but the mystery that—). Harry drove himself and Longwei to the tents (when did he learn where the tents were?) and watched Longwei run off to parts unknown amongst all the colors, bright electric lights—Harry pulled up the chore list.

‘Feed the animals’ was the first thing on the list.

… right, where were the animals? Harry caught the first person that looked even remotely kind and got pointed to the tent behind the main one. There was a man directing a string of helpers around, so Harry quietly joined the throng and fed the horses, counted the rabbits to make sure they didn’t escape, and eyed the random donkey that had been painted like a zebra.

Odd, but okay?

Next on the list, ‘MAKE COTTON CANDY!’

Harry had to wash his hands thoroughly, be inspected, before he was given a work station inside a trailer and a machine. A cart full of sugar and plastic bags was also provided. Harry nursed his fingers whenever the plastic blade slapped him when he was a little slow, but overall he numbly followed his task list.

(If he ignored the little screaming voice inside—would it eventually go away?)
When he finished making all the pink and blue cotton, Harry was off and on his third task.

3. Check the electricals.

Was that a word?

Harry bounced around, checked the lights and supposed everything was in line as he glanced to task number four. Which was to… Harry squinted at the smudge of a word.

Okay. Skip on to five.

Check the ticket booth? Sure. That was fine.

Harry speed walked to the front of the circus.

(What am I doing…?)

Harry bumped right in to someone (someone just slightly taller and blonder…?) that was exiting the ticket booth. Harry caught that someone was still inside, but the blond he ran in to took his attention. The green fatigues and the headband caught his attention, they were so bright in the circus light. Luminescent white lights shining down against the black of the sky.

Harry frowned, “sorry—didn’t mean to run in to you… you alright?” Harry asked, staring at the true-blue eyes of the blond that seemed frozen in to place. Harry waiting a moment before he waved a hand in front of the man’s face. The man’s eyes tracked his hand, but he didn’t move.

“… right.” Harry blink, and then promptly squeezed past the man to enter the ticket booth. It was a woman in a clown wig. Harry glanced to the weird flame mark on her cheek—it looked like she was covering it up with some make up?

“Hey, do you need help in the booth?” Harry asked, and the woman blinked at him, freezing briefly before she continued to apply the concealer to her cheek.
“Not at the moment, no.” She spoke in German, and Harry realized belatedly that he was speaking in kind.

“Right… okay, I’m gunna move on.” Harry waved and ducked out of the booth, hearing a faint ‘later!’ from the woman in the wig. Harry ducked around the still frozen blond and left. He checked the list and… found that the rest had been scratched out.

Right… had he done that? It did look like his hand writing.

… Why did he do that?

Harry flipped the list over and saw his own inelegant writing sprawled over the back in technical pencil.

‘FIND HOME’ was the message.

Not helpful.

Still, Harry drifted to some tables and found some other men and women in uniforms that matched his and got in line for a bite to eat. Harry lingered at his table. The blankness between his memories left him at a loss of what, exactly, he should be doing. Harry poked at his food, the overwhelming smell of a grill and its smoke irritated his nose, and Harry wondered what he was doing with himself. Why he was so calm.

“… I should be panicking.” Harry murmured to himself.

He should be calling someone for help. Harry case a quick detection on his food. And then another area spell—no magic anywhere close by. Once again, he was the most magical thing for miles. Harry left his wand in his sleeve and pulled up his phone.

There was another memo.

‘GET HELP’ was typed.
“… I’m not a very helpful person…” Harry numbly noted to himself. He had twelve missed calls from Longwei. Harry put his phone face down on the table and ate his food.

Harry finished his meal, dumped the trash, and returned the tray. From there, he walked out in to the booths and wandered. He watched the slowly forming crowds. Watched them swell. His eyes caught red hair—

Heart stopping.

Ginny?

Harry slipped through the crowd, following the short flash of red until he caught up after sending a tripping hex after his intended target. The fall and following standing from the ground of the red head allowed Harry the time to catch up. Harry grabbed the arm of the red head, and blinked at the masculine face that greeted him. Red eyes—compass pupils—Harry pulled his hand back like it burned from the soft grip he had had on the red head’s arm (notGinnynotGinny). Harry found himself out of breath, and stuttered out a quick sorry, and fled to the young man yelling, “wait!”

He could feel the chase.

An invisibility spell and Harry quickly squirreled himself away—

Harry blinked back to himself, throwing up everything he ate behind one of the smaller tents. When his stomach finally settled, Harry vanished the mess.

And found himself in front of a bunch of children. They were at the tables. Harry blinked at their cheerful little faces and clapping hands. He found a hat in his hands and the cheering thundered in his ears. His eyes felt so hot—and he desperately needed Oodako… but he was back in to the hotel room, wasn’t he?

“Bring the rabbit back!” A little girl at his feet called. Blond hair in pigtails and dreamy blue eyes fixated on him. Harry couldn’t help but automatically smile at her. Was he… playing magic for them? Harry looked in to the empty black top hair and shifted it upside right and wiggled it a bit to show that nothing was inside.
“What color should the rabbit be?” Harry asked, somehow speaking clearly despite the heavy tongue.

A boy in the back of their cluster snidely yelled out, “rainbow!”

An easy request.

It felt like his head was on fire. Harry, with his wand poking out of his sleeve, grinned. He offered the hat to one of the crowding in parents. “Something from your pocket. Whatever you’re willing to sacrifice to the magic?” The man balked for a moment, but the instant begging from the children had him rifling through his pockets. The man deliberately grabbed a long piece of white string rather than a coin and dropped it in. Harry smiled and brought himself to ‘center stage’.

He waved the hand with the wand over the hat, mumbled some nonsense and—a little nonverbal transfiguration—pulled out a small rainbow bunny.

The screams of pure ecstatic joy made him grin. He always enjoyed pleasing an audience. That was the best part of show business. Harry gently set the rainbow furred bunny in to the eager hands of the closest child, even as the children swarmed closer.

The man who donated the string was gaping, just a little.

“Sorry ‘bout the string,” Harry gave a little shrug to the incredulous gaze of the man. “had to give up a little something,” and that was what Harry had changed in to the bunny. Harry clapped his hands and produced flowers out of his sleeve, and with a flick of his hands he changed the petals in to something sparkly—and passed them out to the children. Whispering that they were only going to last for a little while. Many of the children pulled out phones and proceeded to take pictures with them.

Harry laughed and—his gut said look—and he looked sharply to the left. There was Longwei, looking out of breath and a little wide eyed. “Did you… pull those flowers out of air?” Longwei looked a little off center, and for the first time Harry could remember the other looking so.

“Yeah. Just about.” Harry shrugged and wiped at the sweat that was pouring down the back of his neck. It felt like the middle of summer, he was practically rolling in sweat, now that he noticed.
Another blink and—and he was back in his hotel room, the dark-dark night bleeding through the thin curtains as he faced Longwei. Longwei had a hard grip on his hands and Harry stared at the Chinese man. His heart was thudding hard like he had been running for his life. And Longwei was so, so close. But Harry’s back was to the door.

“Was it something I did? You ignored my calls all night. Are you okay?” Longwei pressed, subtly looming all the closer. It was all calculated, Harry dimly realized it even as yanked his hands away. The small move hurt his very soul, and Harry could swear he felt a burn through his chest, clawing at his throat and springing tears to his eyes.

“Harry?” Longwei didn’t press closer. In fact, Longwei took a step back

“Stay… away.” Harry raised his hands, and gently pushed Longwei back with a shove to the Chinese man’s chest.

It wasn’t designed to hurt, but Longwei looked wounded.

“Go away, Fon!” Harry snarled—in pain and hating and hurting and Longwei-Fon’s eyes minutely widened—

*Harry lashed out with a punch. It connected with Longwei’s jaw—and Harry felt like his whole body was laying on nails. It hurt it hurt it hurt—*

Harry gasped in to consciousness.

He felt like he was burning hot—not just from temperature, but from the fact that it felt like he hadn’t slept in days and he still felt terribly awake.

He was at the border between Germany and France now. Well, Harry knew that logistically it was called ‘the border’, but in reality it was just a road with signs on either side declaring which side of the road was which county. Harry had parked to the side where he could on his motorbike, and was sitting on the curb. Harry glanced up to the nearly dark sky, and sighed to himself. He felt Oodako squirm a little, and Harry dropped his head in his hands.

The streets were empty. The night was quiet.
Harry didn’t feel like he could sleep. And ultimately that wasn’t healthy. Harry rubbed at his eyes and shifted to sit back on his hands and stare up at the sky. He took a deep breath and let it out slow. And then he did it again. Harry appreciated the quiet, but at the same time his skin felt like it was crawling. Harry watched the last of the sun drift away and blacken the sky. Watched the lingering clouds go from orange to dark greys under the full moon.

He wondered how the werewolves faired under the hidden Unspeakables rule. Teddy wasn’t a werewolf, but it was always a thought that he remembered in conjunction with his godson. Harry watched the moon for a time, counted the twelve cars that drove by and just sat himself for a bit.

Teddy is dead. Was killed.

Harry closed his eyes, and recalled Teddy’s face the last time he had seen it. Or, well… he tried too. Harry frowned, brows drawing together as he hazily brought what he could to the forefront. Piecing together skin tone, face shape, smoothness—Harry slowly opened his eyes.

…it hadn’t been too long since he had seen Teddy. Three months at most.

This couldn’t be normal.

… what about James?

James, his nosey son who loved to cause little mischiefs that often sent his siblings scrambling to find misplaced toys around the house. So self-sufficient, with a confidence that Harry could only assume came from Ginny. The son he gave his invisibility cloak to, the Christmas after he came back from Hogwarts the first time.

…but what did his face look like?

Harry’s fingers clenched, and he felt his heartbeat thrum in his ears.

Albus?
They shared the same eyes. Harry squeezed his eyes shut and tried to recall his son. Bright green eyes. Black hair… But in the end, Albus’ face was as fuzzy as James’ in his memory.

As fuzzy as Lily.

…. As fuzzy as Ginny.

“… this can’t be normal.” Something was wrong. Harry had been saying to himself that something had been wrong for some time now. But it was this that really brought it home. Harry had memorized Ginny’s face for years. Her hair, he had been able to pick out flowers and leaves of the exact same shade and present them to Ginny on a whim. He had been able to find leather Quidditch guards that matched her eyes without her being there at his side.

These were not his other memories. These were his own. Memories from days, and weeks, and months ago were washed out and blurry. But he could remember thinking about his wife after waking up with Frank in that stupid little office. He had pictured her face clearly, that first night at the Cauldron before he had pushed the thought away. He had… he had…

What had happened?

Harry scrubbed at his face.

… the history book. He needed… Ginny, Frank said she had remarried. But to who? Where had she lived? Harry had had a single page. But Hermione’s life had been detailed. Ginny’s life had to be as detailed. Right?

Harry shifted and glanced around. Well, the street was empty. The buildings around were dark. Harry pulled off his trunk and unshrunk it. He dug through and pulled out the wizard shoe box and re-shrunk the trunk. It took a bit of time to get the book he wanted. He had shoved his arm in up to the shoulder and dug around for what felt like hours before he pulled out the right book. Harry eyed the pile of books he had pulled out from the black library.

“… I spent over a week in that apartment… why did I never read these?” Harry asked to himself, even as he felt Oodako crawl out from under his driving jacket and stick to his back. Reading had not been a thought outside of taking care of Oodako. He had read that. And then he had just stopped. Why had he stopped?
He needed information for the future.

Why had he stopped?

The pile went back to the box, and Harry shoved the box and the book in to the front of his jacket. He casted a quick bit of charms on Oodako to make others look away. He needed a bit of light to read this. A quick drive chilled his overheated body with the cold night air (and he was able to safely travel even though he felt a little light headed), and Harry settled himself in front of a 24 hour convenience store in France. Harry walked his bike up on to the sidewalk and settled himself next to it in front of the window. He glanced up to spot a camera, and found a stationary one facing away from him. Harry glanced up at the bright light, and with a flick of his wand he knew he had to prepare a line.

Harry placed the tip of his wand to the cement.

… and came up with a blank.

This… this, he had learned in the Auror corps for stake outs. Why was it gone? It was one of the first things he had learned, right? The wand movements and the incantation should be ingrained. Harry shifted and leaned back against the wall of the store and stared down at his wand. Subtly, he tucked it under his leg and focused on his knees.

This… this was not good. Harry took a deep breath—tried to think of his medical skills.

Bandages. Sewing. Wrapping. Sunshine colored flames—

Where were his memories from the Auror corps?

“… fuck.” Harry exhaled.

Harry felt the tentacle tapping his face, and he turned to look to the disillusioned Oodako…. Or, Oodako that was supposed to be disillusioned. It was half faded. Harry stared for a moment before he reached out and ran a hand along the top of Oodako’s visible head.
This was not good. And Harry couldn’t even think of where to start.

... other than where he already was.

Harry slid his wand back up to his sleeve and pulled the book out of his jacket. There was nothing for it at this point. Harry watched the magic dissipate along one of Oodako’s tentacles for a moment before he cracked the book open. The pages hissed as he ran his fingers over the words.

It was easy, finding Ginny Potter.

Her early life was not explained in detail. It was after his death, that the details started. The trials—Ginny Potter accused of having Harry Potter murdered while under a deep cover mission that succeeded. She was removed from the Potter will, and fled to France. There, she re-married...

Harry rubbed his eyes—he felt numb. He just... couldn’t.

James Potter defended his mother vehemently during and after the trials, and left England with his mother. The eldest Potter boycotted England, and finished his education in the colonies. Vowing never to return to British soil. Unlike his brother, Albus Potter remained at Hogwarts for all years of his education, living at the Malfoy estates. Lily Potter, youngest child and only daughter of The-Boy-Who-Lived and Ginny Potter, had her education in France.

This was... never something he wanted for his family. But... he could understand James. But why would Albus stay? Why did no one help Ginny? The mention of a trial was so bland—what kind of false pretense did they accuse his wife of? Harry drummed his fingers on his knee, before he turned the page.

Ginny Potter, renamed as Ginny Leandro... Harry’s eyes fixated on that last name. Definitely not a British name. Harry slowly let out a breath. He had been, in the back of his mind, pained at the idea that someone he knew had married his wife after his ‘death’. Harry had forced himself to not think of it, but now he was just relieved that he wouldn’t have to think of it.

Harry’s fingers trailed down the paragraphs to the end...

Ginny Leandro was buried in France.
Harry slowly closed the book.

Ginny died three months ago. And even Harry could see that that couldn’t be a coincidence. As he had been found by the unspeakables shortly afterward. Harry could tell, through the dates listed—Ginny had waited for him, in the end. Waited twenty five years. And then had remarried.

Harry raised the book and pressed the cover against his forehead. She had waited.

She had waited more than long enough. She had raised their children by herself. And when they were adults, found some form of happiness for herself.

“I’m glad… you found some happiness.” They had meant to be together until the end. But… but he was at least happy she didn’t have to live alone. She could have, but she didn’t have to. Harry blinked away a few tears and slumped back against the wall. He desperately wanted to find that graveyard. He wanted to just go, spend a few weeks—

Harry gagged at the sudden violent pull of his stomach that eased a second later. Harry, hunched over, blinked at the ground before he slowly straightened up. He pressed a hand to his forehead and checked for his temperature. Nothing. He hadn’t even done anything! He had just thought about staying and overseeing Ginny’s gr—

Harry groaned, hand pressed to his mouth.

…it was his thoughts, wasn’t it?

His body felt icy cold yet burning, now.

Something was wrong and he needed help. He needed help and everyone was dead, compromised or… or…
Harry’s eyes drifted down to the book.

… Albus. Frank had said that Albus was in France. And while Harry didn’t want to trust a single word that tosser had spoken to him… if there was a chance…

Harry pulled out the wizard shoe box and pulled out the books he had found earlier. He could have sworn he had seen it… Harry smiled when he found his chosen book, and shoved everything back in to the box. At least he didn’t have to shove his arm in as far as it could go this time.

‘THE MANY APPLICATIONS OF BLOOD AND MAGIC’

Harry’s fingers traced the cover, pausing a moment to search for a name. Finding none, he flipped inside and moved toward the location section. Albus was his child, and Harry had more than enough blood to spare for tracking the other down if he was close enough.

(This is illegal—the moral side of Harry hissed.)

(It’s now or never—crowed the more recent, more impulsive and infinitely more desperate side of Harry. It’s only going to get worse.)

Harry read the instructions. He was going to need a surface, blood, and a pure flame. Harry glanced around the street. And preferably not somewhere where he could be seen while he did it as well. Harry eyed the picture in the book for a moment, and when he felt he had it memorized he folded the corner of the top part of the page and then closed it. Harry closed his eyes, picturing what he would need to draw and burn. Harry started to count.

5 seconds.

1 minute.

4 minutes.

And Harry opened his eyes and looked out to the street. Already, he had forgotten the general shape of the image. The image that had clearly been pictured behind his eyelids had dissipated as rapidly as
the afterimage of an open flame.

Harry sunk his teeth in to his bottom lip and carefully stood up. The shrunk the box and dropped it in to a pocket, and ducked in to the convenience store he had been sitting in front of for the last little bit. At the door, Harry paused and looked out over his shoulder to the street. He glanced up. The pink dawn hours twinkled back, and Harry shivered. Where had the hours gone?

He stumbled in, his legs like jelly and his lungs as if they were full of water.

(\textit{It's only going to get worse...})

Harry took a moment to use the restroom—locked the door behind himself. With his wand he quickly burned the necessary rune from the book in to the tile. The heat coming from the tip of his wand almost matched the burning he felt in his chest. His body was in pain by the end, and cutting his arm to gather blood felt like nothing. Harry gouged his arm with a cutting curse, dipped his fingers in the welling blood, and quietly traced the rune. Of course, one dip wasn’t enough blood to trace the whole thing.

But when Harry went to get more—the cut was gone. Harry numbly brushed his fingers over the spot, smearing the small amount of blood around. Harry took a shuddering breath, and his hands were smooth as he gouged at his arm once more. Created another wound. Dipped in for some blood. Traced. Went for more.

Again.

And again. And again.

With the rune eventually complete, Harry rushed to murmur the incantation after glancing to his book. The locking charm on the door was holding, even as someone started to knock on the locked room.

It was supposed to hurt. But Harry supposed he had met his threshold and had clearly gone beyond it. He couldn’t feel much, even as the rune transferred to his hands and burned itself in to his palms.

Go south, the rune whispered in to his mind.
The book stated that he would have an hour to find the intended target before he lost his mind.

Harry apparated. Disappearing from the clean bathroom and to the street. He shrunk his motorcycle and shoved that in to the zippered pocket with his vials.

And south Harry went.

He closed his eyes and focused on the magic, gut stabbing feeling the runes in his palms were giving him—and blind apparated.

Harry blindly dug his feet in to the ground once he landed—wards pushed at him—and Harry pushed back just as hard and shattered them. They shattered around him, and Harry felt something in his chest shatter too… and come together in to something that almost allowed clarity. Harry took in a deep breath and looked at the too early morning sky and…

And blinked, as he found himself standing outside the main base of the Carcassa famiglia.

Harry staggered to the side, and then toward the building.

HOME—his body declared. And his palms throbbed as he watched the burned runes slowly start to dissipate in to nothing. Each breath he took… he felt a little more like himself. A little more centered. A little more like Harry, and less like the silent scream he had become over the last few days (weeks? Months?).

Harry pulled out his hand, even as all the lights in the villa turned on, and casted, “appareo.”

Harry needed to know…

His eyes burned with the sudden influx—so much white light. There was enough magic here that would have put Grimmauld Place to shame. Harry took a shaking breath and stepped forward. He blinked hard and his vision returned to normal.
First. Albus.

Why was Albus here?

(The Carcassa were only a famiglia through sheer tenacity and bad reputation—but why would they kidnap someone affiliated with them? If Albus was hurt… Harry would burn this place to the ground. Questionable current relationships with anyone or no.)

Find Albus.

Burn everything that stood in the way.

Chapter End Notes

NOTE: The dashes are meant to indicate things that Harry doesn't remember. I doubt it was obvious and this is the only chapter I'm introducing it in to (probably). But in case you were wondering what that was, it was just the insanity creeping in. EDIT!! From suggestion, I changed the dashes through the words to BOLD with ITALICS to indicate when there is a happening that Harry basically won't write in to a memory. Memory problems are a thing. Ahaha..

On a whole, I was very unsatisfied with this chapter. Mainly because it is a giant mish-mash of Harry's insanity and nothing is exactly clear at the moment. So take from it what you will. I really needed this chapter so I could proceed on. So I figure that this is a necessary evil. (And apparently I can't write a filler chapter to save my life... so instead I filled it with tons of clues and made it important instead.) Harry has been having a lot of non-alcohol-induced blackouts... Hell, he was around Longwei for about five days. Heavens know what happened there...

And lol I can't believe Harry trusts everything he reads, the idiot. I guess Hermione and her reverence for books finally rubbed off in some way. History is written by the victor, after all.

Anyway, the next chapter will have a significant effect on perceptions, acceptance, and a clear OH WOW SO THAT IS WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING.

Thank you all for reading this far. And for the kind words. And the great questions! And your patience. If you have any questions, I'll try to answer them without spoiling the next chapter. And if you found anything off, please feel free to point it out and I'll see if it's intentional or not. So on and so forth.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

“The art of necessities is strange
That can make vile things precious.”
--KING LEAR

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Harry blandly pulled out his phone. Well, the half of it that remained. He hadn’t made it through the blind apparition completely unscathed. But this was the phone with Reborn’s number. His few photos. Under the light of the Carcassa’s increasing awareness, Harry thumbed open the micro SD slot and quietly stuck the chip in to his pocket. He zipped it up, and added a protective charm to the entire pocket. His jacket had had so many modifications by this point that while he had lost a chunk of his jeans and most of his pocket (and the back heel of his left boot, actually), his jacket had survived unscathed.

(We’ll need to get some patches and sew them on~)

Harry had his wand in hand, a quick spell had his pants and shoes in working order.

A deep breath—the air was sweet grass and forget-me-nots. It was like the cloud over his mind parted in two and he could finally think. Everything was clear before his eyes.

The flood lights turned on.

Harry shaded his eyes with his left hand. And flicked his wand loosely in his right hand, quietly charming the ground under himself. Spelling the loose gravel firm in case he needed to run. Purple jump suited Mafioso rolled out of the open doors of the villa. None of them came toward him. Instead they expanded in to the space between Harry and the quaint villa that itched familiarity and slowly expanded out in a shallow circle around him.

“Skull!” A woman called, striding forward from the mass.
Oh, Harry remembered her body language. It was handcuff failure girl.

Harry shot out his wand—a silent *LEVICORPUŞ*—and the girl was wrenched in to the air by the ankle. Harry calmly walked the distance between himself and her. She had been midway between himself and the villa, but the distance was short.

For a moment it was pure silence—and then the clack-clack of guns cocked and ready to fire.

Harry stopped in front of the silent dangling of the girl.

His mind—the clearest it’s been in so long—allowed him to detect the magic in her suit, in her helmet.

“Where are you holding Albus Potter?” Harry asked, feeling a little distanced from the good cheer in his voice, and the smile he could feel stretching his face. This wasn’t the time to be cheery, but Skull-as-Harry had used his cheer as a distracting weapon and it sincerely and often worked.

The good cheer was disconcerting all the same. Seeing the aggressor so pleasantly cheerful was always off putting. The same disconcerting feeling that arise when a Bond villain was too pleasant, too charismatic. The air became thicker.

Nothing from the suited woman.

“I want his location,” Harry adds pleasantly. Days in the Auror corps flashes before his eyes. Raids on the homes of those accused of the Dark Arts. Stake outs in the streets. Chases through Diagon Ally. And a moment, just like this. With Harry and his wand in hand—and someone helpless at his proverbial feet.

Harry did not much appreciate the silence.

He raised his wand. And out of the corner of his eye, watched the helmeted small army tighten their circle around him. A few wands spaced between semi-automatic rifles.

A quick reducto shattered the helmet of the dangling girl. Revealing a pale face with eyes and mouth
scrunched tight. Thin red lines appeared where the helmet shattered against her face, but no blood appeared.

A quick shield protected their little bubble from the onslaught of spell fire. The guns had yet to dare a bullet. But that didn’t hold his attention whilst he knew he was safe under a shimmering shield. He and the girl both protected as the spell fire died down.

She opened her left eye. And then the right.

Harry stared in to the electric green eyes of the girl from the apple tart café.

“…You…” Harry pressed his lips together tight, his heart giving one painful pound before his ears grew hot and his throat tightened.

“WHERE IS HE!” Harry finally yelled—his mind jumping to spells to MAKE her talk with a fluidity that he had missed. But with a raging anger he could have done without.

“Are you here to finish us off this time?” The girl asked, head shifting to the side. Her hair was apple blond and short. Harry hadn’t realized he hadn’t noticed the color, but it had just enough tinge to it to be familiar. The calm way she had phrased ‘this time’ sent Harry in to stillness.

Slowly he shook his head, “… I want my son.”

The girl blinked for a moment, “then let me down. Grandpa will be inside.”

… Grandpa?

Harry inhaled sharply, and mutely casted the counter curse. The girl dropped, but twisted in a way to land on her feet. She balanced with her arms out for a moment before she rose up to her feet. They locked eyes once again.

Grandpa? (It rang in Harry’s head—and he could see the color of his own eyes in her electric green. Different, but eerie in similarity. The shape of her face was familiar in a painful way that made his mind lurch.)
“Give me your wand,” she held out her hand.

Harry slapped her hand down with his left hand—“in your dreams,” he hissed. He refused to hand over his wand! That was the most ridiculous request he had heard in his life.

The girl hummed and took a step back, keeping her eyes on Harry as she minutely shook out her slapped hand. Never even daring to turn away even the tiniest bit in a way that the brave never turned away from oncoming death.

“… what do you mean by again?” It came out as a whisper, but Harry didn’t regret saying it all the same.

“I mean what I mean—I don’t say anything I don’t mean.” The girl continued on, still backing up. Harry paused, and with his wand in hand he took a step forward. A quick recast of the shield spell had that hovering in the space around him as he walked forward.

Harry glanced away from the girl to the Mafioso around them, “are they all indoctrinated? Italians?” Harry asked, reluctant to leave his eyes off the girl for so long.

“More or less, but we don’t swear on a saint and burn them as our induction,” she answered, both of her hands hovering behind herself as she approached the doorway of the main villa entrance in her backwards walk. The Mafioso around them backed up minutely, but not leaving more than an arms width away from them. The girl caught the doorway with her hands, and smoothly maneuvered herself to walk through the dark wooden arch and in to the brightly lit villa.

Harry was not going to take his eyes off apple tart girl—just as she wasn’t going to take her eyes off of him.

“… does the Carcassa indulge in the drug and skin trade?” Harry asked.

A negative shake of apple tart girl’s head. “No. We just let everyone think that.”

“… even me?” Harry choked it out.
"Even you. We’re not here to play the mafia game… Harry Potter.” The girl named him with complete confidence. She stopped in front of a set of closed doors.

“The Carcassa famiglia is a young famiglia—only 49 years. We’re a few months shy of a good fifty. As long as the big fish don’t catch a whiff of us, we’re just fine…” The girl leaned against the wide double doors that led in to the large dining hall that Harry could honestly never remember it being used.

Harry tightened his grip on his wand so hard it creaked. “And why, exactly, do you spread such lies?”

“Protection, of course. We don’t have ties with anyone, and no one wants ties with us. We are free to be as we were meant to be.” The girl explained. Her eyes glanced quickly to the wand, but they swiftly darted back up to look at Harry in the eyes.

“… and that is?” Harry hissed.

“The safe harbor of Harry Potter,” she murmured, and pushed the handles of the doors and stepped back and through the now opened doorway.

And there he was.

There they were.

Harry looked past the apple tart girl, to the three figures standing at the other end of the long table. Harry blinked, and relaxed his grip as he realized then and there—these were his children. They were his children and their aged faces were terribly familiar to Skull, they shown like little bright spots in his memories of the Carcassa.

The inner circle of the Carcassa famiglia. The elder three. The three underbosses. Those under the leadership of the first Carcassa boss.

“… you never used your real names,” Harry choked. Their faces linked together in his memories. His mental image of his children swiftly imprinted themselves as older. Much, much older. The soft
winkles of their faces. The freckles that they got from Ginny.

“Homenum revelio,” Harry murmured—the only ones there were his children—and apple tart girl. Harry’s feet brought him thudding closer and closer to where the three stood. Harry reached the start of the long table, even as apple tart girl kept a pace just in front of him. But she wasn’t his focus. Just a small side thought.

His daughter, his Lily, merely smiled and held Albus’s hands. “Silly, we never changed them, not much,” her voice was as delicate as when she was a girl, but slightly husked with age. Harry thought he recognized the pink cardigan as one of Ginny’s favorites. It was old, well worn, and well loved.

“Giacomo, Giglio… Garth?” Harry trailed off as he named his children by the names they carried within the famiglia. “Why Garth?”

Lily’s face stretched in a smile as her grip on Albus’ hands switched to holding on to her brother’s arm with a laugh. “I knew he would question that!”

Albus let out a sigh, “… unlike you and James, my name didn’t directly translate to Italian! And I thought we agreed on the unification of ‘G’ names.” Albus reached out and gently shoved at James’ shoulder as his older brother loomed closer.

James merely grinned and stage whispered, “called it.”

It was like some strange fast forwarding in time. Lily, as always, holding on to Albus as the two brothers gently teased each other. Harry felt hot and cold seeing it—and strode forward. He ached to hold them, all of them! The last time they had been in his arms, they had all been able to fit. Hardly grown at all.

Apple tart girl planted a feet in front of Harry, and became a wall separating Harry and his children. They were only half a room away!

Harry heard a crackle in his ears, and between his blinks, he found the tip of his wand jammed against her throat.

And a knife at his femoral artery.
The girl pressed her lips together in to a fine white line—“you need to drop your wand, Harry Potter.” Harry’s hand trembled, and he watched the tip press just a tiny bit more against her air pipe, watched the tightening of the corners of her eyes. “Before you do something that you regret,” she continued, her eyes glancing to the right and toward his older children, before looking back to him.

Harry looked.

James had stepped forward. In front of Albus and Lily in a clearly defensive stance. James gave a shaky smile at the eye contact. “Dad…” James hesitated, “dad, please trust us. Please. Put the wand down.”

No one was surprised.

“… have I done this before?” Harry cracked.

“… yes.” Lily murmured, head slightly peaked around James shoulder so that she could still keep a wary eye on the situation. “And we’ve put in contingencies since then.”

“Is that why I don’t remember this room?” Harry asked, his wand completely still in his hand.

“It was redesigned, just in cases like this,” Albus stated as he edged back with Lily at his side.

Harry glanced down to apple tart girl—“and… what’s your name?”

“Liliana.” The girl, the young woman, spoke tersely. Harry eased the wand tip away from her neck and took a step back. The knife followed him until he stepped just slightly out of range. Liliana had kept her cool this entire time.

“She’s my granddaughter,” Albus supplied (Frank lied. The book lied. His Albus had had children!) from where he and Lily had almost exited the room.

James had been the one that stepped closer. In his hands now looked like a rapier.
“I’ve been here before,” Harry echoed absently. And just from the reactions of everyone else, it had not been pleasant. “I’ve been here before, and I’ve caused damage.” And Harry did not doubt that he had done significant damage. His whole life had been spent getting stronger just so he could overcome difficulty after difficulty. Always getting stronger just so that he would never succumb to some neo-Voldemort.

“Please, dad. Your wand. On the table. Leave it there and no one will touch it.” James continued.

A choked laugh escaped, “just because my wand is out of hand doesn’t mean I can’t do magic!” The clouds were coming back in to his brain. His ears were hot and Harry had a shake in his heart as the world started to blur.

“No—but we can’t use magic anymore. Not many of us can.” James kept his voice soft, and his tone even. One hand up in a placating gesture. It wasn’t what James was doing that made the creeping flame end. It felt like ice water had been dumped over his head.

Harry looked to Liliana, who merely raised an eyebrow at the regard.

“There were wands outside…” Harry murmured.

“Those are the last of us,” Liliana added. “Whom wasted precious magic on you. They’ll get a talking to.”

It was just… too much.

“What happens if I put down my wand?” Harry asked. Eyes on Liliana.

“I will lead you to a room we have had prepared for you. You remember it, right? The bath?” Liliana slowly straightened up and flipped her knife so that she held it reversed in her hand. Her knees were still slightly bent, ever ready to spring back if needed.

With the phrase ‘the bath’, a mental image came to mind. A large stone room with sweeping windows. A cover for the stone bath… “A sensory deprivation chamber?” Harry frowned.
“The last great feat of Aunt Hermione,” James offered with a quirk of his lips.

“And what, I take a bath?” Harry wrinkled his nose.

Albus was the one that spoke then, having not retreated any further from the room despite being right next to the exit. “It’s a solution I’ve devised to see if you’ve had any physical tampering. Any skin contact potions. It happens frequently.”

“… I’ve done this… every other week?” Harry asked, eyes drifting past James to Albus.

Albus nodded, “yeah… Mafioso and wizards… Dad, you’ve always been easy to find. It’s just the matter of keeping you as whole as possible.”

Harry’s hands shook.

If he let his wand go, then he would be vulnerable. Because while he could still do magic, he was infinitely more skilled with a wand. Even just having it in his sleeve left him fully armed and more dangerous than most.

“Dad, we don’t know where you got the death stick—but you have to put it down.” Lily added, a bit more pale faced than normal.

“It’s not…” Harry looked to his wand.

It was his holly wand. Right? It looked like it. It felt like it.

“Please dad.” James murmured. “Please…”

(I can trust my children—Harry repeated in his head. He repeated it again and again and again—)

Harry peeled off his fingers one by one as he shifted and held his wand over the table side. Each
finger he peeled off with the intent to put it down—his heart started to rocket. His breath shuddered and he alternated between burning and cold.

“Please,” his children echoed, and Harry blinked and watched the death stick drop.

It clattered on the table, and Harry dropped his hand to his side, glad that Oodako shot out and wrapped himself around Harry’s entire right hand. Harry took a shuddering breath and took a few steps to the left, stepping away from the table and putting some distance between himself and the table. Harry brought up his right hand and cradled Oodako to his chest, rocking the octopus that grew heavier as it grew larger at will. Its legs soon sprawling out of his arms before slowly wrapping around Harry in a loose hug.

His heart was racing, and his breath whistled.

“Harry… Harry!” Liliana was there, in front of his face. And he focused on her calm. She didn’t crack a smile, “you’ve done good. Thank you. Come, let’s get you in the solution. And in to the bath.” Harry took a shuddering breath and raised his eyes. Lily and Albus were gone. The only one that remained was James, who had his rapier in a sheath at his hip. Paired with the dark casual business suit.

Harry wobbled slightly, “looking sharp, son…” Harry tried to smile, reaching one of his hands out as Oodako transferred his wait to attaching himself to Harry’s chest. James smiled and reached out for Harry’s hand, before he froze and caught a look to the rune burned in to Harry’s palm.

“Blood magic?” James asked softly, finally closing the distance between their hands and turning Harry’s palm over so the chandelier above could illuminate the design.

James swiftly traced the design with his finger, and Harry let out a breath as the burning in his palms eased upon the contact. He hadn’t even noticed the burning sensation until it had eased. Harry brought up his other palm once he was sure that Oodako could support himself, and father and son watched as the burn scars bubbled, burst, and then peeled away to reveal fresh, healthy skin. James lightly picked at it, before he murmured, “I didn’t recognize the whole of it—did it lead you here?”

“Yes… I meant to find Albus…” Harry trailed off.

James quirked a smile, “well, it’s good that we were all in a place you could reach. The goblins will build up the wards again, so a small shattering is fine.”
“Goblins?” Harry rubbed his hands together, watched the peeling skin fall and disappear before it hit the ground.

“Yes, we provided sanctuary to the British goblins with a few… concessions,” Liliana tapped her knife against her cheek, “Goblin steel is superior to any metal that a man can make, after all.” James let out a huff and quietly told the girl to please put away her toys.

“What happened to the goblins?” Harry asked, because the ‘great goblin galumph’ was something that existed in the back of his mind, bubbling forward now that the topic was mentioned. James tucked Harry’s arm in to his elbow and quietly led them on toward the deprivation chamber. All of the hallways were made out of nice, old stone. Practically dripping with magic.

James was silent for a moment before he spoke, “well… you did, dad. I believe you were… thirty-three—when the unspeakables got a hold of you after your…” James trailed off.

Liliana filled in the gap, “fifth time slipping from unspeakable control.”

“Seems about right,” James murmured. Harry pressed his lips together and looked out of the windows of the hall to see the morning light was now decently illuminating the acreage around the Carcassa villa. In fact, Harry slowed down and squinted outside. Was that a centaur? James tugged on Harry’s arm, and they continued on.

“Those were not good times. We were able to get a forewarning to the Goblins, which brokered us the deal. But some Goblins had to be left behind to die. There were volunteers, but even then they are bitter over the whole event. Britain is not their favorite place at the moment,” James spoke solemnly. “We lost a lot of people, bringing you back from that…”

Harry’s fingers tingled. He focused on taking deep breaths. Up ahead was the room that contained the ‘medicinal bath’ that Harry-as-Skull had constantly used. Hadn’t someone sold the idea to him as meditative skin care once?

“Who… who died?” For me? It was silent, but the sentiment rang in the air all the same. They paused on the threshold of the room that held the deprivation chamber.

“Dad… let’s get you settled first. Then we can start from the beginning. We never… we never thought you’d be you again,” James reached out and brushed a thumb near Harry’s eye. Harry
reached out and caught the hand, pressed it against his cheek.

Even though James’ words made so much sense. Logically… well, Harry hated the idea. He wanted to know now! Now! NOWNOWNOW—

Harry took a shuddering breath. “I’ll trust you.”

“Do you remember what to do?” Liliana asked, eyes ahead.

“… Just strip and go in, right?” Harry wrapped his arms around Oodako once more.

“More or less. No earrings. No clothes. When you get out, don’t touch anything you’ve been wearing before. We’ll have to scan them and decontaminate.” James reached out and brushed back Harry’s hair. “There will be a cloth set of sleep wear on a chair. Put that on, okay?”

Harry was stamping down the need to run as much as he could.

Of course, that reminded him… “my memory vials, could they handle a search?”

“Memories?” The word came out sharp and Harry stepped back automatically.

(If you can’t trust family, the wheel will only come full circle. And Harry was here.)

Harry slowly reached in to his pocket and withdrew the bracelet. A twist of his wrist and it was full formed again. The long belt and many, many clusters. James reached out slowly, and while watching Harry’s face, tentatively took it in to his own hands.

“Whose memories are these?” James whispered.

“Mine… as Skull.” Harry answered, whispering in kind.
Liliana and James glanced to each other. “Where is your pensive?” James asked instead. And Harry let his answer speak for itself. James grimaced, “you’ve been directly inputting them… I’ll have a Goblin give it a quick look over, and have Lily retrieve the pensive. Out of all of us, Lily is the best in this field.”

Harry’s hand shot out and clamped down on the best, his glove creaking.

“. . . don’t know why I did that.” Harry murmured.

“Let go dad. Please.” James didn’t tug away, and waited Harry out. Slowly, just as with the wand, Harry uncurled each finger and pulled back. James and Liliana stepped away. Harry turned to the threshold of stone that was here before him. There was a simple wall in front of him just past the doorway. With an opening left and right. Harry motioned to the left, looking over his shoulder to James and Liliana. James nodded, and Harry looked forward again. He stepped forward.

The stones around and above him lit up with a golden shimmer. Two steps in and Harry felt a great big yank on his chest. Two steps—and he stumbled over and in to the wall, planting.

And feeling so light—like he was floating.

“Compulsion charms, I believe,” James quirked a helpless smile, watching the shimmering stones. “Goblin magic, very handy.” Harry nodded, even as the helpless, constant anger he had been burdened under melted away. The paranoia, the rage, the need to burn everything and stomp the unworthy—

Harry took a shaky breath. “Right… right…” Harry rubbed his eyes and staggered to the left. He quietly followed the hallway and after a moment, stumbled in to the cozy chamber. The windows here were clouded for privacy, stretching from floor to ceiling. Harry saw candles and matches, but forewent them considering that the morning light was strong enough.

The center of the room had a stone bath. Every inch of it, inside and outside of it—runes. Beautifully handcrafted runes. Harry had never learned too much of runes. Sure, he could use them in a pinch, the simplest and most effective ones for Aurors. But deconstructing an entire paragraph of runic work? That was not his forte. Harry stepped to the tub and eyes and pale orange of the half-filled tub.

Harry tried to calm his heart with meditative breathing.
Harry reached for Oodako, and gently placed the octopus on a comfortable chair in the corner, on top of the pale blue and white striped pajamas. Harry squinted at them, because that pajama set was eerily familiar. But he couldn’t put his finger on it. Harry backed away and took a moment to place everything in his pockets on top of the small wooden table tucked to the side.

The motorcycle. The microSD chip. The big of change and small wad of cash he hadn’t realized was there. The magic shoebox, and the trunk necklace. Harry eyed his ‘treasures’, and itched to hide them all away once more. He added his motorcycle keys to it, and made himself look away. He stripped out of everything and dropped it to the floor.

The coolness of the room—it was soothing. It calmed him.

“I’m safe here.” Harry murmured. And perhaps if he said it enough, he’d believe it.

Harry eyed the pale orange mixture. It looked like melted orange sherbet ice cream. It looked thick, too. Harry gagged slightly as he stuck his foot in. And immediately he shivered, it was cold like ice! Harry took several quick, sharp breaths as he stuck his other foot in, and eased himself in to sitting. Quickly, before he could think too hard over it, he laid down.

Just as he remembered, the sides of the tub stretched up and over his head. Stretching until both sides touched and sealed him in to a bubble of dark. Harry closed his eyes and focused on deep breathing. Everything tingled. It was a familiar sensation, actually.

Slowly, the liquid warmed up in to something pleasant.

Harry relaxed, and drifted.


And if he ever saw Frank again, he would destroy him.

Harry doesn’t know how long he drifted, but eventually the tingling stopped. And the sides of the
stone bathtub slowly retreated and lowered back in to its’ original state. Harry slowly sat up.

All of his scars were a bright orange. Harry stared for a moment before he placidly rubbed the heel of his palm over one of his more prominent chest scars. In fact… there was a huge swath of angry orange over his stomach, palms, and inner arms, a different color from the mild pale orange of his scars

This had never happened to him before. Or so he thought. Harry eased himself out of the liquid, which was more like a gel now. Harry eyed the shape his body left behind, wrapping his arms over his chest as he shivered in place. The light coming in through the clouded windows was noon bright, and it illuminated the room. Harry padded over to the lounging Oodako, and quickly stuck his strangely dry body in to the pajama set.

Once dressed, Harry reached for Oodako before he paused.

James said… not to bring anything back that he was wearing. Oodako was included with that, wasn’t he. Harry shivered and forced himself to step back. Oodako eyed him and gave him a lazy wave.

“Make sure my things are okay while I’m gone, alright?” Harry asked with a shaky smile. Oodako looked relaxed, so Harry would trust in that. Oodako wiggled slightly, before wrapping himself around the chair and settling in.

Harry took several deep breaths before he padded out of the room, barefoot.

Lily was waiting for him on the other side of the threshold. The stones didn’t glow this time around.

Lily did theatrically wince when she saw him, though. “Right. I’ll take you directly to Albus. He’ll sort out what’s been applied.” She explained, and wrapped her arms together in front of herself. Clutching at her own elbows to stop the temptation of reaching out to Harry. Lily had always been a big hand holder.

“How old are you, Lily?” Harry asked. Because he needed to focus on something else.

Lily chuckled, “well, that’s a familiar question. You always pestered me about that—when you
Harry grimaced. And Lily grinned at his face. Eventually, the smile wore away and she let out a breath, “I’m 86, years old.” She paused, then added, “I was eight, the last I saw you.”

Harry rubbed at his face. He thought… he remembered her there, at the Hogwarts express.

“I never went to Hogwarts. Shortly before I turned eleven… the plague hit.” Lily looked to Harry then, her fingers clenching hard on the sleeves of her pink cardigan.

“Plague?” Harry drew to a stop, and Lily stopped with him.

