When Darkness Comes

by sifshadowheart

Summary

Harry Potter was a contrary creature. He'd learned young that anything Vernon Dursley said the opposite was likely to be true. So when he turned his teacher's hair blue - magic according to his classmates - and Vernon decried that "There Was No Such Thing As MAGIC" Harry knew that magic was real - more that magic was what he had. A Grey Harry story.
A Pinch More Cunning, A Bit More Caring and a Tad Less Naïveté

When Darkness Comes

Author’s Note: I know, I already have a bunch of stories that are WIPs but the muse wants what the muse wants.

Disclaimer: Harry Potter is the property of JK Rowling and the respective copyright holder(s), this is fanfiction without monetary gain attached.

Warning! This story *may* contain the following as the story develops: SLASH, possible MPreg (still undecided) non-canon relationships and behavior/characterization. This includes a definitely Grey!Harry with possibilities of a Dark!Harry depending on where this takes me. I write AU’s for a reason people…

This first installment will give an insight into changes I’ve made from pre-series through second year, as it really doesn’t begin until Third Year, and is very long, nearly a story in and of itself. Right now we’re looking at updates every two to three weeks for this one.

A Pinch More Cunning, A Bit More Caring and a Tad Less Naïveté

July 24th, 1991

Harry James Potter wasn’t like he was supposed to be.

No, not at all.

Whatever wisdom had imagined that ten years of neglect that at times shaded into abuse would create a meek, malleable martyr, clearly didn’t understand abuse or neglect.

Yes, some people end up beaten down, their spirits broken, waiting and wishing for nothing more than a hero to rescue them and take them away.

But not all of them.

Petunia Dursley wasn’t quite like what she was supposed to be either.

Both of which were never shown to clearer effect than on the bright morning, on a perfectly normal day, in the perfectly normal home of the perfectly normal thank-you-very-much Dursleys.

The morning was July Twenty-Fourth, a mere week before young Harry’s eleventh birthday, and for the first time in his life (that he could remember, he was only ten after all) Harry had received post.

Harry James Potter

Smallest Bedroom

Number Four Privet Drive
It had come through the mail slot, along with the rest of the mail, but had fallen on top of the stack, giving Harry a split second to see the address and make a decision, one which – whether he knew it or not – changed the course of his life, much like another, seemingly small, decision had changed it once before when Petunia had perfunctorily shot-down her husband’s awful sister’s suggestion of “just stuffing the runt away in the boot cupboard” when Harry had outgrown his crib in the nursery.

Petunia might fear that her sister’s son would grow up to be as different as Lily, but she wasn’t completely vile – even if she was afflicted with intentional blindness at times – thank-you-very-much, and her nephew wasn’t a stray dog or a dirty secret to be tucked away.

They were getting assistance from the government, the standard orphan’s allotment, to take him into their home after all, and what would the neighbors think if ever any doubts about his living situation were brought to light?

A seemingly shallow argument, but one that worked quite well on her blustery husband, who was led all-too-easily by the women in his life when he wanted to be and utterly intransient when he wasn’t.

Which worked in Petunia’s favor – most of the time – except for when awful Marge dropped in, then all of a sudden Vernon would have two forces in his life pulling him in two between them.

Tucking the strange letter – it was made of nothing he’d ever seen or felt before – into the waistband of his heavy cotton work pants that were a size too big (Petunia believed in getting as much wear as possible out of his clothes, though kept to buying them only a bit big to keep from them wearing through before he even grew into them) and pulling down his plain cotton t-shirt over it, he set the morning post next to his uncle’s waiting plate and dished up his own helping of one egg with one scoop each fried tomatoes and mushrooms – no more no less, as it was every morning. Petunia keeping a half-hearted watch over her men or not, Harry would be in for a smack from her husband if he dared to help himself to the sausages or bacon before the “man of the house” got his fill of them or for “taking more than his allotment.” Harry didn’t mind so much. Too much grease before going out to do his chores in the yard and flower beds didn’t sit well in his stomach anyway.

A plate of food down before the other males in the house woke, eaten under the gimlet eye of his aunt along with the required single cups of milk and juice with a glass of water to wash it all down, then Harry was rinsing his things off and heading outside, pulling back his shoulder-length hair into a band as he went.