She nodded, before she shrugged and looked away. “Well, it wasn’t really a plague. Not in a sense that most would understand. I got sick, a really bad fever. And when the fever broke… I was a squib. A lot of witches and wizards were. Everyone under five. I was some strange… freak accident.” She shrugged her shoulders hard, but her voice was soft with old hurt.

Harry reached out to touch her shoulder, to draw her in for a hug.

“Don’t! … you’ll get contaminated. Albus has to look at you first… and then… then, I’d really like a hug,” Lily had stepped away, her smile forced and blinking hard to get rid of the sheen of tears.

“I.. I am so sorry.” Harry murmured.

She shrugged, “well, you don’t have to have a lot of magic to work with creatures. Or potions… or mind magics. I had just enough—but not enough to qualify for Hogwarts. Of course, even then…” She trailed off and shook her head. Resolutely she marched on, and Harry followed after, arms folded as well.

“I got in to raising magic familiars. And it worked out for me. Cats and owls, and… more exotic beings.” She smiled to herself, and Harry recognized their path as going to the villa’s medical ‘wing’, although it was a rather small space considering that the Carcassa famiglia didn’t house more than a hundred members.
“I even raised Oodako. I didn’t expect him to cling to you, like he did…” She trailed off. “With your magic in the wrecked state it was at the time…”

“Is that why he can change size when he feels like it?” Harry asked, surprised yet not about this revelation.

Lily laughed, “that, and much more! The dear thing, I think at one point you trained him to do massages… We have a large tank for him to relax in, once we make sure he is decontaminated.”

“Decontaminated…?” Harry prodded.

“Ah, just a quick scan though an arch, much like the one that leads to the bath. It should remove any charms or curses that could be there.

Harry nodded along. “So.. Lily, how old are you?”

Lily quirked a helpless smile at Harry. “old enough, daddy, where you shouldn’t ask a lady her age.” She breathed a sigh, “I’m eighty-six. It’s… been a long time, since I’ve seen you as you are. Mum was the one that figured out that your memories as Harry Potter were actually physically removed, rather than just blocked in your head. That had been… disheartening to discover, in all honesty.

“… how did Ginny find me?” Harry asked quietly. Even as he scrubbed through his head for some kind of identifying memory.

Lily looked to Harry as they came to full stop before the warm wooden doors of the medical wing. “Mum… had Kingsley and the remains of the order that swore oaths on their magic—they helped her infiltrate the unspeakables. Long enough for her to… set a way to track you.”

Harry’s stomach churned. His head felt like it was on fire.

“How…?” He murmured, faint.
“… Albus would be best, to explain.” Lily concluded, hand raised as if to touch Harry’s face, before she quickly brought her hand to the door and pushed it open.

The face looked above him. Holding strips of Chris’ flesh in front of his eyes. “My, I think this helps.” That was Chris’ face! It was his face! The world had tunneled and all Chris could see was the stick that could cut coming to the corner of his mouth and—

“Warbeck! Come over here and finish the insertion.” A pause, “now!” The man ripped open the side of Chris’ mouth. And Chris hadn’t thought he could feel even more pain. But the scream that ripped out of him was animalistic at best.

A man and woman shuffled over as Chris’ torturer stood and left his limited field of vision.

The colors were washed out and wrong. But the face was familiar in shape. As if Chris had seen it hundreds of times before. Tears were pouring out of her eyes, and she had hundreds of little stones hovering in the air over his body.

“It’s alright, Gertie.” The man whispered. But Chris couldn’t look away from her face.

“I’m so sorry, Harry…”

Harry squeezed his eyes shut. Raising his hands and hiding his face as he choked. He choked on tears and air. His knees were on the ground and he really couldn’t… he just… couldn’t.

It had been Ginny! She had been there! Her colors might have been altered. And her hair… but Harry could recognize the curve of her cheek. The shape or her nose and brows.

“Dad..” Murmured a voice next to Harry. Harry heaved—phantom pain in his face.

Stones. Stones pushed in to the wounds left behind. The slow push and insertion of the stones—

Harry heaved again.
“Dad, look up.” The male voice begged.

Slowly, Harry complied.

There was Albus, kneeled on the floor across from him. Hands splayed out harmlessly and eyes begging.

“There you are…” Albus murmured, voice cracking.

Harry raised his eyes beyond Albus, to Lily, who was wringing her hands and pacing to the side. She was actually in tears. Albus made a soothing noise, and that gathered Harry’s attention.

“Dad. We need.. I need you to drink several counter potions. I just… need to rub some paper over the afflicted areas to find out what you’ve been dosed with. I need you to stand… on your own, and get yourself to a table. Can you do that?” Albus bit his bottom lip, the whites of his eyes so prominent.

“Albus…” Harry choked.

“Come on dad, you can do it. There are no dragons here.” Albus murmured, shifting to slowly stand. He moved so slow, Harry thought he heard the creaks and pops of old bones.

Harry shuddered and lurched to his feet.

The bed was close. That was fine.

Between blinks, he was sitting, and Albus was decked in a full medical coat and blue gloves. He had a paper that he was rubbing over Harry’s mouth, making a soothing noise every time Harry flinched when Albus touched the large facial scars.

Albus pulled the paper back. It was the same angry orange as on his hands, and stomach. Apparently it was over his face as well.
“..what is that?” Harry slurred.

“The vestige of a long lasting mind altering potion,” Albus murmured as he brought the paper to several clear vials off to the side. Methodically, Albus peeled strips of the paper away and inserted them in to the vials. The papers dissolved in to the clear liquid. One turned violent pink.

“Do you know what it is?” Harry used his sleeve and rubbed at his face. Wiping away tears.

“… unfortunately, yes.” Albus held up the pink solution with a grimace.

“… what is it?” Harry needed to know.

“Well, there was never an official name for it—outside of generally calling it ‘the dragon taming potion’, invented by Charlie Weasley. Created for direct application to the hides of dragon infants to foster feelings of love and compliance so as to make the care of orphaned dragons easier…” Albus swirled the potion before going to the closed wooden doors of a large cabinet. Albus opened it, and started to search through it as he continued to talk. “Some tosser in the twenties adjusted it for human application. It’s been a menace since then. Directly apply it to the skin, it has a three day waiting period to soak in. And once instant of the afflicted feeling safe with someone and bam—instant loyalty.”

“It needs the three day gestation period to completely permeate all the cells of the human body. From there, it can induce pain if the afflicted try to shift their loyalties, think of going to someone other than the one that the potion has latched on to—and of course, afflict retaliation pain.” Lily murmured, hovering close. “It lingers in the body for up to five years.”

Harry felt cold.

So… so when he thought of Longwei…? Harry let out a sigh, his tense muscles relaxing.

Albus and Lily shared a look, and Harry punched the bed with his fist.

“Counter-potion?” Harry ground the word out.
“Do-able,” Albus stated, pulling out several vials and jars and placing them on a large work station.

“Don’t drink anything yet,” James stated as he pushed the doors open. “We’ve got a maggot infestation.”

“. Maggot?” Lily frowned.

James glanced to Harry, before he sighed and drew in close. James held up one of the vials of memories and shook it. “Maggots. Tiny things. They’ve been placed inside the vials—dad’s been shoving them in to his head.”

“Maggots!” Lily sounded much more alarmed. “Memory or brain infesting?”

“Wait, what?” Harry hissed out, on his feet.

“Mum always said if you don’t know who made it, don’t consume it!” James pointed at the vial accusingly.

And that was true. That was very much true. It stemmed from the diary that Ginny had fallen in to step with a long time ago. The long ago statement of Mr. Weasley wobbled in to place, ‘Never trust anything that can think for itself if you can’t see where it keeps its brain.’

It’s always the unknowns.

Harry groaned and dropped his face in to his hands.

“Maggots first. Now. Everything else comes second to that,” James insisted. Lily and Albus murmured their agreement as Lily went to the cabinets.

“Daddy, lay down. I’ll get something whipped up,” Lily insisted, pointing to the bed that Harry had left.

Harry hesitated, “my memories… are they…”
“We’ll have a mind healing session after. We’ll see what we can do, okay?” Lily offered, quickly turning on a Bunsen burner and setting a glass vial on top. Water. Powders. Glass spoon.

James came in to Harry’s field of vision, “dad, who gave you the vials?”

Harry, irrationally, remembered Reborn asking the same question. But here, the answer slipped out. “Frank Longbottom did.”

James stared for a moment before his face twisted with anger, even as he paled.


James’ face was grim. “Is this true?”

“Y… yeah…” Harry murmured.

“Dad, tell us everything. From the start. Please.” James’ hands came up in a familiar begging motion. Harry felt sensation leave his legs, and he dropped heavily on top of the bed.

Information was give and take. His children were sharing as much as they could while still making sense. They were helping him. Family could be trusted.

So Harry opened his mouth and recalled what he could. Feeling the gaping holes in his memories as he scrambled to go over everything said to him. Everything he saw. How Harry came to consciousness in the ministry of magic, under the eyes of Frank Longbottom.

How later, in the department of mysteries, Frank had him unconscious for an unknowable amount of time. Hidden next to the veil of death.

The fight and burning of Grimmauld Place.
The… the time lapses. Everything. He could think of.

Lily pushed a mug in his hands. Creamy white and thin liquid inside.

“It’ll get rid of the maggots. I’ve added a sleeping agent. You’ll be burning pretty hot, but we have you. Okay daddy?” Lily murmured.

Harry stared at the cup. Then to his children.

“This is the safest place on the planet, made just for you.” James insisted, and Albus nodded.

“… Ginny made this, didn’t she?” Harry asked.

Lily nodded, since his eyes landed on her. “Mum was boss. Until she passed. Liliana is going to be the next boss. We’re all… a little too old.”

“Focus on getting better, dad. Everything else. That’ll be in time. Okay?” Albus spoke, motioning to the mug.

Harry took a deep breath, checked the temperature, and downed the tasteless concoction in one go.

It hit his stomach, and churned angrily. Harry lurched, hand going to his mouth even as Lily collected the mug. For one moment, Harry was afraid that he had been duped. That he had been betrayed. But then it calmed down. Slowly he eased himself down and closed his eyes.

“I’ll stay with dad. Work on the counter potion,” Harry heard Albus speak, even as someone drew a blanket over him. “Lils, go talk to the centaurs, see if they’ve seen anything in the stars…”

Harry heard James murmur, “Lily, please make something we can use to kill off the rest of the maggots… the vials need to be viewed.”

Harry cracked his eyes open briefly, and watched his children drift away from his bed. He closed his eyes, one moment feeling terribly awake.
And the next, nothing.

Harry woke up screaming—a face twisted and burned by fire above him, and twisted hands on his shoulders. Everything was on fire. The heat, it swelled over his face in waves and he thrashed. The demon lost its hold and fell away. Harry jumped, scrambling up and to his feet. The blanket twisted around him and he slapped wetly to the floor.

“Dad… dad! … st… hal…”

Albus… that was Albus! He sounded so far away.

There. Harry stared at the demon. It was looking at him! Its face blackened and cracking and it opened its mouth and spoke with Albus’ voice, “…. Just…. Hallucination! Dad!”

Harry dry heaved.

The fire burned hotter.

Cold water was dumped on his head. Harry jumped—and the fire was gone. It felt like he had been running. His chest heaving as the cool water kept coming. There was a young boy, with a hose from the little hand sink pointed at Harry. Harry groaned and dropped his head till his forehead touched the floor. An answering groan came from Albus, who slowly creaked to his hands and knees.

“Bit too rough, dad…” Albus wheezed.

Harry laughed weakly. “It’s… its hot…”

The water stopped. The boy was there, a hand laid gently over the back of Harry’s neck.

“He is really hot, sir.” The young voice murmured.
“It’s alright. Let’s get some ice packs…” Harry was soon settled in and tucked with some ice. Albus leaned over Harry, and Harry blearily watched his son.

“Dad… I need to check something. I hate to do it… but I need to make an incision.” Albus had his gloves on, and scalpel in hand.

Harry cringed away. The last time someone loomed over him with a weapon, as far as he could remember—there had been a lot of blood and pain. “What. Why?”

“It’s just… the tears, I need to make sure they’re still active!” Albus hurried, already reaching for Harry’s arm.

Harry choked on the fear, eyes on the knife. “What tears? H..hey!”

The boy was at Harry’s elbow, stilling his arm.

“The phoenix tears. The tears and venom never really left your system, you know…” Albus trailed off and made such a quick incision, Harry hardly felt it. A hiss of air contact, a small wisp of near invisible smoke, and the cut bubbled and healed over with nary a smear of blood.

“Okay, okay—it’s all still active. Lily’s potion must have triggered it. You’re burning out everything in your system. We’ll keep the ice on you so you don’t cook alive. You’re in good hands, I swear…” The hands on his arm pulled back, and Harry cradled it to his chest.

“Please… make it stop…” Harry murmured, the fire in his head felt so heavy, he gagged.

An ice bag was laid over his chest. And two were tucked around his neck.

“It’s okay. It’s okay. We have you…” Albus murmured. Black spots raced though Harry’s vision.

A few blinks, and then… darkness.

Harry shivered, cold as he woke up to the darkness. The window was open wide, and the moon was
only a little less than full outside.

“Harry Potter…” A male voice murmured, and Harry startled slightly before he turned to the right.

“… Firenze.” Harry choked, recognizing the aged face of the centaur that was sitting on the ground next to his bed. Firenze hummed, eyes still fixated out of the window to the moon outside.

“The moon smiles upon you. Good fortunes.” His quiet voice was like a pin drop to the room.

“Rest, Harry Potter. You are where you’re needed.” Harry watched the withered hand come out, and let Firenze gently closed his eyes. “Rest, you will need it.”

Harry surrendered, and slept.

Chapter End Notes

So, I got called 'funky little shakespeare' and it was the best thing ever. It made my day. Kudos to you polyxena_chatoyant.

I know I didn't answer all of the comments. Sorry friends. I kind of just wrote this instead. Big reveals, but not too many. I hope some things are given a bit more clarity. More will come in time, of course.

I'm kind of rushing to be honest, so I don't have much time for a note. So I hope you guys have enjoyed this. I didn't pick though and edit this chapter as much as I wanted, so I hope it's good enough. I just wanted to get this out now because I won't have a chance to fiddle with it for a few days.

But yeah, things are slowly folding together.

Side note, KING LEAR kind of struck a chord with me. "Striving to better, oft we mar what's well."
BEST THING EVER.

WIZARDS COULD LEARN FROM THAT.

Enjoy!
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

The path to finding answers breeds more questions. The cycle continues.

The moon smiles. The wand turns.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“That’s eerie...” Harry murmured as he watched the miniscule scrunching lights inch up the side of the pensive and toward the harsh blue flame in a jar. “Is there a reason they’re going to the fire, and not just staying where they were?” Harry rolled his shoulders and minutely shifted around while still lying on the bed. He had had to get up a while ago and do a quick rinse while the sheets were changed.

He felt… oddly drained.

Lily hummed, watching the maggots as they burned in the magic flame. “Compared to the pensive, this flame is a beacon of stronger magic. The stronger the magic, the more ambient magic available for them to focus on procreating. When a wizard does magic, a mark of it is left throughout the body… a playground for these guys to colonize.” Lily murmured. Harry was glad she was so focused on coaxing the maggots out of the tiny pool of memories still in the pensive.

“So… the more magic I did, the more I fed them…?” Harry tried not to gag, but his voice gave a strange wobble mid-way through.

“Naturally, your body will burn out poison and infestations. It’s your status quo…” Lily trailed off and glanced to Harry. She paused before she looked to the maggots again, “well, that is, your body has a conflicting source of phoenix tears and basilisk venom. The venom tears through your body, killing everything it reaches. And the tears heal the damage. The effects of venom on the human body have never been studied at length—because no one has ever been recorded as surviving. You’ve been your own case study.” Lily fed a few more black leaves in to the blue fire when the flame started to shrink. The maggots hesitated for a moment, but once the fire was back to attractive size, they continued their frantic crawl.

“The effects were initially dissipating with age, but with the changes in magic they started to become… infinitely more potent. I would say your blood could honestly be considered a weapon of epic proportions should anyone touch or consume it,” Lily tapped the side of the pensive with a short
metal rod, dislodging a few stubborn maggots and jump starting their crawl to the flame. They number of tiny lights was lessening. “A weapon… or a miracle beyond measure. But is it worth the risk to find out?” She hummed.

“So… the fevers…?” Harry trailed off, more than ready to change the subject from something he didn’t want to think too hard on. It was serendipitous

Lily quirked a smile, pleased that Harry was catching on so quickly. “Right on the dot, dad. It was a sign that your body was burning your infestation out. You probably would have gone back to rights… if you hadn’t kept putting more in to your system. Their lifespans inside you was short, which is why you didn’t become a vegetable in a few hours.” Lily stirred the memories with the rod, prompting another swarm out and toward the blue flame.

Harry closed his eyes with a sigh—of course he had made things worse.

“Its okay, these maggots are tricky. They’re Exspiravit maggots—they transcend physical boundaries. They need magic to live, so they often gather in swarms on a host. They’re also a pest in plant roots if they invade the soil of magical plants…” Lily trailed off.

Albus approached, his short grey hair hidden under a surgical cap and face mostly hidden by a mask and wide safety glasses. His gloved hands held a tray with a soaked cloth on it.

Harry groaned before he tiredly squirmed out of his hospital shirt. Harry dropped it to the side and gave Albus access to the still viciously angry looking orange smear over his stomach. “So, what’ll this do?”

“It’ll remove the residue. It’ll stop any more from permeating your system. The removal of the potion influence over you will take a few days to completely flush out of you. Do-able, but complicated.” Albus reminded Harry as he set the tray down on the bed side, and carefully picked up the cloth. Harry hissed when the cloth was draped over Harry’s stomach. It was cold.

Albus hummed his sympathy. But that didn’t change the fact that Albus soon wrapped up Harry’s arms in a similarly soaked cloth and then stuck Harry’s arms in plastic bags.

“This is disgusting,” Harry hissed, wiggling his fingers.
“This last one is for your face. I advise that you keep your mouth closed for the duration of this,”
Albus held up a cloth that was vaguely facial in shape. “Before I apply this, is there anything you
want us to talk about for you?” Albus offered, if only because Harry was obviously not going to fall
asleep.

“… you keep mentioning magic—it’s different? Your, uh, granddaughter mentioned that the wizards
and witches last night ‘wasted’ magic on me. What did she mean?” Harry haltingly pulled his
thoughts together, doing his best to express himself.

Albus let out a breath and nodded. Harry motioned for Albus to apply the cloth, and shivered again
when the chill was placed over his lower jaw. It spanned over his nose, his cheeks, down his face,
and most of his neck. There was a slit for his nose—it all smelled overwhelmingly of… sage and
pomegranates. And probably a few other things. Harry waved a wrapped hand and motioned to the
facial mask.

Lily grinned, and Albus pinched off his gloves and had them dropped in a foot bin before he pulled
off his protective gear. “It’s a binding potion—to soak up the potion remnants. The strongest smells
from it are the sage and Pomegranate peels, but you’ll also be smelling the bayberry bark. They’re
the most pungent ingredients.” Harry mentally sighed to himself, and closed his eyes and waited for
someone to speak about their chosen topic.

“Magic… isn’t what it was.” Lily started off the conversation. “Do you remember that I mentioned…
the fevers?” She asked, and Harry lifted a hand and gave an ‘up’ motion. Lily obviously took that as
a yes, because she continued.

“The fevers were only the beginning, really. We had a large squib population forming. Since then,
stretching on for about twenty five years, half of the magic potentials suffered the fever and became
squibs. Most of them being muggleborns, just from sheer population size.” Lily chattered, and Harry
opened his eyes to watch Lily stir the pensive once more.

“When you fell under the Arcobaleno curse—well, that’s when… when the magic started declining
more and more. Eventually, not even squibs were born. There was just… nothing. It caused a lot of
desperation. The purebloods called that generation ‘muds’—and they became research fodder. None
have survived so far. The breeding program of squibs, all their muds are donated to the program.”
Harry watched Lily for a moment longer before he closed his eyes.

Harry wanted to know this. He asked for this.

He couldn’t even put to words how he felt.
His stomach twisted and he clenched his hands into fists.

Lily had specifically mentioned the Arcobaleno curse… that coincided with the lack of any kind of magical birth.

“Of course, by then we had already founded the Carcassa. Mum pulled us out of Hogwarts after James was kidnapped. Lost him for a good three days. He wasn’t really the same after that. He told mum what happened, but we never caught wind of the details. They took… a lot of blood.” Lily trailed off.

“I still say they used the blood to locate you. The times coincide… but we’re getting off topic.” Albus gently guided their conversation back to their chosen topic.

“Right, right… Well, I can’t find any more maggots. So this has been decontaminated.” Harry opened his eyes, just to watch Lily place the blue flames to the side. The pensive was moved from Lily’s lap and shakily transferred to a workstation. Lily let out a tired groan as she slowly lowered herself back in to Harry’s bedside chair. A thin, wrinkled hand moved to rub at her hip as she relaxed.

“But yes… magic. We’ve noticed that the more magic used by castors, the shorter a witch or wizard’s lifespan. They age prematurely, and often die of one natural cause or other. Squibs don’t seem to be as afflicted with this problem. But full grown witches and wizards…” Lily trailed.

Albus pulled another thin chair close to the foot of Harry’s bed, and Harry watched his son slowly sink down. “Mum trained us in passive magics. Auntie Hermione and Auntie Fleur pulled together to find as many alternatives as possible. Mum constructed alliances with as many races as she could—it was noticed that over time, the power of creatures was, and still is, increasing. Centaurs are living longer. Pests are multiplying at astronomical rates…”

“In general, they’re becoming more powerful, their birthrates are increasing—and they’ve been rapidly developing magics of their own, when there was none before. Or the strength of already affirmed magic has shown various levels of increased strength…” Lily hummed, threading her fingers over her stomach.

“Of course… there was that spike, about five years ago?” Lily checked with Albus, who gave a tired nod. “I think we had a sudden spike of squibs. Mum staged a kidnapping of them—we’re raising them here. All twenty-six of them.”
“There was record that there should have been forty-nine of them.” Albus closed his eyes and tiredly tilted his head back. Harry eyed the thinness of his son’s skin, and the slump of his shoulders, the bulging of neck veins pressed to thin skin. It was easy to see through the rosy tint of his memories, but looking at his children now reminded him that they were old in ways that he couldn’t understand. His son looked like he was ready for a nap, what with the way that his head was starting to nod.

Lily looked to Albus and sighed to herself. “Right. There should have been more. They were all born within ten minutes. That was just in Britain, though… I’m sure there is more of them, elsewhere.”

Lily turned and locked eyes with Harry. She leaned forward and slowly ran her fingers through Harry’s hair. Soothing it back and out of his eyes. “The world has been changing pretty rapidly. I’ve watched it do radical changes throughout my whole life. Even the birth of a squib has become a precious thing. I remember a time when it was still considered an embarrassment.” Lily sighed and let her head drop down to rest next to Harry’s own on the pillow.

“It’s a crazy world, dad… your Arcobaleno are kind of crazy, too. But I feel like they’re not as crazy as what the wizarding world has become.” Lily murmured, and Harry twisted his head to look to her. Their eyes locked and she smiled.

“You’ve complained about them a lot. It was rather tense in the beginning, hearing about what was happening to you. Mum despised the whole lot of them. But they pulled through, in the end. When it mattered the most.” Lily closed her eyes when she spoke, reaching out with her hands to wrap around Harry’s closest bicep.

“… it was painful, watching you. What they did to you…” Her fragile hands tightened on Harry’s arm. “We did the best that we could. But… but sometimes our best wasn’t good enough. And I… I am so, so sorry.” Lily pressed her cheek against Harry’s shoulder.

Harry wanted to ask, but the cloth…

Lily sighed again, “… James is getting a visual time line prepared for you. Mum kept a ‘just in case’ record box. In the event that you were ever… you.”

Smoothly, they descended in to silence. And Harry closed his eyes.
Lily had always preferred to sleep with him. As a babe, she had fussed terribly with Ginny and refused to go down for naps unless Harry was the one settling her. She eventually settled to accept both of their parenting. But she had been fussy in ways that Albus and James hadn’t. (James had always been a mama’s boy, Harry believed the term was. They had all been so different, endearing in their own ways.)

And they just quietly eased in to a doze. Familiar but strange at the same time.

A timer rang off to the side, and Albus jumped out of his nap with a startled snort. He blinked for a moment before he scrambled up. Albus slipped on his gear, with new gloves, and promptly removed all of the soaked cloth from Harry’s skin, starting with the one over Harry’s mouth. “Don’t talk yet. Please give me a moment dad.”

They clothes were dropped in a hazard bin, and Albus used what Harry could tell was rubbing alcohol just by the smell of it—used it to rub off the remaining residue. A cool water moistened cloth was rubbed over that to clear up the last of it.

“Allright. That should take care of that. I’ll go ahead and start the brewing process for the potion you have to ingest. The effects are still there, but your body will no longer absorb the residue. Once we have the potion made, it’ll take you about three days to slowly sweat it out. You’ll need a dose every five hours…” Albus trailed off before he moved to pitter-patter around his work station.

“This potion takes several hours to brew, doesn’t it?” Lily asked, getting a confirming hum for her question. “Dad is cleared to leave, yeah?”

“Yes. Can’t do much more for him at the moment. This takes time.” Albus waved a hand, and Harry tiredly sat up. He pulled on his shirt and buttoned up. Once that task was done, he hopped to his feet. He was very much glad that he was getting the chance to leave. As much as this room was more like a cozy workshop, it still smelled like a hospital wing and Harry was not going to get much rest there. Lily took up his hand and moved to make for the door.

Harry paused, and Lily came to a stop once he did as well.

“Albus… what about… the scars?” Harry asked, holding up his free arm to show off the lightly oranged scars running up his arm. Over the hours the color had shrank to small circles directly over the scars. Albus turned to look, as did Lily. They shared a glance.
“… Talk to James, first. After that, we can sort them out. If you’d like.” Albus demurred and turned away.

Lily tugged on his hand, and Harry silently let her lead him away.

They moved through the halls—and outside.

Harry took a deep breath and shaded his eyes as Lily lead the way toward a house a small distance away. “This is the Potter family home, now. Mum had the cottage moved from Scotland to here. Wizarding magic doesn’t maintain it, but Goblin wards now.” Lily supplied as they walked through the soft grass and to the front door. Harry glanced down to his bare feet before mentally shrugging to himself. He raised his eyes, now used to the bright outside sun—and enjoyed the rolling hills of Italian countryside. Lily led the way inside.

It was almost like a manor. Beautiful polished floors. Open floor plan. Lots of seating. A nice fireplace tucked in to a corner. They didn’t linger long, and moved through the home toward a hall that branched left and right. Lily led him as far left as they could go before she pushed open a bedroom door.

Oodako lazily waved a tentacle from the large fish tank he was lounging in.

Harry smiled, slipping away from Lily to go up to the glass. Harry pressed a hand to the glass, and Oodako pressed a tentacle back. The moment lasted shortly before Oodako drifted off to lazily hunt for a fish. The tank was rather huge and finely decorated, and Harry stepped back from it and finally evaluated the room.

A fairly large bed, Gryffindor red sheets, matching curtains and rugs—and wide double doors that led to a small private patio. There was a small privacy fence, and the patio itself wasn’t large enough for more than a metal table and chair set.

“Mum made this one. As a reminder for you,” Lily closed the door and drifted in. Harry spied all of his things that he left behind on a desk tucked in to a corner of the room. And in the corner… his firebolt. Harry blinked and drifted toward the object. But before Harry could reach out to touch, Lily spoke. “Brooms don’t work, not anymore. They’re just… brooms.” Lily moved toward the double doors that led to the patio and opened them up.

A sudden warm breeze pushed the vaguely stale air out of the room.
Harry dropped his hand, and turned away from the broom to watch his daughter step out on to the patio and sit in one of the chairs. Harry followed a moment later and sat down as well.

They shared a silence for a moment before Harry broke it. “It was said… that the more magic a wizard or witch uses, the shorter their lifespan?”

Lily hummed, eyes up to the sky. “Yes. Our bodies are fully capable of magic. Tests were inconclusive, but it was supposed that instead of an outside source of our power, we use our lifespans, now.” Lily drummed her fingers on the arm of her chair.

“I thought… wasn’t it theorized that we used the natural power of the earth? Something about ley lines?” Harry thought out there. His theory had never been the best. That had been more of Hermione’s thing.

Lily dropped her eyes and looked to Harry. “They disappeared… when the Arcobaleno curse was broken.”

There it was again, comparing time lines to his curse. “What are you implying?”

Lily rubbed at her face, “we don’t have all of the pertinent information. You never explained why the Arcobaleno were chosen or cursed. A curse has to have a function—you were baby sized for half a century, dad.” Lily dropped her hand, stared at it, before she folded her hands in her lap.

“The creature in the checker mask—must have gained something from it all. Whatever it was… James always suspected that it directly interfered with the magic we used.” Lily took a shuddering breath, eyes on the ground.

Harry reached out and placed a hand on top of her folded hands.

“It’s why we decided to go ahead and use the resources needed to clear out the maggots. If those are your memories as Skull, perhaps we can get some information about why…” Lily trailed off, shifting her hands so she could thread their fingers together.

“I… I have always wanted to know why…” She trailed off in to silence.
“Please get some rest, daddy. I will as well. It’s been a trying couple of months, hasn’t it?” Lily spoke faintly after a time. She patted Harry on the hand and stood up. Harry nodded in agreement, and silently watched her go. The door to his room quietly shut. It was once again him and his thoughts. Well, him, Oodako, and his thoughts. Harry took a moment to bask in the sun before he stood and walked back in to his bedroom.

The tall bureau in the corner had an abundance of male styled clothes. Harry pulled out a simple shirt and jeans set and changed after locating appropriate undergarments. The bottommost drawer held clothes that tickled at his memory—and the punk style of the clothes reminded Harry a lot of what he supposed himself as Skull would have preferred.

In fact, Harry inspected the room a bit more closely. Under the bed was a series of plastic boxes filled with his things. Well, Skull’s things. “We must have had a room in the barracks here…” Harry murmured, “right Oodako?” Harry peered up and to the tank where Oodako was. Harry didn’t think Oodako was listening, because he was still lazily swimming around. Harry supposed there was a barracks—where else would the Carcassa host everyone?

Well, considering that most of the Carcassa were apparently magicals, it made sense that Harry had never stuck around. Was never given a house and a room. Wanted, but at the same time set aside. A cot—a place to sleep. Safety, but at the same time… Harry rubbed the back of his neck, and buried the hope that all of this trust was not being misplaced deep in to the depths of his bleeding heart.

Harry pulled out the boxes and pawed through everything.

He had a lot of sets of punk styled boots.

… and a big box of earrings. And related paraphernalia. Harry stood up from the floor with a finely crafted jewelry box and moved to grab his wand—

Harry paused.

His wand… ? Not here.

“They kept their word, then. It’s still there, in that room…” Harry trailed off. On the topic of magic, now that he was thinking about it, did he even want to use magic? Harry shivered at the memory of fire, the self-induced pain as he had kept flooding his system with magic that fed the maggots. Not
even just that, but the fact that he was using his life force to fuel his magic? Harry watched his free hand flex. He didn’t feel any different, but maybe that was how it started? He had been using his magic as freely over the last few months as he always had been.

Harry quietly left his room. It didn’t take much for him to find a shared bathroom in the hall. With himself in front of a mirror, Harry really took stock of himself. His hair was still sticking up at odd angles, and terribly purple. His eyes still electric green with fading bruises. He was a bit pale still, but with a healthier tinge than he remembered seeing last time he looked in a mirror.

It was the orange dots that marked the stones that disconcerted him. Harry trailed his fingers over the massive swell of scar flesh, and the eight circles that marked how many stones were there. Harry took a steadying breath, slotted his teeth together, and used his fingers to press firmly on the scar.

Chills ran down his spine as the twinging almost-pain sensation ran through him. Harry took a sharp breath through his nose and pressed firmer. And there. A stone. That was not flesh. Harry closed his eyes and dropped his hand, gripping the sink as he focused on breathing. Blindly, he reached for his phone—

He stopped.

He didn’t have his phone anymore. But even then, who was he going to call?

Harry’s eyes landed on the jewelry box. Quietly he opened it up. Nothing too ostentatious inside the dark red velvet. The box itself was expensive dark patina of holly wood. Silky smooth to the touch. “Must have been a gift…” Harry murmured to himself. His fingers brushed through the studs and silver chains. In fact, it appeared that Harry’s color scheme had very much been purple and silver. “Red would have clashed,” Harry sighed.

Still, Harry eyed the holes he had put in to his body.

Harry found three silver studs, and inserted each one in to the open holes of his left ear. The weight of it was slight, but soothing. Harry trailed his fingers over it. It was only three flat circles, but it was nice. He paused and looked through the box and found one that actually had an octopus engraved on a flat circle of a stud. Harry chuckled to himself, and exchanged the middle stud in his ear with that one.

Perhaps Skull as himself was adorable in his own way. Like a punk child trying to be tough, but
tenaciously holding on to the childish things that made him happy. Like Oodako. Harry pawed through the rest and found a few more octopus themed pieces. A necklace with a tiny stylized tentacle, even.

Harry found a simple silver bar and inserted it in to the eyebrow piercing. Harry even tried a small stud for his nostril—but the sensation churned his stomach so he took that back out. The lip piercing was sealed, so Harry let that be. Harry paused at the large ball studs with the really long bars. He held one up and then stuck out his tongue.

Not a hole there, but still. It looked like the kind of thing that would fit. Harry shook his head and placed it down and back in to the box. Harry tilted his head side to side, and then jiggled his head around to see how he felt about the additions.

It wasn’t… a bad feeling.

Harry gently tugged at the jewelry before he closed the box.

“The only me, is me… but I’m not what I was. Not anymore.” Harry watched his face in the mirror. The movement of his lips as he spoke to himself. “I’m me, and a bit more—that sounds better.” Harry smiled to himself. It wasn’t bad, to see himself smile. It was familiar in shape, and Harry appreciated the familiarity.

What was it that Reborn said to him? “… Our choices make us, don’t they…?” Harry took a deep breath and let it out.

He returned to his room and set the jewelry box back in to the plastic box that he found it in. He resealed the box. Harry found the plainest set of boots with the fewest metal spikes and stuck his feet in.

He felt more at ease, now. Like the boots and the jewelry were a strange form of armor. He felt safer.

Harry kicked the boxes back under the bed before he laid down. Sprawled out on his back, Harry stared at the ceiling before he closed his eyes. Perhaps a bit of meditation would do him good? He focused on his breathing and relaxed.

A simple knock woke him up. The sun was setting outside, and a chill was creeping in from the open
patio doors. Harry sat up as the door opened. The hall light burst in to the room and Harry squinted. There was Liliana.

She took a deep breath and let it out, “… a word, please.” Liliana left, leaving the door wide open. Her voice carried, “meet me in the kitchen.”

The kitchen?

Well, alright. Harry rubbed at his eye as he rolled out of bed and plodded after her. Due to the open floor plan, he spotted the kitchen well enough and found Liliana sitting on a stool at the kitchen island. There were also wide doors here, open and letting in the slight chill of the approaching night.

“Grab yourself a drink,” the young woman motioned to the fridge, before taking a drink of what looked like cola. Harry nodded and looked through the fridge. Eventually he decided on a simple water bottle. He took a seat next to Liliana and sipped his drink. Harry watched her face, and how she studiously didn’t look at him.

“… you don’t like me, do you?” Harry couldn’t help but ask. First she had treated him was a callous disdain with the handcuffs. And the failed kidnapping. The intense staring at the café. The cautious hostility the night before.

“No. I do not.” Liliana replied flatly.

Harry steeled his heart, “any particular reason why?”

“You killed my mother in one of your rages,” Liliana’s electric green eyes turned to the right, for a moment flashing orange as her hand came up to tangle in a golden necklace that she wore.

Wait…

Liliana’s mother…

“… Albus’ daughter?” Harry felt numb when he said it.
Liliana nodded grimly.

“I…?”

He felt sick.

Liliana looked away. “All I knew you as, was Skull. And one day you just flipped your shit. Great grandmamma—she never figured out what caused it. You snapped out of it, after a show of force. Didn’t remember a thing.”

“… were you there?” Harry heard the water bottle in his hands crinkle.

Liliana took a deep breath, “… no. I was not.”

“I…” Harry trailed off.

“… I forgave you for it. Everyone knows that you’re not able to really stop these things. But… But I can’t…” Liliana took a long sip of her cola.

“You resent me,” Harry filled in the silence.

“Yes,” Liliana agreed, and looked over to him. She paused, eyes drawn to the jewelry that decorated his face. She reached out and tugged gently at the one in his eyebrow. “You’ve always been like a strange uncle to me. A bouncing, energetic—and slightly crazy uncle. Never here long, but always fun when you came back. And then…”

“And then I… killed your mum.” Harry filled in the silence.

Disbelief was the first emotion. Disbelief and denial.

And then… grudging acceptance.
In the end, it was just another sin.

A name he couldn’t put a face to.

It didn’t even feel real.

“Garth, Giacomo, and Giglio—they’re dying. We’ve estimated that they don’t have much time left… Skull.” Liliana drained her can of cola and pushed it away from herself. She didn’t look at Harry, and Harry didn’t correct her on the name she used.

If Liliana had better memories of Skull, than of ‘Harry’, he would allow her whatever comfort she could get. “When you say not much time left…” Harry trailed off.

“The world today is not the same as when you were… conscious. The age of wizards is done, to paraphrase the centaurs.” Liliana drummed her fingers on the marble countertop of the island. “The older generations have been steadily disappearing. No one is reaching the full lifespan of the normal wizard from before.” Liliana concluded.

Harry paused, “… what about… me, then?” He was physically very healthy. Would he be outliving his children?

“You’re an aberration—you do not qualify.” Liliana stated solidly, her voice as carefully flat as ever.

“How much time?” Harry pressed, switching back.

“They’re on a potions regime, and they’ve been on significant bed rest for the past year. Everyone expected them to pass before great grandmamma…” Liliana frowned to herself. “They’ve been exerting themselves too much these past few months.” Because of you, was the blatant accusation that Harry heard without it being said.

“Maybe a few more months. Garth gets exhausted easily… And Giglio—she is frail. Giacomo is the healthiest. I believe he will last the longest.” Liliana concluded.
Harry took a breath, shaken and trying to keep that buried. For some reason, even with the physical evidence before him—it just seemed so impossible. They were too young. (Expect they weren’t—they really weren’t.) “You seem… very calm over it.” Harry murmured.

Liliana whipped about to face Harry directly, back straight and shoulders back. Lips terse and eyes biting. “I’ve known them my entire life. I’ve known they’re frail since I was ten. I accepted their coming death when I was fifteen. I’ve watched them waste away! You don’t get to even imply that I’m heartless.” Liliana bit out, knuckles white and excluding violence.

Harry closed his eyes and dropped his face in his hands.

“Sorry…” Harry trailed off. “I just…”

Liliana sighed. “No, no…it’s—“

“It’s not fine. It really isn’t. But I…” Harry interrupted. But lost his train of thought over it.

Liliana leaned back and stared at the ceiling. “It is what it is.” She concluded. “Besides—I need to talk business with you.”

“Business, is it?” Harry asked, taking a few more breaths before he straightened up.

“Yes, business… Arcobaleno business. What are you planning in that aspect? I am boss, here. I need to know what our stance is. The Carcassa has claimed you, Skull. But the Arcobaleno have a claim as well. What are you going to do?” Liliana pressed.

But really, what was Harry going to do?

“I… I don’t know,” it came out weak.

Liliana frowned, young lines creasing her face. “… no. You must know. Think hard, Skull.”

“Do I have a choice? I see where you’re pressing.” Harry lowered his voice, shoulders drawing up.
Liliana crossed her arms over her chest, “there is always a choice. But I must know it.”

“… let me think on it.” Harry murmured. “… please.”

“Then you can do something for me while you think of it,” Liliana declared, and Harry frowned. He frowned at the countertop, before he directed it at Liliana. Well, Harry had done ‘jobs’ for Ginny (and wasn’t that a strange thought? What had even been in those boxes he had shipped?) but this would be the first one he would be doing for Liliana.

Well, the silence spoke for itself. And Liliana drew herself up. “Your jumpsuit. It has runic modifications. Amongst other things. You need to retrieve it from where you’ve been separated from it.”

“Wait… you mean…” Harry pressed a hand to his shirt even as he eyed the jumpsuit that Liliana was wearing.

“Yes. Go to the Arcobaleno hideout and retrieve it.” Liliana was sitting up tall, shoulders back and trying to be authoritative. It was as cute as it was vaguely insulting. Before Harry could even demand why she would want such a thing, she continued. “It’s soaked in your very presence. DNA and power. The Carcassa villa location is a hidden place. But if turncoat Longbottom gets his hands on that suit—if he realizes just how valuable that thing is…” She trailed off. "The memory you've left behind in that suit is undoubtedly strong enough to lead him here."

It would be a catastrophe.

“But wait… the wards I crashed…?” Harry shivered.

“Fixed and in place. The goblins were quick. We were down for only a handful of minutes.” Liliana dismissed. “My underboss is swift.” Well, it was good that they were competent.

But, there was still the problem of the ‘Arcobaleno hideout’, and returning to a place he didn’t know how to feel about or want to return to or… “Where is the hideout, anyway?”

Liliana closed her eyes, her eyebrow furrowed as she held herself back from obviously sighing. “I
guess I need to see Lily about my state of mind…” Harry rubbed his temples, pushing down hard as if that would stave off the headache.

“Indeed,” Liliana grimly sassed.

Harry nudged the water bottle away from himself. He had hardly taken a drink from it, and sagged forward to pillow his head on his arms. “… maybe I should just leave? So that you’re not found.” Harry offered it, as much as it pained him.

Liliana scoffed, “no. This is your home too.”

Harry peeked at Liliana. Well—his gut didn’t say that she was lying. She looked down at him. Hand still tangled in her necklace, clutching at the jewelry like it was the most precious thing in the world. Perhaps it was to her. “You can’t mean that, after what I did.” Harry pointed out, without directly stating the death that lingered between them.

“It’s complicated… It’s complicated, and we will never be close. But great grandmamma loved you so much that she created the Carcassa. Over time, it morphed in to a multipurpose entity. But the basis of it will never change. This is your home… as long as you want it to be. This is where your children lived their lives. Your grandchildren… your great grandchildren… and all of your future descendants. This is the home of Potter—even if under a different name.” Liliana was definitely charismatic with her words, even though she was cold to him.

“… as it is—just… just keep proving to me that you’re worth loving. Worth the heartache. You’re love and heartache in equal measure, as great grandmamma once explained you…” The twist to Liliana’s mouth was bitter.

“… your mother… what was her name?” Harry asked.

Liliana closed her eyes.

The silence stretched.

“Her name was Rose. Grandpa Garth’s youngest daughter.” Liliana slowly answered, easing her eyes open to lock with Harry. And then she didn’t look away.
“His other children?” Harry asked, feeling a bit breathless.

“Seven children total—Gabriel, Sergio, Emilia, Donna, Bellance, Antonia, and Rose.” Liliana listed. “Mostly girls. The only surviving ones to this day are Emilia and Donna. They’re muds.” Liliana trailed off, an argument with herself active behind her eyes as she mentally debated if she should speak. And eventually she decided on yes, and spoke. “… They’re also flame active. Rains. They took after their mother, Grandma Aria. She passed away ten years ago. Blood infection.” Liliana was watching him intently, looking for weakness.

Flames…

… Flakes…

Harry frowned to himself. “That is… Flames are…” Harry clawed at his memory, begging for something. But the silence yawned wide in his head. Just a darkness that stretched on and on as he sought an answer.

“It’s evolution. The evolution of magic,” Liliana’s eyes almost looked like they were glowing, flashing orange even as her hand went white from the grip around her necklace. “I know the older generations don’t think of it as such—but I know it to be true. There can’t be nothing in the absence of magic, so there is this.”

Harry shivered. “I don’t… I don’t have enough information about this.”

“Get yourself sorted then. Sorted, and that suit! That’s an order from me. For the wellbeing of everyone.” Liliana pointed a finger at Harry before she stood up. Liliana swept her fingers through her short hair in a gesture that Harry remembered himself doing more than once, especially when nervous.

She’s nervous giving orders.

But gutsy enough to do it anyway.

Harry silently watched her leave. Harry growled to himself and ruffled his hair. Damn his memory!
Harry marched back to his room and picked up Oodako. He paused and eyed his belongings. The back pack, the shoebox… the motorbike.

He pocketed the bike and it’s key. Perhaps a drive would do him good.

“Let’s get my wand, Oodako.” Harry settled Oodako on his left shoulder. And once Oodako was firmly wrapped in to place, Harry strode out of his room, out of the Potter House, and back to the main Carcassa villa. He located the greeting room, and spotted the death stick right where he had left it.

Harry gingerly picked it up.

Nothing. He felt… absolutely nothing. Harry gave it a wave, and watched the short lived life of bright purple sparks shoot in to the air. Harry settled the wand on his palm, free to wiggle. Although now that he was here and in this moment of time, well…

Harry didn’t have any plans to live forever. Ginny had already gone before him. Teddy as well. The rest of his children apparently not too far behind. Harry had no problems with freely using his magic to make himself better, in eliminating Frank and any other threat that would bring harm to this sanctuary.

Harry would not shy away from the inevitable.

Death was never the enemy. Neither was age.

“Point me Lily Luna Potter.” Harry murmured, and watched the wand spin until it located the direction it wanted. Perfect. Harry kept his hand steady as he moved through the villa and out the front door. The wand was pointing out—was Lily outside of the villa?

Harry didn’t have long to think of it. The clip-clop of hooves caught his attention. Harry glanced up—the sun had set. The moon was out. He looked to the left—and there was Firenze.

“… I never expected to see you again, honestly. When you returned to the herd back then.” Harry admitted, “but with the world as it is… I am glad to set my sights on you.” Harry turned to face Firenze, head craned back to look up at the old Centaur as he towered above. Pale and shimmering in the night.
Firenze offered a wrinkled smile and a hand, “come, take a walk with me.”

Harry didn’t hesitate to take the hand, and laughed at the strong yank that had him almost falling off of Firenze’s back. Harry clamped down with his legs and balanced himself without having to grab at Firenze’s back. Firenze might look old, but his strength was still there. Firenze turned left and started a slow, steady plod toward where he had come from. Heading toward the woods that was kept neat and away from the main villa by several meters.

Harry waited till they were in the trees before he spoke, “do you know anything about what happened to the magic?” Because Harry had gotten the wizarding side to what they thought happened. Centaurs were wise, surely they had some idea?

“The energies of the world have slotted back in to place. All is as it should be,” Firenze was following a well-worn trail in to the woods. They didn’t go far before they reached a clearing that had a half forgotten gazebo in it. Mostly overgrown in vines. Bushes planted around the gazebo were tall and burdened with bright purple flowers. The smell of it was heady.

Harry’s head swiveled around. The same type of tree was planted in a circle around the clearing. Tall, thin, and heavily burdened with lilac pale purple blossoms that grew in clusters and sagged like old fox tails.

“What is this place?” Harry asked, hushed. The very air seemed charged with something here.

Firenze motioned for Harry to step down, and Harry dutifully slid off and on to his own two feet. Everything seemed so much larger here. Firenze silently plodded in to the gazebo, which had an entrance and size that would make centaur habitation easy. Harry trailed after. The gazebo had been white, once. But the paint had peeled away in large patches.

Harry found a bench to perch on, and turned to face Firenze. The centaur merely reached out of the gazebo to touch the vibrant purple blossoms of the bushes. “These are often called the marvel of Peru. The Greeks called it the night flower. The French call it the belle de nuit. All the same, they only open wide at night.” Firenze plucked a flower and offered it to Harry.

“The flowers have been used to make food in dazzling colors. Parts of the plant can be used for diuretic, purgative, and for vulnerary purposes. The leaves reduce inflammation… and the seeds are considered poisonous. A pretty flower, for such uses.” Firenze continued, and Harry waited as the centaur spoke what he wanted to speak. Rushing a centaur was never going to be one of the life
choices that Harry picked if he could help it.

Of course, then Firenze decided to go silent. Harry waited as long as he could. But he could only stare at flowers for so long.

“Why did you bring me here, Firenze?” Harry asked, breaking the silence after it became a bit too much.

“You were ready to be here, so the world moved to allow you to exist in this space as you are.” Firenze turned his wizened face to smile at Harry.

“But why is this place so important? I mean—it’s not like it isn’t pretty… but why?” Harry gently set the flower on to the bench space next to himself and focused his undivided attention on Firenze.

The old centaur hummed and craned his head back. The point of the roof was gone. And from the inside they could look up and in to the sky.

“What importance would you give to this place?” Firenze didn’t answer, and Harry despaired over ever getting a straight answer the longer they spoke. Things always got muddled, and he didn’t much appreciate.

Harry slumped, listing a bit to the side as he let his head fall back to stare up at the foliage or the plants buffered against the sides of the gazebo, blocking most of the view from the open ‘window’ areas. Well, why would anyone keep this place? It was rundown, but no one was working to fix it up. The air was charged with some kind of feeling, but Harry couldn’t place a thumb on what it was.

In short, this would only be useful as a…

“This is a memory. A representation of someone’s memory.” Harry concluded out loud, and angled his head to look to Firenze.

The centaur hummed, but didn’t correct nor deny the assumption. Harry let out a breath and returned his gaze to the foliage. “I don’t know what you’re trying to impress on me, Firenze.”
Firenze hummed, “not many do. That is the conundrum of life. We are the sum of our experiences. We are what we learn. But when we depart from this world—what happens to the marks we left behind?”

Harry froze.

Oh…. Oh.

“The marks fade. The world turns.” Harry murmured.

“All that is will be again, and all that has past will come again,” Firenze replied in kind. Harry opened his eyes to look to the centaur, and found that the centaur was not looking at Harry, but at the spot where he had picked the flower from before.

A new flower was already there, fully bloomed and facing up toward the moon.

But what does that mean, exactly?

“… you’re not going to explain this any more than you have, are you?” Harry couldn’t stop the sulky tone even if he tried.

Firenze laughed, “your Ginny said the same thing to me—many times.”

Harry twisted his fingers in the fabric of his jeans. “Firenze… was she… was she ever happy?” Harry didn’t dare look up from his hands. He didn’t want to see, so he closed his eyes.

But he left his ears open.

“Did she miss you? Yes. Your Ginny mourned and loved in equal measure. She smiled, and she cried—plotted and reacted… she was the full spectrum of the rainbow, as humans often are. Instinctively your species knows how to impart as much joy in to their lives so that it may be fulfilling.” Firenze’s voice was low and soothing, like a wind whispering on the breeze.
“But to say she was happy? I do not think the word ‘happy’ could encompass all that can be felt by a human in their lives. No, I believe the question you want to ask is… did she live?” The silence was back. Harry stared in to the dark behind his eyelids.

“… did she live?” Harry finally begged.

*Neither can live while the other survives.*

“Yes.”

Harry heard the smile in Firenze’s voice, and opened his eyes.

The centaur was gone.

There were no flowers on the bushes. Although the lingering too sweet smell still clogged his nose. Harry idly glanced around and then down to his knees. Purple caught his attention, and he looked to the left and found the flower that Firenze had gifted to him still there. Carefully, Harry moved to cradle it in his palms with care.

“Was that a dream, Oodako?” Harry asked the octopus. Oodako gently squeezed Harry’s shoulder in silence. In comfort. Harry let out a shuddering breath and pressed the flower to his lips—gave it a kiss. And let it drop to the ground.

“All that is will be again, and all that has past will come again,” Harry murmured to himself, echoing Firenze. Slowly, Harry stood up. He carefully stepped over the flower he had dropped to the ground. He walked to the threshold of the gazebo and paused to stare.

The flowers in the trees had all dropped. Carpeting the forest floor in pale lilacs. The trees bare except for the memory of what had been there.

“… till the next time, then.” Harry smiled to himself, reaching up to stroke Oodako’s head. “I can live with that.” Harry stepped forward, carefully stepping along the path that had brought him here. Trailing footprints behind him as he went. Although no hoof prints could be spotted.
The air was electric on the tongue. The night pleasantly cool on his face.

Wand in hand, “point me, Lily Luna Potter.”

The wand spun, then settled.

And Harry followed the magic.

Chapter End Notes

I'm on a roll. And apparently I can kinda sorta write a filler chapter? Not much movement in the story line, but a lot of information to bulk up the story I suppose. I was going to write more, but it seemed a nice place to stop. So the next chapter is going to have that forward PUSH of the story... and the Arcobaleno again! They're not gone. In fact, this probably is just the beginning of their final integration of the story.

SO, BECAUSE I WROTE A CHAPTER INSTEAD OF ANSWERING REVIEWS, here are some of my comments on general questions/expressions from reviews.
1. I've noticed that a lot of reviewers were blaming Fon for the potion (it wasn't him. Trust me. Fon was just an unfortunate victim of circumstances here.)
2. Frank will make his return. (I'm very fond of him, actually. Of course he'll be back.)
3. It's not the unspeakables that stole the magic from the wizarding population.
4. The unheard of third prophecy will become a plot point. Patience here.
5. Liliana and how she treats Harry... when mental illness is a prevalent thing in someone that you love, feelings get complicated. She and Skull had a good relationship before things went bad fast. Because it can be said that Harry has been mentally ill for some time. Explanations will inevitably come out, but Liliana and Harry will never be close. They're so far removed, and physically look to be the same age. They had a disconnect, and a history that they can overcome... but only just.
6. "There are no dragons here." That phrase... ahah, it's a clue. Prepare for future reading.

This chapter kind of wrote itself. And I'm pleased with it. We're on the final road to the climax. We've got a final objective (Frank), and several points to accomplish before we get there (the suit, the third prophecy, the arcobaleno decision...). I was hoping to finish this story in 20 chapters, but I'm starting to feel like it'll be closer to 25. (Whoops...)

I write kind of fast, which means I can do a chapter a day as long as life allows. (Which we've seen what life can do to me. So please don't expect a daily update. Just enjoy them when they appear?)

Thank you for reading, and I hope you've enjoyed the road so far.
(And to everyone that reviews. They really bring me such joy. I'm sorry I'm terrible with replying.)
Their eyes are flat and their faces are still. Strangers, yet not.

A lifetime without Harry has left Harry a stranger to his children.

Real mafiosos don’t think like Heroes do.

Not even the ones that used to be heroes.

“… do with him?” Harry heard as he approached the small brick patio near a large gate. Due to those uttered words, Harry frowned to himself as he slowed. He was still cloaked in the shadows of night, the dazzling lights around the old stone gate kept their area well illuminated against the dark of the night, but the walk up to the gate wasn’t as well lit as possible. If Harry was the tiniest bit closer, he would have been easily visible within the reach of the light.

The gate was closed, but there was a small black limo on the road inside the gate. The stone patio scattered with metal chairs and tables.

Harry spotted Lily and James at the center of the cluster of tables.

Harry wanted to linger, to listen—but bad things have happened to Harry due to hearing incomplete conversations. On his own part, as well as on the part of others. Harry wasn’t in a position to act on bad information (and a preference to not, as well). The consequences for such a thing would be…

Well.

Something he’d rather not think about.

So Harry approached the table, pulled a chair, and sat down with his children. His children looked to him, and without a world Harry placed his wand on the table. Lily gave a sigh. James murmured, “oh, father…”

They didn’t need to hear a reason to understand.

Harry reclined back in to the chilled metal of the chair and spoke, “Liliana asked me to go retrieve my suit from the Arcobaleno.” He decided to lead in to that, and watched the confusion give way to concern.

“Right, the suit… If the traitor gets his hands on that…” James trailed off.

Lily crossed her arms, “but he already had his hands on it.” She paused, and Lily glanced to Harry through her eyelashes, a silent apology on her face in the twist of her lips. “Whatever he could possibly have wanted from it, he should have already gotten it.”
Harry frowned and leaned back at the thought.

That was true.

“I wasn’t wearing my suit when I… returned to consciousness in Frank’s office.” Harry trailed off.

James looked off to the side. “But he gave it back to you?”

Harry slowly nodded. “… he gave me a box full of my, uh, things. And Oodako.” Harry motioned to the lump under his shirt, where Oodako had stuck himself on the walk over to finding Lily. “When I opened the box, one of the first things that I found was the suit. It was… bloody and ripped when I got it.” Harry rubbed before he pressed the palms of his hands against his eyes in the hope to ease the pressure that was building.

Without looking up, Harry asked, “What could he have done with the suit, anyway?”

“Gain trade secrets. They most likely have a large quantity of your blood on hand,” James murmured, voice soft in sound but steeled. James took a deep breath through his nose, and Harry looked up at the sound to focus on his oldest child.

“Liliana might just be testing you at this point, dad.” James added, now that they had eye contact. “When you were Skull—you were used as a courier between our bases. Transported plants and other such magical goods from our processor areas to refineries—” James flicked up a curved, aged finger with each statement that ‘Skull’ had been responsible for.

“—Wait, the drugs?” Harry asked with a frown.

James actually rolled his eyes, “Technically yes. Potion supplies mostly. We own a lot of the ‘uninhabitable’ mountainside. Goblins and Trolls work in those areas for potion ingredients—research, protection, and development.” It was technically drugs, but it would better be qualified as medicine.

“Auntie Hermione, she was one of the first to notice the trend of magical decline in humans—she helped start our magical preservation efforts. Uncle Bill became the champion of it, though. Dedicated the rest of his life to it.” Lily curled her hands in her coat, which Harry noticed was rather thick for such a pleasant evening.

While this was all very interesting, and did introduce him to the broader picture of the world, it still didn’t help Harry with his current impeding problem. Harry slumped back, letting his arms rest over his stomach. From what Harry remembered, he did have several muddled memories doing missions for the Carcassa. And most, if not all of them, involved driving to various places in a car or motorbike.

Nothing like the few vibrantly violent memories of the Arcobaleno.

But Harry wasn’t really ‘Skull’ anymore. He was ‘Harry’.

“So… a test?” Harry asked at last.

“A test of skill,” James supplied.

Even as Lily countered with, “A test of loyalty.”

Harry watched his children look to each other. Well, it seemed like there was a difference of opinion. “What does she gain from me going to retrieve the suit?”
Lily looked to James, so James straightened up before he spoke. “When you were Skull… you were loyal to us. We had an understanding—when you worked under mum. But mum is gone, now. Liliana is sliding in to power, and she needs to know if you can and will work for her. It’s a simple mission—consequences are small, since the Arcobaleno can’t hold you, and won’t kill you.” It was a safe mission.

“It’s your chance to see if you want to work for her, as you did for mum.” Lily added gently, reaching out with a hand palm up on the table. Harry didn’t hesitate to reach out and place his hand on top of her own. Their fingers laced together. Spider thinned and arthritis widened knuckles tucked in tight amongst young fingers. “The Carcassa existed as a safe haven for you, daddy. As you were entrenched in mafia, there had to be a space in the mafia for you—so it was made. But now that you’re you, we don’t need the guise. But the Carcassa has changed over time. Its purpose has multiplied. Now it is more, and it won’t ever simply be just a place to live anymore.” Lily was always good at soothing things out even as a girl, and especially as an old woman. Like a diplomat.

“The Carcassa exists for more than just one man, now.” James rasped, adding his own hand on top of the pile of fingers. Harry smiled and closed his eyes at the warmth.

It all made so much more sense when they spoke.

And it gave Harry a choice, which Harry couldn’t express how much he appreciated such a thing after the insanity that had infected everything he had touched within the last several weeks.

Well, Harry would probably have appreciated it more if Liliana had just outright said what Lily and James had just expressed. But considering the circumstances Harry would make some allowances for this one instant.

Did he want to work with his great granddaughter? The child of a woman he apparently murdered?

“… What happened with Rose?” Harry asked, and felt the moment when both Lily and James attempted to pull back. Harry firmed his grip on Lily’s hand. Gentle, but unmoving. James slowly drew his hand back, and Harry opened his eyes to focus on the still faces of his children.

They didn’t question how he learned of Rose. They sat in stillness.

Real Mafioso, Harry’s mind unhelpfully supplied as he watched his children. Slowly, his oldest son and his only daughter turned to look to each other. The calculated movements of old, retired criminals that were interrogated over past crimes but had survived long enough to create a language without words or movement. Harry had seen these looks before. This eye communication which was less magic and more familiarity.

The eyes of people that did not work on the same law that he did.

(That he used to work on—Harry unhelpfully commented to himself. But was that his fault?)

“Officially… you, as Skull, killed her. One heavy hit to the temple.” James murmured.

Harry tensed at the word ‘officially’.

He was really getting tired of all of this subversive shit.

“… unofficially?” Harry hissed, letting go of Lily’s hand before he had the chance to unintentionally hurt his daughter by sheer grip. Harry had always had a problem with digging his nails in to his palms, and he would not risk his daughter’s fragility due to his usual habit.
“Daddy… if you want to hear, put up a privacy spell.” Lily murmured, eyes on the wand that was still on the table. Eyes on the death stick. Harry had already made his statement on his willingness to continue using his magic. What was such a simple request in the grand scheme of things? The wand practically flew in to his hand, and soon the soft sounds of the world were muffled to even their hearing. Harry set the wand back on to the table, and focused on James.

“… unofficially, you took the fall for mum.” James murmured.

“Wait. What.” Harry’s eyes felt over dried from how far they widened over that. Of course, then Harry promptly choked on his own spit and fell in to a coughing fit.

Pro—the coughing gave everyone much needed time to really digest that tidbit.

Con—Harry really needed a drink, now. His throat continued to itch even after he cleared his airway.

Once he had gotten himself settled, Harry took several deep breaths before he felt centered enough to focus on James once more. Harry took the time to really look at his son—the wispy hair, the sun spots decorating his skin, the way he just sagged and drooped—and took in just how old he looked.

“… what happened?” He asked, couldn’t help but ask. Couldn’t say anything else.

Lily was the one that took over, “Rose barged in during an unscheduled one to one meeting with you and mum. You weren’t supposed to be there… Rose was our first flame active child. She was a sky flame—and she clashed terribly with mum and why the Carcassa existed at the time.” Lily sighed and rubbed her temples as she continued. “Rose had big ideas—big plans. And attempted to undermine mum at every turn. But mum was very, very clever. And always brought Rose to heel.”

“Mum told her to gain a full court before mum would consider giving up the reigns,” James quietly interjected, the fingers of the hand that he had on the table minutely spasmed while retaining the shape of an imaginary glass. “Rose quickly… destabilized from there.”

Lily nodded, “we didn’t have very many flame active members at the time—we still don’t. Flame actives are the elite of the elite. And they have so many better options than us. Especially with the reputation that mum used to hide our existence from the spotlight.” Ginny had been clever, not only in how she had settled the Carcassa in the mafia world, but also in how she wanted to reign in Rose. “And we don’t exactly recruit outside of the remains of the magical world… that decided to abandon the big governments.” Lily added.

“… we learned, after the fact, that Rose had tried to make some dealings without mum’s knowledge. She needed control right then, rather than spending, potentially, years trying to find trustworthy elements. She jumped the gun, and attempted to take mum’s life.” James sighed, eyes closed and looking strangely bruised as he threaded his fingers together on top of the table.

“But I was there,” Harry quietly interjected, and both children nodded.

“But you didn’t kill Rose;” James opened his eyes, only to look away.

“Mum did.” Lily murmured.

“And I took the fall?” Harry pressed a hand to his heart.

The silence was more than answer enough for that.

“We never told Liliana the truth. Or the rest of the Carcassa.” James added.
“… we?” Harry asked, voice tight.

“Mum, James, Albus, and me,” Lily quietly pointed out. Harry dropped his face in to his hands and tried to sort out the mixed feelings he had inside. He had lied straight up to Liliana’s face when he hadn’t exactly been himself. They all had. They had a death in the family and they were, essentially, the force behind the death.

His wife had killed their granddaughter.

“It is what it is,” James added, “we all made our choice over it.”

“Liliana didn’t even look wrecked at the idea of me killing someone in a rage. Not wrecked, not shocked, not even surprised. Who else have I killed?” Harry asked without looking up from his hands. His face felt tight, and he didn’t let his voice shake out of the terse question.

This was never a question he imagined himself saying. He was in a situation he hadn’t, in his wildest nightmares, ever thought could occur to him. This had never been in his plan for life.

But wasn’t that the story of his life?

Silence.

Yes, this was the story of his life. Harry Potter, the underdog. The survivor.

Harry looked up.

This wasn’t Voldemort. This wasn’t a wizard brought eradication of the world. This was something entirely different. But Harry Potter was once again the linchpin to everything once more. Would all of this had happened regardless of his choice if he hadn’t been conned in to memory loss?

Harry focused his eyes on James. Focused on James’ lowered eyes and downturned lips and tried to remember a much younger face for his oldest son. But the disconnect was too strong. It didn’t feel real and Harry wasn’t sure when the surreal feeling of his life started and didn’t know when it was going to end.

“Come, dad. I’ll show you the time line I set up.” James shifted and sat up with the soft pops of old bones and tendons. Lily followed in kind. Harry was the last to stand. This was it—this is what he had been searching for from the start. His answers for the times that had been missing.

“Can we trust Liliana?” Harry asked before the privacy charm dissipated by them leaving.

Lily nodded, “as long as she wears the necklace—if she ever steps out of line…” Lily trailed.

“The failsafe mum built in to the properties will react.”

“Goblin wards will wreck her.” Lily added.

James nodded, “enter, stranger… but take heed…” Harry listened to his son recite the old Gringotts poem. It was pleasant, hearing a bit of the past come back to the present. Harry dimly remembered their first trip to Gringotts. Just him and James, the two of them standing off to the side as James fumbled with his growing reading skills and recited the warning at the time.

Harry would always treasure that moment. His young first son on his arm, hand outstretched and pointing to the words on those great doors as he stumbled through the words.

“What’s the treasure supposed to be now?” Harry grabbed his wand and pushed in his chair.
“Maybe you?” James offered, “maybe the creatures? Maybe the remnants of magical kind? Maybe all of it.” James shrugged his shoulders, and Harry offered his arm to the old man. James’ smile warped, twisting in to self-deprecation as he gratefully took the arm. Lily slid in to place on Harry’s other arm, and the three of them started the trek back to the main Carcassa house. A slow, careful shuffle that accommodated his children’s measured, careful pace.

The privacy ward softly popped and dissipated once the castor left the ward lines.

“So it’s cursed? Her necklace?” Harry kept his children steady and his pace even as they moved.

James nodded, “it was something mum commissioned from the Goblins. Liliana accepted it from a young age. She was pre-selected to become boss due to her flame active status. The necklace hides her presence, amongst other perks. All for the cost of loyalty to the Carcassa."

Harry frowned, “and what does that loyalty require?”

Lily patted Harry’s arm, “love. For the Carcassa. And for you.”

“… she shouldn’t be required to love me.” Harry murmured.

“No. But she does anyway. As much as she denies it. You are easy to love.” Lily hummed. “Regardless of the past, you were there her whole life. She wants to hate you, and she puts up a good front. But treats you with care.” Harry mulled over the words, thinking back to his previous, recent encounters.

The park with the handcuffs. Liliana had been too careful, so careful that she hadn’t even closed the cuffs correctly. It couldn’t have been incompetence, if they wanted to press her in to a position of power. It had been gentleness.

Here, when he had apparated in. Had taken her essentially hostage… there had been no attempt at retaliation. Only to calm.

In the end it all left a sour taste in his mouth. This situation was entirely built on a lie. What had led Ginny to this? Harry hoped that once things were settled, he would see this memory for himself. Harry doubted that himself as Skull was privy to all of Ginny’s inner thoughts and workings. But seeing such a memory would allow Harry access to his thoughts and reasoning that he had had at that moment of time.

As another change of pace, what exactly had been Harry’s relationship to Ginny as Skull if they were doing private meetings…?

“Were Ginny and I…?” Harry trailed off, unable to put the thought in to words.

Harry kept his eyes forward and toward the building that James was leading him to. Lily answered him eventually, “no… most of your time spent here—you were in the form of a child. Any relationship you may have built in private with mum… would have been limited to that.”

James murmured, “and mum wouldn’t have been satisfied… if it wasn’t you, either.”

.. but had Ginny found… another?

Harry cleared his throat, “so… time line. We’re going to look at the time line. And afterward—I need… I don’t remember where the Arcobaleno base is. It might be in the memories… or in my head?” Harry angled his head and looked over to Lily, who looked up as he looked down.
“We’ll get you sorted out,” Lily smiled, soothing as she patted Harry on the back of the hand.

“Albus made some clarity potions for this. You can down a mouthful every thirty minutes,” James provided.

“I’ll guide you through meditation first… and from there, I’ll need you to bring me in.” Lily added, eyes still on Harry, and Harry unable to look away.

“… bring you in?” Harry prompted.

“Yes. I don’t have the power to actually hop in to your mind. But if you invade mine—I can use the connection to follow back to yours.” Lily explained, eyes connected with Harry for a moment longer before she looked to the doors they approached.

A mindless spell had the doors opening before they reached them.

“I don’t… I don’t think that’s how that works?” Harry hesitated just briefly before walking through the door and let James take the lead to guide them on.

“It’ll work, trust me.” Lily laughed and slid away, taking the lead.

James briefly, gently, squeezed Harry’s elbow and let go as well.

“And you, when did you get taller than me?” Harry huffed, turning his attention to James and the minor fact that James’ eye level was a smidgen higher than his own, even when hunched.

James quirked a grin, “half a century ago, daddy dearest.” James let out a throaty chuckle, and stepped through a series of doors—Harry could feel the blood activated wards as he stepped in to the room, in to the office.

There were papers pinned to the walls in this overly spacious room. There was no string, so it felt more like an imitation from his own paltry office as an Auror rather than an exact imitation. Harry took in a breath and held it for a moment as he eyed the full scope of how much there was.

“Here dad. This is the start,” James murmured from the far left wall. Harry looked down to Lily, who was lingering at a window at the far side of the door. Looking in to the night.

Harry let out a breath and nodded. His boots scuffed softly on the marble as he speed walked to the start. James helpfully pointed to the first page and then slipped away to bring a chair to Lily. Both of his children settled down, and Harry turned his eyes to the paper. It was written in English and…

… this was Ginny’s handwriting.

Harry pressed the heel of his palm to his sternum, and focused on reading the content rather than trying to memorize the curve of letters in notes that he’ll never gain more of. That will never be written again.

‘Rick Smith – One year. Simple shop worker. After first year, memory modified and personality altered.’ Harry’s eyes scanned over the brief summary of the short life of Rick Smith, the fish and chips worker in central London.

The next page… ‘Christopher ‘Chris’ Giovanni. 29. Quick to anger personality. Likes to take risks—gets caught in an illegal gambling ring. Chris soon owes money and becomes an enforcer. Flames activate. Unspeakables use Chris and cohort gang to assassinate vocal squibs. Thirteen confirmed kills…’
Harry’s eyes tracked down from the paper, to the multiple pictures and biographies penned below the, also short, life of Chris. Harry numbly counted thirteen photographs. Harry closed his eyes before he could recognize any last names amongst the dead.

… someday, when he had the time to break down—he would find each grave and lay lilies at their stones and beg their forgiveness.

Harry would like to let the grief swallow him—but he logically knew that such an act would throw him out of commission like the haze that was the year after the final battle of the dark terror of Voldemort. It had only been Ginny and pregnancy that had brought him out of that. What would he have now? Mafioso chasing him around the world and his children dying of the flu? No, Harry needed to settle with the Arcobaleno. He needed to see to the comfort of his children before they passed.

(Needs to burn Frank Longbottom out of existence, and wipe out the insanity of the wizarding world. What was left of it…)

A torn sheet of paper was pinned next to the life of Chris. It read simply as ‘Checkerface search is inconclusive. Modifications implemented to increase enticement.’ That wasn’t Ginny’s handwriting. Who wrote that?

… Harry felt his stomach twisting in knots as he continued on. Just a little faster, a little more urgent to get to the end of what would undoubtedly be hell to know. But something he would not be able to live with not knowing. ‘Modifications’ was not a kind word, especially considering that these were the people taking, erasing, and changing his memories and personality as to their fancy.

Harry’s eyes skimmed over a printed date—the information was rather more important.

This looked more like a hand written report. This wasn’t Ginny’s writing either. ‘Subject ‘Chris’ was subdued. Project ‘alpha stone’ commence. Approximately one hundred and seven stones were inserted in strategic locations around subject’s body. Initial readings have proven positive results in suppressing all but the minutest traces of magic. Initial readings show that location magic added to the stones is unreliable…’ Harry took a sharp breath and reached up to touch his face. He pressed hard to his check and felt that presence. That bump. That stone.

… wait. The stones? But… but he could do magic now? Harry stared at the word ‘unreliable’ for a moment before he closed his eyes and took a few more breaths. Read it all and then formulate your own thoughts of the matter, Harry coached himself. It was really the only thing that had him so quickly opening his eyes again. A finger out and on the page as he forced himself to parse through the initial findings of the ‘rune stones’. It even included some drawings and schematics.

Harry cursed his impossibly basic understanding of runes. These drawings were gibberish.

There was a scribble of purple ink at the bottom… A single line. Ginny’s handwriting.

“… A disruption stone?” Harry murmured to himself. Well, it was better than something that could blow up. Harry raised a hand and rubbed his chin. It figured that Ginny wouldn’t write an explanation if she kept these notes for herself. Harry could only make an assumption about this. He hoped it meant what he thought it did…

Side effects of the stones include—personality shifts, mood swings, calculated personality alternation… Harry’s skin itched at the thought. He stared for a long moment before he silently vowed to get all of them out as soon as possible. Who had the power and knowledge to alter him? Harry would rather not give them the chance…
Harry noted another paper that mentioned the death of the ‘gang’ that Chris was a part of before he was relocated and fully altered for the next go at enticing the creature known as ‘Checkerface’.

… how was it that Harry still didn’t have a memory of this creature? If it even was a creature, at this point. Harry shook his head and moved on. Harry found a note that his changed personality for the life of ‘Brian’ was considered ‘extremely over the top annoying’ and after a year he was ‘tweaked’ a little. A modification was made to the stones to, instead of block his magical energy…

There were numbers and readings listed in ‘before’ and ‘after’ columns on a paper. The neat block letters written in muggle pen were clearly Hermione’s handwriting. Considering all the penned calculations, it made sense that Hermione was behind this one. Harry’s fingers traced the numbers and the heavy indents that Hermione had made in the page. As if she had written them with force. Or was just upset. There was a big number written on this page. ‘29 and 1/2’. It took a moment before Harry realized that this was his age.

He looked to the left to where he had started, and then to this paper.

It seemed like a long time. But in reality… it was about two years and a half since he was… conscripted? Captured? Coerced? In fact, Harry peaked ahead and noticed that soon the pages were numbered in slowly increasing increments that correlated with the one in front of him. Everything was organized to his age rather than a date. Although after a bit of searching he could find the dates as well.

Harry read further in to the second life of ‘Brian’, the life that was essentially restarted after he was considered too annoying to be any good. Considering Skull, that probably wasn’t a trait that ever fully went away. Of course… the second life of Brian had heavy underlines under the large letters of ‘DISAPPEARED’.

Oh… Harry had actually given them the slip? Well, apparently to the Unspeakables. It wasn’t their reports that Harry continued to read, but Ginny’s handwriting as Ginny listed the name of a circus as to where he had gone. The names and general descriptions of the people that Harry had spoken with. How Harry had gone flame active (again) during a fight with some minor gangsters for the circus.

Under the circled age of ‘30’ it was listed that Harry ran away before the police could investigate him at the circus as an undocumented worker. But also under the paper that listed him as thirty years old… it was listed that the Unspeakables found him in Spain using blood magic.

“Of course, by then we had already founded the Carcassa. Mum pulled us out of Hogwarts after James was kidnapped. Lost him for a good three days. He wasn’t really the same after that. He told mum what happened, but we never caught wind of the details. They took… a lot of blood… I still say they used the blood to locate you. The times coincide… but we’re getting off topic.”

Oh… so that’s what they had been implying. Harry pressed his lips together

It was on parchment, rather than muggle printer paper, that the story continued on. The Unspeakables gave Harry a side mission that Ginny had fully documented. Which was the assassination of the Spanish minister of magic. A list of the dead… Ginny highlighted that the force of Harry’s will broke the mind magics and he fled after he had brought down several casualties ranging from the actual family to their defensive wizards and witches they had hired to protect their home. Although he hadn’t fled far enough to escape the clutches of the Unspeakables, since it was noted that shortly afterward that the Unspeakables found him and wiped his memory to continue use.
And then Ginny and the order engaged. Harry pressed his hands to the wall, blocking in the paper and quivered as he read the swift report. The sentences were short. And everything clinical. Harry’s eyes glanced up to the age he was during this report. Aged 31.

The list of the dead was printed here.

Harry held his breath as he looked through the names for anyone that he knew. Only a few jumped out as vaguely familiar. No one that was… important to him.

In the end, it was stated that Harry escaped from both parties.

The death toll was high.

57 people.

It was Ginny’s handwriting that reported that he indulged in petty crime, joined another circus. Got caught by some local police in Croatia… and then someone in the not fully formed Carcassa squealed his location and the Unspeakables picked him up. (Harry read the note Ginny made about —someone, their name had been viciously crossed out with black pen until the paper was ripped where a name was. Harry wondered if Ginny did that. If she had ripped that person as she had ripped the paper. The action reeked of anger…)

The next several pages were colored periwinkle and with the number ‘33’ added to all of these pages. Harry took a moment to count the pages and roughly got about thirty of them. It took a bit of reading to realize what this all was.

… this was the extermination of the Goblins. This is why Gringotts was.. gone?

And the dead… Ginny tried to stop him. And eventually succeeded.

But the list of the dead.

… Percy Weasley… Ron Weasley… Cho Chang… Molly… Arthur…

Harry made himself finish the list.

But it… started to blur...

...Greengrass… Lavender Brown… Seamus Finnigan…

Harry felt empty. And he kept the emptiness close as he continued on.

(Ron… Ron, dead in the tunnels of Gringotts. They had survived before. But to die there… with Harry as the cause? Oh god… Ron…)

Ginny and the order capture him and the basic schematics for the stone bath and corresponding chart were pasted to the wall. A list of potions that was used to purify his system. And then they… they..

Harry clutched at the feeling of empty and begged himself to hold on to it when he read the next sentence in Ginny’s steady handwriting.

‘I authorised a mind wipe. Hermione did it for us…. Most of the compulsions and potion regime cannot be counteracted at this time. We have taken blood samples and cures will be made from it so that at a later time we can free Harry… a false life under the name of Henry…’

The empty feeling was dissipating.
Ginny had… Ginny had…

Harry quickly moved on as he focused on breathing. Long, hard inhales through his nose and slow exhales from between clenched teeth. He needed to think about anything but that.

So he moved on.

Breath.

Apparently his new life as Henry had him once again falling in to the mafia as if it was fate or destiny without any underhanded influence from the British or Ginny. And once again he was inevitably scooped up by the Unspeakables (although this time from Russia…) for a time. It took 5 years before Harry was rescued by Ginny and the Order (although it was named ‘Carcassa’ in this report) and the age of Harry was listed as aged 34 to 39.

The dragon potion had been used. An antidote was given to Harry and… Harry ran off?

Well, Harry just needed to be dosed with the dragon potion a third time to become a trinity in this act. Harry bit down the laugh and stomped it down before he could make a noise. Breath. Keep breathing. It was getting rather hard to keep breathing without doing something.

Lily had… she had spoken about this. All of this, hadn’t she?

“…it was painful, watching you. What they did to you…. We did the best that we could. But… but sometimes our best wasn’t good enough. And I… I am so, so sorry.” Lily’s voice echoed in his ears, and Harry clenched his hands in to fists and let his fingernails bite.

The medical reports that followed… were not good. These were not in Ginny’s hand, although it had the same slant that Ginny used. It mentioned long term problems from the abrupt end of potion treatments and how it could interact with Harry’s multiple conflicting problems. Forgetfulness. Some short term memory loss…

… wait. Did he… just have a memory problem now? Something… permanent?

Harry took a hard inhale and pushed himself to shuffle a bit more down the line of papers.

Age 42 ½, Harry does a trick on a motorcycle that resulted in a popped tire, and a head on collision with another moving vehicle. Followed by a coma. Followed by him… waking up in the hospital. A German hospital.

The one he had visited. Before Liliana found him. When he ran off from his apartment after the biking competition.

(Harry felt no small amount of relief, knowing that the end to this part of his life was coming and the Arcoblaneo was starting. Because he had been Skull for so long. A currently unremembered life, but the knowledge that he had remained as he was, unaltered, for so long… brought a small amount of relief that seemed so large and important to him because the rest of himself was screaming in the back of his head.)

Pages were dedicated to his medical recovery. Of potions slyly slipped in between muggle medicines to rapidly improve his condition. His problems with speech and walking due to head injury eased and then eradicated due to new breakthroughs from the advancements of potions by Hermione Weasley and Albus Potter. Although nothing helped the memory loss. In fact… a forgetfulness potion had been added in.
The calm was almost gone. Harry could hear his blood pounding in his ears. Racing under his skin. He needed to do something, but at the moment he had nothing to do to work through this shock.

The words were blurring. Harry focused on reading the rest as fast as possible. The smallest details weren’t reading, but he was getting the gist of it.

44 years old. Free from the hospital. A donor (Ginny!) paid for his hospital expenses and he had gone on his way. Almost stabbed in an alleyway. Reported as flame active once more… settling down and becoming a paid under the table stuntman first in Germany. Then in America. He stayed there for three years…

“Oh… I’m…” Harry was the original Skull? The ‘Immortal Stuntman’? Doing stunts that no one else dared in shows and on film? There was even a list of his movies and newspaper clips lovingly cut out and preserved in laminated form taped to the wall.

Somehow, the revelation of being the original Skull was totally unimportant in the scheme of things. A small after the fact thing that could bring a smile once there was enough distance from the aches of the pain he was in now.

Aged 52. A single picture… of Harry in a café in his full Skull regalia and the reflection in the window of a mask with checker patterns on it. A single word was written there. ‘CONTACT’.

The next single paper of Gryffindor red had Harry’s ages listed in a timeline. From aged 52 to 53 was labeled ‘undisclosed Arcobaleno business.’

Aged 53, initiated Arcobaleno curse.

The age of 53 was listed. Then 54, 55, 56… it kept going all the way to 101. With the written words ‘curse broken’. None of those numbers listed anything from the Arcobaleno. But Ginny’s handwriting appeared with number-letter combinations that obviously led to another filing system to what had happened at that age. Harry would have to find out where the rest of that was. Since it was obviously Carcassa business.

Ages 102, 103, 104, 105; all of it was listed as ‘Arcobaleno business and Carcassa missions.’

“So… my, uh… minions were all.. Carcassa?” Harry lifted his voice, not looking but talking to his children all the same. A soft ‘yes’ from Lily had Harry nodding as he reached out and ran a finger over the number ‘106’.

That number was not written in Ginny’s handwriting style.

Harry didn’t know if he wanted to erase that number or immortalize it.

Harry looked down at his body and ran his hands over his torso. This was not the body on an old man. “… have I grown… since the five years the curse was broken?” Harry couldn’t help but ask. It wasn’t written.

“Not in any noticeable way. You haven’t been around as often outside of Carcassa duty ever since the curse broke. Even then… you still look very, very young.” James added on the last bit after a beat of silence. Harry pressed his fingers against the corners of his eyes and felt smooth skin. He was supposed to have laugh lines, right? Well, he hadn’t had much reason to laugh and be merry for much of his life. But they were less laugh and more of age lines that he should have gotten a long time ago.
Harry leaned forward and pressed his forehead against the wall. After a moment of resting against
the wall he pressed in hard. He wanted to lament and scream at the sky a terribly simple ‘why me’
and then break something glass and easily fixable. He needed to get this out.

“Don’t touch me!” Harry snarled in to the wall when the feeling of an incoming hand to his arm
came to his senses. A muffled gasp and the hand drawing back and… Harry felt instantly guilty.

But the swirl of his emotions was still bubbling like a potion about to explode.

Harry turned his head slightly and looked out of the corner of his eye to see who was there. Lily’s
pale face stared slightly up at him. Eyes slightly wide and hands pressed to her heart.

“Please…” Harry choked, trying to soften the blow anyway even though he wouldn’t take it back.
His body felt like it was on fire as his emotions were. “I just… I just…” Lily’s eyes dropped
without a word and she looked away from Harry.

“I know, daddy.” Lily murmured, eyes fixed on the floor.

Lily said ‘I know’, Harry could read the English words falling from her age thinned lips. But all he
could hear in his head was Ginny’s voice repeating ‘I authorized’ over and over. Harry turned back
to the wall as he closed his eyes. He leaned his head back and slammed his forehead against the wall.
The hard knock jarred his senses and sent aches spinning along his nerves. Harry opened his eyes,
tilted his head back and did it again. The pain no longer as sharp, but hair raising all the same.

Harry sighed. Unclenched his hands and stepped back from the wall. He turned and found James at
Lily’s side, hand at her elbow and his shoulders tense.

“How could she...?” Harry asked. Because that was all he could do. All he could focus on. All he
could ask. The Ginny that had authorized the mind wipe—the thought hurt more than the fact that
Hermione had done it. Hermione, in a sense, he could understand. She would have found some logic
behind the action and would have followed through not matter how much it pained her. If she
thought it would help Harry, she would do it...

... But Ginny? The little girl who had her own memories muddled and warped by Tom Riddle, who
would know exactly how he would have felt when the truth ultimately came to light?

Harry fist ed his hands in his jean pockets and tried to not tremble in rage.

“Daddy...” Lily whispered, and Harry looked to her once more.

“... I’m so sorry.” She murmured, tears leaking from the corners of her eyes and hiding in the divots
of age on her face.

And the anger, the rage... just left.

Harry had no small doubt that his children were involved in his fate. They were the leaders of the
Carcassa. Or at least they had been when this had been a problem. They had been a part of Ginny’s
crusade to save him however they could. And perhaps even before then, even before the Carcassa
had been named what it was and had been going under the continued use of the name ‘The Order’.

“Why... If it was known where I was, why did no one...” Why did no one save me? Harry wanted to
know. Desperately wanted to know.

James stepped forward, easing just a bit in front of Lily.

... it hurt. But didn’t hurt at the same time. Seeing his oldest child as an old man stepping in front of
his youngest child, also an old woman, to protect her from Harry.

(Had they done something worth that kind of caution? Or was it Harry?)

“The wizard ing world, in lieu of it’s natural magics... has turned to soul perversions. The Muds research was not leading to results. And soul magic, while previously banned in the past... has known research and results that span centuries. They’ve stolen creature souls—and are burning them to harness their magic. The wands are not the same anymore.” Lily murmured, her voice soft and a bit pained for it. She looked stretched thin and pale.

“The way they use magic now—it’s not what it was. And we’ve had a hard time... counteracting it.” Lily was weary, and Harry remembered Liliana’s haunting message that his children had been on bedrest and all had thought that they would not be around today. That they should have died some time ago. “How can we save you from what we don’t know how to fight...?”

Harry raised his hand. Palm out. He wanted to lead her to a chair...

James stepped further forward. Lily half disappearing behind his shoulder.

Harry lowered his hand.

Strangers. These old faces and James’ hard eyes and... and it wasn’t just Harry who had lost these people. It was his children who had lost their grandparents to Harry. Their uncles. Their family. Liliana wasn’t the only one who had suffered a loss. And in the face of years of tragedies, what had Harry become to them?

“You should... sit. Lily. You’re looking pale.” Harry murmured, eyes dropping to the floor.

James turned and looked to his sister, and carefully took her by the elbow and brought her to the table to sit her down.

Harry, distantly, wished for a time turner.

But also knew that one could not change the past.

... after all. He had tried. And it did not end like he had thought it would.

“I’m sorry, for snapping.” Harry added, not drifting closer to the little table by the windows that his children had gone to. The space between them was physically so small that Harry could join them within a few steps. But the physical divide wasn’t the only one there and Harry didn’t know if he was strong enough to cross what laid between them (and a small part of himself wondered if he even wanted to). The hints of the rising sun put a warmth to Lily’s face that counteracted the pale sheen to it. Lily gave him a wan smile as James settled a pillow behind her back and used a hand to rub at one of her shoulders.