It was a dreadful, heavy mass, and often got in his eyes.

But it was better than the alternative: messy, out-of-control hair that wouldn’t even pretend at a semblance of order and making him look like he’d been fiddling with the light sockets and a piece of metal.

Best of all: it covered up the ugly red scar on his forehead that never seemed to go away or heal, which was a cause of many a glare from Vernon with mutters of freakishness.

And that was something else again.

Harry had never been a stupid boy, even if growing up as he had had turned him into a contrary one,
and one of the things he learned quickly, besides to stay out of Vernon’s way unless he was braced for a smack or an insult, the same with Dudley, was if Vernon yelled loudly about something, he was usually in the wrong.

So when Harry turned his mean teacher’s hair blue, which many of his classmates had dubbed *magic*, and Vernon yelled for hours about *there’s no such thing as MAGIC!*, until he was blue in the face, Harry knew that his fellow students must be right, by simple virtue of Vernon being wrong.

Magic it was, magic *he’d* done if he understood the hissed conversations between his guardians right, so it was magic he had, not any form of *freakishness*.

Safely tucked away in the garden shed under the cover of gathering his needed tools for the day, Harry eagerly cracked the old-fashioned wax seal – something he’d read about in books or history texts but never seen in real life – on the heavy paper that he fancied must be parchment if it was sealed with wax, bright green eyes with no need of glasses having never been shoved away to live in the dark with chemicals all around him, just about *ate* up the words on the paper.

_HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY_

_Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore_

_(Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorc., Chf. Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards)_

_Dear Mr. Potter,_

_We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment._

_Term begins on 1 September. We await your owl by no later than 31 July._

_Yours sincerely,_

_Minerva McGonagall_

_Deputy Headmistress_

The second page was vastly more interesting than the simple note of acceptance, Harry finding himself dazzled by some of the things listed on the supply list for the school.

_HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY_  

_Supply List_  

_UNIFORM_  

_First-year students will require:_

1. *Three sets of plain work robes (black)
2. One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear  
3. One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or similar)  
4. One winter cloak (black, with silver fastenings)  

Please note that all pupil's clothes should carry name tags.

COURSE BOOKS

All students should have a copy of each of the following:

The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1)  
by Miranda Goshawk

A History of Magic  
by Bathilda Bagshot

Magical Theory  
by Adalbert Waffling

A Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration  
by Emeric Switch

One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi  
by Phyllida Spore

Magical Drafts and Potions  
by Arsenius Jigger

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them  
by Newt Scamander

The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection  
by Quentin Trimble

OTHER EQUIPMENT

1 wand

1 cauldron (pewter, standard size 2)

1 set glass or crystal phials

1 telescope

1 set brass scales

Students may also bring, if they desire, an owl OR a cat OR a toad.

PARENTS ARE REMINDED THAT FIRST YEARS
“Brilliant.” Harry breathed, eyes wide before reality crashed down on him with an accompanying wince. This was not going to be a fun conversation to have with his guardians.

No, not at all.

Though that spark of contrariness that had grown into a near-bonfire over the years was viciously pleased. The Dursleys wanted to send him to Stonewall after all. Where better to go instead than a school of Magic that according to them wasn’t supposed to exist in the first place?

…

He’d been right, it wasn’t fun.

But given that he’d done more than a little self-study on the subject of magic ever since the blue-hair episode and Vernon’s subsequent tantrum had convinced him of its existence, he knew how to handle it.

A point of his finger and a bit of what he called Wishing and Vernon found himself frozen in place mid-shout that night at the dinner table, Dudley shortly following, as two pairs of eyes – one in watery blue and the other gleaming green – had a stare down before Petunia picked up the parchment between the tips of her fingers with a resigned sigh, breaking the tableau.

Harry had never used his Wishing magic openly before either on or around the Dursleys.

But still, his aunt had been less than surprised – if not exactly pleased – that he had, confirming that she at least knew about it – as he’d long thought was the case given how Vernon and Marge would grumble about “that sister of yours” to Petunia.

“I tried my best.” Petunia sighed, staring blankly at the words on the pages, words that were nearly identical to a those of a letter her sister Lily had received so many years before. “I thought with hard work, and a firm hand, that you wouldn’t end up there, one of them, like her. But in the end.” She sighed, shaking her head and closing her eyes. “I suppose blood will out. Vernon.” She said sternly. “Dudley. Blood will out. Lily’s blood, Harry’s, mine. We might have a magical grandchild one day.” She told her still-frozen husband as she rose and scraped first her and then Harry’s plates into the bin, letter in her hand. “A grandchild that will be loved no matter if he or she is different or not. Come, Harry.” She marched out of the dining room and towards the stairs.

“There’s something you need to see in the attic.”

A flick of his hand as he scrambled out of the room had freed the Dursley men, the truth of telling blood finally making a dent in Vernon’s bloody-minded obstinacy as he eyed his perfectly normal son.

Dudley wasn’t that bright of a boy; his cousin outdid him in every subject.
But he was normal, with a stout build that if Pet wasn’t so firm with both of them would have likely toppled over into massive like Vernon’s sister and father had done.

“Well.” Vernon blustered to no one but his stunned-quiet son. “I suppose that’s that then. Finish your dinner Dudders, you’ve dish duty tonight.”

Upstairs in the attic, Petunia was kneeling down in one corner, beside a few things Harry had never paid much attention to before: a wicker basket, like you’d use to carry produce from the market, and an old steamer trunk.

“This was hers, Lily’s.”

“My mother’s?” Harry said with cautious reverence. He hadn’t been told much about either of his parents. Just that they died in an attack of some sort, the same that had given him his scar.

“Yes.” Petunia nodded once, then handed over the list. “She went off to school, there, and year by year left the rest of us behind. You lost your mother, but I lost my sister much earlier than Halloween of ’81. Much earlier.”

“What about my dad?”

“Oh, him.” Petunia snorted, rolling her eyes. “Dumbledore. Headmaster of that magic school, among other things. It’s explained – as much as he explained it anyway – in the letter if you want to read it.” Dusting her hands off, she rose. “I’ll take you to where they buy their things, they’ve a bank there I recall from when I went with Lily a time or two while she was in school. They might have a better idea if your father left you a pence to your name. You’re welcome to Lily’s things regardless, I imagine at least some of those books will be in there, it’s her school things after all, and the titles sound familiar to me.”

“The man.” Petunia wrinkled her nose as if smelling something foul. “Dumbledore. Headmaster of that magic school, among other things. It’s explained – as much as he explained it anyway – in the letter if you want to read it.” Dusting her hands off, she rose. “I’ll take you to where they buy their things, they’ve a bank there I recall from when I went with Lily a time or two while she was in school. They might have a better idea if your father left you a pence to your name. You’re welcome to Lily’s things regardless, I imagine at least some of those books will be in there, it’s her school things after all, and the titles sound familiar to me.”

“Thank you, Aunt Petunia.” Harry remained sat on his bottom, eyes wide on the steamer trunk before calling out as she made her way over towards the attic door. “Aunt Petunia?”

“Yes, Harry.”

“Will you go with me tomorrow?” He asked, turning to glance at her from over his shoulder. “To the bank? I don’t quite know what to ask…”

A short nod was his answer, then the orphaned boy turned back to the trunk, undoing the clasps and opening it with the reverence of a devout acolyte faced with a sacred treasure.

Harry brushed one thumb delicately over the embroidery on the oval “face plate” set into the rich
leather.  *LJE.*  Lily Jocelyn Evans, his mother’s name from the little he’d been told over the years. The leather and silk thread hadn’t faded at all, though the brass fittings were a bit tarnished.

Magic, he supposed, real magic like that taught in a school instead of his simple *Wishing* tricks could probably do all kinds of things like preserving a trunk.

Breathing in the scents that came with the opened lid, and ignoring the basket and its contents for now, Harry smelled a great many things, some of which he could put names to: paper, ink, leather, even the lavender from fading perfume and the cedar sachet that was a remedy to keep away pests. But there were other things he had no names for. Things that he’d never scented in his life to know them, adding a strangeness to the air.

Leaning the trunk lid all the way back, Harry rested his hands on the trunk’s lip, eyes wide and fixed on the pictures revealed in the dusky light provided by the late evening sun coming in through the windows and the pair of bare bulbs that buzzed faintly overhead.