Harry felt Oodako’s tentacle brush over his ear, and turned to find the octopus had stuck itself on to his back instead of hiding under his jacket.

“It’s okay daddy,” Lily added. But James didn’t agree. But he didn’t refute nor say anything else about the action either.

“It’s not okay... and I am sorry. I’m just... a bit... off.” Harry offered lamely, and distantly wished he was as put together with his words as Hermione was. That he had had the time to grow and age and become wise like his friends and family had been able to. But here he was, a man of his hundreds and still rather stuck like a man entering his thirties. If even that.
Why hadn’t he aged?

Harry rubbed at his face, and then reached up to brush a hand over Oodako’s tentacles. The petting was soothing to Harry, and Harry let the silence settle and cool his temper and calm his children.

“I’m... I need time to think. I’m going for a ride. Please... get some rest,” Harry bid his children after a time. Harry watched their eyes and still faces for a moment, watched James nod and barely heard Lily’s murmur of ‘yes Daddy’ before he turned and swiftly walked out of the room. He gently closed the door behind himself. The door clicked shut.

Harry ran through the halls until he burst outside.

He couldn’t stay here. Not for one more second.

Harry just needed a bit of... time.

He enlarged his motorcycle and swiftly sat. Harry forwent the helmet, and focused just on turning the motorcycle on. The machine roared to life, and Harry made sure Oodako was tucked inside his jacket. Harry waited for a moment as Oodako seemed to shrink and actually moved to settle under Harry’s t-shirt.

The drive to the gate was quick.

Seeing Liliana there wasn’t... what he had expected. Harry eyed her purple jumpsuit even as she stepped forward. Liliana didn’t offer a word, but she reached in to her pocket and offered a phone to him.

Harry took it.

“... if you’re stuck and able to call for help...” Liliana offered, crossing her arms over her chest as she stepped back. They didn’t stay crossed for long. And soon one hand came up to tangle in the necklace around her neck.

The cursed necklace.

A chain.

It was a simple silver chain, but it represented more to Harry now. How had she taken it, knowing what it would do to her?

“Come with me,” Harry offered with a hand out.

Liliana blinked, already balking as she took a step back. “Why?” It came out harder than necessary. But Harry could read her easily. It was a bit of distrust against wanting to go. She eyed the motorcycle, and it was less distaste and more wanting.

“The only thing that beats a motorcycle ride is a broom—and we only have one of those,” Harry offered. And wondered if this is what Lily would have been like, had he been aware at the time of Lily being that age.

Liliana hesitated.

Her fist tightened in the chain.

“I can’t.” She murmured.
Harry lowered his hand and forced himself to smile. “Another time, then?”

“Yeah... the next one?” Liliana asked, squaring her shoulders as she faced Harry head on.

“It’s a promise.” Harry offered. And Harry watched a ghost of a smile cross her face. For a moment he could almost see Albus in the face of this young adult before him before she turned to the gate guard and motioned for it to open. The gate lifted up like a castle gate, and Harry glanced around. The stones were actually rather familiar, now that he looked.

Still, itching familiarity or no... there was freedom ahead of himself.

“Be careful.” Liliana offered.

Harry chuckled to himself, and it came out bitter. “When was I ever?” He was a reckless mess of a human being. Harry didn’t let her respond to that as he twisted the accelerator and shot off down the paved road.

He wasn’t sure where he was, exactly. But Harry had time. And he rode the road for a long, long time. The sun was high by the time he finally came to a stop. He had passed through a few small towns and around one city before he stopped on the roadside.

Harry got off and walked the motorcycle to the side before he sat down next to it in the dirt. He reached in to his pocket and pulled out the cell phone that Liliana had given him. He fished through his pockets and eventually had his memory chip in hand. He had to turn the phone off and insert it before he turned it back on.

Harry fiddled for a little while before he took a picture of his motorcycle and made that his lock screen. This moment was calming, and it made the blood in his veins simmer rather than boil. Harry hoped that was just his terrible temperament rather than the stones at work altering him to some unseen plan. Harry shifted to lean against his motorcycle and he closed his eyes. Harry focused on breathing. Let the sounds of the occasional bird chirp fade with the world. Let the teasing touch of wind to the skin and hair disappear. The weight of Oodako on his chest soon became a non-thought.

(...)He would not think of Ginny...

It almost felt like he was floating.

(...)He would not think of his children, strangers, on the cusp of death...

But he eventually floated back to himself.

The sun was going down.

And Harry’s body keenly reminded him that he hadn’t actually eaten all day. Even with that urging he was reluctant to return to the Carcassa headquarters. Harry pulled out his phone once more and paged through the contacts.

Liliana was listed. As well as James, Lily, and Albus—all with their British born names than their Italian twisted ones. It was a nice gesture from Liliana to give Harry some familiarity, if nothing else.

... he hadn’t gone with Lily to settle his memories.

(Did he really want to remember the rest?)

(At this rate... not really.)
Harry sighed.

Well. It was time to do something rather stupid, then.

He dialed the number before he could think better of it, and raised the phone to his ear. It was picked up on the first ring, and Harry blinked open his eyes and stared at the trees with a frown. Well... his calls weren’t usually picked up so quickly.

After a beat of silence, the quiet voice of Reborn reverberated through the earpiece. “... Skull?”

“... hey.” Harry lamely muttered as he tapped the toes of his punk boots together. “Um... how do I... that is... What’s the address of the Arcobaleno house?”

“... are you planning on going there?” Well, at least Harry wasn’t the most incredulous of the two here. That scoff would have burned if Harry had had to hear it in person.

Harry sighed to himself as he dropped his face in to a hand. “... if I say yes?”

“It’s not the smartest move to ask where to go to the person chasing you.” Reborn almost sounded like he was pained. But Harry didn’t know if that was just his perception, or a bit of his own embarrassment warping the words that he was hearing.

“Well... I’m kind of, uh... hungry. And a bit...broke.” Harry wanted to hit his head against the wall again. His forehead ached in rememberance. Harry listened to Reborn’s strangled laugh that sounded more like stress and something cracking. “And would very much like to know where to go... if possible. Dunno if I have the gas.” Harry leaned back and looked up at his motorcycle.

“... Where are you now?” Reborn asked instead.

“... Um. On a road?” Harry grimaced. He could almost hear the phone in Reborn’s grip cracking. “... maybe Italy?” Harry offered more. But Harry was thinking that just might make it worse, the annoyance that Reborn had to feel over the ineptitude.

“Have you had any blackouts recently?” Well.. that was an odd question.

“... no...?” Why was he even still answering? “Are you going to give me the address or not?” Harry demanded, near about ready to throw the phone away. He was getting a little riled up himself at this point.

“It’s not really a secret if it actually has an address.” Reborn bit out, his voice crisp with barely any bite of his Italian accent, and Harry rolled his eyes at the superior tone. He knew plenty of ‘secret hideouts’ that had addresses. Although it wasn’t a muggle address so it was a tiny bit different in this aspect.

After all, some spell work and even a quick ‘point me’ wouldn’t help with wizarding address. Once they were hidden, they were rather hard to find.

A ‘point me’ spell.

A...

Harry felt his own eye twitch. Was he a wizard or was he not? The Arcobaleno hideout didn’t have wards to protect it from location spells! (Harry had made an assumption again... ever since the war his homes had been so heavily warded—and it seemed he did live at least partially at the Arcobaleno base... but Skull was not a wizard. Obviously there would be no wards!) Harry suppressed the need
to scream as he pulled up his legs and pressed his aching forehead against his knees. This was a new level of inanity even for him.

“...ull! Skull!” Reborn’s tiny voice barked in his ear.

“... sorry. I’ll have to call you back.” Harry said and ended the call before he really did scream at himself.

Harry jumped when not even a second later Reborn’s number popped back up on his screen in a call back. “Sorry senpai,” Harry grimaced as he shut his phone off and tucked it in to an inner pocket. He brought out his wand after glancing to the road.

“Point me Arcobaleno hideaway!” Harry smiled to himself.

... and then the wand in his hand didn’t move.

Oh shit.

“Um, point me Arcobaleno house?” Was that a question to his wand?

“Point me... Arcobaleno secret hideout?”

“... Arcobaleno building?”

“Vongola maintenance building?” Well, that got a reaction, but it probably wasn’t it. Harry canceled the spell and pressed his hands to his eyes and rocked back on his heels. What could they have even called the building? Never mind his previous idea of wizarding addresses being better than muggle ones, there was too much variable!

... oh god, what if it wasn’t even in English?

Hopefully... maybe... It was probably something pretentious... like...

“Point me Arcobaleno Mansion!”

Harry swore loudly when the spell took hold and the wand pointed along to the direction of the road that he had been traveling. Well, maybe if he drove very fast he might get there soon enough?

... maybe before Reborn got there since he had flat out just told the world’s greatest hit man where he was going.

“... I am a trouble maker and I can’t deny it, Oodako.” Harry groaned to himself. He was making things harder for himself once more. Harry threw his leg over the motorcycle and straddled it as he settled. Harry tucked Oodako back in and patted down all of his pockets to make sure he had everything. His wand was tucked in to his jacket sleeve, his Oodako over his stomach. His gas tank half full...

Harry stopped every thirty minutes to pull over on the road and to perform the spell once more.

After a quarter of the day he pulled in to a city and tried not to feel bad about scamming a gas station out of gas. He sneakily repaired a bit of wall and roof as thanks, although the station probably wouldn’t think of it that way.

It was sun down when he, surprisingly, arrived. Harry had thought he would have had to transfigured a camp for the night and live it rough for another day or two. (It figured that Ginny would have the Carcassa headquarters this close to the Arcobaleno mansion. Harry didn’t know if
that made his heart warm or gave him chills...)

Harry had to drive along a dirt road, but eventually he came through to a clearing and to a stop in front of what could really only be called a mansion.

“Who paints a mansion white in a forest?” Harry asked Oodako as he turned off his motorcycle. Harry unzipped and prodded Oodako to come out and sit on his shoulder. Harry let a tentacle wrap around the top and side of his head to hold on. Harry gave a judging scoff as he eyed the white paint and large windows. It all oozed rich and wealthy and a part of him that was little Harry Potter from the cupboard trembled at the thought of making such a clean thing filthy with his presence. But the older, more experienced part of Harry gently smothered the feeling and straightened his spine and let his body strut to the door.

There was either a lot of traps in this mansion. Or there were none and the Arcobaleno sense of superiority stopped them from laying traps and everyone’s fear stopped them from invading the home.

... or the fear that Reborn would eventually find out and hit them in a way they wouldn’t get back up from.

Harry eyed the door, his focus on the lock in front of him. The single lock. But while there was a lock.

Harry currently had no key.

But he had a wand.

(Which was just the best skeleton key in existence, wasn’t it?)

“Quick in and out, right Oodako?” Harry hummed and a quick Alohomora had the front door unlocked. Harry smiled wryly and sent a few detection charms out before he cautiously opened the front door.

Nothing happened.

He peeked his head in and looked left, right, and up. And then he tapped the ground in front of the door, putting some weight on the spot to see if a trap door would occur.

Nothing.

“Huh...” Harry stepped in and softly eased the front door shut. The dusk of the outside was rather bright. But even with all of the windows it was dim inside of the mansion.

But even with the dimness, Harry could tell that the interior was all warm wood. And... “That looks famous. And expensive.” Harry blinked at the rather giant canvas with a bunch of multiple colors in dots and drips. Harry glanced to the right of the front door and found a tiny table with a few glass bowls on it. Only one of the classy bowls was decorated with stickers of skulls over it, practically covering the glass.

In fact, looking even closer it looked like the stickers were keeping the glass together. The bowl was a little misshapen. Shattered and carefully stuck together with adhesive skulls. Harry set his motorcycle key in the bowl before moving in to the house. He needed to find his living quarters.

... if that was even where they put the suit.
“Oodako... we might be here for a while.” Harry sighed and drifted around the front entrance hall. There were three hallways that led to different directions in the mansion. Through one he could see what looked like a hosting room at the end of the short hall from the entrance. The hall itself was spacious. The other halls led down to a twist with doors lining the walls. Harry ruffled his hair before he turned to the front door and laid down a ward line.

Harry would not be caught unaware if someone came by. Harry could think ahead, after all. And if anyone, muggle or wizard, stepped through this magic line—it would give a ring only he, the castor, would hear. With that settled, Harry picked a hall and walked on. Harry passed by more sitting rooms than he cared to count. Storage. A weapons ro—

Harry paused, back tracked, and looked at the large floor to ceiling walls that were covered in weapons on hooks on the walls. Some looked like medieval swords... and one looked like a tank’s canon.

_Seriously?_ Just a little bit ridiculous.

Harry rubbed the back of his neck and shuffled along.

He found the kitchen and swiftly raided the cupboards. There wasn’t anything fresh in the refrigerator, and no bread on the counter. But there was a can of peaches Harry popped open. And a can of beans he put on the stove. Harry plated the beans once they were warmed up. He left the peaches in the can and before he brought his fork to the meal, he scanned the food for any kind of ‘additive’.

All of the foods were safe.

Harry licked the plate clean. And drank the juice from the peach can. Probably not healthy at all, but might as well? It was sweet, and Harry was craving sweetness to offset the bitter of his life. Harry left the dishes in the sink and set the can on the counter before he continued his exploration. By the time he finished his rounds around the main floor by the light of his cell phone (because he didn’t want to actually turn on the lights) he hadn’t found the stairs to the next floor.

Harry dropped down to slump in to a coffee nook in the kitchen. Harry sprawled across the bench tiredly and let his legs hang off the sides. He hadn’t really slept the night before and the bench he was on was rather cushioned. Harry patted Oodako on top of the head as he settled down and turned off the light of his cell phone.

He checked how many times Reborn had called him.

Twice.

But there were a lot of numbers that Harry didn’t know. So perhaps that had been Reborn trying to get him to answer on another number? In total, there had been 36 missed calls so Harry could only assume it was Reborn’s heckling. Harry tapped the phone against his nose, and felt the stretch of the grin on his face before it really registered that he was grinning. Harry didn’t think long about it before he dialed Reborn’s number again and put the phone to his ear.

There was no hesitance on Reborn’s part this time.

“Skull. Where. Are. You.” It wasn’t even a question this time. Nor a demand. It sounded like an inevitability.

“I don’t have to answer you, you know.” Harry reminded the other as he strained his eyes to see the tall ceiling of the kitchen in the dark.
“But you will. One way or another.” Reborn was calmer this call than the last. The energy Harry could hear over the phone was different. Perhaps it was the general atmosphere behind the call? “I don’t hear any cars around you. You’re inside.” Reborn deduced from the lack of white noise around Harry.

Harry rolled his eyes before he shut them. It was too dark to look at anything anyway.

“Answer me.”

“Nah, it’s kind of more fun this way.” Well, that slipped out before Harry could think better of it. Harry could swear he heard the phone actually crack from that one, from the pressure Reborn was putting on it.

“If you’re inside—” Reborn hissed.

And then Harry felt his alarm ward for the front door go off. The two bell ring before silence. Harry dropped the phone but scrambled to save it before it clattered to the floor. Harry just barely caught the device. Harry felt his heart hammering in his chest as he got to his feet, putting the phone back to his ear. “Inside where?” Harry felt like his voice did a good job sounding calm, even as he picked up Oodako and let the octopus attach itself to his head. Tentacles sticking to his forehead and under his chin like a demented bicycle strap.

“Hmm.. I wonder where.” Reborn sounded... predatory.

Not good.

Harry fumbled with the phone and slammed the ‘end call’ button. He clutched the phone tight in his hand as he hurried to the large cupboards that could definitely hide a person if one was clever enough. Harry swiftly and silently opened the doors until he found a space that was the most empty. All that was inside was a back of slowly rotting potatoes. The smell could be better, really.

But Harry would rather not risk the time and instead shoved some tiny tuna cans to the side and slotted his body in next to the potato mess. Harry felt Oodako shrink even more to accommodate the hiding spot as Harry eased the door shut. Until only a crack remained for him to peer out in to the dark of the kitchen.

Harry pressed a hand to his mouth to stop a giggle from coming out. There was nothing funny about this! Reborn was dangerous!

But this was also the least complicated aspect of his life.

The most fun.

Where he didn’t feel guilty.

He didn’t feel hurt or threatened by the Arcobaleno. Their conversation was a strange thing. And they had hurt him in the past. But Harry was strong, now. They were no threat to him with his full facilities intact.

In fact... this might be the perfect time for a bit of clever revenge.

Harry grinned, and felt the shifting of Oodako, as if the Octopus could feel Harry’s rising anticipation. Harry shifted and kept his eyes glued to his view of the kitchen. Reborn might be silent, but Harry would eventually see the man. And once Reborn left the kitchen, Harry would follow along. He needed to find out where the hidden stairs to the next floor was anyway.
And from there... well...

Harry wasn’t going to take this as far as his own father and godfather had. That thought made his stomach churn. No, just something light and fun. Something to one up the hit-man that assumed he was the world’s greatest in everything.

Eventually, the dark shadow of Reborn ghosted in to the kitchen.

*Let the games begin.*

Chapter End Notes

Hello friends! I've been in a zombie state lately due to extreme weather that was rather high day and night. It cooked me and I melted for a month. The weather is cooling down. So this chapter was finally scraped together.

I hope this chapter solidifies the time line a bit better. And we can see just how long the Arcobaleno have existed with Harry as a member. As well as a clue in just how Harry got there, and in general what happened to this world as Harry's livelihood crashed and burned around him multiple times.

If you guys have any questions or theories, please put them down in the comments below and we can all have a discussion. It's really fun to hear what you guys think will happen next. Although I think I've made everyone paranoid of any possible good thing that could happen (I also have a tendency to ruin things too, don't I?).

This will be the last information binge chapter. And Harry has now taken his own agency in to his own hands. In short, Harry is on the offensive now. Rather than just reacting to the world around him.

Thank you all for reading!

EDIT: So hey, quick question! Would you, readers, like to see Reborn stay by himself for the rest of Harry's scrambling around the mansion... or would you want more Arcobaleno?
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

We make our choices.

And our choices make us.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 17

Harry used his wand to edge the cupboard door shut after noticing the shape of Reborn in the kitchen, and a swift spell vanished the rotting potatoes. Harry debated for a moment if he wanted to do a bubble charm against the lingering smell, but in the end decided not to. He had vanished the mess, and it wasn’t the most awful thing he had ever smelt (or drank—potions were rather terrible, really).

Instead, Harry cast a few silencing charms on his space—and then pulled out his phone.

He didn’t even have to think about the number.

When Reborn picked up, Harry relaxed against the side of the cupboard.

The silence stretched out for one long yawn before Harry spoke.

“Why can’t I remember you being nice to me?” Well, that hadn’t been what he had been intending to start with but it was best to just roll with it. Might as well, as Harry couldn’t actually say he had been intending to say anything in particular. Harry closed his eyes and enjoyed the relative safety of the small space and waited for Reborn to speak.

The silence stretched for a moment, “I… am not a nice man.” Reborn murmured.

The pause after that lasted too long. Harry understood that Reborn was going to draw out the
conversation as much as he could to try and locate Harry with the phone call. Harry also knew that that tactic would be in vain. For however great Reborn was, Reborn would not expect Harry as he was now. Wouldn’t expect ‘Skull’ as he was now.

“What makes you keep trying, senpai?” Harry hummed, the foreign word slipping out without a stutter from changing language. Harry paused and focused his thoughts on that word. ‘Senpai’. A prodding of his own memory eventually had a string of consciousness push against the back of his eyes in words that were initially gibberish to Harry—that warped in to something he could make sense of in the same way that when one cupped a hand full of water. Some water would remain in the palm and the rest would dribble through the cracks between fingers.

Harry minutely searched his memory for some concrete translation for that word. It was almost like a spell—it had weight to it. It had meaning. And Harry could almost put his thumb on it. Almost.

Almost—he needed to work harder to change that state of existence for himself. Nothing in half measures, not anymore.

Harry waited for a moment, “… do you even know why? Why you keep at this?”

“Because….” Reborn trailed.

Silence. Long, drawn out. Harry could hear the tiny, faint footsteps Reborn was taking through the phone Harry had pressed to his ear. Reborn was searching, with a fast clip to his steps. It was audible due to those dress shoes that Reborn always insisted on wearing (and would always rage if there was the slightest speck of dirt or scuff on them).

“Just because?” Harry rolled his eyes at the continued delaying tactic. Not gunna work, mate.

“Just because is all you’re going to hear until we are face to face.” Reborn answered with a finality, and then didn’t hang up at the suitably most dramatic moment that he could of.

Harry cocked his head to the side. “… you’re not hanging up, are you?”

“No, I am not.” Reborn answered immediately.
“… so hey, I’ve looked around. Where are the stairs?” Harry grinned to himself when he heard that rather familiar ominous creak of Reborn gripping his cell phone too tight. It was amusing now to get such a reaction, even more so from this place of safety. Heckling Reborn had to be his new favorite past time (since all his other ones were gone—).

Reborn let out a slow breath. “… how did you even make it here?”

“… Sheer dumb luck?” Harry asked, quoting McGonagall because that had yet to steer him wrong really.

Reborn snorted.

“.. what happened… when you were captured… what happened to you, Skull?”

Well, that was an unexpected turn. “Dunno yet—not really.” Harry shifted, sitting up more and edging a bit to the door. The time to chat was running out, Reborn had most certainly left the kitchen after not hearing Harry within it. Harry didn’t need to linger in indecision and hiding. That wasn’t the type of man he was, after all. Harry was a bit too much ‘all or nothing’. Had been ever since the philosopher’s stone. (Maybe even before then? When Harry hunting was a thing, Harry learned fast that hesitance led to painful bruises…)

(But snitches get stitches. And I’m not a snitch.)

Harry would wrap this phone call up and then start his own turn. Reborn had initiated this chase, and Harry was rather done with dancing to the other’s tune. “I’ve learned… a lot about me, even if I don’t remember it all in the most… straight, coherent way right now. What have you learned?”

Harry hadn’t actually expected any information.

“That you’re originally an amnesiac from Germany of unknown origins. And that the incident that happened… is suspiciously similar to what happened to you at your motocross event.”

Harry paused. Squinting his eyes at the door.
“… you… you were there?” Harry knew that Reborn had showed up later at his apartment of the
time. But to be a part of it all even before then…? “… did you actually find me… from those stupid
texts?” Harry felt his gut clench.

“… I do not know what you have against my name, but it isn’t stupid.”

… dear Merlin—what had happened during that blackout?

“Not stupid, but so cheesy.” And Harry hung up the phone, muffling a laugh in to his hand as he set
his phone on silent and shoved it in to his pocket. Harry pulled the death stick close, and swiftly cast
a disillusionment charm at himself. It was a bit cramped to twirl his wand around his body, but Harry
managed it before he cautiously pushed the door a little open. His legs were strong as he took to his
feet, nary a tingle of returning blood to the extremities. Harry took a moment to squint at himself after
he shook himself out and mentally cleared himself to run around. He was suitably chameleon-like.

A silencing spell on his boots, and Harry felt well off enough to creep around.

Harry stomped about until he found Reborn prowling the hall. Harry slowly eased himself around
the curve of a hallway as he watched Reborn heading away and down the hall—the only bright spot
on the man was that band of sunshine around his fedora, and the little green chameleon that was
hanging on it. Reborn’s dark suit blended in nicely with the shadows of the house, but his hat was
like a little sun beam declaring ‘HERE I AM’. Even the white of his dress shirt somehow seemed to
be muted compared to the fedora’s decorations.

Harry glanced down to his own legs, checking to see that his spell was holding before he scampered
after Reborn. It was rather fun, ghosting after the man. But even then, Harry made sure to hang back.
While the night and lack of lights would surely help the spell, there was always the chance that
Reborn could see the slight ripple of Harry’s body. After all, the spell was disillusionment, not
invisibility.

He stalked Reborn for a time. But two rooms in to the stalk (like some demented hide and go seek
game—Reborn was checking as many nooks and crannies as possible), Harry swiftly became bored
with the following around.

… as it was, Reborn wouldn’t expect him at all.

That just left…. What to do?
Harry waited until Reborn ducked in to a fancy office/sitting room before he ran down the hallway (ever thankful for that silencing spell) and ducked around a corner before popping his head out shallowly. Harry would think of something…

It took Reborn ducking in to another room before the idea came.

Harry waited in anticipation for when Reborn ducked in to the toilet in this hallway

And Harry used his wand to shut the door. Harry jumped and let out an automatic giggle at the loud BANG of the door slamming. The sticking charm he had flicked out mere seconds after that initial spell splashed over the door before Reborn had a chance to charge out. Harry hopped over and crouched down next to the door, drew a nice rectangle on the floor in front of the bathroom and ignored the ominous jiggling of the handle of the door.

Something tickled at the back of Harry’s mind. Harry stilled, the little hindbrain part of his head was declaring that he missed something.

… there was no actual lock on the door, Harry realized as he looked up. There was no keyhole. And no sign of a dead bolt. (Well, if Reborn ever deigned to ask that one, Harry would have to answer the man with silence because Harry had locked a door with magic when it had no lock…) Harry turned his attention back to the floor, and then murmured the incantation for a sticking charm, swirling his wand over the invisible rectangle to do a nice area effect.

Harry scuttled back to the secure location around the bend of the hall with his wand in hand. Once settled, he raised his wand and pointed it to the bathroom door. The door was making ominous, almost breaking groans, so Harry swiftly twirled it in the customary shield movement and murmured, “finite incantatem.”

The door exploded outward, slammed in to the wall, and almost slammed back in to Reborn again as the man quickly stepped out. Reborn caught the door and held still for a moment as he looked up and down the hall, barely moving his head as he gave a wide sweep of the area. Harry pressed his grin against the back of his hand and leaned forward minutely to see what Reborn was going to do.

Seeing no one, Reborn shifted his grip on the door and lifted his right leg.

Well, he lifted his leg and left his shoe behind. Reborn stilled, right foot in the air and shoeless. The
man stared at the floor for a long moment before he lengthened the reach of his leg and stepped far outside the invisible boundary of the sticking charm.

Reborn’s left shoe remained behind as well.

Reborn turned and faced his shoes, standing in only his black ankle socks. The hitman calmly crouched down and reached out to the tongue of his shiny dress shoes. The whole scene caught wonderfully in the faint starlight coming in through the windows, it felt rather dramatic and Harry was content with that. Reborn tugged on the tug of his shoe, but the shoe remained very much stuck to the floor. Harry pressed his grin to his forearm, pressed against the wall of the hall and withholding his need to cackle obnoxiously.

“… Skull.” Reborn called as he stood up. Reborn looked down the hall to the left, and then to the right (where Harry was), before he reached up to the chameleon on his hat. Reborn murmured something as he ran a finger down the back of the chameleon, and the chameleon seemed to quiver for a moment. Reborn stepped back a little bit, until he reached a deeper shadow…

And then disappeared.

Harry gasped, but quickly slammed a hand over his mouth, turned, and sprinted off back to the kitchen. Had Reborn always been able to camouflage? Well, apparently his current memories as Skull had never noticed such a thing.

(Perhaps Reborn had never bothered to do so around Skull, because Skull was such an annoying teammate and the bluntest approach possible was the most necessary one…)

Harry ran back to the safety of the cupboard and dived back inside. Harry closed the door, and then checked the charms he had previously made on it. They were holding.

He let out a long sigh and pressed a hand to his heart.

A moment later, and he had his cell phone dialed and up to his ear. Reborn picked up the call swiftly.

“So… there is really only one way this is going to go, really,” Harry said. Harry closed his eyes and grinned to himself, confident again after that almost encounter and a moment to calm down his heart. Nothing was wrong with a little boasting right now, since he had removed Reborn of his shoes.
unscathed. The fedora would be next. “I am going to make sure you are covered in glitter and left in the dust… did you drive a car or a helicopter?”

“I do not even deign to answer that.” Reborn’s murmur was a silent ‘if you don’t know the answer I will shank you.’

Harry chuckled, “Glitter, in the dust—and me running off with your car keys.”

“Try me.”

“You think I can’t do it?” Harry grit his teeth.

“While I’ve learned to expect the unexpected from you—you won’t be able to finish that list.” Reborn sounded so sure about that.

“What pocket are your keys in?” Harry squinted at the cupboard door.

A beat of silence and then, “front left trouser pocket.”

Challenge accepted.

“Lovely—side note, I’m upstairs now. Is my suit in my room? Yunno, the one that blondie lifted from me after Britain happened?” Harry asked, tapping a finger on his cheek as he waited with baited breath for a reaction.

…. No reaction.

“… Senpai?”

“The door upstairs isn’t even open—you’re not upstairs.” Reborn hissed.
“Yes I am,” Harry fibbed—well, if it was a door that led upstairs, then Harry should have found it because he had investigated every door possible before Reborn had come along because there was no visible fucking staircase. Whoever designed that was a pain in the ass. But because there was no visible stairs, and no doors that led to a closet staircase, that really left only one pretentious conclusion. “Whose idea was it to make a hidden door?”

“Yours,” Reborn bit out.

…. “Bullshit.” Harry called.

“Ask anyone—it was your lame idea.” Reborn said, and Harry could almost hear the man rolling his eyes. Harry nudged open the cupboard door to look out.

Reborn was standing in front of a wall in the kitchen. Harry tilted his head to the side, and with his hand deep inside the cupboard, he snapped his fingers. The leather left a peculiar not-muffling, but it was still loud. Harry watched Reborn pull the phone away from his ear, look at it (Harry snapped again, just for effect and to see if Reborn would notice the spatial difference), and place it back.

“… Did you just snap at me?”

“…. No?” Harry said, waiting for Reborn to turn around.

The silencing charm was holding on the cupboard.

(With Reborn, it was probably best to expect this insane man to pull unexpected shenanigans. With the way magic was in the world, perhaps Harry was being over-cautious but he was used to the world jinxing him at the most inopportune moments…)

“It’s not lame to have a hidden door in the kitchen. It’s better than the stupid pictures of the countryside.” Harry quickly deflected, hoping that if he dropped enough clues then Reborn would actually go up the stairs, actually open the door so Harry would be able to find it. “Since when does anyone listen to what I say anyway?”

(And maybe Reborn would forget that he had called the cool hidden staircase idea ‘lame’. After all, Hogwarts was cool with all of the hidden passageways. Which Harry had used liberally.)
Harry watched as Reborn reached out to one of the framed photographs and minutely adjusted it to perfect straightness. (Note to self, tilt every picture frame he passed by… and apply a sticking charm.) “… this is a home for all of us. We all had a say—although we vetoed your more terrible suggestions. You got the secret staircase in the kitchen.”

“… what did you get?” Harry asked, honestly curious. What could Reborn want in a home?

“My own suite.” Reborn shot back.

“… huh.” Why hadn’t he expected that? “Woulda thought you’d have gotten some secret basement training facility.” Harry remarked.

“That too.” Harry could swear he saw the curve of Reborn’s grin, even in the dark.

… Harry hadn’t found a hint of this so called secret training room, and that was going to bother him because it was supposed to be a basement. Maybe he would be able to stumble upon it before he left?

“In any case, I’m looking for my suit. Is it in my room?” Harry asked again, using his hand to bang on the side of the cupboard in a mimicry of footsteps. Harry watched Reborn tense, wait, and then the hitman used a hand to push at a space of wall—and the wall popped out as if it was some IKEA door. Reborn didn’t bother to close the door as he hurried up the stairs.

“Is that why you’re here, then? For your things?” Reborn didn’t even sound breathless despite Harry knowing that he was climbing the stairs at a fast pace.

Harry ignored Reborn’s question. “Hello? Seriously. Whose room? I hope it’s mine.” Harry ended the call and rolled out of his hidey-hole. (It was less of a hiding spot and more of a secret base at this point, since he had hidden there twice…)

Harry tip-toed to the secret door and cautiously peered up the stairs. It was pitch black inside the staircase, but he could see the shape of the open door at the top, and the dark of the hall up there which was lighter than the dark of the stairs.
Before going up, Harry reached out to the photograph that Reborn had fixed and tilted it in to an impossibly sharp angle and applied the sticking charm. “Hah,” Harry mumbled to himself before he focused on the stairs. Wand in hand, Harry slowly stepped up. He placed his foot gently on the tip of each step before sliding it forward enough to have a stable footing. It was slow going, but he eventually made it to the top of the stairs. Harry stuck his head out and looked about.

The hall stretched long, and looking both ways Harry noticed that the hall hooked in to sharp corners to the left and to the right. There were no windows near Harry, but the far walls were littered in them. Seeing no Reborn in sight, Harry stepped fully in to the hallway. Harry slid his wand up his sleeve on his right arm and looked around in slow sweeps.

The floor was wood (not wood laminate, but expensive wood), the walls were cream colored with white edging. There was scenery photographs and paintings everywhere. Harry idly tilted them as he walked by the décor. The sound of shifting frames was minimal at best. Harry paused every so often to open a door. Lots of storage. A few empty rooms. Some work rooms… Harry turned the corner, paused, and took a step back to peer around.

…. All the doors in the hall had been opened.

It appeared that Reborn was finally laying his own traps.

Harry had followed Reborn to the upstairs, and it appeared that the hitman was finally taking his own steps (either that, or he was systemically searching every inch of every room looking for Skull). Harry stepped to the wall and tapped the tip of his wand against it, murmuring the heat detection spell. It was a minor area effect spell that helped when suspects were hiding in the furniture. Or hiding animals or captives in the furniture amongst other places (like the walls—it had saved Harry from several ambushes in the past… mostly. It’s reach wasn’t the best…).

Harry eyed the hall, watched the brief flares of soft reds spark and swiftly fade.

Well, Reborn wasn’t invisibly in the hall unless his Chameleon could hide his heat signature.

Harry edged to the first room and peeked in to it. It was a pretty large room, although details were hard to spot while it was dark. Harry glanced over his shoulder and up and down the hall before he shifted in to the room and edged to the side of the door so he wasn’t silhouetted in the doorway. Harry tapped his wand against the wall at his back, and froze as red sparks jumped and danced in key locations around the room.
Harry waited—nothing.

The sparks faded away to nothing.

The wizard paused before he reached out and slowly closed the door—sent a blackout spell to the windows—and flicked on the light. Harry glanced down to hospital tile and then focused on the sterile metal furniture. There was a large table space full of beakers and other such science equipment that Harry could barely even recognize a quarter of. All the liquids were very… florescent. There were a lot of electric machines that looked like microwaves and what not. These machines were scattered throughout the room where the sparks had existed.

Harry edged forward from where he had pressed himself against the wall, and crossed his arms over his chest to resist reaching out and touching all the glass vials. Who knew what would explode… Harry drifted around—the walls were white, which made the room a bit unbearable with the hospital grade fluorescent lights.

Harry eventually found a tiny fold up cot in the corner. With a large terrarium stuck under the space.

… Harry slowly tilted his head to the side. And then inched closer. There was a little bit of a track imprint inside the terrarium. Harry squinted…. Alligator?

“…. whose room is this…?” Harry grumbled to himself, and tapped his steel tipped shoes against the metal frame of the folded cot. There was no dresser. And all the cupboards had glass doors filled with who knew what substances and powders and…

Well—it was just all nope.

His suit wasn’t even in here. Just from a visual confirmation.

Harry sighed, turned off the lights, and left the room.

The next room wasn’t that much better—Harry gave it the same treatment. Heat signature check, blackout spell to the windows, close the door, and then turn on the lights. At least this room had a little bit of soul with the dark wood floors. Although the walls were a nondescript beige that matched the hall—this room was only mildly personalized. And dusty.
The sheets were high quality.

But it seemed more like a place to visit than a place to live.

Harry meandered around for a moment, checking the furniture and nooks for his suit before eventually turning to the door. He was out of the room a moment later and in the hall. That was two busts, and there was only one more door in this hallway before Harry would need to turn a corner. Which ended up being a bathroom. Harry tapped his fingers idly on the door frame for a moment.

Oodako’s tentacles tightened, and Harry stilled at the warning.

Harry’s phone vibrated in his pocket. Thankfully the jacket muffled the vibrating noise, even though Harry felt it dancing. Harry didn’t answer it as he skipped down the hall, turning the corner.

The doors were open here. Harry skipped them, and turned the other corner. It seemed that this floor was one giant square. With this turn, Harry spotted Reborn half out of a shadow, leaning against the far wall with eyes obviously fixated on the door that led to the second floor from the stairs.

Harry inched minutely closer, safe in the fact that he was free to move without his shifts caught by a keen eye. It made Harry feel more confident, and it egged him on to edge all the closer as Reborn’s eyes were fixated on a different point of the hall. Harry walked closer until he was in line with the door closest to Reborn. With that, Harry shuffled most of his body in to the doorway and settled. Harry had always been a little bit of a sneak—but it was just good sense to spy and get as much information as possible from a target when one was able to.

(Because without information, anyone could just throw fiendfyre around and accidentally burn down the only magical monument that their wife left behind—)

Harry’s phone stopped vibrating, and Reborn lowered the phone from his ear. The hitman leveled his eyes to his own phone, face expressionless, before he shifted a finger and the screen went dark. The reflection of the screen light disappeared from Reborn’s face and eyes, and the fedora’s shadow hid everything once more.

Mr. Chameleon sure was hard to read.
After a moment, Reborn stood up from where he was leaning against the wall. His socked feet soundless as he ghosted around the corner. Harry tilted his head to the side, and stepped further in to the room he was mostly hiding in. Harry eased the door shut, twisting the knob all the way before slowly pushing it in place. Harry gently released the doorknob until it had no more torque, and then let go. There, hardly a sound.

Harry casted a swift silencing charm around the room, doubling up on the door and windows with a firm ‘just in case’. Harry turned back to the door and squinted at the dubious lock built in to the round door knob (all the other door knobs had been handles! Fancy carved ones, why did he get a dingy little round one?). These things were flimsy at best, and he wished that there was a dead bolt on the door. Harry pinched two gloved fingers together and delicately turned the small lock before he turned around to look at the dark room.

A quick spell toward the window—the black out spell—had the window darkening so that the outside world was gone, although on the flip side it became as dark as a dungeon in the room. Harry shivered at the loss of sight, it did give him goose bumps now that he had slowed down. Another flick and the curtains were shut. Harry glanced down to the crack between the door and the floor before he looked to the room at large. Another bed room, so Harry summoned a pillow and placed it down against the crack.

And he finally turned the lights on.

…. *Purple.*

“… This is mine, then.” Harry stared at the dark purple walls, down to the purple carpets piled over the hardwood floor, and then to the bed spread—which was black with a red octopus print stamped over every inch of it. The octopus looked eerily like Oodako, and Harry could only assume it was a custom order.

Harry toed around the items scattered over the floor—it looked like someone had torn through here and left a whirlwind behind—and sat down on the bed tiredly. Harry unzipped his jacket and let Oodako ease out from where he had been tucked away to keep him close while he ran around.

Oodako dropped on to the bed spread and languidly spread out his tentacles.

“Glad you’re feeling relaxed,” Harry smiled at the octopus, before he turned to look at his room at large. It really looked like someone had torn through this area and Harry hoped that it wasn’t him that had done it. Because the last time he had been this messy he had been eleven and it had been the first month of living at Hogwarts before Neville had quietly come up to him and expressed his feelings
over the matter.

Besides the colors and the bed spread there wasn’t too much around to have Harry claim that this room had belonged to him as ‘Skull’. There was a cheap tall dresser with a vanity mirror on top. The top of the dresser was laden with so many beauty products and bottles that the top of the dresser had bowed in the middle—a sigh of its cheap quality.

Harry tracked the white finger prints and smudges around the sides of the mirror from having been adjusted during use. And a doodle of some terribly drawn smiley face at the bottom done in what looked to be a dark purple lipstick.

From there, there was a giant cork board next to the door that was overflowing with posters of motorcycles and stunt riders. Harry’s eyes swept along, before looking back with a frown. Something was off over there—Harry slid to his feet, ignored the clothes and empty bullet casings he scattered on the floor as he stepped over to the board. The board was custom made, and Harry had to peel back some of the posters on the left side just to find the rough frame. The board itself was longer than Harry was tall.

Harry ran his fingers over the posters, and realized that… there was a lot of purple. On the bikes, on the bike rider. And… well—there was even a photograph of a toddler sized bike rider on a proportionate bike. The toddler was helmeted, but having Oodako sitting behind the toddler gave a rather big clue to who it was.

Ooddly, there was a purple string that stretched over the picture. Three separate strings, it seemed. That started somewhere else under the posters and ended somewhere else as well. They didn’t seem meaningful, but at the same time Harry didn’t think himself-as-Skull was a crafty decorator.

Which meant that he should take a look under the posters. Because there was most likely a reason.

There was just… so much stuff. Harry let out a huff of air as he reached toward the skull shaped cork board pins and carefully extracted them after getting a firm hold of the papers they were keeping up. Harry turned, looking for a place to set them down and eventually just placed them on the floor next to the cork board. Harry collected the little skulls in his hands as he cleared the cork board real estate near the toddler photograph of himself.

“Oodako—that is such a weird curse. I’ve never heard of a curse that de-ages someone, rather than just killing them or raining misfortune on someone.” And Harry would know, since he had dropped more than his fair share of curses on people, as well as having been related to a curse breaker through marriage. Curses were meant to harm, and while there was obviously some harm done, it didn’t seem
enough to Harry just from the memories and the random photo he had found.

Harry paused when he found some of the cork, frowning as he ran the gloved fingers of the hand that wasn’t holding the pins over the edge of an index card with his cramped chicken scratch riding. Why was there writing under all the pictures? (Especially pictures of himself—why was there so many? Harry doubted he was that much of a narcissist…) Harry reached for more, and slowly emptied the board of all the posters and pictures of bike and his adult body doing stunts.

The wizard stepped back and dumped the several dozen skull pins that he had on top of his dresser in front of the oval vanity mirror. Harry watched the skulls bounce around in the spaces between the bottles and jars of beauty products for a moment before he turned to the board once more and took a few more steps back.

It was… massive. Index cards and papers and a rainbow of different colored strings connecting different cards together. The picture of himself as a toddler he left behind, because there was string over it. In the middle of the board was a card written in bold letters ‘HARRIUS POTTER QUAE EST?’

Latin.

‘WHO IS HARRY POTTER?’

All the cards were written in Latin. With better grammar than he normally did. Harry was well known for atrocious shorthand and gibberish words that only made sense after a bit of head tilting.

“… Oodako?” Harry called, looking over his shoulder to his octopus. Oodako had moved over to the edge of the bed closet to Harry, and when the octopus noticed that Harry was looking, raised a few tentacles up and toward Harry. Harry stepped over and offered an arm to the Octopus. Oodako lifted himself up and attached himself to Harry’s shoulder. And Harry felt calmer for it, having someone with him (even if they were just an octopus).

Harry stepped back to the cork board. And he noticed all of the hospital identification badges.

The names of the photos had been scratched out with some kind of knife. But Harry… he recognized the faces after a moment. They were older than he remembered—but that was Bill. Harry raised a hand to trace Bill’s face, and then he moved to the next of the same identification tags from the same hospital (the one he visited, he realized) and he discovered Fleur—terribly beautiful and having aged
And Neville. And... a girl that looked a lot like Hermione, actually. The bookish glasses and large front teeth.

A lot like Hermione… but not… not quite.

But not like Rose either. Who was that?

“Why did I scratch out their names?” Harry wrinkled his nose at himself, and brought his fingertips to his lips, pressing his lips against the glove covered digits. Harry’s eyes continued along. It didn’t take him long to realize that himself as Skull had realized something was off, too. This was very much reminiscing of old Auror data collection and analyzing. Hermione had helped modernize this a long time ago, but Harry had been initially trained to put together his evidence and cases like this.

There was a photograph of Frank. Not much younger than what Harry had seen him as. It even had ‘Frank’ written on a card next to the photograph, with ‘Carcassa?’ written on the same card. Harry had obviously met Frank before…

It was a cut photograph, too. Harry could see a pale arm of someone else in the photo. Harry reached out and slid the photograph of Frank out from its pins. Disappointingly, the photograph really was cut, not folded. Harry debated for a moment before he slid the photograph in to his pocket. The background of the photo reminded him of the outside tables at Carcassa.

Frank had even been smiling.

…. He looked friendly.