A strange kind of tape he’d never seen before affixed the pictures to the trunk, reaching out gently Harry took them down one by one and set them in a stack on top of the baby blanket and letter in the basket, examining them as he went.

One of them he’d seen before – a family snap from a Christmas morning when his mother and aunt were both young, younger than Harry was now. Everyone was smiling and laughing for the camera, Petunia’s gleaming pale hair a clear match for her father’s – Harry’s grandfather Harold if he remembered rightly, who he was named after. His grandmother Grace claimed rich chestnut hair with a tinge of red that came through even in the faded colors of the old photo, while his mother’s rich auburn shone, matching emerald eyes shared between his mother and grandfather, while Lily looked who looked quite like her mother despite the hair and eye color while Harold and Petunia were near carbon-copies of one another, save for the eyes with Petunia taking hers from Grace instead.

Petunia kept a copy of the same picture tucked away in one of the oldest “family” albums on the Dursley’s lone bookshelf in the living room – more for knickknacks and pictures than books, save for a set of encyclopedias and a dictionary plus the requisite family bible, all pristine in case company came to call.

Harry had fed his mind quite a lot in the early years prior to his schooling on those few books, enjoying the stories of the bible very much, as many children do, though much of the language flew right over his head.

It was like watching his mother age before his eyes as he studied the pictures.

Here she was young – about his age – with a skinny black-haired boy scowling alongside her in front of a gleaming red train.

There she was a few years older in a picturesque town covered with snow, the same boy rolling his eyes at whatever had her laughing.

These were magic pictures, they had to be.

After all, they moved.

A few pictures later and he could see that they were in their late teens – both boy and girl – he got only surlier while she shone brighter.

Then he wasn’t there anymore, the boy with the sallow skin and worn-out clothes, and instead his
mother was with a group of different boys. Oh, there were pictures of her with others too. It wasn’t all one boy or these others, one girl in particular had the kindest brown eyes and quite a nice smile – if seeming a bit shy – but they showed up the most out of anyone.

One of the boys was holding his mother’s hand and looked a lot like what Harry thought he might when he grew up, with a Head Boy badge pinned to his…school robes? That matched the Head Girl pin on his mother’s own. They were blushing, and glancing at each other out of the corner of their eyes as the other boys – two of them – one with a bit of unfortunate scarring on his face while the other was the sort who was handsome and knew it, laughed at them in the background.

The last picture he took down was just the two of them – his mum and who could only be his father – the boy wrapping his arms around the girl from behind both smiling radiantly with graduation caps on their heads and a ring shining brightly on his mum’s finger.

Harry didn’t get much money for spending, part of his aunt’s attempt to keep him – and his magic – repressed he thought, but he decided right then and there that even if there wasn’t a penny to be found for him at this magic bank that he’d use his savings for mowing the neighbor’s lawn or watching strange Mrs. Figg’s cats overnight for a nice album to put these in, so he could look at them whenever he liked without having to worry about them tearing or crumbling to dust in his hands.

At first glance of the contents of the trunk – aside from the pictures – it looked like an organized space, almost like a memory chest, that spanned what Harry thought might be his mother’s school years.

And at second glance he realized that the interior fit more things than seemed possible, about twice as much as it should, he decided after a careful inspection of the outside and inside of the trunk.

He smiled a bit, magic real magic being just as amazing – even in simple things – as he’d always thought it might be…if he weren’t alone that is.

Deciding to tackle the things he might need first rather than just jump in willy-nilly, Harry stacked the books next to the basket on the floor of the attic, arching a brow when upon removing the first set of book he found another underneath it, and so on, until he finally ran out after pulling out a good two dozen volumes. Running his eyes over the spines, and comparing the titles, he thought he might have all the books he’ll need for school – all of school – depending on what courses he took in later years, since a good third of these weren’t for subjects listed on his account of needed supplies. Picking up the Magical World – an Introduction for Muggleborns from the top he flipped to the title page, already deciding that he’d read this one tonight, so he’d be prepared tomorrow when he went with his aunt to the magical district.

On the title page under the title, byline, and other information, written in a loopy hand was the inscription: Property of Lily Jocelyn Evans.

Smiling brilliantly, Harry snapped the book closed and get it back on the second stack of books, not wanting any of them to topple and get damaged, then sorted quickly through the rest.

A lot of it looked like a year’s worth of school uniforms – but he found a pair of cloaks, one heavier than the other that he thought might fit him…and help him fit in tomorrow. Setting the lighter one aside, he didn’t find much else of interest. Mainly just notes from classes, or letters to and from his mother both of which he set on top of the pictures to read later – though for very different reasons.

Multiple trips were called for to move his findings down to his room, but first he made sure to securely latch the trunk in hope that whatever magic made it work wouldn’t have stopped now that he’d opened it.
Nodding once, Harry picked up the basket and cloak, heading for the attic door and his first of several trips of the night to and from the attic and his room.

…

Dudley whined a bit when he was left behind the next morning to help his father mow the lawn – the only outside chore that belonged to the Dursley men besides wheeling out the bins for pickup (Dudley) or cleaning the gutters (Vernon hired it done rather than do it himself) – instead of getting to go along with his mum and cousin Harry to London.

But Petunia was implacable, and unless or until her Dudders gave her a magical grandchild, he would have as little to do with that world as possible.

To her mind – that world was nothing but dangerous and greedy.

It had taken her sister, then it had killed her.

She would do what she could to arm her nephew…now that she’d failed to suppress whatever it was inside him that made him Other…but she wouldn’t have her family involved with that world at all beyond that.

Realistically, she had as much of a chance of having a magical grandbaby as she did one with red hair or green eyes, but that didn’t stop her from wishing that what was passed down tended towards the latter instead of the former.

Taking a deep breath, she eyed Harry and the familiar cloak over his arm. He had enough sense to wait to wear such a distinctly other thing until they got to the entrance at least. And he’d brushed his hair neatly that morning and tied it back, though as it covered that dreadful scar that aberration from a perfectly neat and normal appearance was all to the better to her mind. He was wearing his summer church trousers in khaki rather than his everyday jeans, and his shirt was his second-best short sleeved button-down that was reserved for school events in warm weather, but she supposed given what she remembered of that place, that Harry would fit in a bit better in those clothes there than he would normal summer wear…and he wasn’t entirely out of place in Privet Drive on a Saturday morning either.

It would have to do.

“Do you have your list, Harry?” She asked as she gave one last check of her purse and pretty summer dress. It wouldn’t do – just in case – to end up having to make another trip because there wasn’t anything waiting for him at their bank. Cash in hand would be easiest to exchange.

“Yes, Aunt Petunia.” Harry nodded politely. “We don’t need any of the books. The editions from the trunk will work fine. It’s just the other things I need.”

“Very well.” Petunia agreed with his sensible decision to use the perfectly serviceable volumes she’d seen him hauling down from the attic by the armful. “We’ll stop at Selfridge’s while we’re out if we can’t find the other things you’ll need for school. I remember Lily often complaining about quills of all things before Father gave her a fountain pen for Christmas that first year.” Petunia sniffed. Imagine still using quills! “And she preferred notebooks to taking notes on reams and reams of parchment – more economical as well. You’ll need a few normal things to fill the gaps in your clothes as well.”

“Okay.” Harry agreed simply. It did seem odd to him when he was reading the Introduction book that quills were still in use in the “Wizarding World.” And he’d surmised the using notebooks for
himself after having unearthed his mother’s in her trunk – some with quite a few tricks and hints that would help him in his classes, more than a few of her books having notes in the margins as well – and not all in her hand.

The guide had been as helpful as it was confusing in places, such as how to dress (hence his best summer-trousers and second-best summer button-down) and what he’d need for school that wasn’t included on the supply list, such as the quills that his aunt had just spoken about, and where to buy it all, with the shops broken down and given average prices for items in each place, such as how much a set of school robes cost at a shop called Madam Malkin’s versus another Twilfitt and Tatting or the Secondhand Robes shop.

Granted, the prices were all a good twenty years out of date, which meant some of the shops might not be around anymore either, but it was still valuable information – often for as much as he could puzzle out about how the magical world worked from things like prices and the verbiage used as the information actually spelled out for him in black and white.

It wasn’t a lengthy trip by car from Surrey to the place in London on Charing Cross Road where his aunt took them, but parking was scarce once they got there, leading them to parking a ways away in a garage and walking the last bit.

Thankfully, Petunia had worn her sensible – if expensive – walking pumps rather than some of her sillier shoes.