… did Frank still have friends in the Carcassa? Or had Ginny kicked them out as well once Frank defected? When had Frank defected? Harry looked around once more, eyes looking for any more clues that jumped out. He didn’t exactly have time to pick through every inch of this because Reborn would no doubt be sweeping by this room soon enough. Harry was reluctant to take down the board to bring with him. Even shrinking it had the chance to disrupt the order that it was currently standing in. He didn’t have his shoebox to safely transport it in, either. Shrunk didn’t mean it couldn’t fall apart in his pocket. His charm skills were only so good, after all.

Even with the death stick.
“I didn’t date anything.” Harry groaned as he looked for little numbers. A month or a year would have been fine. But there was nothing! Harry even pulled out a card and checked the back. There was literally nothing there for him to see. More cramped writing. But there was no order. “If I thought I was the only one who would ever see it…” Then perhaps Skull had always assumed that he would just remember the order. Or the color of the inks was a clue. But there was no code for Harry to learn, no explanation.

The fallacy of the assumption that all memories like this would stay forever.

Harry jumped slightly when he heard a door slam in the hall.

“… Let’s just get the suit, Oodako. You ready?” Harry asked, shifting his jacket so that Oodako could crawl in and he could re-zip. With the octopus ready, Harry turned to his room at large and rifled around. He checked his clothes on the floor. He checked under the blankets. In the dresser (damn, he had a lot of bike clothing), and he even checked the bed side table (damn, there were a lot of guns) and ultimately came up with nothing for wherever his suit was.

“… The last time I had it on… was after I got… I got…” Harry paused and pressed his hands to his eyes. “The blond man. What was his name again…” A haunting image of a face without eyeballs came to life behind his eyelids. “His name…” Harry trailed off. But now that he needed it, it felt like he was grasping at water and trying to hold it.

“Reborn or… Or…” Harry took in a deep breath and let it out slow. “The blond one. The only blond one. The blond Arcobaleno.” Harry said to himself more so than to Oodako. Harry rubbed at his eyes before he tilted his head back and closed his eyes.

Harry was trying his best to make some mental connection to have the name pop up.

But that wasn’t forthcoming.

So Harry breathed.

It was nice, to take just a moment to breath.

A quick glance around his room—Harry’s eyes eventually went back to the most cluttered and rather insane looking place in the room. The top of the dresser in front of the mirror. Harry stepped closer to
it and let his gaze sweep over it.

… glitter.

Harry grabbed a purple glitter lipstick and held it up to the light. Harry glanced to the vanity mirror, took in the little smudges, the mostly used up but not finished products. So much of it was that white face paste. Harry held the lipstick in his hand for a long moment before he pulled off the clear plastic cap and twisted the faux gold bottom end.

… Skull had always worn lipstick as his war paint. Harry slowly brought it closer.

*Whats the harm in trying?*

Harry kept his lips slack and pressed the purple glitter first to his bottom lip. His bottom lip shifted and the lipstick slipped and got some of the space under his lip. Harry narrowed his eyes at himself and focused. Eventually he resorted to hazy memories of Ginny sliding a lipstick back and forth and rubbing her lips together. Harry clumsily repeated the action before he pulled it away. He used a finger to try and push the small smears back in to line, and it seemed mostly alright.

“This is more glitter than purple… like a… what do you call it?” Harry cocked his head to the side. It was like one of those balls that were covered in little squares of mirror. Harry had seen it before, but he couldn’t exactly put a finger on when, where, or what it was called.

Harry eyed the lipstick and then looked for more.

… his lips didn’t feel so dry with it on. Maybe Skull had the right idea, there. His face was already a mess, what was a little lipstick in the long run? It would give everyone something else to stare at aside from the scars. Harry grabbed a few more as he spotted them and slid them in to a jacket pocket. Driving along the road without a helmet had chapped up his lips and a bit of his face, so maybe this will minimize the damage on the way back.

With that curious matter settled, Harry flicked off the lights and canceled the spell on the window. Harry kicked the pillow away from the door crack and pressed his ear to the door… and canceled the silencing charm.

Silence.
Harry unlocked the door and slowly pulled it back until he could see through the sliver of door. Harry lingered for a moment, watching the dark hall for movement and eventually coming up with nothing. Harry waited for a moment longer before he eased out of his room and quietly shut the door.

Harry shuffled over to the next door and opened up a… bathroom. A full bath. Harry eased himself inside and locked the door. A quick silencing charm and then Harry pulled out his phone again. There was only the one missed call from before.

“… Hey Reborn? Are you just waiting for me to call at this point?” Harry asked once the phone was picked up again. Silence answered him, but Harry supposed that Reborn was just using the conversation as a distraction to focus even more on Harry.

“Does it bother you that you can’t hear me?” Harry rolled his eyes at the dark mirror.

“But you are here.” Reborn smoothly answered.

“Only till I get what I want—then I’m gone.” Harry answered, head cocked to the side. Well, there was only one way to go about this now. “I want my suit—the one you guys took from me. My driving suit.” Harry extrapolated. Because if Reborn went to the suit in an attempt to thwart Harry, then Harry could find it easier. “The one I wore before I met you. It disappeared and I want it.”

“The one Colonnello found you in.” Reborn’s voice was as flat as it was soft.

“… yes.” Harry replied in kind, mentally repeating Colonnello’s name so as to fix it within his memory. He could recall the ferry ride after he returned to consciousness. After he had fixed those eyes. Harry raised a hand and pressed it against his once burned shoulder. “That’s the one.”

Harry hung up.

“Point me, Colonnello’s room.” Harry watched his wand spin and point to his left. Harry jumped out of the bathroom, keeping his wand balanced on top of his hand as he walked. The point tilted around until it led him to stand in front of the door next to his own room.

Harry could hear muffled footsteps.
“Accio, Skull’s bloody suit!” Harry whispered to himself after grasping his wand in hand. Harry muffled his gasp as a swath of cloth zoomed in to his face. Harry grappled and eventually shrank the cloth to a manageable size before shoving it down his jacket front and letting Oodako wrap it close.

That was it.

Deed was done.

Harry sprinted for the stairs. The hidden door was shut, but Harry knew it was there. Harry shoved his body against the wall space and watched it spring back with a grin. Harry shoved it all the way open.

And then Harry was flying down the stairs.

Not by choice. Something slammed in and the floor was gone from under his feet and tight bands had found purchase around his body as he fell.

Shoulder to the stair. No pain.

Hand slammed under a body. No pain.

Head contact to step. No pain.

Impact with the floor—no pain, but Harry dimly recognized he landed on something squishy more so than the hard kitchen floor as he spilled out in to the kitchen. Harry found himself scrambling, sucking in breathless gasps as his body reoriented. Or it tried.

Harry only choked briefly from the arm around his neck before Reborn shifted and breathing was easier—although the arm didn’t exactly leave. Harry kicked out his legs, and Harry felt Reborn let out a puff of air against his ear, and then the hitman shifted just enough, a knee pushing forward and pushing hard against the back of Harry’s knees.
After a moment, Harry let out a breath and let his body go limp—the ball was in Reborn’s court at this point.

“… do you even remember what senpai means?” Reborn’s breath and body was too hot, and Harry felt like he was stuck in a fever once more. Harry pressed his lips together in silence, and waited for the minutest shifts of Reborn so he can work himself free.

“Traditionally, as a direct translation to English it does mean ‘upperclassman’ or ‘superior’.” Reborn hummed to himself and he did shift. Sadly, it was only to grab on to Harry’s wrists and press them together so Reborn could extract his other arm from the awkward tangle they had been in before.

Harry bucked his body. And got his head firmly pulled in to the fold of Reborn’s arm and shoulder. The hand of the arm around his neck buried its possessive fingers hard in to Harry’s shoulder. “But the reality is so much more. It is part of another word—kohai. Tell me what it means, I know you can talk.”

Harry’s stomach twisted, “… junior…” “ Harry bit out through clenched teeth as he squirmed his wrists despite the warning, mild crush of them being tightly squeezed together.

“So, superior and junior. It doesn’t end on the definition. It is a social obligation. Senpais are obligated to watch over, guide, and take care of their underclassmen. And as a result, kohai are obligated to let themselves be taken care of.” Harry yelped when his head was dropped hard to the marble floor of the entry way, but perhaps the worst of it was that Reborn suddenly let go of every part—and the warmth left when Reborn physically flipped Harry over. The world gave a dizzy lurch, and Harry stilled.

Harry blinked and squinted his eyes up at Reborn. The hitman didn’t reach out and touch Harry, and slowly Harry pushed his palms to the floor and sat up. Harry glanced down to where Reborn’s knees were hovering over the floor as the man sat back on his heels. Harry’s eyes flicked up, and found that intense stare fixated on his face. On his lips. Harry stuck a hand in to his pocket, grasping for something distracting.

Reborn reached out—

Harry raised his unoccupied hand to counter—

-Reborn slapped Harry’s hand away, sending it out wide—
-and used the fingers of his hand to hook a thumb in the corner of Harry’s mouth and stretch it to the side. “And seriously, out of all the ones you could wear you chose this *monstrosity*?”

Harry shoved the open glitter lipstick against the white shirt of Reborn’s belly—it landed with a soft ‘pat’.

Harry froze as he watched Reborn’s dark eyes slowly track down to where the lipstick had smeared purple and glitter. Harry jerked, and the lipstick broke off the base and dropped to the floor with a soft plop.

The thumb hooking the corner of Harry’s mouth pulled wider.

“You ruined my shirt.” Reborn’s voice could be described as hollow, but Harry, swear down, could hear the dark thoughts residing there.

Harry’s automatic garbled reply was, as simply put, something that could have been done without. “I promised glitter.” Harry used his fingers and flicked the container of the lipstick up toward Reborn’s face with magic enhanced speed. When the hitman moved to catch the object, Harry grasped the hand with the thumb hooked in to his mouth and pressed the wrist where the tip of his wand was hidden—*expulso*—and sent the limb and the rest of Reborn flying back by a foot or two. Enough space for Harry to jump to his feet.

Reborn rolled to his feet smoothly, his hands untucking the folds of his suit coat to let it hang behind himself as he shifted to slowly stand up.

There they were, toe to toe without a door between them.

“You still have keys and dust on your list,” Reborn reached in to his suit breast pocket and pulled out a cigarette. Harry hummed as he watched the hitman put the death stick between his lips. As Reborn was reaching for a light, Harry held up Reborn’s car keys.

Reborn’s calm patting stilled as he focused on the key that had an engraved ‘R’ on it. As well as decoration via key chains.
“You have a thing for lizards.” Harry hummed, eyeing the little lacquered green thing that looked a lot like Reborn’s companion that was currently hanging off of Reborn’s shirt collar.

The silence stretched.

“… you are being deliberately obtuse.” Reborn remarked as he pulled a lighter. The cigarette was lit, but Reborn did not inhale. Instead, he let the smoke curl upwards next to his head like a marionette string.

“Sure thing, Mr. Chameleon.” Harry grinned as he shifted his grip from letting the keychain dangle, to grasping it firmly in his hand. “All that is left—is to leave.”

“… Mr. Chameleon?”

“Reborn is a stupid name!” Harry yelped as he dodged to the left and dived out of the kitchen. Harry grinned as he rolled to his speed, his speed unhampered as he sprinted along. Harry was almost to the door before he felt a tingle up his spine and he ducked.

… A gun bounced off the front door where Harry’s head had been. Harry skidded to a halt and turned to look to Reborn. “…. Did you just throw your gun?” Harry choked, and then jerked to the side as one one of the front entryway bowls that Reborn blurred-snatched-threw came at his way. Harry dropped down and backward rolled out of the room and in to the hallway behind himself. “I hope that one was yours—else someone is going to get angry!”

“It was yours!”

Harry laughed as he shoved off from the closest wall, and let the momentum launch him forward in a sprint. He felt fingers brush against the back of his neck before he built up his speed with a leap. “Liar! My stickers wouldn’t have made that much noise!”

Harry let himself run in to a doorway, letting the recoil bounce throw him abruptly in to the room he had chosen. Harry fell forward in to a roll, springing by a chaise lounge in a gaudy yellow (it glowed even in the moonless night!) and leaped for the window.

A flick of his wand hand—and the window shot up in time for him to dive through it.
Something grabbed his foot.

Harry’s hands caught him before he tore up his face on the ground, but the impact left him jarred. Harry yanked at his foot, even as he turned to look.

All the air left his lungs—and Harry went still.

His hands shook.

“… Luce!” The name came out like a curse. All Harry could see was her face.

(“... We’re not a great fit…”)

“No… It’s me—Yuni… Skull…”

(“...In the future…”)

Harry couldn’t breathe. Before his eyes, Luce’s face… tilted.

(“...Fate… has other plans for you…”)

A younger face.

(“That future is not for you.”)

The same blue eyes. Wider, somehow. But somehow all-knowing despite their openness.

(“That future is not for you.”)
The hair color was the same. But the cut was different. Slight, but different.

("That future is not for you.")

The unfashionable uniform hat and white coat was still achingly the same.

("That future is not for you.")

That same mark.

("That future is not for you.")

Under the left eye.

("That future is not for you.")

Reborn calmly stepped out of the window, letting out a puff of smoke as the fedora shaded his eyes. The man put his hands on his lips, weight shifting smugly to one side.

("That future is not for you.")

Not-Luce pressed her lips together. Tears glimmered under the light of the stars.

("Fate has other plans for you, Skull.")

Not-Luce’s lips moved. But Harry could only hear one thing in his ears.

("That future is not for you.")
Harry grabbed a fistful of gravel and dirt and threw it at Not-Luce’s face. A girlish shriek and a call for ‘Princess’ somehow broke through the echo of Luce in Harry’s head, even as he rolled away with his body free. Narrowly dodging Reborn along the way.

Harry threw up his right hand— _expulso_ —

He watched the leaping Reborn get thrown back like a rag doll. The man landed on his feet like a cat, somehow. Harry berated himself for standing still and watching for that safe landing, and scrambled to turn and sprint around the side of the house.

Even if just by star light, Harry spotted Reborn’s car well enough.

Harry jumped and slid over the hood of the black car to get to the driver’s side—

“ _Gwah!_ ” Harry jerked and dropped down to the ground, narrowly missing the head lock a waiting Colonello had prepared for him. Harry scrambled, moving out of Colonello’s grasping hands for a moment before sending a weak jelly legs curse to the blond. Harry rolled away as Colonello dropped face first into the gravel.

Harry kicked the man away, and watched Colonello shakily move to his feet. Able, as always.

Noticed Reborn, so close already. Just a few strides away.

Harry laughed bitterly as he slumped back against the driver side of Reborn’s car. It was sleek and black and somehow between the front door and arriving here, Harry had lost the key fob. Harry felt rather much like this was a good time to lay down and wish that Mafioso weren’t so terribly _resourceful_.

(“ _That future is not for you._ ”)

(“ _That future is not for you._ ”)

(“ _That future is not for you._ ”)

(“ _That future is not for you._ ”)
And *competent.*

… and *dedicated.*

“Why do you all keep… trying? Why can’t you just let me have what I want and let me go?” Harry asked, his voice slipping high in a whine as he petulantly raised a foot and slammed the heel of his biking boot against the side of Reborn’s driver door with force.

Reborn’s eyes narrowed in to slivers of darkness, made more dramatic by the lack of moon and a lack of outside light. Harry barred his teeth in response.

“We are elements that exist under—“ Connello started, shouldering his gun as his blue-blue eyes flitted to the side and fixated on Reborn. Harry noticed the action out of the corner of his eye, for he too was focused on Reborn. The man’s shoulders were straight and tensed. His open suit coat fluttering in the night and the silky shine of his tie was reflecting meager starlight.

He was impressive.

Harry hated it.

“—don’t *bullshit* with that! She refused me! I was never bonded to anyone!” And it still burned. It burned so, so much. The *shame-humiliation* was still so strong that Harry’s throat tightened in sympathetic remembrance. “All because of her stupid belief in fate—“ Harry cut off, biting down on his lip as he pressed hard against the car, as if that could save from Reborn’s gun shots as the man shot in his own driver’s side window.

“Don’t you *dare*—“ Reborn’s sibilant hiss was a haunting echo.

Weren’t new moons supposed to represent new beginnings? Of birth? *Rebirth*?

Then it was time he burned these bridges. Harry needed to be a new man—and the world of Mafioso was not for him. No—even the Carcassa weren’t true Mafioso.

“*Fuck* you and *fuck* your fate—!” Harry gasped as his left leg gave out from under him. Harry
dropped hard, elbow bouncing off the hard packed gravel as he went flat. Harry heard a scuffle, but could hardly pay attention to it as he reached down his left leg, inching until, midway down his thigh his fingers encountered wet warmth. Then torn jeans. And then… a hole. Slick and wet and…

Harry pressed his palms to his gunshot wound as he slowly raised his head and focused on Colonnello and Reborn grappling, Reborn’s gun on the gravel and at the midpoint between Harry and Reborn.

Harry raised a hand, and the gun smacked in to his palm.

…it felt like the heaviest thing he had ever handled.

... I’ve been shot....

Harry felt so numb. Nothing hurt.

... I’ve been....

Harry’s finger slid over the trigger, the grip so familiar that he felt like he was flying. Harry used his other hand to push himself up to stagger to his feet once more.

...shot...

No pain!

Fuck you, Reborn!

Harry pulled the trigger, and watched Reborn silently tumble back and down, silent because the roar of the gun eclipsed everything else. Watched as Colonnello stumbled to a halt, hands already up in the air and still with his back to Harry. Harry dropped the gun, eyes only for Reborn now as the man laid still on the ground.

“… Skull….” Colonnello’s voice floated through the air like smoke. Warbled through the ringing in
Harry’s ears.

Harry’s stomach hurt. The shame-humiliation-regret soured his mouth and flushed the anger right out of him.

Harry shivered and opened his mouth—

A bright white light ripped through the clearing, coinciding with the roar of Harry’s bike as the vehicle came to life and ripped forward with the showering of gravel.

“—Skull, get on!” Liliana’s voice barely rose above the sound of the bike and Harry’s own heart. Harry jumped on to the back of the bike. His arms looped around Liliana’s middle, even as his head turned to the side and looked—

Reborn was standing next to Colonnello. Both of their arms at their sides, Motionless.

“Don’t come looking. Don’t find me.” Harry spoke, and doubted they could hear him.

But actions were louder than words, weren’t they?

… he and the Arcobaleno were from different worlds.

Harry did not feel strong.

“That fate is not for you,” Harry hissed, his eyes dancing away from Reborn to the teary Not-Luce, standing just behind the elbow of a tall suited man. So small.

“Wait!” It came out high pitched and wanting—

Magic was always separate. Meant to be separate. And he was the most magical thing around.
The world turned.

And Liliana spirited him away in to the night.

Chapter End Notes

So I finally got it finished. Hot off the press.

(What's been going down IRL; me mostly regretting life choices. I've been promoted at my job with a thankful pay raise... even as the cost of paying for my health care has raised. I know I could always go cheaper... but my family has a history of cancer so on the off chance I kind of don't want to risk it... I've gained more work hours as well. Which means less writing time.And yeah... regretting everything.)

Harry has his own agency. And he makes his own choices. Time to shift back over to Frank. Don't worry, the Arcobaleno aren't done... but Harry and the Arcobaleno are just going to be dicks to each other for a bit longer.

I hope the chapter settles well. I don't think my style has changed much... but this chapter was just hard to write and I want to move on. I'm hoping to finish this story in about 7 more chapters... less if I can make it happen. I just don't want to put a number up top in case I go over. So let's see if I make it.

Once again... I appreciate and love all of your reviews. They really do motivate me and make me smile on days when I'm not my best. I'm just terrible at replying to them. But I love each and every one of them. Thank you for taking the time to stick around, read this story, and review when you have the time. (But if you need to sleep, please do that first. Because life can get tricky being sleep deprived.)

For a bit of fun, can you guess whose rooms Harry went in to upstairs? (Aside from his own as Skull, ahaha...) Just for some fun chatting.

Another P.P.S. kind of note thing... Has anyone ever gotten so angry that you immediately regret the next thing you do? I was really bad at jump rope. So when I met some new people that I hoped to be friends (when I was like, seven) right after moving to a new home, I joined in and failed so hard. I was immediately embarrassed and they laughed... so I showed off my extensive swears and made mortal enemies with my next door neighbor. I regretted it all immediately after I went home... of course I never apologized. Because I was ashamed. I've long since matured and grown up. A lot of years between then and now. But it still lingers. (Fun story times, yeah? ahaha... it's better than shooting someone. -coughs- Reborn and Harry. -coughs- )
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

The calm before the storm.

Harry is fortifying himself to finish the mess that Frank started.

He didn't plan on losing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry opened his eyes when the air stopped roaring in his ears. When his stomach stopped squeezing, he lifted his face away from where it was pressed against the back of Liliana’s neck. The bike trailed to stop—they were only a minute away from the Arcobaleno mansion when Liliana turned the bike away from the gravel road and in to the woods around the beaten path.

A few feet in, they came to a stop next to a stone that, at any other moment, Harry would have considered inconspicuous and a non-threat. Harry numbly watched Liliana kick out with her own steel toed boot to a divot in the rock. Instead of a thud-scuff, Harry heard a chime and click—and the ground ahead of them, the mulch and dead leaves and dirt… sank down like a ramp to an underground garage.

Liliana rolled them forward and in to the mouth of the earth.

The earth swallowed them. The night disappearing behind them as the earth groaned and made itself whole. They were in the pressing dark before swaths of torches hissed to life on both sides of the tunnel they were in. Harry squeezed his eyes shut briefly before he blinked them open, the sting of sudden light after complete darkness had faded swiftly and left him able to clearly see the fine details of the tunnel walls. It wasn’t packed dirt like he had first assumed… but carved stone.

Harry narrowed his eyes, focusing on the carvings as Liliana let them drift forward a bit longer.

“Liliana,” a masculine voice spoke, and Harry’s eyes darted from the stone carvings holding the torches to the waiting figure that quickly stepped over. A tall, leggy man stepped away from the wall. Decorated in a purple jumpsuit that matched the one that Liliana wore. Harry shivered, and through his numbness he could feel the tingle of the enchantments that radiated off of Liliana and this new man. It was a cloying sensation that Harry couldn’t quite put a finger on, but registered all the same.
This man had the same familiar-but-not sensation that all of the children of his friends gave him.

A man with Weasley red hair. And swarms of freckles.

“Fab,” Liliana responded in kind as she pushed out the kickstand of Harry’s bike and turned off the vehicle. Liliana tilted and looked over her shoulder to Harry. She didn’t have to open her mouth before Harry unlocked his arms. She nodded and stood, slipping away from the driver’s seat to move and stand before ‘Fab’.

Fab reached out and pressed a hand on top of Liliana’s head.

“I’m not hurt,” Liliana murmured, and Harry looked away. This moment felt… intimate. Harry’s eyes caught the bloodstain of his pants and he quickly followed it. There was a significant amount of jeans missing, considering that it was one bullet wound to the leg. Harry reached out and paused.

He turned his hand over, palm up.

The whole underside of his glove was missing. Just the pale flesh of his scarred skin. Harry blinked. And then pressed his still gloved hand to the cold blood on his thigh. He counted to ten and then raised his hand. The glove was still intact… with a bit of cooling wet on it.

“The effect is temporary,” Liliana murmured, and Harry looked up to where she was standing at his shoulder, with Fab standing behind her back.

“… I’ve never noticed it…” Harry murmured.

… this could only be the ‘aberration’ that he had been called. Harry clenched and unclenched his hands before shaking out the tingles. There was no longer a bullet hole in his thigh, and only the memory of what transpired remained.

Harry willfully turned his thoughts away.
Arcobaleno no more.

Skull no more.

Harry had burned his bridges.

“Do you have a bike?” Harry asked, his attention back on the two. Fab gave one big nod and Liliana looked to the side where, parked next to the wall of the tunnel, sat a darkly purple bike. Harry recognized it… but at the same time he couldn’t claim to have ever seen it before.

Harry focused his eyes on the tunnel. “… what is this place?”

“This is the result of The Underground project. Great grand-mum started it a long time ago. It was the first multi-race project that the Carcassa did. A series of tunnels spread throughout the underground of Italy. Reinforced and hidden through Goblin magic.” Liliana’s voice echoed against the black. The torches only lit up their small section. Everything else was a maw of black.

“… why would the Goblins…?” The back of Harry’s neck prickled, and he slowly looked over his shoulder in to the black of the tunnel behind himself. Harry couldn’t see it… but something was watching him. Liliana followed Harry’s gaze and stared in to the black as well.

“… it’s for the betterment of all. When the last of magic fades from us humans…. Who would be left but the Goblins and other magical beasts?” Liliana lowered her eyes before she shifted her weight. “… the Carcassa has access to all, but the control of it will remain with those who created it. We are safe here. We insured it.” She added for good measure before she turned and moved to sit astride her own bike. Fab slid in to place behind her.

“Come along now. We have a potion waiting.” Liliana glanced down to the hands around her middle, checking to make sure Fab was in place.

Harry spoke before she could ignite her bike.

“Albus said I had to take a dose every five hours…. ” Harry remembered that.
“Yes. They’re spaced. The potion can’t stay on the burner… and the magical qualities of the potion starts to degrade and become useless five hours after taken off the flame… but if overcooked, it just becomes a poison.” Liliana gave a little shrug, “ironically the potion that causes the enslavement is more of a gel with a shelf life that hasn’t been fully measured.”

“Why did you come?” Harry wanted to leave, the burn of multiple eyes was starting to make his adrenaline run. But he needed to know, why did Liliana come for him? Why did she come to the Arcobaleno home? “… How did you…? Why is this…?” Harryh reached up and ran his fingers through his hair, to try and brush away the tenseness.

All he got was sticky smears of his own cold blood.

Liliana shifted so that she was more firmly facing Harry. The Weasley behind her followed along in facing Harry.

“Well… for how? We kind of… regularly track you. The Carcassa usually has some kind of device in your bike—that one is currently broken. Along with a tracker in your electrics. Such as phones. That’s how we normally know where you are…” Liliana looked away, her hands off the handles of the bike and drumming on her thighs. Looking anywhere but at Harry now.

She took a breath, “as for the tunnels going here…? I dunno about that. Great-Grandmum planned the whole system with the Goblins. This was just… the closest one to you. The tunnels are enchanted for faster travel. So…”

She took another fortifying breath and looked up again.

Finally locked eyes.

“… I prefer it, when you’re in full control of your own facilities. I don’t want anyone but you, controlling you. So let’s get your system flushed. Grandma also mentioned that it’s time to shove all of your memories back in to place.” Liliana gave a nod, turned and roared her bike to life.

Harry let out a slow breath, having been holding it throughout Liliana’s answer. He looked down to where his hands were clutching his handlebars. He loosened his fingers, and then turned the key.

The feeling of silent eyes on him didn’t leave until they came out of the tunnels and in to a parking
garage. It was a very familiar place, but even then Harry couldn’t say one way or another if he had ever been here before. This aching feeling of familiarity-yet-not was starting to burn thickly in Harry’s chest, where he couldn’t tell if he was angry or upset, was starting to get annoying. Harry parked next to Liliana, and once their engines were turned off, silence rang in the garage. Harry sighed and leaned forward until he could press his forehead against a handle bar.

The world was just…

… Harry was tired. He ached. He felt so stretched thin and weak.

“… Grandpa is waiting. And then Grandma Giglio should have set up by then,” Liliana’s voice was soft-loud, and Harry just nodded. After a moment, Harry shifted and slid off the bike and to his feet. He glanced down to his still bloody thigh.

… to vanish or not to vanish?

(The growing, spiteful little part of Harry wanted it to remain. Look at what Reborn had done! .... A larger, more mournful part of himself wanted it gone. Wanted to erase what he had done in return.)

Harry tapped his wand to the mess, and the blood was magic’d away.

… the guilt didn’t disappear with the blood.

Harry took off the gloves he had, and shoved them in to a pocket of his jeans. His hands were very much bare to the world now, but it was better than wearing one glove without a palm covering. “Let’s go.” Harry looked to Liliana, and she nodded and turned, and took point of their group. Harry looked to ‘Fab’, who was also looking at Harry. Specifically looking down from his superior height that the Weasley family tended to have.

“… ’ello.”

“… Ciao.”

Harry nodded, and looked ahead to the back of Liliana’s head. There was truly nothing to say after
that, so Harry let the silence thicken. The comforting shifts of Oodako against his stomach was soothing enough. But the movements were getting more agitated the longer they walked, so Harry unzipped his jacket, and Oodako flowed out to come to settle around Harry’s neck. Harry glanced down, and with his fingers he gently petted the top of the octopus’ head.

It was perhaps because the octopus was so different from an owl that Harry hadn’t rebelled at his very presence.

(He had never been able to use an owl again. Mailing letters was something he could always press other people to do. And a bit of charm work had mail that was meant for him to go to a certain location for pick up. Urgent matters were always sent over Patronus anyway…)

The garage was underground, but a quick bit of stairs and they were back under the night sky. Clouds were rolling in, and soon the stars would be blocked from view. Just a big blanket of black around the earth. Harry blinked up to the sky once, before he focused on the earth once more. He had better things to focus on than the sky, no matter how his eyes naturally sought the stars that he had spent years studying.

The walk back to the medical infirmary was swift. And Liliana and ‘Fab’ left him at the doors. Harry watched them walk away until they turned the corner of the hall. Harry stayed still for a little longer before he pushed the door and slipped inside.

There was Albus, hunched over the small desk and writing with a muggle pen. A dip pen, if Harry wasn’t mistaken. Better than a quill, but at the same time similar enough. Albus looked up at Harry’s approach, and he gave a tired smile.

“I’ve also got some scar reduction cream,” Albus added as he set his fancy pen in its designated holder. The old man creaked as he got his legs under himself. “If there is anything you don’t want to get permanently sweat stained, I suggest you take it off.” Harry nodded and turned to the bed that he had previously stayed a night in, and tossed his jacket there, as well as his old, folded jumpsuit that had still been tucked inside.

“… lovely. Thanks.”

“We have a three day regimen. A dosage every five hours. I’ll give you 15 dosages,” Albus was mostly talking to himself as he pulled on leather gloves—the scale pattern looked very much like a Ridgeback—and picked up a glass vial that was sitting in a glass stand.
The potion looked like water. It was clear.

“… what are the side effects?” Harry asked as he took a seat on the bed. Oodako dropped down on to Harry’s discarded jacket and wrapped himself up in the folds until Harry couldn’t even see a hint of red anymore.

“Discolored and staining sweat—it’ll be an unattractive orange.” Albus started, shifting over to stand before Harry. “Nausea. Feverish. Some have reported mild hallucinations.”

“That… sounds terrible.” Harry grimaced.

“It’s worth the end effects.” Albus gave a shrug and then uncorked the vial.

It smelled… like nothing.

Harry accepted the vial—it was still warm—and he downed the half mouthful of potion. Harry silently handed back the vial, and ran his tongue over his teeth. It felt like he hadn’t brushed his teeth in days, everything getting thickly fuzzy. But he wasn’t sure if that was the potion or the fact that he hadn’t been keeping up with dental health exactly.

Albus puttered around for a bit before coming back with a jar. Harry blinked.

“I used that one—it might have been expired.” Harry said, eyes tracing the jar. Albus stilled, and Harry looked up.

“… you used an expired medicine.” Well, that flat tone was familiar, but at the same time it had never been directly at Harry before. Once again, it was the return of that familiar-yet-not sensation.

“…. Yeah.” Harry admitted as Albus easily waited him out with the patience of a father long used to dealing with teenagers.

Albus let out a big sigh, “where is the container?”
“In the trunk… want me to get it?”

“… please.”

Harry paused before he stood. “Um.. how long before the effects of the potion come in to play?” Because the side effects did not sound fun, and traveling while they occurred was doubly not fun sounding.

“Is your stomach empty or full?” Albus asked as he shifted to sit down again.

“Um… not that empty?” Harry offered, and Albus cracked a smile and waved Harry along. Harry hopped forward and took off at a jog. The halls were empty, but it was also night time. The silencing spell on his boots was still in effect, and it was eerie running without the sound of thudding along.

It was why, when Harry drew up to a cracked door spilling light in to the dark of the hall… he slowed down. Paused, and then crept closer.

He trusted his family.

Truly, he did.

Harry peered inside, and spotted Liliana sitting before Lily and James in a cozy looking meeting room.

“—shot him. I mean, I remember great-grandmum talking about the Arcobaleno, but I never thought the stories of them being such dicks would be, well… so accurate.” Liliana grumbled before she blew against the steam of what Harry thought was coffee when he squinted. Harry could see her profile, with Fab leaning against the back of the couch behind her. Lily was in the small couch opposite. And James was in a chair, Harry could only see the back of his head.

“You saw him when he was with Fon, right?” Lily asked.

“Yeah—he seemed nice enough I suppose. Didn’t put hands on great-grandpa or anything.” Liliana said before she took a sip.
“His leg—was it alright?” Lily glanced to James, and then focused on Liliana once more.

“Yes. Although there was that byproduct. It looked like acid burned at his pants, and glove. I have a little deterioration on my jacket as well. Have we figured out why the deterioration effects only occur sometimes?” Liliana leaned forward and set her cup on the coffee table in front of herself. Well, Harry assumed it was a coffee table, considering that James’ head was a bit in the way.

James shook his head, “no… we could talk to dad about it tomorrow… since now he’ll be able to comprehend and work with us to find out the extent of the aberration.”

“Like how when he fell at his motor cross event…” Lily trailed off.

Liliana gave a full body shiver, “that was terrifying. I wish we had gotten our hands on that bike—someone obviously tampered with it.”

“The teams still haven’t located it?” James cocked his head to the side.

“No, all reports are negative. Even the specially trained niffler team hasn’t had any luck. At this point, it’s looking more like Arcobaleno work than the other Mafioso.” Liliana reached up and ruffled her hair in a familiar gesture. Harry realized it was familiar as soon as he reached up to ruffle his own.

“Wait, you think—?” Lily was frowning.

“No. The Arcobaleno aren’t interested in tampering with Skull’s bike. It’s just that there was no magic located on the scene outside of a few creatures. But they were interviewed and documented. The beast masters infiltrated most of the other Mafioso famiglia and have located nothing so far. I poked around at the Arcobaleno mansion to look for it—didn’t find it. But I didn’t really get a chance to explore.” Liliana drummed her fingers on her knees.

They really were talking about him. And surprisingly… it wasn’t causing a terrible feeling in Harry’s stomach. No, they were talking about his health. His care. And were going to talk to him about it tomorrow. They were probably very used to speaking about him like this, considering his years where he was technically incapacitated as a wizard…
That did raise the question of what happened to his wrecked bike, though.

But if the other Arcobaleno had it… did it really matter? He was here and now.

Liliana had gone in to the Arcobaleno house, though? Harry paused, and blithely remembered that he had left his motorcycle keys in his bowl. She must have grabbed them. Harry reached for his jacket pocket, and remembered that he had left his jacket with Albus. And Oodako. He should probably get going. Harry took a step back.

What he heard made him pause.

“Liliana, have you had any contact with Frank?” James’ voice was as clinically clear of emotion as possible. And it swiftly made Harry hesitate to leave.

“… why would you ask me that?” Harry could barely hear Liliana’s voice. Harry shifted and stepped forward again. Hovering close to the door to peer inside. Liliana had sunk low on the couch, arms firmly crossed over her chest.

“You know why. Tell us,” Lily’s voice was certainly harder.

Liliana’s face twisted, a hand raising up as if to grab on to her necklace, “no,” she bit out. Her voice deepening darkly as she lifted her lips to flash her teeth. “No, he hasn’t done a thing.”

“Good. You know the protocol.”

_The protocol?_

“… I do.”

_What was this?_

“Amazing. We wouldn’t want another slip up, after all. Thank you for your hard work, sweetie. Finish your drink before you go to bed. I’m going to go visit dad, now.” Lily smiled kindly at Liliana
as she stood up. James nodded, raising a hand toward Lily in farewell. Liliana didn’t sit up, and merely squinted her eyes at the cup Harry couldn’t see from the crack in the door.

Lily was moving toward the door.

…. Harry could reveal himself. Demand what was going on. Harry shivered.

He would talk to Liliana, tomorrow.

He would… ask her if she had gone inside the mansion. And see if she would be truthful. And from there… maybe find out more about the current state of things.

*(Do I really know my children?)*

Harry hopped back and sprinted down the hall and out of sight. He arrived soon to his room, finding it exactly as he left it. Hovering in the doorway, however, Harry paused briefly before he pulled out his wand. Well, the Elder wand. A few spells found nothing dangerous. But Harry hadn’t set down detection wards before he had left, either.

He took a moment to set up those wards now. To make this a safe space. It took less than five minutes. He snatched up the still shrunken trunk and left.

Stepping in to the medical room again found Albus and Lily chatting side by side in matching chairs.

“Dad, what took you so long?” Albus asked, although he had yet to pull himself to his feet.

Harry gave a small shrug and looked down at his pants—and lied.

“I considered getting a change… but you mentioned staining sweat—so I just came back.” Harry juggled the trunk between his hands to hide the small shake he felt run thought his arms.

Albus gave a sympathetic nod. “I’m sure we can find some scrubs? Let’s see the scar reduction.” Albus gestured to the trunk before starting his slower process of standing up from his chair. Lily
merely spread the blanket firmly over her legs and remained sitting.

“I’m glad you’re home, daddy.” Lily added.

Harry gave a smile—but he felt disconnected. Looking at Lily’s pleasantly smiling face… she seemed like a kindly old lady. But before, back at the tables outside… and even at that meeting room with Liliana—it struck Harry hard that his children really were Mafioso. More so than he could recall himself being as Skull. These were the people that… well…

Harry set the trunk on the ground and expanded it with a tap of his wand. It took but a moment before he had the jar in his hands and held it out to Albus. Albus pulled on some rubber examination gloves before he held out his hands.

Harry paused and didn’t hand the jar over.

“… why are you…?”

“… I have a suspicion, dad.” Albus admitted, and shuffled a little closer. Harry set the jar in to Albus’ waiting hands, and he watched his son open the jar and peer inside. It looked the same to Harry, the same as any old scar reduction cream. Albus didn’t allow for skin contact as he squinted, wafted and sniffed and held the jar up to the light. Eventually he brought the jar to the desk. Harry glanced once to Lily, but only got a shrug from her.

Harry peered over Albus shoulder and watched his son rub a paper along the inside of the jar, and then place it in an open vial on the desk. From there it was the slow shuffle to the cupboards before Albus came back with a clear jar of colorless liquid. He used a clear glass dropper with a white rubber end to add in some drops.

It only took a second before the paper inside turned the same bright orange that had marked up Harry’s face, hands, and stomach.


Harry hadn’t touched his stomach with the scar reduction cream. But his face and hands…?
“… No.” Harry couldn’t help for that to come out as it finally clicked.

“… Yes.” Albus countered gently as he sealed the jar, and then the vial. He placed them in a glass box to the side and then expertly pulled his gloves off and dropped them in to a hazard bin. “An overdose has never been recorded, but dad… if you weren’t like you are, you probably would have overdosed yourself with that bit.”

Harry couldn’t believe it. Couldn’t believe that he had dosed himself as well as what Frank had obviously done. Had rubbed it in to his own skin with his own hands. Slowly, Harry shifted and sat down on the bed. A second later and Oodako was attached to his neck and hanging down his front.

“It’s all good now, though. We have the counter potion. You’ll be right as rain soon.” Albus added, his hands up in a placating gesture and his voice still oh so soft. Harry took several deep breaths, and looked away from Lily as the realization fully sunk in to her then.

“I noticed that you had a lot of potions in there dad. Were there any you used besides that one?” Albus inquired.

…. Yes. There had been. “Pain potion. Nerve booster. Burn paste… Potter pupil restorer?” Harry hesitated to state that last one.

Albus looked alarmed, “your eyes…?”

“No, not me. Someone else…” Harry interrupted, and watched the alarm swiftly fade. Albus hesitated but nodded, and then gave a small smile. Harry stood with minimal shake and checked inside the trunk. The only jar he could find inside was the Potter Pupil Restorer, and Harry listened as he pulled that out and shrunk the trunk once more.

“That was the last intensive potion I made before we realized the toll magic had on our bodies… I’m glad it helped someone. But, have you been monitoring them? The potion can have side effects…” Albus trailed off, and matched Harry’s grimace at Harry’s negative head shake.

“If you get the time, check their blood pressure, vision… if they haven’t equalized out yet and are still getting headaches…” Albus trailed as he shuffled along. And eventually produced another vial. He placed it in Harry’s hand with a smile. “I like to call this a brain booster—common side effect is too perfect vision in humans. And we aren’t made to handle so much details. It can cause migraines. This does a permanent brain change… to bring the brain up to speed with superior eyes. Although if
they don’t need it, don’t give it to them.” Albus warned, patted Harry’s hand and eased back a little.

Harry offered the Potter Pupil Restorer and let Albus handle that. Harry nodded his mute agreement, and handed the vial off to Oodako, who dropped and moved to spread out over Harry’s jacket once more. Sliding the vial in to a pocket.

“Dad, would you be up to sorting your memories out now… or taking a rest?” Lily offered from her seat.

…I perhaps…

“I think a bit of rest will do me good. I’ll be here for the next three days, won’t I?” Harry asked, looking to Albus.

“You can come and go—just need a dosage every five hours.” Albus reminded Harry as he pulled on a new set of gloves, and a jar from the cupboards was soon in his hands. Albus paused before he opened it and offered Harry to look inside. It was half used. “Scar reduction… the cream you put on was mixed with the dragon potion. Scar reduction cream doesn’t take well to being mixed with anything. It was more… ah, wet, than this.” Albus explained as he scooped a dollop on to his finger and rubbed the mixture. It was grainy. Harry remembered the other one being shiny and more gel like.

“… right…” Harry murmured, and didn’t resist as Albus placed the cream to his face. Albus reached around with his cream free hand and supported the back of Harry’s head before he started even circles of rubbing the reduction cream in to Harry’s face.

“… did you decide if you want the stones removed?” Albus asked, using conversation to ease away the quiet of the room.

“… we didn’t talk about it—but I’d like them gone…” Harry murmured.

A pause, and then Lily spoke up. “… we’d have to entreat some creatures for help, then.”

Harry reached out and paused Albus’ hand, and looked over his son’s shoulder to Lily. At the silent look, Lily spoke again. “… it took an astronomical amount of magic to get them in to you, dad. One of the casters died back then from magical pull. We don’t have nearly the strength for it now. Our
best bet would be to go to the Goblins… but they’re not the most accepting when it comes to you.” Lily’s lips twisted down in a deep frown at the end, and Harry couldn’t help but respond in kind, but let Albus continue on.

“… can they be used against me?” Harry whispered.

“… Yes.” Albus answered back.

Then… Harry needed to figure out a way to remove them himself. Harry glanced up to Albus before he closed his eyes. He needed to do it himself, so as to not worry his children. They didn’t need that on their plates right now. Harry could talk to Liliana, he imagined that she would be able and willing to help. Or at least help him along.

She had stated it before—she preferred it when the only person controlling Harry was Harry.

The conversation died, and remained so as Albus spread the reduction cream over Harry’s face. With it evenly spread, Albus pulled back. Harry let out a sigh and laid back, letting his legs dangle off the side of the bed. Harry felt Oodako shift to sit on his stomach, but didn’t bother to open his eyes. Harry hadn’t realized how worn out he felt until—

Harry blinked and then squinted at the morning light. There was a hand on his shoulder. “Here dad, second dose.” A vial was pressed to Harry’s lips, and there was a hand under his neck to elevate his head. Harry opened his mouth, swallowed the potion, and closed his eyes again. He drifted off soon enough.

When Albus woke him up for the third dose… this time, Harry felt very much awake. He sat up and looked around. The infirmary was empty except for him and Albus. Harry downed the small bit of potion and handed the vial back. “I’m going to head out for a bit… be back in five hours?” Harry offered, pulling out his phone to check the battery and time. It was 10 in the morning, he would have to be back 15, then.

The phone had very low battery.

And roughly twenty missed calls.

“Yes… but before you go, dad, I…” Albus paused, took a deep breath and then let it out slow.
Albus set the empty vial on the desk, pulled off the gloves, and then dug in to his pocket. “Open your hands…”

Harry shifted and cupped his hands together.

Numbly, Harry watched the resurrection stone drop in to his scarred palms.

“… where did you get this?” Harry whispered.