Otherwise her temper – and patience – would have been worn thin long before they made it into the dim pub that she had to squint to find though Harry had no problem seeing at all.

Shrugging into the cloak and following behind his aunt, Harry took everything in, noting that most of the patrons of the pub were at least a little…off from, well, normal people he supposed.

No one was really doing anything magical…except for one younger-looking man who was reading Stephen Hawking and making his spoon stir his tea with his finger tracing lazy circles above it in the air.

Before he could take a second glance at that interesting fellow, or the women who looked almost like the fairy-tale version of a wicked witch, down to the warts on their noses, Petunia had caught the attention of the publican and was quietly soliciting his assistance.

“Tom, isn’t it?” Petunia asked with her best “company” smile on her plain face. “My nephew here just got his letter, we’ll need your help getting into the Alley, I’m afraid.”

“Muggle family, eh?” Tom the bartender asked rhetorically as he bustled around the side of the bar. “Not a problem at all. Follow me, follow me.”

Keeping pace behind the older man, Petunia reached down and tucked Harry’s arm through her own with a cautioning glance, then Harry’s attention was being called for by the bartender.

“Ah,” Tom took out his wand, which Harry studied as carefully as he could with the mere moments he had to do so. “Here we are, the entrance. Now lad.” Tom waggled his wand a bit. “It goes like this, watch the pattern, though I daresay if you need help the first few times, there’s always someone behind the bar to assist.” The older man gave a knowing wink, tapping out the sequence then saying with a showman’s flourish. “Welcome to Diagon Alley.”

“Thank you, sir.” Harry told him sincerely, Petunia echoing him as manners demanded, then ushered her charge through the archway and out into the hustle and bustle of the Alley, steering him
resolutely towards the white edifice she well remembered from her own youth.

“Now, Harry.” Petunia said, firmly drawing his attention away from the bright sights and sounds of the barely-controlled mayhem that was Diagon in full-swing, even as he caught sight of crossroads leading to other streets and magical areas. “I would venture seeing how you’re dressed, that Lily’s books gave you a few suggestions for how to fit in here. Did they prepare you for what the…ah hem…bankers are like?”

“Yes, Aunt Petunia.” He nodded along dutifully with his answer. He might be contrary but so long as Petunia was being helpful and obliging there was no reason to be spiteful for spite’s sake.

He left that to Marge Dursley and her oafish brother Vernon.

“Very good.” She said, pleased. “Very good indeed. Well.” She started up the white stone steps, Harry keeping pace, though she let him drop her hold when they made it into the cool interior of the bank, her nephew keeping his wits didn’t stumble or stutter or any such boorish thing upon seeing the creatures that passed for bankers in this world. “Here we are.”

Petunia marched briskly up to the nearest free goblin, noting the name, then speaking in her sternest no-nonsense tone, one hand clamped firmly on Harry’s shoulder.

“Goblin Goldfist, I am Petunia Evans-Dursley, and I have brought my nephew Harry Potter to investigate the matter of his inheritance as he has been confirmed as magical via an invitation to Hogwarts but has never received any statements or information regarding his family accounts from your establishment.”

Goldfist blinked, processing that quickly, then blanched a bit at the implications. Harry Potter, living with his maternal muggle aunt, and he’d never received an account statement? Branch Manager Ragnok was going to have someone’s head.

Thankfully for Goldfist, he was only a teller, not an account manager and it wasn’t his head on the chopping block.

Scratching out a note, he translocated it to the Branch Manager’s office, then a press of a button summoned one of the trainee runners – goblins barely out of schooling who weren’t even high enough on the pyramid to drive a cart – to escort the pair of humans to Ragnok’s office.

“Thistlegrim will escort you to the branch manager Ragnok’s office, Mrs. Dursley, Mr. Potter.” He told them in a voice that sounded like two rocks grating against each other.

Petunia thanked him with a stern nod, in keeping with her character, while Harry voiced his in his pleasant manner before following along at a nudge from his aunt, Petunia keeping hold of him as her words had drawn more than merely goblin attention at her nephew’s name.

…

Branch Manager Ragnok was having a rather profitable day when the note came from one of his tellers.

Summer during school shopping was always filled with profitable days, second only to the winter shopping season for Christmas or Yuletide gifts.