“Mum gave them to us. The stone. The wand… and the cloak. I was given the stone…” The middle child, the stone. Why did Ginny follow the story? How did she even know about the stone? Where had she even found it? He had never told her where he had left it. That he had ever hair it. He had never…

Harry lifted his eyes from the stone, and stared at his son. “Why… do you have it?”

“… I think it’s because mum knew I’d never try to use it. All of your hollows—they don’t work. Not for any of us.” Albus offered, and Harry noticed that his wrinkles were particularly deep today as they pulled around his eyes.

“Where are the others?” The question pulled out of Harry before he could think otherwise.

“James had the wand… before Longbottom stole it.” Albus glanced to where Harry kept the wand, where it was poking out of his sleeve. “Lily has the cloak.” All of the Potter children had held a hollow.

“But wait… Frank—he is young. Isn’t he a…?”

“Mud? No, a Squib. One of the lucky few for his age.”

“Why the wand…? Why can he use magic now?”

“He is burning the souls and lives of creatures to fuel it. Normal muggles still can’t use such a thing
—but those of us who are still witches and wizards and squibs… we can still burn others for our greed.” Albus spoke softly, reaching out and letting his fingers run over the sheet of the bed, straightening it out more as a fidget than as actual work.

Harry clutched the stone in one hand, hiding it in a fist. He didn’t look up, “why are you giving me this?”

“Dad… magic is dead. And no one knows why, not really. We have theories upon theories, but it doesn’t change the fact that magic is dead… Except for you.” Harry didn’t look up, not even when Albus’s chilled fingers reached out and cupped the side of Harry’s face. A little bit of pressure, and Albus waited.

Harry looked up.

“It seems right to me—and perhaps you can find some use for it?” Albus smiled, thin lips going even paler with the pull of emotion.

“… do you think it’s dead or dying, Albus?” Harry asked.

“It’s like a white rhino. Still technically there, but everyone knows there is no future in sight unless drastic measures are taken.” Albus offered, finding an appropriate metaphor to express himself.

“… is it worth saving?” Harry asked. “If someone found a drastic measure, do you think it’d be worth it?”

“I think… everything has a time, dad.” Albus offered, using both hands to cup Harry’s face when Harry shifted to look away.

“… what about me? When was my time?” It slipped out before Harry could stop it. Something about this situation was wrong. And it was easy for Harry to pinpoint exactly what it was. Harry was Albus’s father. But here they were, an old man and a young man. With the son stopping his father from looking away… and the father looking to the son for his answers. It was all so wrong.

Albus hummed, “well, perhaps it’s not so set in the past? Perhaps your time is now? I think mum would enjoy knowing you’ve made the best of it.” Albus’s wrinkles seemed to lessen, and he leaned in closer.
“… what should I do?” Harry whispered.

“Well, what do you want to do?” Albus smiled, old and wise like his namesake. “You have time. Me, on the other hand… I’m running out. I can feel it. So, dad… please accept this stone and my burden.”

Harry’s arms came up without thought, reaching out and wrapping gently around Albus’ middle and pulling his son in to a firm hug. Harry closed his eyes and breathed. Albus smelled like medicine and hospitals. He was so thin but so big. Harry gave a little squeeze, and imagined himself an old man, holding on to his young son and reveling in old age as he had always planned to.

Harry felt when Albus’ arms came up and wrapped around his shoulders.

“I love you.” Harry choked.

Albus squeezed Harry’s shoulders. “I’ve loved you. Every day.” Albus murmured in return.

Albus leaned back, and Harry let him go. Harry’s nose felt clogged, and his eyes felt tight as he lifted his face and looked up to his son. Albus smiled, leaned down and pressed his dry lips to Harry’s forehead.

“I missed everything.” Harry whispered.

“A lot—but not everything, dad.” Albus offered as he shifted over and sat next to Harry on the bed. He reached out, and Harry took the offered hand with his own empty one. Harry made sure to be gentle with how he held on. Even Albus’ skin felt thin. His bones felt delicate. Albus was like a small bird, feeling light as air with the knowledge that too much pressure would crush him.

“I didn’t get to see you grow old…” The sting of tears burned. “I missed everyone growing old. I’ve been…” I’ve been left behind.

The tears were dripping down, leaving burning trails over his face.
“But didn’t you?” Albus asked, his other hand reaching over and patting the top of Harry’s hand. “You’ve been with us for years… not as you are. But in some form. You’ve watched us age. We’ve had birthday parties together. Not as father and son… but as members of the Carcassa. You’ve been our protector, and we’ve protected you in kind.”

“… I wasn’t there to protect everyone… Teddy…” It still hurt. The files.

Albus’ hand within Harry’s own flexed, relaxed, and then gripped back.

“… He made his choice, dad. He remained behind… we lost him to the unspeakables, as well as his whole squad.” Albus’ voice was soft.

“… His squad?” Harry looked up from the floor and to Albus.

“… Yes. Not all of them were killed, not all were replaced… many were memory charmed and altered if it was compatible. And then there are the dragons…” Albus trailed off in to silence.

“… they have dragons?” Harry asked.

“Dragons? Ah, no. Not as you think. No, the dragon tamers can’t contain them. We have squads of actual dragons under the dragon potion. But most of them have run wild in Russia and China, now. Their intelligence has jumped astronomically, so there haven’t been any problems on that end…” Albus went clearly off tangent, and Harry wondered if his children realized how much they sounded like the International Confederation of Wizards.

So knowledgeable, controlling, and restrictive.

“Albus—if we’re not talking about the beasts… what do you mean when you say ‘dragons’?” Harry’s stomach squeezed.

“… Well, the research on the squibs and muds after magic began to fail… It didn’t produce the results that they wanted. But there were some results. We didn’t realize what was happening… Scorpius was investigating… when he disappeared. They were trying to find a way to combine the souls of beasts with a wizard so as to not burn our own lifespans. The results were… Horrific.” Albus’s voice started strong, but slowly weakened and became faint near the end. Harry remembered Scorpius.
“… Scorpius was a nice boy.” Harry offered.

“He was a good man… a young man.” It didn’t need to be stated that Scorpius hadn’t gotten much older than that, than being a ‘young man’.

“They’ve created new creatures—we’ve called them dragons. But they’re more like chimeras.” Albus offered, and then grimaced, “well, ‘chimera’ is a more appropriate name, considered that they are indeed omens for disasters. The way they’ve been enchanted… They’ve all been soaked in the dragon potion—we’ve coded them as ‘dragons’ because of their tendency to be enchanted to produce a flame similar to fiendfyre.”

“So you mean to say… Scorpius was…?” Harry trailed.

“I’ve seen him—the dragon with his face…. And I don’t have the strength to put him to rest.” Albus confessed as his eyes dipped to their hands. “… I want to lay him in a grave, and let him have his peace. But I… I waited too long. I always meant to wrangle myself together and use what magic I could to put him down… but… but…”

But he hadn’t been able to do it.

“But I was too weak. And now I’m too old.” Albus’ twisted bitterly and let out a sigh.

“You’re not weak, Albus.” Harry reached out and wrapped his arms around Albus’ shoulders and held on to his son. Albus shifted, and curled in to Harry and let his father hold him. Harry was glad to take the weight.

“… I accept.” Harry murmured in to Albus’ thin hair. He accepted the stone… and Scorpius.

“I’m sorry.” Albus whispered.

“I’m not.” Harry tipped his head back and closed his eyes—and held on tighter to Albus.
After all, Harry had spent most of his life saving people. What was one more, in the long run?

(It’s always one more. One more person. One more life. One more… and more… and more…)  

They stayed there, together, until it was time for Harry’s next dose. After the potion, Harry kissed Albus’s forehead and bid his son to rest. Albus agreed, and they parted. “Be back by 20, okay?” Harry agreed, accepted a bit of tissues and left with Oodako.

Harry carried his jumpsuit and jacket to his room. Harry dropped his jacket on the bed, set Oodako in his aquarium, and focused on the jumpsuit. The fruit of his labor. Harry let his fingers run over the burned shoulder, recalling the hard burn that was there.

…. Wait.

Harry set the suit down and tugged off his own shirt to look at the shoulder that had been burned. Harry poked the flesh there—it didn’t scar. Sure, Harry had other scars, but there was no burn scar. No pull of tissue. Harry frowned at his shoulder and then looked back to his suit.

Well, he’d give this to Liliana, then. Harry shifted through his zippered pockets and any other crevices he could find. Two bullet shells, a few coins, an old gum wrapper and—

Harry hissed and pulled his hand out of his pocket.

Right—the third prophecy. The one that he had put in his pocket. The one that had shattered. Harry checked his fingertips. There were three dots of blood that he wiped away. No cuts. Harry took a deep breath and let it out, then shivered.

Harry used the back of his hand to wipe the sweat from his forehead, and wrinkled his nose at the orange tint of his skin.

Harry left the suit on the bed and took a long shower. He let his mind go static and just let the hot water soothe him. All too soon, his skin wrinkled up like unappetizing prunes. He turned the still hot water off and focused on his clean up. Harry left his dirty clothes in the bathroom, and dug around the dresser until he found a ratty shirt and jeans that had obviously been worn to the point of near decay. It would be fine to trash them afterward. (Because looking at the shirt he had already pulled off, there were smears of orange at the armpits and along the small of the back.) As it was, shortly
after pulling on the new clothes Harry felt the sweat pooling in the small of his back, and sticking his dark shirt to his skin.

A glance to the clock on the wall showed he still had several hours.

Harry ran his fingers over his face with a frown. The scars didn’t appear to be diminished in any way, despite the application of scar reduction. Was there a time limit of having a scar where it would no longer work? Not only that… but were the stones forcing them there? They were made with magic—would it be like his lightning?

Harry groaned and dropped face first on the bed next to his jumpsuit. He wasn’t vain! He just…

He just… wanted to be Harry. Just Harry.

Not Skull.

Not the boy-who-lived.

Not the man with the Glasgow grin.

Harry’s phone vibrated angrily, clattering loudly on the bedside table. Harry lifted his head and blinked at it. Who would be calling him? He had just seen Albus and it wasn’t time for the next dose.

Maybe… Liliana.

Harry raised a hand, paused, and then stood up. He’d rather not be lazy. He swiftly shuffled to the phone and snatched it up. His eyes ran over the number, paused, and then he did it again. Let his eyes slowly take in the number that blazed across his screen. Harry stayed still and let it ring out.

The screen was dark for only a moment.

And then it flashed again.
And again.

And again.

Harry stared at the screen and watched the continual calls from multiple numbers. He only recognized a handful of them. And the familiar ones popped up the most. Harry slowly moved and sat down on the bed.

… what the fuck did they think they were doing?

What were they thinking they’d accomplish?

When Colonnello’s number popped up, though… Albus’s words flashed to the forefront of his mind (quicker than it would have weeks ago) and Harry selected the ‘accept call’ button without thinking it through. And once he did it, Harry froze. He started at the screen with the accepted call button.

Slowly, Harry brought the phone up to his ear.

“…. So. Have you had any headaches?” Harry popped the question, because he was already this far.

“… What. The. Fuck.” Colonnello hissed.

Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath and let it out. “… Headaches? Migraines?”

“I can’t even…” An explosive sigh. “How’s the leg?”

“… fine.” Well, this was going to be pleasant. Cue sarcasm.

“You’re at the Carcassa base, right?”
“… No.”

“I’m outside.”

Harry reached up and rubbed his face, “… Bullshit. I’m hallucinating. This isn’t happening.”

“Why do you think you’re hallucinating?” Colonnello asked, his voice creeping out of the phone in a higher tone. Panicked. Agitated but weary.

Harry blinked his eyes up at the ceiling. He popped to his feet and took his wand in to hand. “You’re a hallucination, figure it out.”

“I’m not a hallucination!” Colonnello yelled. Harry took the phone away with a grimace before he put it back.

“You might as well be! If you’re not having headaches, then GOOD-B—“

“Wait, wait, wait! Migraines! Yes. Me. Don’t go.”

“… you’re lying.” Harry hissed.

“I’m not. I’m not. Don’t hang up.”

“What do you want Colonnello? I cut my ties. I’m not an Arcobaleno.” Harry murmured as he looked around for any slip on shoes and came up with nothing. So he sat down and spelled his boots on.

“… wishful thinking doesn’t make you not an Arcobaleno.” Colonnello said. That was familiar. Harry had heard that sentence before. Perhaps not said in the exact same way, or with the same tone, but the phrasing was familiar. It ached in his bones.

Harry tapped his toes once he was on his feet to settle his shoes, and he strode from his room. “It does now.”
Harry heard the sigh that Colonnello let out. “You’re being such a pain!”

“Because I’m not rolling over and letting you bully me?” Harry flinched at the bitter hiss that came out as. That had been his voice, but the sheer presence of barely repressed rage was shocking even to him.

The silence didn’t stay. “Skull…”

“That’s not me.”

“… what happened to you?”

“Nothing!” Harry didn’t want to yell, but he did. He stopped at the entrance of the home of the Carcassa founders, and yelled at the phone in his hand. “Nothing happened to me!” Which was true yet not true. Everything had happened, but with the absence of the memories it didn’t feel like much at all. Being told what happened, reading about it, it was not the same as having lived it.

No, Harry was as he was. At the core of himself, had he even changed the slightest?

“It did! Whatever those bastards did!” Colonnello yelled back.

“I happened to me.” Harry cut in sharply.

“… what?”

“I happened. Me. The person I was before I was Skull. I’m alive. I was first. The life of Skull does not get to dictate my life! He’s dead! He’s dead and you have to accept it!”

“Skull—wait—“

Harry hadn’t realized this had been eating him up inside. It spontaneously came forth, and like much
of his life he kept with it. He needed to get this out. He needed to end this Arcobaleno nonsense. “I
am my own master, and I bow to no organization!”

Colonnello was not like Reborn. No, he didn’t lay in wait to counter Harry’s words when given the
chance with a superior argument. No, Colonnello yelled right back and did his damn best to yell over
Harry.

Too bad Harry yelled right back. He stopped listening and yelled louder as he marched toward the
gate.

“I don’t care! I don’t care, I don’t care, I don’t care! I am not Arcobaleno. I am not Mafioso! I am a
police man! I have a wife and children! I have a family, and I don’t need some half baked
organization trampling over my life and thinking they can control me!”

“Skull, we’re not—“

“No one but me decides what I do!”

“S-skull...”

“And you! You!” Harry snarled, “you abusive bastard! Some senpai you turned out to be! You…. You are not at the gate.” Harry blinked as he came to a stop in front of the gates of the Carcassa
compound. The rage fled like a cold splash of water to the face and Harry was left blinking at the
gate, glancing to the lookout, and then back to the gate.

“… Yes, I am.”

“No, you’re fucking not. I’m at the gates now.” Harry hissed.

“… You’re fucking kidding me. No. We’ve tailed you to this compound before!” Harry could swear
he was hearing murmuring of other talking voices on the other line.

Harry moved away from the gate. Toward the woods. Toward the grove of trees.
Harry heard voices, faint, and pressed the phone more firmly to his ear. “—can’t track the signal—“ mixed with, “—the compound is empty—“ and Harry felt like destroying the cell phone in his grip.

“… You don’t really have any migraines, do you?” Harry murmured, seconds away from hysteria. The Acrobalo had hadn’t given up, have they? They were gathered as a group, Harry could hear it.

… they never listened to Skull. Why would they listen to Harry?

“… I do.” Colonello murmured back. Harry couldn’t tell if it was a lie.

“. I’m just hallucinating this…” Harry glanced up the trees as he walked further in.

“You’re not! Skull—!”

“Harry! My name is Harry Potter and I exist!”

“… but do you really? We found the board. In your room. Are you sure you didn’t just make that name up? Did they torture you? Break you? I mean, we all know you’re the weakest—“

Harry bit the inside of his cheek and hung up. And then turned the phone off.

“… You’re such a dick, Colonello.” Harry sighed. And shoved the phone in to his pocket. “Goodbye. Fuck off.” Harry grumbled to himself as he hurried along. He found the gazebo, and dropped down on to a still useable bench. Harry closed his eyes and let himself relax.

He really was so twisted up about Skull, wasn’t he? Harry opened his eyes and stared up at the battered roof of the gazebo. Harry had a feeling that the twisted up feeling would never really go away. Perhaps Harry should hold a funeral and let the ghost of Skull take a final rest. That man had lived long enough, hadn’t he? Didn’t Harry get a chance?

Harry stuck his hands in his pockets and closed his eyes.
Harry counted his breaths, and once he got to 20 exhales he opened his eyes and stood up.

Something warm in his hand.

Harry pulled his hands out of his pockets and glanced in to his right hand. Harry opened his fingers and found the resurrection stone.

“Now… how did you get there…” Harry murmured to himself. He leveled both hands and passed the stone back and forth between his hands at a bit of a toss. Harry had never planned to hold the stone again, not since he had dropped it in the Forbidden forest. Not since he saw his parents and said his goodbyes.

But there were questions… questions that the dead could answer.

Even with that, Harry still had his doubts about the stone. Doubts he had never voiced, and only years of living had brought them up. But his doubts had always centered on the words of his family. Not their visage, but the words that they had said.

And the story… had bringing them back to this earth made them suffer, even for the short time?

… but questions. Questions that need answers. So many questions—so many dead to summon.

But should he?

Harry turned the stone over in his fingers.

If he was going to do it… who would he summon?

… just… who…? Someone important. Someone that would have answers about the thick of things. Someone that… Someone that Harry knew would give him the answers that he craved. Perhaps not questions about Frank, or about magic. But the root of this problem. What started it all.
A beast in a checker patterned mask.

The stone burned cold.

Who would know anything about that?

Harry turned the stone over in his fingers—and felt that lurch of OTHER. That gasp of absence.

“Potter.”

Harry’s eyes fluttered open to the voice that resonated through his bones. This was a voice that he should not have forgotten, but it had faded in his memories as time had trudged along until all that was left was white noise. Until that voice sounded again. It struck Harry how much that voice sounded like… home.

It was a voice that was second to his own.

A voice that had stayed with him most of his life. Through his formative years.

The man whose existence bruised Harry’s own. Scarred it.

“Tom,” Harry echoed back.

Tom Riddle stood before Harry with a familiar face—the Tom Riddle of the Diary. Shorter than Harry was now. It was eerie, seeing someone that had been as large as a Basilisk brought down to human height. Harry reached out and ran a thumb over Tom’s cheek, and felt the press of cold flesh.

Fitting. Tom Riddle was the type of person to run cold despite the false flush of life to his cheeks.

Harry watched the corners of Tom’s mouth pull in to something that wasn’t quite a frown, nor a grimace of distaste. Harry waited for a rant or a rebuke, for anything that he had and would have
assumed that Tom Riddle would have indulged in. But all he got was eerie silence.

“Don’t you have anything to say to me?” Harry asked, head tilting to the side, as if by changing his own orientation to the world he could right this slightly off feeling of unmet expectations.

Tom Riddle shifted his head to match, eyes looking beyond Harry with a derisive snort. “I have nothing I would want to say to you. My killer.”

Perhaps if Harry didn’t have so much of Skull in his head, if he hadn’t been the one to burn London, he might have denied that. Might have denied the idea and rebuked with the idea that it was less murder and more like putting down a rabid dog. But it was just semantics, in the end. And in truth, Harry was a killer.

(A firmer, deeper, nameless part of Harry whispered ‘better them than me’…)

“… but you respond when I ask questions. I can touch you.” Harry reached out again, his hand reaching out and pushing on Tom’s shoulder with enough force to send the teen back a step. Tom Riddle’s not-quite frown deepened.

“Yes,” Tom Riddle bit out, eyes focused on Harry now.

Harry stared at the youthful face before him, looking for the familiar signs. Ah, there it was. That maddening rage. Tom really could feel—even if he was unable to feel like a normal person. Even if it had been a long time coming, fighting through a deathly calm.

“Perhaps you’ll be delighted to know that in the end, I didn’t save the Wizarding world. No—magic is dead now. At least for wizards.” Harry quirked an almost-grin, watching Tom’s face (with probably more glee than he should have) as the teen’s eyes widened and Tom’s face went in to expressive slackness. A psychopathic slackness, the kind that Skull had seen more often than not within the mafia. Tom Riddle obviously did not know how to respond to that, and Harry dearly wished that this was not a shade, but the actual soul of Tom Riddle.

(Some too bitter part of Harry wanted Tom Riddle to suffer a horror similar to what Harry had suffered within the shadow of Voldemort.)

…it would be gratifying to know that wherever Tom Riddle went in his afterlife existence… that he
knew magic was dead. That everything Tom had ever done—all of his great deeds—was dead as well. The history of Voldemort would die with the Wizarding world. “That’s the problem with secret societies. They’re all bound to eventually fail. Fail, and return to dust,” Harry mused as he shoved his hands in to the pockets of his ratty jeans.

“But I have something to ask you. Did… a man in a checkered mask… ever approach you?” Voldemort was the last person he wished to talk to, but even then this Tom was almost pleasant to deal with. He was familiar in a way that most things were not.

(Because all that Harry was familiar with was dead.)

 “… a creature did appear before me, when I was young and gathering power.” Tom Riddle murmured after a time, shifting and moving to circle around Harry.

Tom Riddle did not leave footprints. Nor a shadow.

Harry shifted and copied the shade of a once great man.

“It desired things that ran counter to my grand design.” Tom concluded diplomatically, the corners of his eyes tight and his vision ever fixed on Harry. Harry responded in kind. Could only respond in kind, as he had always done.

“What did he want?” Harry liked to think he requested that, but it was more of a demand than an option.

Tom stilled, and Harry mimicked him, coming to his own stop.

“… My ultimate mission… was to create a world for the worthy. A world where the strong led the weak. All that was magic would remain magic. I could have brought all of wizard kind to such heights…” Tom Riddle sighed, aging minutely before Harry’s eyes until the shade was less teen and more young man. His cheeks were suddenly sharper and less plump, more hollow. But his eyes were filled with the same intensity. Perhaps even more manic now because of it.

“And you took that away!” Tom hissed.
Harry snorted, “if you think that, as you were, you could have ushered in another golden era of wizard kind—then you’ve definitely brought your insanity with you to the other side.”

Tom gave a helpless shrug paired with a charismatic smile.

“So, what did checker face want?” Harry stepped in closer, watching the minute shifts in Tom’s expressions as the man—now of the same height—scrambled for an appropriate facial expression to match the topic and his own thoughts.

“Ah, that…” Tom hummed, delaying briefly as he rolled his shoulders and settled on a face that was somewhere between contrite and righteous. “It promised power, unbelievable power that the world had seen perhaps once or twice before—all in exchange for the future.”

Great, now Voldemort was speaking in riddles.

Harry tapped his toes to the ground in agitation before he ground out the question, “what future?”

Voldemort chuckled, face coy with lowered eyes, curled lips, and arms folded behind his back as he continued on his circle. Harry moved to match the man, and together they walked in a circle on opposite sides. Their eyes locked, and neither unwilling now to break this standoff that they had inevitably fallen in to. This mimic of their life brought to flesh for all the world to see.

“The future, Harry Potter. Come now—how much life have you managed to claw from this world and yet still unable to solve a bit of simple word play?” The coy look remained, paired with a winning and too human smile pasted on Voldemort’s face. Voldemort was handsome in the way that someone of his breeding should have never been allowed to be. Cosmic chance and stardust had led to the recipe that was Voldemort.

“I’m on a bit of a schedule. Tell me,” Harry deepened his voice with order and watched Tom shudder.

“Children, my boy. Children. The future. That thing requested genocide for power… perhaps if that thing had approached me at another time, I might have agreed. But at that one moment in time, I decided that such a thing was not part of my intention for Wizard kind.” Tom’s words were crisp, and as cold as that initial touch. “I rejected the proposition, and never saw the creature again.”
“… and in the end, you performed to his desires anyway.” Harry concluded.

“… in the end, yes.” Tom Riddle sighed, his eyes briefly closing to follow the rest of his face in something that was almost like sorrow.

“Did you ever ask why?” That was the golden question, in the end. Why did Checkface want wizards dead?

“My business with it was brief—what need would I have for the reason for its desires?” The golden question, never to be answered by anyone but Harry it seemed. It was like the Philosopher’s stone all over again. Unhelpful teachers and ultimately running headlong in to danger himself with perhaps a fifty-fifty chance of dying along the way.

“Terrible—but great,” Harry snorted as he looked away, twisting the stone in his hand.

Harry looked back, and the shade was gone.

“I’ll get my answers once I sort out this wizarding mess—Checkface will get what he wants, in the end… and one day I can ask why.” But not today, and perhaps not any time soon.

But eventually.

Harry normally got his answers, eventually.

And with the stone in hand, Harry looked ahead where Voldemort’s existence had last stood upon this earth. There were infinitely better people that Harry could have summoned back from the end. And one named burned on his tongue.

…but Harry refused to utter that name.

As much as he desired to see her—Harry remembered the story of the three brothers too well. Harry didn’t care if Voldemort suffered a little pain by being brought back to the world as a powerless echo of what he once was. But to do that to Ginny?
No.

Ginny could wait for him… just a little bit longer. Until the divide of death no longer separated them.

Harry dropped the stone in to his ratty pocket.

He was on a bit of a schedule.

He needed to speak to Liliana. Finish the potion regime. Clear his system. Accept Albus’ burden.

Frank’s face came to mind. Angry. His words echoed, ‘I didn’t ask you to burn us!’

Well, Frank didn’t ask… no one ever asked for a burning. That’s why the witch hunts didn’t go over so well. It seemed that in his absence the wizarding world had reached an irredeemable level of self-serving obsession.

Everything has a time—and it was time that the wizarding world ended. Ended, and moved on.

“Point me, Liliana.”

The wand spun, paused, and pointed to where Harry wanted to go.

It was more of a walk than expected, finding the garage again. Harry found Liliana sitting on the ground next to her bike surrounded by tools with ‘Fab’ sitting to the side with a book in hand. They both looked up to Harry at the same time. Harry wasn’t wearing the boots of yesterday, and these ones clopped noisily on cement.

“Liliana… I’d like a word, if you don’t mind.” Harry quirked a smile, but he knew it fell flat from the frown that appeared on Liliana’s face. She gave a short nod and came to her feet, briefly cleaning her hands on a rag before stepping over to Harry.
Harry glanced to Fab, and then back to Liliana. “… in private?”

“Fabian is my caporegime… my right hand man. All that I say and do, I can do before him.” Liliana really was a leader, and Harry could feel it resonate in his bones. He shivered.

A test of truthfulness…

“Did you go in to the Arcobaleno mansion last night?” Harry asked.

Liliana nodded.

“Why?”

“Mostly to look for you. And a bit of checking out the competition… and a bit of looking for answers, too. Picked up your keys that way, lucky that I did wasn’t it?” Liliana grinned, but it faded off to her more normal, solemn look.

Truthfulness confirmed. Harry nodded as he glanced to Fabian once more. Fabian looked calm and undisturbed, but if Liliana called this man her ‘right hand man’, then there had to be something considerable about him.

“What’s your connection to Frank Longbottom?” Harry asked.

Liliana flinched, taking several steps back. Her hands clenched in to fists. “… Why… would you ask me this?”

“I eavesdropped, on your conversation last night…. With Lily and James.” Harry confessed. Shameless in the hunt to get his answers. He was old, what need did he have for shame?

“… that’s a bad habit you have there.” Liliana murmured. Voice low, and vaguely wounded.

“… It is.” But he wasn’t sorry. ‘Tell me who Frank Longbottom is to you.” Harry pressed again.
Liliana raised her hands and rubbed her face. She moved, shifting to start pacing in circles. Fabian had stood as well, hands at his side and ready as he stood next to the bikes. The silence stretched.

“… When did Frank turn against us…?” Harry asked instead. Delaying but not taking back his first question with a new one. Sometimes all one needed with an interrogation was a lead in question. If they answered one question, more were sure to be answered soon.

“… he officially turned from us… two years ago.” Liliana murmured, eyes lowered once she lowered her hands. She crossed her arms over her chest and continued pacing back and forth.

Two years? That was so recent…

“He stole the Elder wand… how did he manage that?”

“… he was trusted.” Liliana bit out.

“… the Longbottom line have not married in… how did they get so trusted?” Harry successfully resisted the urge to pace around her. No, he was not Voldemort and Liliana was not an enemy. Harry looked to the side, shifted, and moved along to his bike, which was still next to the one that Liliana had been providing maintenance on. Harry threw a leg over and sat astride his bike.

Liliana stared for a moment before she walked over and sat upon her bike as well.

“… I have to know, Liliana. He started this. I need to know him as much as I can. Frank Longbottom started this—and I am going to finish it—“ Harry started, but Liliana cut him off.

“You can’t!” Liliana bit off, and then froze in place.

“…. I can’t?” Harry whispered, and ignored the way Fabian was shifting side to side.

“… I’d rather you didn’t.” Liliana murmured, leaning forward and pressing her forehead against her handlebars. Harry decided to use Reborn’s tactic of silence and waited for more information.
It came, in broken bits. “It’s just… that I… Frank…” Liliana tried, stopped, restarted, and eventually ran her fingers through her short hair in frustration. She stomped one foot on the ground and gripped the handlebars hard in her hands.

“Frank was the storm.” Fabian spoke in soft Italian.

Harry didn’t remove his eyes from Liliana’s hunched form.

“… I welcomed him. He was beautiful.” Liliana whispered, closing her eyes and her face. Doing her best to wipe the grief from her features. “… we were going to get married.”

Frank had certainly been trusted. Harry could see how the man had gotten his hand on the wand. And probably much of everything. Harry was just going to have to assume that everything he knew, Frank knew as well. It was better to assume too much rather than too little.

“Harry… I think this is all my fault.” Liliana eventually whispered in to the silence of the parking garage.

“… why would you think that?”

“… Frank.. he… he started to change—we… we got really drunk one night. And I don’t… I don’t remember what I said, but…” Liliana’s voice was thick, and trembled.

“… Liliana spoke about how much she wished magic was still thriving. She swore she’d be an amazing witch. More amazing than you.” Fabian answered, moving to stand at the front of their bikes. Taking the eyes of both of them on his form.

Harry focused on Fabian. “… and Frank started to act strangely after that?”

“Yes… he read a lot. He took many trips off the compound. Spent less time with Liliana. It was disgraceful, an element ignoring his sky. Started rumors, that did.” Fabian’s lips twisted down in such a frown that was more akin to McGonagall than any Weasley that Harry had ever met.
“Fab…” Liliana sighed, weary from a conversation long repeated.

“… you’ve bonded, then?” Harry asked, mind clawing for the information behind bonding, flames, and elements—and coming up relatively blank outside of a blanket response of want aching in his chest.

“Yes… We’re still… connected. The distance hurts.” Liliana quietly admitted.

“… would it hurt him as well?” Harry asked.

“Yes. Him more so than me…”

“Then what he is doing is giving him the strength of will to endure.” Harry added, eyes on Liliana once more. “Any thoughts on what he wants? Since I was obviously part of the plan.” Harry gestured to his body as he spoke.

“… I think he wants to bring magic back.” Liliana murmured.

“It seems the most logical conclusion.” Fabrian softly agreed.

“… the question is now, why would he resurrect me to do such a thing?” Harry murmured, and got no response for it. And in the silence, Harry spoke again, “… if he came to you now, would you accept him back?”

“… no,” Liliana hissed. Her fingers on the handlebars were bone white. “Never.” Liliana took a calming breath. “Family, always.” She murmured with a reverence that Harry had seldom heard within his life.

“Always…?” Harry asked.

Liliana looked over, “.. great grandmum.. your wife—started the motto. It’s the Carcassa law, now. The first one.” Liliana’s face was dry, but a bit of red was creeping in to the corners of her eyes. She looked pinched. And her eyes shined.
“Ah… It’s better than the motto that haunts the Potter line… Gin and I were never really happy with it.” Harry admitted.

“… what was it?” Liliana asked, looking for the distraction from the clusterfuck of their lives.

“… The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” Harry answered, “rather dramatic.”

“Very dramatic. It suits you.” Liliana managed a semblance of a smile.

“Hey—that was a joke, right?”

Liliana chuckled, and relaxed. Harry smiled and reached out, ruffling her hair until she swatted his hand away. Their eyes locked.

“You do realize that Frank can’t be left alone to do as he pleases.”

“… Yes, I know.”

“I’m going to finish this.”

“… I know…”

“Finish it with me.” Harry insisted. Liliana’s eyes flickered away.

“You don’t mean it—you wouldn’t trust me.” Liliana crossed her arms over her chest, pulling in defensively. As if preparing herself for some physical blow.

More like a verbal one, “I trust you.” Harry murmured. And got her to look to him once more. “We’re not the type of person to let things like that go.” Harry had still struggled with resentment with Ron for a time after the final battle of Hogwarts. It had been slow to resurface, and it had taken more long talks than Harry would ever admit to… but if Ron had sold them out, Harry would have
never forgiven him.

Frank had sold Harry out. And if Harry was right about Liliana, then she wouldn’t forgive him either. Because he had turned from her already.

“I’m going to Lily now. I’m going to sort out my memories… and then we can all sit down together and decide our plan of action… get our best foot forward.” Harry shifted and stood up off of his bike.

Liliana nodded, paused, and then spoke, “did you get your suit?”

“Yeah. It’s on my bed.” Harry confirmed.

“… what’s your verdict, then…?” Liliana asked.

Harry smiled, “I’ll stay with you.”

“… no more Arcobaleno?” She asked.

“No. No more of them.” Harry agreed, feeling a little queasy at the thought, but pushing through it all the same. It had been a long time coming from Harry as he was. And from what memories Harry had from Skull… it had been a long time coming.

Liliana nodded, “I’ll see you for evening tea.”

Harry waved as he strolled out of the parking garage. He turned on his phone and ignored the missed calls flooding his inbox. He still had a little bit of time before the next dosage of the potion. So Harry made his way back to his room checked on Oodako, and looked to the glass shards still on his jumpsuit.

“… Reparo.” Harry tapped the shards. It shivered—and a half formed orb melded in to existence. Harry carefully picked it up and inspected it.
There, minuscule, was a name inscribed. Only found from running the pad of a finger over the embossed name. ‘SELENE LOVEGOOD’. Harry blinked and set it down on his bedside table. He set his phone down after placing it on silent. The vibrating was a bit much.

“Point me, Lily Luna Potter.”

He had waited long enough.

Chapter End Notes

So, there was a lot more conversation than planned. Harry ended up talking to a lot of people over a short period of time. I had planned for more action in this chapter, but they all just kept talking, so it got pushed to the next chapter. I've sorted out how many more chapters left and gave a rough estimate. It may go over by one more, just through spontaneity. But we'll see when we get there. My plan was to finish this before the new year, so I'll do my best in the time that I have left. Writing this has been a bit wrenching lately, as well as RL troubles.

I hope this chapter is acceptable. I feel like some conversations were just a little necessary.

I love Frank and Liliana, by the way. I adore them. Conflict at its best, really. Frank did not appear in this chapter (which I had planned to do), so he'll be shuffled off to the next chapter. More action will be coming your way soon enough. Please don't mind my slowness.

Question for you guys, which conversation did you like the most?
And what are your thoughts on Frank and Liliana? (And maybe a little bit of Fabian as well.)
“Skull—“
“Not Skull—“
“I’m not calling you Harry Potter—“
“It’s my name—!“
“It’s too plain!”
“… Wow, discount Voldemort.”
“… what.”
“Bye!”

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

“Okay daddy, just get comfortable,” Lily motioned to the long couch even as she took a seat in a wooden chair. Harry nodded and dropped down to the motioned place. Harry’s eyes couldn’t stop moving about the office that they were in, taking in the small personal touches that shone against the streamlined look of everything else.

There were no photographs, not on the walls and not on the desk standing at the other end of the room in front of a fantastically large set of patio doors. The curtains were all sheer and gauzy, and all of the plump furniture was much the same. Harry rubbed his fingers over the fabric, and couldn’t decide if it was soft or that faint abrasive quality that gauzy fabric had. Everything was very white with purple accents.

Purple pillows. Purple knitted blankets. Purple rugs. There was a chandelier with even purple accents in the cubic zirconia. It either sparkled like diamonds or glittered like amethysts.

… why so much purple? Why not red? It was a nice Gryffindor color…

(Not that he could judge much, after seeing purple hair in the mirror for so long, Harry could admit to himself he would feel strange seeing his normal black hair… not that he couldn’t adjust, but it’d be like looking in the mirror and seeing a different face—which, notably, he has done… several times.)

After a moment he focused on his daughter, who was soothing a knitted blanket over her legs. The sky was dark outside, but the chill wasn’t bad enough to warrant a blanket to Harry—but to his
fragile daughter, Harry didn’t think the same could be said. Harry reached out, paused, and let his hand hover in the air as he waffled with indecision to finish the reach or to pull back.

Lily glanced up, and took the hand with a smile.

Harry felt the ball of anxiety in his chest ease. The last time he had reached out…

“Are you ready, daddy?” She asked.

“… more or less. Really. I’m ready to be a whole person.”

Lily’s hand tightened, “… it’s not a matter of being a whole person or not.” Lily lowered their hands, until they rested on her knees. Lily placed her other hand on top as she exhaled a sigh. “… It’s more like… setting a broken bone? No… that’s not quite right. Like… like a phoenix on burning day.”

“Burning day?” Harry asked, quirking a grin. He remembered that first panic with Fawkes on the first burning day he had ever witnessed.

“Yes… It’s like restoring the natural order of things. You’re not a lesser person before a burning day. But things are a bit off and need to be righted.” Lily calmly concluded.

Harry minutely paused before he nodded.

“Before we start… I have a question, Lily…” Harry minutely hesitated. Although much like a scab, it was either pull it or let it fall off in time. It would be coming off regardless, and for Harry it was always best to do it now rather than wait.

“… did Ginny force the three of you in to this mafia life?” It had been wearing at him for a little while, the longer he was interacting with his children. The more times he saw those faces…

“.. No, mum didn’t force this on any of us. We went willingly in to this… especially me. This was all I have ever had.” Lily hummed as she leaned back. She let go of Harry’s hands, and Harry slowly pulled away as well.
A pause, “I was wondering about that… I have… I have this memory—of all of us. On the platform. I was waving goodbye to all of you as the Express takes you to school and I…” Harry trailed off, because he knew Lily would understand. He had this memory of her leaving him for Hogwarts. Something that couldn’t have ever happened. Harry was taken out of the picture long before Lily was at an eligible age for Hogwarts.

“… you do? …It’s a common phenomenon, really. At least with memory meddling.” She paused, and at seeing Harry’s blank look, she added, “it’s why those that do memory charms only implant a basic idea. Once the idea is implanted, the mind will make a story around it. Say that you charm away someone’s memory of a super important exam, and implant the idea that they missed it. From there, the mind will… absorb the fact that they ‘missed’ the exam. The mind will make its own excuse as to why this happened. Human beings look to inject reason in to their lives. To put everything to order. Missed an exam? Probably sick and slept through it. Or called out sick. Or some other event of equal importance would have happened.” Lily kept her eyes raised, and Harry eventually looked away.

Harry took a deep breath, “… this… this memory thing we’re going to do… it’s not going to fix that, will it?”

“… no. No, it won’t fix the lies we tell ourselves. Our memories are inherently biased and full of untruth. The fact that you are watching Skull’s memories through the eyes of ‘Harry’ means that you will only notice what you, as Harry, can perceive from the life that you as Skull perceived.” Lily paused, and then added, “… from mum’s complaints, I know you never mastered the mind arts. And even then—you wouldn’t have used them as Skull. Nothing is going to be crystal clear. And the only things that will be noticed are things that Skull noticed and bothered to remember.”

While the simplification did help. It left Harry with a bit of a pressing… problem. If he was going to get such an altered view of Skull’s life, was it even worth the trouble?

“I know what you’re thinking,” Lily said after a moment.

“… Really?” Harry crossed his arms and leaned back.

“You’re wondering if it’s worth the trouble to do this, especially when you’ve cut ties with the Arcobaleno.” Lily answered easily.

“… I wasn’t thinking about the Arcobaleno.”
Lily cheekily responded with a, “you are now.”

Harry shook his head and looked away.

“… did you ever complete the list?” Harry asked, and didn’t go in to more detail than that.

A short, quick breath from Lily told him that she understood.

“… Yes. I did. I went everywhere I ever wanted… even if I didn’t get to bring everyone with me to all of the places. It was…. It was enough.” Lily whispered this.

Harry hadn’t wanted the travels to be ‘enough’. Never just ‘enough’.

“… I’ve even taken you to some of these places. We’ve gone to Spain, the Caribbean, and Galapagos.” Lily listed off, still with that voice that was soft with more than just old age, but less wounded the longer she spoke about it.

“… wait. Galapagos… the turtle island?” Harry uncrossed his arms and turned to look to Lily again.

Lily smiled gently, “they’re tortoises, we even brought a few back. Whenever you’re ready you can come and meet the one you’ve taken to. You named him George, I believe. I feel like he has been a little lonesome since your visits have halted.”

Harry snorted, “does Oodako get jealous?”

“… A little bit, from what I recall you make sure to leave him in his tank.” Lily hummed.

Harry dropped his head in his hands, “that… is just ridiculous.” Harry shook his head and chuckled to himself. It was ridiculous that this was his life. Some days, if Harry hadn’t been conditioned from such a young age to roll with the punches, he was sure he would just wallow all day in bed and drink himself to death.
Harry had always assumed that life would calm down after Tom—it hadn’t, obviously. But now he was at this weird moment where he couldn’t decide which situation was worse…

Lily took a breath, and Harry looked up from his hands and the floor to visually take in what she wanted to say. “It is. Worth it, that is. Dad, we have an enemy at our gates… and let me be… frank.” Lily sighed to herself, “Frank Longbottom was very trusted amongst us. And while he was never directly responsible for your care… he was very much.. a friend to you.” Lily admitted.

“… What.” Harry blinked.

“… we have a power structure here, dad. And mum and the boys… and even me—we couldn’t always focus on you. We always had a ‘handler’ on you, whose job it was to make sure your welfare and health was accounted for on the daily. Mezzaluna Lovegood was your… latest one.” Lily rubbed her hands together, looking to create warmth with friction.

Harry tugged his wand from his sleeve and tapped her hands. Lily slowly eased her hand rubbing until she stopped. She flexed her fingers and murmured a soft thanks.

“… Can you continue?” Harry asked, and got a nod from his daughter.

She quirked a smile, “I forget, sometimes… how much you’ve forgotten. I’m sorry that it’s been so… piece by piece.” She took a deep breath, “Mezzaluna had two children, a boy and a girl. The boy, the older of the two—he was added to Liliana’s guardian group. Her Cloud.” At that moment, Lily turned her eyes and focused on Harry’s still purple hair. A moment and they locked eyes once more. Lily held his gaze with full confidence. And seemed to actively seek it out.

“… due to this, Frank has always had an… access to you, that most people usually don’t. From what everyone has understood of the situation, Frank used Liliana as a distraction while he used the wizards of Britain to abduct you and Colonnello.” Lily clasped her hands together in her lap, although she didn’t drop her gaze. “No one ever saw a problem of you being alone with him. We hope that nothing… irredeemable, happened, previous to the abduction. But to learn that, you need access to what you can.”

Harry slowly, eventually, nodded.

That… was reason enough.
“… he used Liliana?” Harry asked, thinking back to a short few hours ago and Liliana’s guilty whisper, claiming that this was all her fault.

(Was it truly? In more ways than one?)

Lily sighed, “… Frank left, abruptly, a year before the abduction. He would send messages to Liliana, claiming he was still alive and needing time. He was periodically sighted in Russia. Or India. There were assumptions made… And on the day of the abduction, he convinced Liliana to find us and sue for his return. That he was ‘ready’… and then he didn’t show up to the meeting. And your watchers were all murdered.” Lily spoke calmly, but Harry could see the grit of her teeth.

Harry had a feeling that there might be more to this whole backdrop of tragedy. Even with that feeling, Lily had given him the essentials. There might be more there… but Harry had a feeling it would only start to kindle a rage in his chest, the more he hears the specific details to the hurt that had been dealt.

“How will this work?” Harry shifted to sit on the edge of the couch, more than willing to shift the conversation that they could actively work on and change, rather than stick to the past. Harry paused and returned back to a more relaxed pose upon Lily’s head shake and small hand motion to settle back.

“Unfortunately, the first part will be difficult. It involves you moving the memories from the pensive back in to your own head. There is a large amount of memories here, and it will take time. And will cause disorientation. Only someone with a wand or staff, or some other obscure enchanted item that we don’t have, can do such a thing.” Lily looked to the pensive, which had been happy to sit and glow on the end table next to the arm of the couch. Harry shifted over and leaned against the arm to peer at the pensive.

The pensive itself was near brimming with the silvery substance.

“… have you considered…?” Harry trailed.

“If this is everything? … yes, it has been considered.” Lily murmured.

“Do you think…?”
“It will be hard to tell, all things considered. You will automatically create memories to bring order to any gaps… Those that notice the nature of such things are rarely the person that has been afflicted.” Lily confessed.

“… so it’ll be a life of lies?” Harry tapped his wand on the rim of the stone bowl.

“It’ll be what we can make of it. If nothing else… we do have a huge backlog of your missions, photographs… and you bragged about a ‘library of diaries’—although such a thing has never been located upon Carcassa grounds.” Lily said.

“… diaries?” Harry frowned. He didn’t much seem the type.

“From what I understand, one of the other Arcobaleno convinced you to do so when it was noticed how forgetful you could be…” Lily trailed.

Which of the Arcobaleno could force Harry to write a journal?

…. Probably Reborn. Harry sighed.

“I was so forgetful that man made me write everything?” Harry grumbled to himself, because of course it would be Reborn. In fact, Harry could feel that curling resentment in his gut. Still, if it was that man that was making him so such a thing, “…then they’re probably at the mansion… maybe even under the floor boards.” Because that had always been a favorite hiding place to Harry.

Harry sighed, those were lost, then. “Shall we carry on, then?”

Lily nodded, and motioned for Harry to fully face the pensive. Harry tucked his feet up after toeing off his boots. “After you finish placing them back… you’re going to use Legilimency on me.”

“… how is that going to help me?” Harry barely even held the scoff back at that one. His children were old, frail, and honestly Harry was even more concerned about using magic on Lily because of what she had admitted to. To the plague.

“Well… we don’t exactly have the time to teach you occlumency. Having you come in to my head… hopefully we can have a meeting of minds, so to speak. You shuffling through my head might help put order in to your own.” Lily offered.
There was so much ‘might’ and ‘maybe’ in that statement, Harry flinched lightly at the thought, even as he pressed back in to the couch. Harry grimaced, “… this sounds like one of those, ‘making the best of what we have’ moments… this has ill effects on you, doesn’t it?” Harry eventually stated.

“… side effects are minimal.”

“… I refuse to hurt you.”

“Daddy…”

“No, I refuse. I’ll take these memories and I’ll… I’ll clear my mind.” It figures that Snape would haunt him, even in to his adult years and more decades after that man’s death than Harry cared to count for. Harry pinched the bridge of his nose, minutely flinching before remembering that he didn’t wear glasses anymore and could no longer stab himself in the eye with them.

Lily frowned, and opened her mouth. Harry raised a hand, motioning for her to stop.

“… It’s not worth the risk.” Harry firmly stated.

“But.”

Harry grinned, “no butts.”

“… You know, I don’t even feel bad about my ‘frank’ moment, now.” Lily said, with a brief moment of unblinking stare. “You have done that one far too often.”

“It’s a fave, I have to admit.” Harry looked to the pensive, even as he admitted that.

“It’s all because of Albus’ nudist phase, wasn’t it?” Lily grumbled.

“Yeah—Gin always cracked up whenever we got a butt joke after that.”
Lily hummed, Harry glanced to her before he stuck the tip on his wand into the pensive. He fished for a memory and hooked one up. He pulled his memory out, and he blinked at the short strand.

“… so, we’ll be putting all of this back in my head…” Harry frowned.

Why did this situation seem very, very familiar?

“… yes.”

“Have to do it myself.” Harry added, squinting at the bowl, and then glancing around the office. It was warmly lit, which made the office seem comfortable enough. But what was it about this situation…?

“… I read as something almost less than a squib.” Lily admitted.

Harry nodded.

“…. Oh.” He remembered what this seemed like. “… no inferi lingering in a lake, right?”

“… what?”

“Nothing.” Harry added, closed his eyes, and pressed the tip of his wand to his temple. He gave the wand a small twist and a little sliver of power. Even with his eyes closed, he felt them roll a bit before he blinked open his eyes. Little flashes of white lights sparking in the corners of his eyes. Harry shook his head to clear the slight fuzz that was there.

… Well, he wasn’t pulled in to that memory. It had been a short strand.

“… Well, this doesn’t seem so bad,” Harry admitted, and then grimaced. He glanced to Lily and found that they were definitely sharing a similar expression.
Lily tangled up her fingers in her knitted blanket, “we don’t have to do all of them in one go…”

“… if I pause, will I create more false memories than if I just kept on?”

“… never proven, but probably yes.” Lily admitted.

The door closed, and Harry turned his head to see James leaning against the door. Harry paused and waited for him to say something. The silence lingered for a moment before Harry broke it. “Come to observe?”

“… I was waiting outside.” James admitted, shifted on his feet for a moment before he moved and sat down next to Harry on the couch.

James raised a hand, briefly, as if to reach out to Harry—but pulled away too quickly before Harry to catch that offered hand. Instead, James reached in to his sleeve and pulled out his wand. Harry remembered it, for the unique handle designs.

“.. James…” Harry murmured.

“If you need it, I can help.” James didn’t raise his eyes from his wand.

Harry clenched his hand tightly around the handle of the Elder wand. No—neither of his children were going to help him with this. Harry just needed to bumble through and stick the memories back in his head. Harry reached out and placed a hand on the back of James neck, and pulled his son in to his shoulder. James stiffened minutely… and, slowly… relaxed.

“I won’t need it. Put your wand away.” Harry said, shifting and placing his cheek against the top of James’ head. The hair was so thin up here. Harry closed his eyes, and wrapped his arms around James firmly.

It took time, before James reached up and placed a hand on Harry’s arm.

James had always been less tactile than his siblings.
Harry took a deep breath before he eased away. James briefly raised a hand up to his eyes, and looked away. Harry rubbed James’ shoulder for a moment, before he turned back to the pensive. Harry picked up a longer strand of memory this time.

Power through it. Get all of it done now, and then he could get wrapped up in clearing his mind and sorting everything into some semblance of order. Harry placed a hand on the rim of the pensive, closed his eyes, and pressed the memory to his temple with his wand.

Colors flashed before his eyes. Harry ignored it for now as he blindly reached out and pressed another memory to his temple. A ringing sang in his ears. Harry blinked, and squinted at the pensive. He blinked away the double vision—he felt…

… like he could craft things from leather? What? That was terribly random.

(Considering Skull, though… the man had worn a lot of leather…)

Harry was rather content with just having this ‘knowing’ sensation rather than getting sucked in to a full memory experience.

“Dad…?”

“I’m fine.” Harry had always just let the memories roll over his senses back when he was casually just shoving them inside his head. It took some time to get through so few…

… the pensive was really full.

Harry debated on if he could do more than one at a time—there would probably be repercussions for that. Harry frowned and took a single memory out and pressed it to the space next to his eye.

… Harry could taste treacle tart on his tongue. And before his eyes… He blinked—and there was a very young Liliana. And… and he could remember teaching Liliana how to make treacle tart. Although what they made was never as good as the store. Harry smiled faintly before he shook his head. Liliana had been cute as a child, more smiley.
Another memory.

Another.

And then—

(Skull looked up from the sweetly feminine hand resting on top of his scarred ones. The smile on Luce’s face was so at ease, so beautiful. That it was directed at Skull sent warmth through his heart, sweeping through his whole body.

She spoke, “We’re not a great fit, in the future. But we’re okay to exist as we are now. In the same sphere. Fate… has other plans for you, Skull.” Luce’s voice softened the longer she spoke, and Skull strained to hear it as much as he wanted to deny having ever heard such words.

Skull didn’t want what fate had planned.

He wanted… a home.

He wanted to belong.

Especially when—and he caused such trouble for everyone! Skull feared the day that they turned their backs on him, because he was the last one that was unbonded in their group.

“That future is not for you.” Luce whispered. The world distorted in tears. Skull was no longer warm.

Skull would tear himself apart piece by piece and build himself up again if that was what needed! He would become a brand new person, just for Luce! Why couldn’t she…

“Not for you, and not for me.” She added, like painful nails to the coffin. She briefly squeezed his hands, and pulled back.
Skull’s hands shot forward, and he held on tight. Skull opened his mouth to beg, but all that came out was a panicked whistle. He shivered, closed his eyes against the tears, and pressed his face in to her hand and wished for the warmth that he had felt just moments ago. He was the last one! Everyone else was already linked together, why couldn’t he have that?

Was this karma? For whatever it was he had done before the accident? Karma from his child? Retribution?

“Why… why!” Skull eventually sobbed, he needed to know what was wrong so he could fix it.

Skull did not function well on his own. Or at all. He needed them.

They were all he had now.

The hand shifted like it was going to pull away, and Skull tightened his grip to bruising. He didn’t want to give this up! Luce shifted, and sat down in the chair next to Skull, instead of across the small table. Luce reached out with her free hand and soothed Skull’s hair back. Each stroke ached.

“... You’ve been burned, Skull. And you haven’t quite... recovered.” Luce whispered, before she pressed a kiss to his forehead. Skull shivered, and eventually loosened his grip on the hand she had captured.

“... burned?” He gasped through barely repressed sobs. He was calming down, he was. It just… took a while. He felt things so intensely that it always took him more time than others to settle. Luce was patient. She had always been so.

She hummed. “... yes. It must have been intense, the bond that you had. I can feel it... the age—I can feel how much you ache. You’re searching for the other side of your bond. And attaching yourself to me, now... will just send you in to discord.” Luce explained as gently as she could. An arm slowly eased around Skull’s shoulders, and he took the time to let go of her hand and bury himself in her arms.

He shivered—he had been burned? He couldn’t recall meeting a sky before he had met Luce. This had to have happened before. In the BEFORE, before.

“When the memory of that person fades... well, perhaps not that—when the scars lessen. When you
ache less in your soul—perhaps the next Arcobaleno sky can bond with you…”

“… the next?” Skull blinked wetly, and almost pulled away.

Luce tightened her arms, “silly me. Ignore that—we can still set down a… bond of intent. It’s like setting a claim. A full bond, at this time… is improbable for you—not impossible… but you’ve been so… damaged.”

Skull tightened his arms around her middle and squeezed his eyes shut. He just knew that his makeup was going to be smeared all over Luce’s collarbone after this cry-fest. He felt guilty. And ashamed. What had hurt him so much that he would lose this thing that even the other Arcobaleno coveted? Skull was never good enough. Not at anything.

Anger flickered, for only a moment—before the shame snuffed it out.

… perhaps… Skull was to blame for this.

Would he ever know?

“… please… don’t…”

“Shhh… I won’t leave. You have me, Skull. As much as we can. Never fully boded… but it should be enough. The others won’t be able to tell the difference.”

… Skull never wanted a bond to be just ‘enough’.

The others may have never noticed, but Skull certainly noticed that ‘enough’ was never quite ‘right’.

)

Harry blinked back to himself, and quivered for a moment on the couch. His head was cradled in a lap. In fact, Harry blinked heavily and looked up at Albus. Harry blinked a few more tears away. Albus gave a shaky smile and brushed away a few tears.
“Here, it’s time for another dose, dad…” Albus helped him sit up minutely to drink that half-mouthful. It was hard to swallow, but Harry managed before he laid back down. Harry glanced around, and spotted Lily and James sitting next to the couch, murmuring softly over a handful of reports.

“… What…” Harry croaked.

“You were overwhelmed by a strong memory. It left you comatose for some time. What happened…” Albus asked, looking more hesitant than curious.

“… As Skull, I was really sensitive, wasn’t I?” Harry asked.

Albus nodded immediately, not even having to ask what Harry meant by ‘sensitive’. “You were very quick to cry, but it always seemed very cathartic for you.” Albus added, resting a hand over Harry’s sternum as he spoke. Harry reached up and pressed his hands on top of Albus’s own.

Harry blinked a few more tears, and nodded.

… he felt… less heavy, perhaps?

But that just left him mulling over what he had seen. He had been rejected from a Sky before? But who? “.. what happened to my memories of my other lives?”

“Destroyed. Your memories of Harry Potter were never removed because of how intrinsically they were tied to basic knowledge skill sets. But everything else was always considered… extra—by the Unspeakables.” Albus explained, and Harry closed his eyes as he nodded.

Maybe he had met a Sky in that time between Harry and Skull? Right?

Harry raised his hands and wiped at his eyes before he sat up. He picked up his wand from the floor next to the couch and turned to the pensive once more.

No one stopped him.
(Reborn loomed over Skull, a heavy knee digging in to Skull’s stomach even as Reborn’s fingers
pinched harshly in to Skull’s cheek. Reborn was radiating deadly intent, and seemed larger than life.
Too large, and the man leaned even closer.

“Who dared do this to you?”

“… it doesn’t matter.” Skull whispered, voice distorted by the strong pull on his cheek.

The pinch tightened. Reborn obviously thought otherwise.

“I… I… I don’t know.”

Tighter.

“I’m an amnesiac. I really don’t know! You don’t think I wouldn’t have taken out my own pound of
flesh if I knew?!” Anger burned—futile and as always with no outlet that Skull could lash out at.

“You don’t have to take out a pound of flesh. I’ll deliver their whole corpse at your feet. No one…
past or present, gets to hurt you like this.”

“… well, I don’t have a past. So you don’t have any corpses to deliver, senpai.”

“Worlds. Greatest.” Reborn breathed. “Even if it takes the rest of our lives I’ll find them.”

“What if they’re already dead?”

“Then in the afterlife I’ll hunt them down and lay them at your feet. And all of us can take out as
many pounds of flesh as we desire.”

Harry’s hands trembled as he fished for more. The world was alight in colors behind his eyelids as he
pressed memory after memory to his temple. Only a handful were really able to throw him out of the
present. Send tears to his eyes. He felt each instance so keenly…

(Skull sobbed bitterly in to the handle of the pistol Reborn had forced in to his hands. Had forced that terrible trigger pull. The echo of the kick back still shook through him. Only two shots. But his ears rang. His body shook.

First shot.

Then the double tap.

It ached. It ached and Skull didn’t know how to stop it. He had just taken a life. And there was no way to give it back. No way to rectify such a thing.

Reborn’s touch burned.

“… he deserved it.”

“No one deserves it.”

“… you’ll find out, eventually, some people do.”

Harry used his sleeve to mop at his face—

(—one day, Skull placed the muzzle to the temple of a woman with the blood of thousands of children on her hands, looked her in the eye, and pulled the trigger.

Skull didn’t cry.)

A potion. A flash of sun.

(“Y-y-yuni! Please don’t cry! The glorious Skull-sama will get you a different picture book!”)
A potion. “Dad, you have to eat. Empty stomachs are no good on this potion. Hallucinations, remember?”

(“Great Leader Skull-sama… can I ask you a question?” Skull grinned up at the sky, his eyes still closed as he absorbed the warmth of the sun. It was such a pleasant afternoon that when Liliana had asked for a picnic, he couldn’t help but agree.

“Of course, subordinate!” Skull cheerily prompted Frank to speak.

Frank was such a serious, round faced little boy! He was curious, but Skull didn’t mind. Not many asked him about how to mend leather, or how much a piercing could hurt. Not many people asked him questions like Frank, expecting Skull to actually know the answer.

“… thank you… it’s just… if you… if you had the power to change the world for the better… but have to wade through the blood of thousands to do so… would you do it?” That was… surprisingly heavy. But Frank was the type to think such deep thoughts, wasn’t it?

Oh wait, he had to answer this right? “… uh.. uh… Of course! History is filled with sacrifice for the betterment of the world! Skull-sama would always consider the world!”

“… thanks.”)

A potion.

(Skull froze the moment he saw him. The man with the ridiculous sideburns. The man was languidly stretched in a chair to seem careless.

But Skull could feel it.

He knew better.
No, it was the fact that this man that Skull had seen this man once at that long ago circus that gave birth to Skull… the fact that he was here in this den of monsters… A flash of Skull’s mentor’s face burned behind his eyes.

Skull, while slowly shuffling to the table, got his boot stuck on an edge of rug, and he was too out of it to catch himself as he landed on his face at the feet of the man that had disappeared the moment she had been dead to a single bullet to the back of her head.

--did this man…?—)

A potion.

“Dad, it’ll be okay… please stop… don’t cry.” James. Hands in his hair. Harry didn’t dare turn his eyes from the pensive. It was half full now. Only so much left. The latent knowledge about the Carcassa compounds rippled in his mind. Knowledge of places Harry had never seen but Skull had adored ached in his heart.

He was coming apart. Tearing himself apart and building himself together again.

Like Skull had always sworn he would do, if needed.

What skull had wanted…

(Skull sobbed in to her hair. Such a little thing. So softly curled in to his arms. Her small hands and small feet. Skull cradled her against his chest—and wailed. Long and hard and loud—because this wasn’t fair!

Why was his daughter dead-dead-dead—

Skull sharply inhaled the scent of her hair. Frantically searching for that soft vanilla scent… and all he got was something rotten.

His baby, only a handful of years old, and the sole reason why he had taken up with the Arcobaleno…
Only three years old and the cancer had taken her. She had been born so sick and had lived so strongly and so shortly...

“Should we move him to his room?”

“No, the disorientation won’t help. Let’s get another blanket.”

“How many more potions?”

“One more days’ worth.”

“—looks like only a few more memories, now.”

(Skull wanted to save them. Every child he came across that was left in the streets from all around the world. Surely the Carcassa was so much better than starving to death, unwanted in the streets?

When Skull offered a hand, and didn’t explain to the children dying in the streets...

Skull ached, because every time those starving eyes locked on to his own when he offered that hand... and stayed there, every time they took it. And every time, Skull begged his boss to find them a good life.

Sometimes, he saw their faces again as guards. And other times... he didn’t.

He burned for them, in either case.)

There. The last one. Harry set his wand on the table and clutched at the blankets around his shoulders. He was so, so cold. He wrapped himself up, and leaned in to the body next to him. They were humming a song. It was soothing.

It helped keep him calm as the cold grip of memories clawed at his ankles.

(“Hey Lal! My gun isn’t shooting any more!”)
“… what the fuck, have you never cleaned this piece of shit!”

“… you have to clean it?”

“… Skull?”

(Skull pressed his face firmly against the pillow in front of himself. He ignored the hand rubbing circles in to his back. It was Mammon’s voice. Although even when trying to ignore it, Skull couldn’t ignore the soothing fact that the touch was helping him calm down.

“I’ll give you a bit of advice… for free.”

“... you never do free,” Skull murmured sullenly in to the pillow.

“If you continue on, you’ll bring down revenue. This will be better in the long run. Write a diary. Log your daily activities. Make a planner so you always know what you’re supposed to be doing. It will reduce your panic, and make sure you don’t forget your duties.” Mammon said matter of factly. Even when speaking, the soothing circles of a hand rubbing against Skull’s back never ceased.

“.. I’m sorry for getting distracted.”

“… We also should have noticed your… memory problems, some time ago.”

“… true. It’s been what, a few decades?” Skull sighed.

“… don’t push it.”

Skull sighed again and pulled the pillow away. But he didn’t look up.

“A diary… huh.” Skull mumbled to himself. And then blinked as one dropped in to the space in front of his face. A moment later and a simple black ball point pen was added to the mess. Well, either
there happened to be a diary nearby with his name embossed on the cover, or Mammon had planned this for some time.

“Write,” Mammon demanded.

Skull complied. )

Harry moaned as he was pulled up to a seated potion. Harry immediately started to sag, but gentle arms around his person gathered him up. Harry shivered as his body warmed up considerably. Like a heated blanket being applied to chilled skin.

(“Colonnello! I’m… I’m not… I feel scared. I don’t know where I set my diary—and I can’t remember what I’m supposed to be doing… and I feel like eyes are watching me!” Skull heaved, trying to fight off the panic as he squatted inside of a locked toilet in the restaurant.

A sigh over the phone, “okay. Where are you?”

“Um.. Um… That t-terracotta coffee place. The one Reborn likes?”

“… ah. Right. I know the one. At least you remembered that I’m currently in Italy this time.”

Skull quivered, letting out a shaky smile even as he squeezed his eyes tight to fight off the tears. “Y-yeah… last time, I called Mammon and found out they were in France and everyone got upset and Rebornyelledand—”

“Hey, nothing wrong with a call. We just worry because you sound so upset.” Colonnello added.

“… I’m sorry.”

“… just do the breathing thing. The one Yuni told you about.”

“Right… yes.”
Time quivered, and sooner than later Colonello picked the lock and sat with Skull in the bathroom for a time and waited for Skull to calm. When the tears stopped coming and Skull stopped shaking, they left the bathroom and sat for a coffee before they stepped outside for Colonello’s car.

They made it to the doors and then—darkness.

Nothing there.)

Harry moaned—his body felt like it had been steam cleaned. He felt so at ease and relaxed. Harry didn’t feel so relaxed very often, and he took a moment to truly relish the sensation. This was the feeling that he treasured, when the world was organized and set to right and Harry could be at peace for a while.

Harry swiftly jumped to full consciousness as he was rudely hauled in to someone’s arms.

… who the hell had the gall to pick him up?

The list was short.

Harry blinked and felt his eyes track to the bright green in his vision, illuminated by afternoon light.

Leon.

Harry looked down from the brim of a Fedora. And locked eyes with Reborn.

Silence.

“… they’ve been forcing an unidentified liquid substance in to you. And you’ve been barely conscious. I’m taking you to safety.” Reborn explained into the long, drawn out silence.

Harry felt too relaxed, too safe, and too tired to even feel upset at the presumption.
“It’s medicine.” Harry gently corrected.

“… it’s sedation.”

“Do I look sedated?”

“You look stoned.”

“… you’ve seen me stoned?” When had that happened? (Approximately three years ago—brownies.) Reborn closed his mouth and absolutely refused to answer that one—but for once Harry didn’t need an answer because the information was already in his head.

“I’ve cut ties with you.” Harry reminded.

“I refuse to cut ties with you.”

Harry squinted, “that’s not how that works.”

“World’s greatest.” Reborn shot back as he shifted his arms. Harry reached out and grabbed Reborn’s shoulder. Hard.

“I’m not sorry I shot you.”

(I am so, so sorry.)

“That’s fine. You missed.” Reborn narrowed his eyes down at Harry.

“… bullshit, I did not,” Harry hissed.
“You did,” Reborn flatly returned as he turned and faced the office door. Harry glanced around the room. Empty. Where were his children?

… or… or was this a hallucination?

Harry squirmed.

It felt real.

“…Did not.” Harry sulkily added, because he didn’t miss. Reborn had gone down, damnit! The guilt churned angrily in his stomach.

“You did—you never hit when you don’t want to,” Reborn reminded Harry, and Harry couldn’t refute that. Because he knew for a fact that Reborn was the one that indeed had taught him to use a gun (even if the asshole never taught him how to clean one…).

Harry pushed at Reborn’s shoulder, “you fell down!”

“Played dead until I heard you drop the gun,” Reborn spoke absently as he came to a stop in front of the office door. Harry reached out and placed a hand on the door, and got Reborn’s eyes to fall on him before the hitman could contemplate how to leave while still carting Harry around in his arms (with plenty of blankets included).

Harry was reluctant to ask, but… Reborn was rather mellow (which gave more credence to hallucination) and even Harry knew this was a perfect time to get this settled. “…. Have we done this before?”

“Yes. More than once.” That tasted like honesty.

“…how many times…?” Harry asked.

“It’s more habit than chance now… but I am deeply sorry I shot you.” Reborn didn’t look away when he apologized, and the apology hung in the air like a miasma. Harry didn’t like it. It felt wrong.
“… you never hit unless you want to.” Harry murmured.

“Yes.”

“You shot me.”

“In the leg.” Reborn didn’t correct, so much as add.

“That doesn’t make it better,” Harry hissed.

Reborn smirked, one corner of his mouth drawing up sharply. “It doesn’t make it worse.” True, but still annoying.

“You always hurt me. One way or another,” Harry accused, recalling all of those ‘training’ sessions that Reborn had done to him. All those times he stood behind Skull and made him pull the trigger at a moving target. Had shaped and cut and had welded Skull in to the Mafioso that could actually function and survive the world that they lived in.

“… I am neither nice nor kind.” Reborn admitted, and Harry wished the man would look away.

“But you could be—if you wanted to. If you wanted it enough. You just don’t want to be nice to me,” this wasn’t like his screaming match at Colonnello. This was more personal. This was a direct accusation on Reborn’s character.

Reborn had been their underboss. The one that gave the orders. Reborn was the one that had reported to Luce. And everyone else had reported to Reborn. Reborn was the one responsible for making sure they could complete their missions. Reborn had been the one that had looked to Skull, seen him lacking, and then burned away Skull’s weaknesses.

… Colonnello had been an ally… who had helped him through his panic.

Reborn had been the one to desensitize him to panic and to give him the strength to work through it.
Harry stared up at Reborn’s face, even as he felt things slowly, ever so slowly… start to sink in to place.

“…there are only so many people in this world that I can interact with as the person I am. Unchecked. Unbound. Unlimited. To interact with as I truly am and as I’m meant to be. Violent. Strong. The greatest… And you’re one of the few people that can survive me and keep coming back.” Reborn murmured, his voice dropping low. But his words, even whispered—Harry felt his skin prickle at the intensity. Reborn had always been intense, but having it directed like this…

“… but why do I keep coming back when you hurt me?” Harry spoke more to himself, and waited to see if the answer would come to mind.

It didn’t.

But Reborn did.

“… I never asked. But you did. You have. Kept coming back. Why do you think so?” Reborn asked, head tilting to the side. Leon mimicked Reborn in the head tilt, and it was so absurd that Harry couldn’t help but minutely quirk a smile before he forced it away.

Harry took a moment to really think. Trying to find that answer that was needed for this question. “… I don’t know. Maybe I’ll never know… we’ll never know. You’ll never know. The me as I am wants to stay as far away as possible.” Harry shifted, squirming even more to get the hitman to just drop him.

Reborn’s grip tightened to the point of almost pain. “Then the you as you are… why do you keep calling?” Reborn then shifted his head to show off the Bluetooth in his ear. Harry frowned deeply, even as he stilled his squirming.

“… I did not call you.” Harry said.

Reborn sighed, before he turned on his heel and padded back to the couch. Reborn blatantly turned his gaze to the end table where the pensive had once sat. Harry couldn’t help but look. There, on the table… was the phone Liliana gave him. Reborn shifted his hold enough, leaning over so Harry could reach out and pick up the phone. Harry obliged with a sigh and lifted the phone to his ear. “Now what…?” Harry asked, and grimaced when he heard his own voice through the speaker of the
“Are you going to answer me?” Reborn pressed. Eyes narrowing the longer the silence pulled on.

“… I don’t know.” He really was too tired at this moment. His energy was zapped. His stomach felt fragile. All of his limbs felt like he had had his bones vanished. He just wanted to lay in bed and sleep until he felt strong enough to get up again.

Reborn looked away and turned to the door once more, “then until you can answer such a question, I am taking you to a safe location. You’ve been showing signs of instability for so long, this relapse has been… unwelcome.”

Harry groaned. “It's not a relapse. It’s medicine.”

Silence.

Harry cracked open an eye and encountered the full force of Reborn’s incredulous stare.

“… shut up.”

“I didn’t say anything.” Reborn looked to the door, and then minutely tensed. Harry looked to the door, and blinked as he spotted Albus. Harry smiled, because Albus was always a welcome sight. The smile faltered, though. Because Albus wasn’t looking at Harry, but at Reborn.

“… How did you get in here?” Albus whispered.

Reborn shifted his weight to the balls of his feet, “through the window.”

… really? Harry turned and looked to the windows of the room. And soon enough spotted the one with the faintly moving curtains.

(Windows were more than an exit, apparently…)
“… wait, were you just walking around and peering in to all the fucking windows!” Harry hissed, trying his best to sit up, struggling as Reborn grit his teeth. Harry groaned, this Arcobaleno nonsense really has to end. “I’m serious, Reborn. I’m not Arcobaleno—and I refuse to be kidnapped by a hanger-on!”

“Wishful—“

“If you say wishful thinking one more time I am going to shoot you in the dick!”

“… you’d miss.” Reborn hissed, and then dropped Harry.

Harry shouted, and landed hard on the floor. He flailed and wiggled frantically to untangle himself from the blankets, and soon got to his feet. He took a few steps from Reborn, and checked to the right to see to Albus. Albus wasn’t there, though. The door was still cracked open. Harry swept his gaze to Reborn, and put his hand to his sleeve for his wand.

Oh, not there.

Harry looked to the table.

“… are you looking for this?” Reborn asked, and held up the Elder wand.

Harry tensed, shifting his weight to his bare toes even as he bent his knees. Reborn held the wand by the tip, and he waved it back and forth in the air in slow arcs. His eyes never left Harry.

“… why did you pick that up?” Harry asked.

“I’ve seen it before, in Germany. Of all the things that has changed in the last few weeks, you’ve continually had this. What is this supposed to be, a wand?” Reborn mocked.

“Well… yes.” Harry answered.
The waving froze.

“… what is it?”

“A wand.”

“No—what is it.”

“It’s a fucking wand you asshole! Now give!” Harry snarled, and thrust his hand forward. Harry watched with relish as the wand snapped out of Reborn’s hand and stung in to his own grip. Harry tightened his hand around the handle and firmed his shoulders as he faced Reborn.

Reborn slowly looked from his hand, then to Harry.

“… Magic.” Reborn intoned.

Oh wait, Reborn didn’t know about magic…

“…. No?”

Reborn’s poker face was holding firm once more, but Harry just had a feeling that Reborn was mentally shooting bullets at his person. “… So, all of this… was magic?”

“… not necessarily?” Harry unfortunately asked rather than stated.

“Hey, are you two assholes done!” Came a voice from the open window, and Harry jumped before he zeroed in on Lal. Harry gritted his teeth at her scowl, but then paused when he noticed that her eyes full of murder were directed at Reborn. “Your dramatics always ruin our plans!”

Reborn, dramatic?
“You’re too serious,” Reborn stated even as he placed his hands on his hips and turned to fully face her.

… didn’t this man realize that Albus wasn’t going to just sit on the fact that Reborn was here? Harry blinked and took a little step back as the two got in to a staring match. It was all for the better then, that these two losers were completely relaxed and stalling. It was also completely bewildering that they would do this on an infiltration mission.

“—and for the last time, stop dilly-dallying!” Lal hissed.

Reborn rolled his shoulders and turned to Harry.

Harry froze with his hand on the door handle of the office.

“Skull—“

“Not Skull—“

“I’m not calling you Harry Potter—“

“It’s my name—!“

“It’s too plain!“

“… Wow, discount Voldemort.” Harry blinked.

“… what.”

“Bye!” Harry flopped out of the office. And right in to Liliana. Harry scrambled to catch her by her
elbows, stopping her from toppling or falling in to the bodies behind her. Harry blinked, holding Liliana up as he noticed Fabian, amongst more people wearing Carcassa purple suits. Heavily enchanted and ready for battle suits.

“… Hi.” Harry blinked at the group.

Fabian blinked back.

Liliana stood up, “Harry, wh—“

“Eep!” Harry scrambled as his feet left the floor, and his body was hauled back in to the office by the back of his shirt. Harry looked up and found Reborn, although Reborn was focused more on Liliana and her guardians as they followed them in to the room.

Well, this was the strangest standoff Harry had been in. He wasn’t even a part of the standoff. In fact, he was pretty sure he counted as the ‘princess’ in this scenario.

“Reborn,” Liliana hissed, “let him go.”

“Why? This one is one of mine.” Reborn didn’t even bother to hiss. He sounded bored. But Harry could feel the grip on his shirt tightening.

“No, he is Carcassa! He is mine, because I am boss!” Liliana swiftly asserted, even as her guardians fanned out behind her in a loose horseshoe.

A touch to Harry’s shoulder, and Harry turned to see Lal. The woman had a rifle in hand, and her usual serious expression back on her face. Another hand to his back, and Harry turned further and found the familiar hood of Mammon.

“… are you all here?” Harry couldn’t help but ask, even though it obviously gained the attention of everyone in the room.

“Of course we’re here. “ Reborn actually groused with that murmured retort.
Harry dropped his face in to his hand and gave one big, long sigh and flicked his wand upward—

*Levicorpus!*

Harry twisted his wand, and sent them all dangling in the air by their ankles. The Arcobaleno, that is. Harry reached out and casually picked up Leon before the chameleon dropped to the floor.

He faced the Arcobaleno, ignoring Liliana hesitating by the door.

(Harry wasn’t a princess!)

Lal hadn’t let go of her gun, but she looked more stunned than anything else as she shifted her body about.

Mammon… was rather motionless, actually.

“… so, you guys are here to ‘rescue me’.” Harry didn’t move his fingers in air quotes, but from the squinting of Reborn’s eyes, he was rather sure that the hitman could hear it. “I don’t need rescuing from my kids, you idiots!”

“… kids?” Lal asked slowly. The word drawing out long and confused.

“I’m his great granddaughter.” Liliana stepped up next to Skull, unquestioningly following Harry’s lead in the conversation. Because if the Arcobaleno were this dedicated to finding Harry, then it really was best to just throw this in to Arcobaleno’s face and let them have their peace so they could go their separate ways.

Reborn, perhaps theatrically, looked between Harry and Liliana.

“… “ Reborn didn’t have to speak a word, but Harry could hear that silent ‘bullshit’ that the man was not saying. Harry couldn’t deny that Liliana and himself looked very close in age. With her being a bit younger.
Liliana put her hands on her hips, “… he doesn’t even need to speak to be a dick.”

“For someone that doesn’t have a dick, you seem fixated.”

Wow, that was petty.

Harry waved his wand and countered the spell. The three of them all landed on their feet.

“… perhaps we should have a nice sit down?” Harry offered. The ache in his body, and the chill that was setting in—he didn’t have the energy to deal with this. But he would talk at them, if only to make them go away.

Liliana put her hand on Harry’s shoulder, “you need to take your last dose. Albus is in the infirmary.” Liliana mentioned, and Harry grinned. He could understand that he had lost some time, but if it was one dose left and then he was free from the dragon potion, all the better!

Hands on his neck, bodily hauling Harry away from Liliana. Harry rolled his eyes and set Leon on Reborn’s shoulder, since the hitman was so close. “It’s medicine!” Harry didn’t even bother to stop the Skull-pitched whine that came out.

Reborn minutely froze before he shook his head. “No, if there are no testers, you’re not drinking it.”

“You don’t get to decide what I do,” maybe if Harry said it enough, Reborn would understand that.

“Skull—“ Lal murmured.

“Not Skull!” Harry hissed, and kicked Reborn in the shin.

The man didn’t even flinch. Harry barred his teeth at his poker face.

“Why aren’t we leaving?” Colonello called from the window as he crawled his way in to the room.
Harry closed his eyes and took a deep, calming breath. This wasn’t happening. Goodness. He was hallucinating. This had to be a hallucination.

The standoff was continuing. Harry had thought it was over already!

Harry raised the wand, and squawked as Reborn snatched his wand hand and pointed the tip far away from his person.

“… Really?”

“… Yes.”

“… the wand makes it easier, doesn’t leave me powerless.” Harry gave a warning before he could think better of it. Sometimes Harry really hated the fact that he gave Reborn so many warnings, outs, and safety checks.

A knock on the door. Harry tugged on his wand hand and found no give. Harry shook his head and turned to look to the door. Hopefully it as Albus—

Dark hair, bright red Chinese shirt—

Harry froze as his eyes locked on to Longwei’s face.

LongweiFonLongweiFonLongweiFon—

His heart trembled.

--go over there be close listen be obedient listen listen follow obey—

His body got a little shake, but Harry couldn’t look away.
Fon’s eyes were locked to Harry.

His mouth was moving.

But all Harry could hear was ringing and this terrible wrenching pain—pain—pain—

—in—

—listenobeylistenobeylistenobeylistenobey—

Harry couldn’t breathe. His chest ached.

Hands on his neck. A stronger shake.

Someone standing between him and LongweiFon but Harry didn’t need to see him to know that he was there. He needed to go over there. Fall on his knees and kiss his feet and—

KILL IT

RIP

KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL

TEAR

KILL KILL KILL KILLKILLKILL

KILL

BURN IT
Harry gasped and jerked up. He fisted his hands on the sheets and swiveled around. “What…. What…” Harry stared at the infirmary around himself, breathing hard.

“… Dad…” Albus called.

Harry jerked to lock eyes on to Albus, and found his son sitting in a chair next to the bed.

“What… what…” Harry stuttered over the word.

What just happened?

“Fon’s not dead,” Albus started off, and Harry’s heart…. Gave a little clench.

“No one is dead,” Albus continued on.

“That’s not what he wants to know,” Reborn’s voice was icy, and Harry jumped to realize that he wasn’t alone on the bed—and that a warm hand was on the back of his neck. He turned and looked up at Reborn.

“… you had a negative reaction to Fon and tried to kill him.” Albus murmured. “We fed you the last dosage after you were knocked out. The effects should be now be dissipated.”

Harry croaked, “… why did I…?”

“… you’ve always reacted negatively to controlling influences when you knew about them.” Albus said. The hand on the back of Harry’s neck tightened.

“… Who… who knocked me out?” Harry asked, a hand reaching out to Albus.
“… James did.”

“… spell?”

“… Yes.”

“Is he okay?” Harry whispered.

Albus hesitated, “… he’s taken ill.”

“I want to see him.” Harry immediately stated, kicking at the blankets. Reborn reached down and yanked them off. Harry froze—his clothes were shredded and bloody. That… was a lot of blood.

“… most of its yours.” Reborn offered.

Harry reached down and ran his fingers over some of the biggest shreds. They looked more like acid burns in some areas. His heart didn’t calm down, and continued to thud away in his chest. Harry briefly closed his eyes and took several breaths. When he felt like his heart wasn’t going to escape, he opened his eyes and focused on Albus.

“… I thought… the blackouts would stop.”

Albus looked sad, “… we can’t account for unique circumstances.”

Harry firmed his spine and nodded before he eased off of the bed. Reborn at his side a second later.

Harry turned and looked up to Reborn.

“… Have I always been like this?” He asked, even when he didn’t want the answer.

“Yes. In varying degrees, but yes.”
The world was turning slightly. Harry wobbled before he straightened up again. “… how bad?”

“Memory lapses. Extremely forgetful. You often temporarily forget names and faces that you’ve known for years. You usually remember within a few days. You’ve been prone to dangerous behavior such as jumping from varying heights for the rush….” Reborn trailed, and eventually decided to remain silent.

“… so, when I started jumping out of windows and running away from you lot…”

“… It was pretty normal. You were never so consistently competent, though. You usually never try so hard.” A pause, “I always assumed you let yourself get caught.”

Reborn reached down and took Harry’s hand.

“You’re Arcobaleno—we take care of each other. Even in the worst of times.” Reborn insisted after a brief squeeze to the hand.

Harry closed his eyes and sat on the edge of the bed, before he could topple over. He thought back, then, over all their interactions.

‘Lacky, I don’t know what they did to you. But we will fix it.’

‘… do you really not remember…?’

‘Are you remembering?’

‘Do you remember our history?’

‘I’m not letting you go.’

And then those damning words that Harry himself had said. ‘All I wanted was help—did you ever
help me?’ The words tasted sour, the memory of it singing in his ears.

That wasn’t the worst of all he had said, was it?

‘You made my motorbike crash, didn’t you?’

‘If I did?’

“Then you’re the absolute worst.”

‘I could live with that.’

Harry used his free hand to rub at his face. Oh, the guilt was going to eat him alive. All of this time, the Arcobaleno must have been worried out of their mind. Although they had a funny way of showing that they cared… but at the same time it didn’t seem too unreasonable when it was obvious that they seemed used to Skull letting loose violent outbursts.

The Arcobaleno were violent criminals—they weren’t going to be perfect saints when placed before a unique case of mild insanity. They were going to grouch. They were going to sigh. And yell. And complain. And perhaps hit too hard in response to being hit first.

“… senpai…” Harry murmured.

Reborn reached over and ruffled Harry’s hair.

“Your… son, said you should be able to safely see Fon now… would you want to?” Reborn asked. Harry blinked at the floor and then looked over to Albus.

“… how long have I been out?”

“… ‘bout six hours.” Albus offered.
“Is Fon okay?"

“He isn’t bleeding or broken.” Reborn offered. Harry squinted his eyes and let the look of displeasure crawl over his face. “… he is okay.”

“Then I want to see James.” Harry decided.

Albus nodded, before he paused and looked to Reborn. “… Only family in the main house.”

It took a long moment before Reborn let go of Harry. When he did, Reborn crossed his arms over his chest. Harry nodded and took to his feet once again. Harry looked to Albus, and offered his son a hand. Albus gratefully took the help to get to his worn feet. Reborn stepped ahead and opened the door.

Harry found that Lal and Colonello were stationed in the hall outside. Next to Fabian. It had been dead silent before they stepped out, and it remained there even after Harry and Albus stepped in to the hall.

“… How the hell did you lot even find this place?” Harry couldn’t help it, he needed to know this one.

Reborn smugly closed the door, “World’s greatest.”

“… I am so tired of that line.” Harry groaned.

“Yuni,” Lal offered, her deadpan face locked on Reborn to see the moment the smug look flatten to indifference.

Albus, who was holding on to Harry’s arm, leaned in and whispered, “this place isn’t warded against muggles… it’s warded against thieves and those who wish to do harm.” Harry nodded to show that he heard the information, and as much as he wanted to poke at the flaw in the wards he needed to admit that magic was a dying thing. And perhaps there were more wards that Albus wasn’t listing.

Harry ruffled his hair, and moved to shuffle along the hall. The entourage could follow. It was time
to go see James. Magic had consequences, after all. And his son was old and frail.

In his heart… he was a little afraid.

Harry didn’t care for the feeling.

Chapter End Notes

... so, I know I promised Frank and Selene in this chapter... but Reborn kind of took over. (He does this, whenever he shows up. Jerk needs entire chapters just for him...)

I had inspirations for things to go differently than the original plan. And wrote this.

I'm keeping this brief because my computer screen keeps blacking out and freaking me out. Ahaha the end feels nigh. If this computer goes down, this fic goes with it omg...

If there are mistakes, I'll come back for them.

Side note... Lonesome George cameo. Cheers.

... Frank and Selene the III will show up... soon...
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Everything was so thin and insubstantial about all of his children. From their wispy hair, to the wrinkling… they were already ghosts, in a sense. And Harry was haunting himself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Walking in to James’ bed room was more jarring than it should have been.

The giant bed that looked like it had been taken straight from Hogwarts. With the matching curtains, the wall tapestry with the Hogwarts Crest, the racing brooms mounted on the wall, enchanted items overflowing the bookshelves; it was like returning home. Literally overflowing! The whole room was overflowing with aging magic.

It was also a bit of a mess.

Albus shuffled past, and Harry watched him from where his feet had glued themselves to the ground. Harry’s arms felt leaden as he took in the scene in its entirety.

… this was the room he always envisioned for himself. This was a scene of a future he had hoped for himself. The room breathed magic, and Harry’s fingers tingled.

Harry felt satisfied, in a sense, that James was able to enjoy such a lifestyle.

Harry’s eyes fell to the bed where all the curtains had been drawn back and tied in to place with golden cords. Lily sat on the bed next to James’ still body with a hand on top of his head as the old man slept on. Albus slowly lowered himself down in to the single chair next to the bed, and reached forward to hold James’ hand. Their hands were both thin skinned, wrinkled, and curled with age. Like puzzle pieces being fit together, Albus took up James’ hand and gave it a gentle squeeze.

The scene felt finished.
‘I shouldn’t be here.’ Harry thought numbly to himself—not because of simple ill will, or for being the cause for the sudden lack of health. No… It was common sense. Logistics. The natural order of things. Harry was too old to be standing here. He was far too old to be alive—too old to see his own children so sick and old.

(Harry had never planned to live so long. Living had always been immediate. Harry knew that living would always have an end. He had been surrounded by ghosts all of his life, he had accepted his end long before he had the ability to recognize his own acceptance. He had never planned to live so long as to be able to see his children like this—he had never wanted to. If there was one thing that he had learned in helping raise little Teddy Lupin, was that all children with dead parents carried the guilt of their deaths with them. Harry had thought he was alone, but learned he was less unique than he thought… which was a relief. It really was.)

It was at this moment that he felt his most unnatural.

“Daddy,” Lily called, and held out a hand.

Harry didn’t know what else to do, so he merely followed Lily’s silent request to hold her hand. Numbly, Harry dropped to sit on the edge of the bed. The bed was enchanted, and didn’t shudder with Harry’s sudden drop down. He looked to James, now. Seeing the shallow rise and fall of his chest. The arms and hands laying prone on top of the sheets.

The oxygen mask. The tanks next to the bed. The fogging of each tiny exhale. The rattle of exhausted gasps.

“… this is all my fault.” Harry murmured.

Who else could be blamed but Harry?

Normally blameless, rolling with the punches Harry was completely at fault now. Perhaps Frank was more right than he should be allowed. Frank’s voice, more haunting now from how long ago Harry had heard Frank’s words—and how deeply they had somehow imprinted themselves on his soul.

(“You let them take you away!” …. Did he?)

“Daddy,” Lily started again, taking a breath like she fully intended to continue. Harry shook his
Harry was grateful that she took the silent sign and held her tongue.

... after all—Harry hadn’t been strong enough, or perhaps not smart enough, to stop this entire situation before it got out of hand. He couldn’t even recall if this was a situation where he had walked in to it willingly, under the pretense that he was going undercover... or if he had been attacked and had been unable to save himself. He couldn’t recall anything at all about the sudden shift of his life other than the fact that he had shifted—

Harry reached out and placed his own hand on top of James’ chilled, unmoving hand. Looked to the pinch of his face. The depth of the wrinkles around his forehead and eyes. The discolored skin that looked to be freckles or age—he couldn’t tell the difference.

Harry shifted and pressed his fingers against James’ pulse. It was sluggish. And weak. Thin.

Everything was so thin and insubstantial about all of his children. From their wispy hair, to the wrinkling... they were already ghosts, in a sense. And Harry was haunting himself.

Harry shivered, letting the full body shudder run through him.

("I didn’t pull you back so you could ruin us!")

Harry closed his eyes, keeping his fingers on James’ pulse as he brought up years of medic knowledge to the forefront of his mind. Slow, sluggish, weak—coldness, fatigue, weakness. Harry shifted his fingers away from James’ pulse, and pulled his hands over James’ fingers.

Chilled.

Harry casted a mild heating charm on the bed. Raising the temperature just slightly.

“We’re ready for this,” Lily broke the silence. She didn’t continue till Harry looked over to her. “We’re old, Daddy. We’re ready. When push comes to shove.” Her eyes slid away from Harry to James. “Minimal regrets.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry noticed the corners of Albus’ mouth drew down on the word
'regrets’, and he kept his eyes locked on to his hands, where they were cradling James’ other hand.

Her words reverberated in the air. Until Harry shattered them.

“I’m not,” Harry felt his throat pinch. It was almost painful, fighting to get the words out. His eyes were burning again, “I’m nowhere near ready.” It wasn’t fair.

There was no real way to step against the flow of time.

“I don’t want to let anyone go.” Harry’s voice warbled near the end, and he hated the fat tear that flopped down his face. Gritting his teeth, Harry used the heel of his hand to wipe the evidence of weakness away. Although the action just made room for the next one. And the one after that. Harry choked down on the scream that wanted to come out as he held on to James’ hand once more.

Harry forced his voice as even as he could, “James, wake up.” He gave the still chilled fingers a squeeze.

Lily sat down behind Harry, and silently wrapped her arms around his middle. Harry felt her cheek come to lay on his shoulder. It was only with her there that he realized he was shivering. That he was vibrating in place.

This was the stuff of nightmares.

The bedside of his child. Gravely ill or gravely injured.

(Not worn thin to the point of insubstantiality. Ground down in to dust by life and ready to scatter over the earth.)

Harry couldn’t even bring to words the sudden cold that had gripped his heart. His chest hurt the longer he looked to James—bands of magic hooking in his ribs and pulling them ever inward. Refusing expansion. His mind would not shift to the idea of James suddenly not being accessible. Of not being in the Carcassa compound.

Of not being alive.
Harry kept his eyes shut and focused on his breathing.

He tried. Harry tried so hard to get his shivering to stop. To make the tears stop.

But… with his eyes closed.

The image of a child—pale faced. Slack.

Smelled like something rotting.

Like the inferi of the lake.

Overpowering.

Young—young—too young, the curve of their neck to skull was too soft and fragile and the lack of their soft exhales was too, too loud—

“—Dad!” the voice of Albus was strong, and very loud—in his ear. Harry jerked, and realized that the scream in his ears was coming from his own throat, and he snapped his mouth shut even as he pressed his hands more firmly against his face. Dug his nails in hard to ground himself.

There was pain in his veins. His body was only as strong as the pain it could endure.

Lily’s hand was rubbing circles against his back.

Harry didn’t look up—but he could feel his children having a conversation over his head, even if they were just using their eyes.

“Why don’t we get you some clothes and a shower? And then we can sit and have a meal.” Harry heard Lily. He really did. But it sounded like she was coming from far, far away. Time felt slow as he lifted his head and looked over and up at her. Harry shivered, and ignored the tears that popped
up once more.

“What… what if…” Harry choked.

_Not James._

_Please._

He wasn’t ready.

Harry bit in to his lip hard. And watched Lily’s hand reach out and wrap around his curled fists. She gave a gentle tug. She wouldn’t have the strength to move him, even if he allowed it. No, she was frail and old and small—

“A shower. It’ll be quicker than a bath. I’ll set out some clothes that’ll make you feel comfortable.” Lily murmured.

Trembling, Harry nodded. He got to his feet at another tug to his hand. Harry couldn’t stop himself from watching James over his shoulder until Lily pulled them entirely from the room. In silence, Harry let himself be led back to his room. Harry didn’t question the nudge toward his personal bathroom. And he went in without a fight.

His fingertips felt like they were on fire. Too sensitive to the touch. But that was probably just him.

He vanished his ruined clothes with his hand. And truly just stood under the spray of water until the smears of rusty-black were mostly diminished on his legs. When only the faintest of smudges remained, Harry grabbed his washcloth and wiped the rest of it away.

…the hot water felt soothing.

His eyes didn’t hurt so much when he finally stepped out.

Looking in to the mirror hurt his head. For a moment, he expected a pasty white face that was as
smooth as a baby… but he also expected black hair and green eyes. He expected enough that he briefly went cross-eyed for a moment before he looked away and rubbed at his face.

His bedroom was empty when he stepped back in to it.

As Lily promised, there was a set of clothes on the bed. Looking at them, though, Harry wouldn’t say that he expected them to actually be comfortable. Harry debated grabbing another pair of jeans he had seen in his wardrobe, but eventually just pulled on the jumpsuit that had been left out.

… this was Skull’s jumpsuit. This was what Skull wore… all the time.

Harry conceded that it was terribly easy to pull it on.

The weight and squeeze of everything was comforting. Harry grabbed his own socks and boots. Idly he pawed through the drawer in his dresser he had dubbed the ‘leather drawer’ and hadn’t investigated much further after that first cursory glance. He took the time to locate some new driving gloves to shove in to his pocket.

A flash of red caught his eye. There for only a second. Harry hesitated only briefly before fishing through and jerking out the red-thing and—

… it was his Auror uniform.

Just as he remembered it.

Slowly, carefully, he pulled it out. When the robe cleared the lip of the drawer, something tumbled out and smacked on to the ground. Harry jumped only slightly at the sound, but swiftly picked up his leather wand hostler. Looking at it, though…

This was not his. But after placing it on, it fit his exact measurements.

… hadn’t he mentioned, off hand, to Ginny… so many years ago… that his hostler had taken a lot of damage? That it was falling apart? He had said that, hadn’t he?
He found a lightning bolt embossed in to the underside. Charmed to shimmer like gold.

Harry shivered, and silently charmed the hostler in to place and shoved his wand inside.

…. He would think about this later. Not now.

He had better things to do now.

Returning to James’ room sent his heart racing. He paused briefly outside of the doorway, and listened to the carrying voices of his children as he forced the shaking in his hands to stop.

“… soup. It’ll be easier.” Lily said.

“True, true. He has regained some color. Perhaps the toll won’t be as bad as we first assumed.” Albus’ voice was a little harder to hear. But still audible.

Lily hummed, “it’ll be good. He may not be on his feet any time soon… but it’ll be good for dad to see him sitting up and awake.”

“Yes… but it was a lot of spells, Lils.”

“… yes. Fifteen, by Liliana’s count. Give or take three, according to Fabien’s account.”

Silence, then. And when it went on too long, Harry padded his way in to the room. There was another chair next to the bed. Lily occupied the other one, and Albus stood by the window where the curtains had been drawn back. Both of his children looked to him, but neither verbally greeted him.

Harry went to the chair and sat himself down. And no one spoke for a long, long while.

Harry spent his time watching James’ breath.
Lily, after a little while, busied herself with organizing James’ shelves in to something less of a whirlwind. And Albus sat down and somehow fell asleep all within the span of three minutes, looking a little pale.

He watched. And brooded (or was it thought? Thought and brooded and wondered and twisted himself up in circles and pretzels and—).

And at least discovered the source of his discomfort. Of his horror.

“I don’t want any of you to die for me.” It tumbled out. And Harry didn’t want to take it back.

Lily looked up from the shelf she stood in front of, a cloth in hand and a picture frame in the other. The moving picture in the frame was aged, from what Harry could tell from this distance.

“Well, that’s our choice, isn’t it?” Lily spoke evenly. “No one can take that from us.” She set the frame back in its place, and then moved to stand next to Harry’s chair.

Looking up at her now, well. “You’re just like your mother,” Harry murmured. Equal parts awe and sorrow. He had never seen Ginny so old, and never so wise. But Ginny had always had the potential for it. And Harry could see the metamorphosis of his wife being the example that Lily lived up to.

“Hm, that’s a familiar statement,” Albus piped up. His head propped up against the back of his chair, and body slumped down with his fingers threaded over his stomach. After a moment he cracked open an eye to look over to Lily, then to Harry.

Lily let out a breath of air. “No, daddy. I believe we’re just like you, really.” Lily quirked a smile.

Harry tilted his head to the side as he looked between his two children. More like him? Harry saw more of Ginny’s spirit amongst the three of them. (These were Ginny’s children, weren’t they? What part of himself did he contribute, did he give?) What could he have possibly given to his children? All three of them? “…uh, Potter luck?” He ended up asking.

Albus chuckled. “More or less.”
“Strange thing, that Potter Luck. Do you think it’s a curse?” Lily curled a smile as she sat on the edge of the bed.

“No,” Albus actually rolled his eyes, pointing them skyward as if the sheer thought that their odd family luck was a curse. “It’s coincidence that we attribute to a figment after the fact. There is no curse, but after things happen we like to attribute such coincidences to the non-existent curse.”

“… you’ve thought a long time on that.” Harry murmured. The words jumbled in his head, much like Hermione’s usually thought out speeches did.

Albus rubbed his hands together, seeking warmth. “.. I’ve had a long time to think, dad.” Albus offered.

“… yeah.” It was the truth, and Harry had to accept it. One could not reverse the flow of time.

This was not the tale of Sirius Black and the Dementors.

No.

The chance of such a tale happening for a second time in Harry’s life was too terribly small. He would never again be so lucky to step through time and save the life of someone dear to him. Not like that. Never again.

Harry rubbed his face and slumped in his seat, mirroring Albus as he closed his eyes. “A long, long time…” And wasn’t that what he had always wanted for his children? A long, full life? Full of love?

… he could have done without all of the heartache and suffering, though.

He was sure they all could have.

Harry hasn’t realized he had drifted off until Liliana was over his shoulder, gently shaking it. When she noticed that Harry was looking at her, she stopped shaking his shoulder. Harry groaned as he
slowly stretched his body, and she removed her hand from his shoulder. He stretched his arms up above and arched his back, and then let himself go boneless.

“He’s making a nuisance of himself.”

Harry paused and focused his eyes on Liliana. In the pit of his stomach, he could really only think of one man that Liliana could be talking about.

He sighed. “How?”

“Harassing the minions. Blatantly camped out in front of this house most of the time. Staring at people.” Liliana listed off.

Harry hummed—that didn’t sound too troublesome. But looking up at Liliana’s face showed that she really was annoyed by Reborn’s actions. Maybe with his known history of Reborn, well, perhaps the small things he did weren’t as bothersome to Harry as they should be.

“Um… right.” Harry shifted, paused, and then pulled himself to his feet. He let his arms hang to the side as he looked around the room. Lily was sitting on the edge of James’ bed, reading a book. Albus was no longer in the room. And otherwise it was just him and Liliana.

“I’ll just… go and see them. Real quick. I’ll…” Harry trailed.

“See you soon, Daddy. I’ll watch over James. He is doing much better. Get something to eat,” Lily smiled, not bothering to look up from the book—no, it wasn’t a book. Looking through a photo album. Harry felt an itch to go and look over her shoulder to see what was inside. But, well…

He could do that later, right?

“… I’ll be back soon,” Harry murmured, and left.

Before they stepped out of Potter house, Liliana reached out and touched Harry’s arm. She didn’t grab, but merely placed her hand against his elbow and drew to a stop. Harry complied with the silent request, stopping to look to her.
“You’re not really breaking your ties to them, are you?” Liliana asked. Her body facing Harry, but her eyes looking away.

This answer was complicated, on the single virtue that Harry didn’t immediately have an answer for Liliana. In fact, as he stood before her now he could almost feel the headache that would be this issue concentrate in to a single point of pain in his forehead.

The Arcobaleno had done… much, for him.

More than they were obligated to.

Perhaps more than they should have.

Looking through the haze of memories, if only briefly—Harry… No, Skull—he had been a mess of a human being, even if it no fault of his own. He had actually nearly ruined missions due to his memory problems. Put them in danger. Had them pick up his slack. Almost accidentally killed half of them. Multiple times.

And even after the shattering of the Arcobaleno curse—even after that, they had still stuck by him. They still checked on his welfare. With more frequency than an obligation or routine called for.

But even then…

Harry pressed his nails hard in to his palm and looked away from Liliana. “I said I would, didn’t I?”

“… Yes, you did.” Liliana whispered. It carried.

Harry wasn’t sure he liked the fact that Liliana had apparently inherited his own dramatic pausing when speaking. Now he directly understood why Draco Malfoy always walked away with his hands in fists and his face carefully blank.

“If I did so—how would you feel?” Harry asked, curious.
Liliana pursed her lips, and finally looked to Harry. Slightly, she raised her chin. “… you don’t need my approval, one way or another. You’re still going to be here… right?”

“Yeah. Always.” Harry felt himself relax. It was suddenly easier to breath. And no headache in sight.

Liliana’s eyes closed, and her shoulders briefly jumped up, and then relaxed. She nodded. “Family, always.”

Harry took his right hand and offered it to Liliana. Palm to the side. He waited for Liliana to notice the hand, and when she did she looked up to Harry. They didn’t speak, they didn’t need to. She took his hand and they shook.

With that, Harry took the lead as he stepped out of Potter House and into the too early morning. He just followed the smell of smoke that led him around the corner. Harry felt his own eye twitch when he recognized a table-chair set that was normally found by the front gate. Reborn was casually leaning back on two of the four chair legs with his head tipped back.

Viper sat in one of the vacant chairs, body calm and rather still.

Just a little way away was Fabien, a mug of coffee in hand and standing next to what could only be a Lovegood. He didn’t much look like Luna, but he was pale, and his face set in a dreamy expression. Harry looked away from him before he could read too much into it.

“Why are you making trouble?” Harry sighed, coming to a stop next to Reborn.

“I didn’t realize something so simple could summon you to me,” Reborn remarked flatly as he ran a finger down Leon’s spine, where the chameleon was perched on his knee. His shiny (new) dress shoes were up on the metal table, and the man really was too comfortable looking where he was. Reborn kept his eyes on his Chameleon.

Harry placed his hands on his hips, “your actions didn’t summon me.”

“Didn’t they?”
“Of course not!” Harry hissed.

“The girl summoned him,” Viper listed off, head tilting just slightly.

Liliana instantly coiled up, “I’m not a girl!” She exhaled with as much vehemence as she could in her need to validate herself as an adult rather than a child. Which was enough for most people. But even when Harry acknowledged that fact, he also felt completely unbothered by her attempts to claw herself on to the same platform that Harry and the Arcobaleno stood upon. It was amusing. Harry was torn between humoring her or poking her himself to see what she would do with another insult.

… wisely, he decided on neither. And ignored her words.

“I’m still waiting for my son to wake up,” Harry chose to say.

Reborn stilled his stroking of Leon, and calmly picked up Leon and placed the animal on his tie. Leon instantly curled himself up, making himself seem like a false decoration. Viper was the one that stood. Their chair silently pushing back as they stood. “Come see the rest of us,” Viper motioned toward the main compound. Where the offices and meeting rooms were.

“Fon is awake,” Reborn added.

Harry flinched, automatically taking a few steps away from the hitman.

Well…

.... Well....

Harry crossed his arms over his chest, tucking his fingers in to the crooks of his elbows.

… Harry didn’t want to go and see Fon. There was copper in his mouth, and red in the corners of his eyes at the thought. But he knew—he knew Fon wasn’t to blame for this. It was Frank. And it was Harry. That was where the potion had started. Harry swiftly clawed at his memories for something
good of Fon. Something to focus on. But all he could think of immediately was the gut wrenching sensations induced by the potion. The antagonistic vehemence and pain.

Chills swept up and down his arms.

“… I’m sorry for it. Really.” Harry mumbled. He looked between the Arcobaleno and then turned away.

A flash of warmth through his entire body. Harry registered that first, and then the caging hand on his shoulder. A glance and he spotted Reborn’s too close poker face. Harry shrugged off the hand and stepped away.

“Stop that,” Harry said.

Reborn cocked his head to the side. Silent.

“The… warmth—thing. Whatever it is you’re doing, stop it.” Harry still felt it in his fingers.

“Ho? You notice that?” Reborn tipped his Fedora, half of his mouth quirking up in a smirk.

Harry brought his shoulders up higher. “I’ve always noticed it.” Even as Skull, he had noticed it. Although he hadn’t always noticed it. Mostly after the curse, it had become apparent to him.

The hum Reborn sounded was short, and Harry wanted to call it mocking. But he was starting to think that anything Reborn voiced would always be so. It was like a vocalized ‘resting bitch face’, as his memories for Skull gleefully supplied as a title.

“Aren’t you going to answer me?” Harry asked, a bit more tired than annoyed.

“Aren’t you going to ask a question?” Reborn was swift and merciless.

Harry decided that this was going to go nowhere, and turned his thoughts to better things. To the fact that Fon was awake and the potion was out of his system.
Where did he and the Arcobaleno stand?

Well—he could at least apologize to Fon to his face, for this mess that Harry had made and dragged Fon in to. Harry pulled out his wand, and felt the sudden tension that raced through Reborn and Viper.

“Point me, Fon.” Harry let his wand twirl in his palm, and point.

“… That one, you could have asked.” Reborn reached out toward the wand.

Harry was swift to use his other hand to smack Reborn’s offending fingers away. Harry made sure to swiftly step forward as he did so, and grinned at the sharp hiss Reborn did. Harry’s grin grew bigger as he swiftly stepped forward again and away from Reborn’s grip. And chuckled at Viper’s quick under their breath chide to Reborn as the Arcobaleno told him in rather rude Italian to ‘quit it’.

Liliana dropped in to a jog next to Harry, stepping in to place next to Harry as Harry led the way.

The walk was… tense.

Harry felt hyper aware of all of them. Like sandpaper to his brain. (Which, thankfully, he had never experienced. But also a saying that didn’t quite make sense due to the fact that the brain did not feel pain—Harry stopped his trail of thoughts, and wondered when, as Skull, he had time to absorb so much strange information… probably from television binging. Not much to do outside of Mafioso business as a toddler when he wasn’t ripping himself apart…) Reborn and Viper behind him. Liliana walking fast to walk ahead and lead the way… and Fabian and the Lovegood trailing behind the whole group.

And here he was, walking to the source of his unease, discomfort, and guilt.

Harry didn’t slow down his stride as he moved. And that was why he came to stop before a room.

… and also because Lal was sitting outside of it in a fancy looking chair.
… cleaning a gun.

“When did you even fire that thing?” Harry couldn’t help but ask, even as he clenched his hand around his wand and canceled the location spell. He shoved the wand away, and focused on Lal as she watched him.

It was familiar and soothing. That look.

It also made his hair stand up and made his heart drum a little harder. He knew that look. The sharp inspection. Looking for weakness.

(This duality of the senses was. Not. Appreciated.)

She minutely pursed her lips and looked away.

“It’s meditative. You were taking too long.” She added, glancing to Harry out of the corner of his eye,

… well, he wasn’t going to apologize for spending time with his family. No matter the not subtle hints that Lal was dropping to the floor with the finesse of a Niffler on the scent of something expensive. Harry could step over these word land mines with ease. Harry stuck his hands in to his pockets and looked to the door that Lal was sitting in front of.

“Is Fon by himself?” Harry asked.

“Verde is inside,” Reborn added, turning to lean his back against the door next to Lal. His eyes were locked on to Harry, and Harry ignored the shiver he could feel coming along. There was just something about this stare that made him want to freeze in place and pray that the hitman didn’t actually see him.

Harry crossed his arms over his chest and squared himself up as he faced the two Arcobaleno. Viper gave a sigh and slipped by the two to enter the room. Harry watched him go, and didn’t let himself look around for support to this strange standoff. To Fabian, to Liliana, to the Lovegood—Harry didn’t look to them, but they all fell in to step to stand next to him in the hall.
Reborn looked amused. And irritated.

Never a fun time, when those two mixed.

“Some privacy, if you’d be so kind,” Reborn made a point to over enunciate as he looked to Liliana.

Harry felt that headache. Again. It felt a bit bigger.

“Carcassa land.” Liliana stated cleanly.

Harry rather wished to stun the both of him and finish his business without them.

“Arcobaleno business.” Reborn refuted.

“And I’m done with the posturing,” Harry rubbed an eye and stepped over to the door. It was cracked open from where Viper hadn’t bothered to finish closing the door.

“Skull—“ Liliana started, and then ate her words.

“I’ll be fine. I’ll finish this up and I’ll return shortly.” Harry stated firmly as he put a hand on the door handle. It was cool to the touch. He looked over his shoulder to make eye contact to Liliana. He watched her press her bloodless lips together. Watched her eyes dart to Reborn and Lal, and then back to Harry.

She was afraid.

… for him.

“I’ll be fine—promise.” Harry added.

(It was questionable if she was scared for him and what the Arcobaleno could do, or if she was
Liliana slowly nodded, and left. Her elements trailing.

Now that he had Reborn and Lal here, well…

Harry let out a sigh as he dropped his arms—and he barely resisted glancing to the closest window. Instead, he looked over to where Lal had never stopped cleaning her gun. She was firmly in the realm of reassembly now. Reborn was leaning an elbow against the back of her chair, and squarely watching Harry.

“**I have a question…**” Harry trailed.

Lal finished clicking her gun together, and gently laid it across her lap before she turned her head and firmly looked to Harry.

“… You said, Yuni…” Harry halted, and restarted, “you, Lal, implied—that Yuni brought you here. But no one has said… if…” Harry tried to keep from mentally scattering. But it was like trying to grasp smoke in his hands.

Lal glanced between Harry and Reborn, and after some awkward silence, she spoke to Reborn, “you’re going to leave him like that?”

“He is trying to assert his independence.” Reborn simply stated as he reached in to a pocket and shook out a cigarette. “Who am I to get in the way of that?”

Harry stiffened up, what was Reborn implying?

“I am independent,” Harry kept his tone as flat as possible.

Reborn hummed and lit a cigarette.
The back of his neck felt like it was on fire.

“This asshole said he was peaking in to windows to find me—but you saw them feed me my medications—which means that you lingered. You’re not that type,” Harry eventually bit out after straightening out his spine.

Reborn just let out a puff of smoke.

… oh right… ask a question.

“Why did you wait?” Harry did his best to not chew on his words as he hissed them out.

Reborn tilted his head to the side, and slowly reached up and took the cigarette out of his mouth. He held it daintily between his fingers.

“You saw them administrating something you thought was a sedative or something more nefarious—why didn’t you burst in and stop it?” Harry knew that this would only bother Reborn. But it was a question that was nagging on him a bit.

But Harry had said his question. And he would wait. It was like waiting for his children to admit to their wrongdoing. He had practice. He could outlast Reborn.

Lal was the one that broke first. Her nose wrinkled and she hopped to her feet. “He bitched about the windows being shatter proof. And then about how he couldn’t force it open.” She sounded amused, although there was an undercurrent of something that Harry couldn’t quiet put a name to. Not yet, at least. Not when he was still trying to reacclimatize to the Arcobaleno.

“You should have heard him swearing—he thinks he can be so creative, but when the real frustration sets in he swears like all the common gutter trash.” Lal was all teeth and side eyes to Reborn, who looked resolutely anywhere but at Lal.

Well… magic was the simple answer to that.

But Reborn had still come in through the window. Reborn might be the world’s greatest Hitman…
Reborn took in a large inhale of his cigarette, and as he slowly let it out he dropped his cigarette and crushed it under his foot. Smearing grey ash over the marble tile floor. The white marble. When Harry’s eyes finished tracking the movement of Reborn’s foot and focused once more on Reborn’s face—Reborn spoke, finally.

“Someone let me in,” Reborn said.

…. Why? Who?

“Who was it?” Harry asked, hushed.

“Why don’t you talk to that old man? The one that smells like a apothecary.” Lal said, side eyeing Reborn.

“The one you called ‘Albus’.” Reborn tacked on, the corners of his lips curling as he stuck his hands in his pockets and casually leaned back. “He—"

“No.” Harry’s voice cracked through the air as he pointed a finger at Reborn.

“No?” Reborn echoed, face expressionless.

“No,” Harry repeated again. “You don’t get to manipulate me like that.”

“Is the truth really manipulation?” Reborn asked.

“It is from you. You… you twist things. You just, just… twist the truth to get a… a reaction. You’ve always done it.” Harry accused, ignoring the crawling itch of memories on his brain. Reborn never truly outright lied to the Arcobaleno. But he withheld things. And twisted things. “I’m not a toy.” Harry firmly added. Because he did not exist for Reborn’s amusement.
Reborn hummed, head tilting for a moment before he snorted.

“No, you are not a toy.” He agreed, mildly.

As mild as Harry’s anger felt. It wasn’t even really anger. He felt more… resigned. And distanced.

Skull might have needed the Arcobaleno to keep from ripping himself apart.

…but Harry didn’t. He didn’t need to appease or work hard for the justification of his own existence.

“Albus still opened the window,” Reborn added as a parting verbal jab.

Harry clenched his teeth and crossed his arms once more.

“… we also got an anonymous tip off… Yuni was the one that took the call. And we were directed here.” Lal added, voice a bit softer as she focused in on Harry.

“… is she here?” Harry asked, just as hushed.

“No. She decided it was best that she didn’t.” Lal glanced to Reborn before she spoke.

Harry straightened up his posture before he could hunch too far over.

… that was probably for the best.

“… What happened to you, Skull?” Lal eventually said.

Hadn’t Reborn said the same thing? Harry didn’t know.
Harry bit down on his tongue to stop the automatic ‘nothing’ from falling out. He didn’t need to incite anyone in trying to guess ‘what’ had ‘happened’ to him. Instead, Harry turned and shoved through the door.

There was Viper—standing in front of a window.

There was Verde, sitting in a chair with his head tilted back, looking bored but also disturbing at the same time. Harry had never cared much for doctors. And knowing what he now knew of Verde, well…

Reborn and Lal at his back.

“Colonnello?” Harry asked, eyes sweeping the room.

“Up here,” Colonnello called from where he had knocked out a ceiling tile and had made himself a sniper nest. Harry stared for a moment, and decided not to address the insanity.

And, finally… he allowed himself to look at the bed.

To Fon.

Harry clenched his teeth tight as every muscle in his body tried to lock up. It took a moment to shake himself loose. And a moment longer before he could fully meet Fon’s eyes. Calm, like a horse. But Harry didn’t doubt that Fon could be far more deadly than a simple horse. The man didn’t look injured now, but… well…

Harry coughed in to his hand and kept his arms crossed over his chest as he shuffled enough in to the room where he could move to the side and not have Reborn and Lal at his back. “Well…” Harry started, and then stopped.

Reborn closed the door firmly. Lal went and took the last open chair.
The chairs were rather fancy, and did not fit at all in the hospital décor. Too warm.

“I guess…. I guess it’s about, uh, time. We all talked. Isn’t it.” Harry eventually concluded. While he didn’t much enjoy confrontations… he seemed to have a special kind of luck in always needing to make them. It was easier to confront children for being naughty, rather than grown men and women who had a particular skill set that involved ending human lives.

Harry sighed, “hello.”

“… Hello.” Fon echoed.

Harry didn’t stop his shoulders from jumping up and hiding his ears from sight. No, not his best moment.

“… So… well—this is going to be terrible… my name is Harry. Not… not Skull. It’s really complicated. And I’m… not doing so great of a job…” Harry cut himself off and let out a sigh.

Reborn hummed from where he was leaning against the door—and conveniently blocking the door exist, just as Viper was blocking the windows—and opened his mouth, “you speak better in scenarios where you’re in danger.”

“I’m not a diplomat,” Harry hissed before he straightened himself out. He didn’t hear the mumbled ‘too right’ fast enough to catch who had mumbled it.

“How about I ask questions, and you answer them.” Reborn shot in before Harry could stumble through another round of indirect conversation that didn’t truly have a point. Harry glanced around the room, and found that most of the Arcobaleno was watching Reborn. Few had eyes on him, aside from Viper (which was more felt than seen, really).

Harry shifted, “fine,” and found a bit of wall to press his own back against it.

“You’re calling yourself ‘Harry Potter.’” Reborn said.

“Not a question—but yes.” Harry suppressed the urge to bare his teeth. He never could help but
poke at those in positions of power. Snape had never appreciated it. Reborn obviously didn’t, either.

“You admitted to Fon that you’re British.”

“Once again, not a question—but yeah, British.”

Reborn’s eyes narrowed minutely. And he pulled out another cigarette.

“You’ve been remembering your time as ‘Skull’, correct?” Reborn continued.

“Yeah. It’s not… it’s not the most… coherent. But I know enough.” Harry added.

Reborn cocked an eyebrow, “enough to associate with us again?” Oh, that was a dig.

“Debatable, really. You’re kind of a dick.” Harry nearly laughed when Reborn almost crumbled his cigarette.

“… so the Carcassa elders are your kids?” Viper asked from the window, viciously cutting in to Reborn’s questioning for answers that they already knew. As it was, there were more important things to ask about. “How old are you?” Because they had seen the elders. And they were at death’s door, so to speak.

“Yeah, they’re mine…. I was born in 1980. So…” Harry trailed, not bothering to count his age as he glanced up to Colonnello to catch the pursed look the blond was sporting over the information.

“Who is Frank?” Reborn asked.

Harry stiffened up, and forced himself to not bolt. At this point… at this point magic was dead. Who even cared at this point? Harry rubbed his upper arms with his hands as he glanced around the room… and eventually settled on looking at Viper. Viper was the one that didn’t show their face. It just… made them seem less loud to look at.

Harry took a deep breath and let it out slow. “… Frank is the reason why your Skull is dead, and
Colonnello had his eyes yanked out of his... skull.” Harry added the last bit lamely. Well, it looked like his daughter wasn’t the only one that stumbled upon a ‘Frank’ slip up. Colonnello didn’t look happy with the reminder.

“You’re not... is your head alright?” Harry eventually asked.

“... Yeah. I don’t have headaches... what’d you do?” Colonnello asked. His chin pillowed on his arms from where he was peering through his hole in the ceiling down at them.

“... re-grew your eyes.” Harry murmured, and dropped his gaze to look at someone else.

Well, that was met with a bit of silence.

“... so... Frank.” Reborn prompted. And was it just Harry, or was Reborn a little bit closer?

“... he staged the kidnapping. Brought us to England and... well... woke me up.” Harry dropped his folded arms, if only to gesture at his own body.

“Now... why would he go and do a thing like that...” Reborn muttered to himself.

Fon spoke before Harry could, “this... Frank—obviously needs something that... Harry, can provide.” The man spoke carefully. His tone measured and controlled. But even with that, for a moment Harry almost saw red. It dissipated swiftly, the feeling or rage turning to apathy wasn’t something Harry wanted to experience often.

“... I’m not... sure... if he wanted my power, or my allegiance... or just my magic...” Harry sighed and rubbed his face, and winced as his fingers brushed over the bigger scars.

Lal tapped her heels on the floor absently, “this magic thing—doesn’t seem widely used. Why is that?”

Harry wrinkled his nose, “... the toll got too high.” He eventually decided upon.
“… what’s the toll?” Reborn asked.

… from right next to Harry.

Harry found himself unsurprised and not jumping in surprise over the sudden relocation of Reborn’s person. It was only expected, really. “… not too sure—that’s not… this happened, started to happen, while I was… not myself. I’m not… It’s… it’s the health. It’s why my son is bid ridden now.” Harry crossed his arms.

“… perhaps the soul, then.” Reborn murmured, because as flame centric Mafioso, they all believed in such a thing. It was substantial to them, after all. The manifestation of their ‘soul’ as ‘flames’.

“… perhaps.” Harry lamely echoed.

“Did you kill Frank?” Colonnello broke the silence.

And, well… Harry didn’t answer, and merely didn’t look up to Colonnello. Reborn gave an aggrieved sigh, and Harry resisted kicking the man in the shins.

“Frank is Carcassa business, now.” Harry eventually decided.

“Not if the Arcobaleno gets him first,” Lal pointed out from her seat, making a gun shape with her hand and gave a few pretend shots toward Colonnello, who retaliated in turn with his finger pistols.

Harry felt almost… pained, when he said, “that’s not how that works.”

“It is now,” Reborn grinned down at Harry. An obvious, ‘what are you going to do about it?’ expression on his face. If Harry could so clearly read his face, then Reborn was obviously projecting at him. Which meant that Reborn was manipulating.

… and damn if Harry wasn’t rising to the occasion. He really should know better, by now.

“Not if I get him first.” Harry declared. Because sooner or later Frank would come for him. He better
beat the man to the punch, so to speak. And end this before there were too many casualties. Harry didn’t need any more unnecessary deaths.

Reborn definitely looked smug. He leaned forward and in to Harry’s space.

“Wanna bet?”

Harry could see where Reborn was going.

“… we can’t go back to the way things were. Life doesn’t work like that.” The words came out before Harry could think better about it. Harry watched all of the expression drain from Reborn’s face. Like flipping a switch. Harry wondered if those emotions had been real, or if Reborn just had extreme control and was able to cover disappointment at the drop of a hat. He cleared his throat, and couldn’t look away from Reborn.

“I might have most of my memories from when I was Skull… but I came first. I… I… I deserve to live. And be myself. I am Harry Potter, and I exist. And I—“ Harry jerked when Reborn’s hand shot out and hooked in to the corner of his mouth with a thumb to pull his cheek hard to the side.

“I’m not giving up. I’m your senpai.” Reborn stated simply.

The thumb garbled Harry’s words, so he stuck out his tongue at Reborn as he loosened his arms to retaliate and then—

Reborn paused, and the angle of his hand changed and Harry jerked when Reborn was no longer pulling at his cheek, but squeezing at the stone. He knocked Reborn’s hand away so hard the sound of a slap reverberated in the air.

The air felt… colder.

“… what was that.” Reborn didn’t demand, and didn’t ask. But he… expected.

Harry felt his throat constrict. “… Nothing.”
“That didn’t feel like nothing.” Reborn stated, his eye fixated on the scar. Harry raised a hand and pressed it over his cheek. Reborn’s eyes fixated on his hand. On the puffiest of the scars. The ones that held the stones. “*None of your business*—” Harry hissed.

“What is it?” Verde asked, caging Harry in from the other side. His face a careful expression of clinical disinterest that had Harry’s hackles rise. Skull had never meshed with Verde, not like anyone else. But then again, Verde really wasn’t like the rest of them. He was so… self-absorbed and distant. It really was a miracle that he had stayed this long, in Harry’s opinion. “Is it the seal? I have been suspecting a subcutaneous tissue seal.” The man cocked his head to the side.

Harry distantly felt all of the muscles in his leg tense.

And was promptly shoved in to a chair that had been maneuvered in to his space.

Reborn’s hand came down on his right arm, and pressed it tight to the arm of the chair. Both hands. Clenching hard and blocking access to his wand.

… Harry didn’t need his wand to do simple magic. Reborn had obviously been watching where he had been storing his wand.

Harry felt a grip on his left forearm and turned to see Lal there.  

*(So what if he suddenly had reflexive tears—that didn’t matter. This was making him angry.)*

“So, we found the seal, then.” Verde asked, looking satisfied.

“Appears so,” Lal answered.

Harry turned his chin to the side, deflecting that specific scar from Verde’s view. “It’s not what you think, asshole.”

“What is it, then?” Verde asked, pulling on a set of rubber gloves from his pocket.
“H.. hey, should we really…?” That was Colonnello. He got a swift hush from Reborn.

“It’s not what you think,” Harry promised, shifting to pry his arms free. Reborn might be a lost cause, but Lal, well.

“Harry—won’t you let us just examine the one spot?” Fon asked, a hand on Verde’s shoulder to stop the man’s reach forward. “Sealing a flame isn’t good. It can make you deteriorate.”

Harry felt… flat. Nothing. He felt nothing for Fon. For good or for ill. And perhaps that was for the best. Harry took in a deep breath and let it out, and then promptly glared up at Lal until she slowly let go of his arm. Harry let out a sharp breath and moved his arm back to his person. He looked to Reborn, and knew that was a lost cause (and who cared if Reborn was doing that warmth-thing that was making the ache in his bones a little easier—).

Harry focused on Fon and Verde. “… I doubt that there is a seal… This… those… the flames—they had to have come from that I have. From magic. I don’t think I can… even if I wanted to—go back to Skull.”

Fon frowned.

“There has been scientific evidence that once Flames are unlocked, they cannot be put away once more,” Verde spoke flatly.

Harry gave a little shrug. It didn’t matter to him, really.

“What is it?” Reborn asked.

Harry pressed his lips together.

“… like a magic version of… a computer virus?” Harry had clawed through his head to find an appropriate equalization amongst muggles. Of course, relating himself to a computer wasn’t the best. But it got the point across.
“It was firm. Like a sub dermal implant.” Reborn stated to Verde.

Harry sighed and used his free hand to rub at his face.

“I’m going to get them removed.” Harry said.

“They.”

“Yes.” Harry bit out.

“Who is doing the surgery, then?” Fon asked, a source of calm between Reborn’s subliminal annoyance and Harry’s growing need to throw them away and gain some space.

Harry gave a little shrug, “… I was hoping the goblins…”

“… goblins?” Harry heard from behind the wall of people in front of him. Viper?

Reborn finally let go of his arm.

Harry yanked it away and crossed his arms over his chest before Reborn could attempt to take it back.

“… Has Skull even had a doctor check up?” Harry caught the tail end of some conversation between Fon, Verde, and Viper. There was a negative headshake from Viper after Fon placed a bill in Viper’s hand.

“Not since… the event.” Viper admitted.

Harry closed his eyes and tilted his head back for a moment. He took a breath and let it out slow. He only opened his eyes when he felt Reborn’s looming. Harry didn’t speak, and merely stared until Reborn spoke.
“Have Verde check you over.” Reborn ordered.

“No.” Harry said simply.

Reborn stared down at him.

“It’s none of your business.”

Reborn continued to stare down.

“It’s outside of your scope of knowledge.”

Still. Staring.

“Because I said no.” Harry eventually hissed, and jumped to his feet. Not waiting for Verde and Fon to step back. The two stumbled back after Harry knocked in to him. But Harry didn’t feel bad about it. It was their fault for crowding.

“I see you’re fine,” Harry concluded to Fon, slapped Reborn’s hand away, and slipped around Fon and out of the door. Harry fast walked away and down the hall.

And ignored Colonnello as the blond fell in to step next to him. Colonnello didn’t say anything, and merely followed along. Harry made his wait to the outside. It was late morning now. And he was already too tired.

… he supposed to needed to find some goblins.

…. Better get Liliana and run his plan through her. He doubted he could approach the goblins without them fearing another assault on their race. Harry rubs his face and lets out a sigh.

“… can’t we help?” Colonnello asked quietly.
Harry paused and looked over. And remembered Colonnello as the man that found him in a bathroom and sat with him until he felt better. Till the world wasn’t so overwhelming and…. And he softened, just a little. “… unless one of you can magically heal me—I don’t see how.”

“Reborn can,” Colonnello offered simply.

“… bullshit.” Harry hissed.

“It’s the truth,” Colonnello said, adjusting the strap of his shouldered gun. He shoved his hands in to his pockets. “He is the best at it…. What exactly are they?”

Harry sighed at Colonnello’s obvious fishing for information.

But… why not.

It was Colonnello, after all.

“… they’re stones. Magic stones. They were ritually implanted everywhere… they… I think they’re the things that switched my magic off, and let them twist to… flames. They also… altered… other parts of me. Which is why I can’t be Skull. Not for anyone. Not even if I try.” It was just not who he was on a fundamental level. There were similarities, but Harry had never been a blank canvas.

“… how many?” Colonnello asked.

“… um… I think… a hundred and something… varying sizes… they work in sync with each other… I need something… more than Mafioso.” Harry eventually bit out, and looked to Colonnello out of the corner of his eye. Colonnello looked serious enough.

“Alright—so.. we’re gunna talk to some… goblins?”

“… we?”

“Of course. You’re not the first to change your name.” Colonnello gave a little shrug. He looked
away. “… I feel better, knowing you’re doing alright.”

Harry pressed his lips together and fully turned to face Colonnello.

Colonnello rambled on. “I mean… the you now… and the you before—you’re very different. But at the same time I see the old you in the actions that you do now. But more… complete.” The Mafioso said.

Harry raised his hands and ran his fingers through his hair.

“Look. Colonnello… the only me there is, you realize, is me. I am as I am. The me that you… trampled. That you hurt—I don’t stand for that. Not anymore. I’m not a toy to care for, and stomp on for entertainment in intervals.” Harry pointed out. Watching Colonnello squint his eyes at the dirt with his lips pressed together.

Colonnello let out a puff of air before he softly said, “yes… I know that… I… I never should have taken things as far as they went. I was… I was angry. And you were annoying and… and just such an easy target.” Colonnello’s shoulder slumped.

“… you do realize what you just said, right?” Harry pointed out.

Colonnello tipped his head back with a grimace. “Yes. Yes, I know exactly what.”

“I’ll never allow you to do it again.” Harry firmly stated.

Colonnello tilted his head to the side, blinked, and then grinned. “Yeah?”

Harry watched Colonnello’s face for a moment. Saw the careful kindling of hope. And perhaps Colonnello cared more than Skull had ever assumed. Or perhaps… perhaps… Skull had really viewed it as some demented form of violent play. Perhaps Colonnello was the same. Perhaps neither of them knew better.

“Never again,” Harry said. And offered the olive branch.
Colonello grinned, and carefully telegraphed his moves to drop an arm over Harry’s shoulders. “I’ll still win at sparring.”

Harry rolled his eyes, “if you can catch me.”

Colonello squawked, much like Falco did. And then promptly started to rub his knuckled in to the top of Harry’s hair.

It was like…

… It was like Ron was back. Right there with him.

Harry… Harry laughed and swatted Colonello’s hand away.

“C’mon. Let’s go see the goblins… somehow.”

He would get ready for Frank.

(And after that… after that he’ll consider… everything else. Everything else could wait.)

Chapter End Notes

... so hello again.

I honestly don't know when the next chapter will be completed. RL was supposed to get better, but it hasn't. But here is for hoping.

This feels like a filler chapter... But it does help set things up a little more. The action is going to start swirling together soon. I hope it was a fun read for everyone.
I was inspired. I don't even know what I'm doing anymore.

Works inspired by this one: 

- ✨ **Dawn of Digital** by Kamishawe, ✨ **Stunt Gods Never Die** by Kamishawe

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!