So when he received a note from a teller, relaying the information that Harry Potter and his guardian
were present in the bank and asking concerning questions best handled by Ragnok personally…well. It appeared that his profitable day might be well and truly over, since the questions that such a person could ask that would have them sent directly to Ragnok were few and far between – and often led to a rather nasty execution of an account manager. Two things were serious enough to necessitate Ragnok’s direct attention, both having to do with the most egregious forms of theft which Gringotts came into contact with – mishandling of accounts either on the part of a guardian or executor, or on the part of the goblin account manager…and sometimes both as it was a rare human that could get away with such a crime against a Gringotts client without the culpability of a Gringotts employee.

“Mrs. Dursley and her nephew Mr. Potter, Manager Ragnok.” The runner Thistlegrim announced the pair of a stern-looking Muggle woman and her infamous nephew.

Ragnok gave the runner a nod and a flick of one finger to send him scurrying back to his duties, closing the door behind him as Ragnok pressed a faceted gemstone set into his desk’s surface that had tracings of runes lighting up all around the room. Goblin magic. Used by every branch manager and upper-manager to prevent…unseemly dissemination of information.

The elder goblin gestured towards the human-sized chairs before his desk with the quill still held in one hand, gaining a stiff nod from the woman and a soft “thank you,” from the boy.

Interesting.

Very interesting, thus far at least.

Perhaps whatever this shambles is, the mental stimulation it provided might make up for the lack of profit…though he rather doubted it, given the depth and breadth of the holdings at stake in the case of young Mr. Potter.

“Mrs. Dursley.” Manager Ragnok’s voice was much like any adult male goblins: rough as two stones grinding together without a single inflection of patience to be found. “Have you proof of your place as young Mr. Harry James Antioch Potter’s guardian?”

There was no need to confirm that boy’s identity, his magical signature had been captured with the registration of his birth for Gringotts’s records.

They knew he was who his aunt presented him as, not merely a boy who happened to have a passing resemblance to what a child of James Ignatus Potter and Lily Jocelyn Evans should look like, down to his skin tone being a mixture of Potter’s middling bronze and Evans’s pale cream, though Ragnok imagined that if the boy needed glasses like his father the resemblance would be more striking.

Petunia, anticipating such a thing, had brought along the pertinent documentation: everything from Harry’s birth certificate that she’d had to send off for from the national records upon finding him, to the note Dumbledore left her, to the paperwork for the orphan’s allotment and guardianship as assigned by Children’s Services. Everything. She knew how these people in the magical world looked at those like her, a feeling she much reciprocated. As a result, she took every measure and left no step undone in case she was ever challenged regarding her custody of her nephew.

She may not like the boy, but she didn’t want him placed in an orphanage either, nor did she want herself and her husband locked away in that awful prison her sister had told her of if any of their friends from this world ever accused her of kidnapping.

Paranoid, perhaps.

But it had led to excellent recordkeeping nonetheless.
Which by the look on the goblin manager’s face, was something he very much approved of.

“Mrs. Dursley.” Ragnok folded his hands on his desk after taking copies of the documentation and handing it back. “As you are confirmed as Mr. Potter’s guardian, do you authorize Gringotts to perform a full audit on all of his holdings and inheritances?”

“Yes, however, my nephew will need school supplies and I’ve no wish to return to Diagon Alley unless necessary. It there a way both can be accomplished?”

Ragnok nodded, snapping his fingers and handing over a pouch to the young wizard – it was his gold after all – Harry taking it with a sharp look in his eyes, a look that hadn’t faded since the moment he’d walked with his aunt into Ragnok’s office despite his polite manners.

Smart boy.

“100 galleons.” Ragnok told them, making a notation on a piece of parchment. “More than enough to settle your business in the Alley. As soon as the audit is completed, we shall send an accounting to your address. I would assume that non-magical mail is preferred?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Very well.” Ragnok nodded, snapping his fingers once which opened the door to his office and canceled the charms. “May your gold always flow, Mrs. Dursley, Mr. Potter.”

Petunia gave only another of her stiff nods in response, hand back in place on her nephew’s slim shoulders while he gave a verbal reply.

“You as well, Manager Ragnok. Thank you for your valuable time.”

Ragnok waved that off, though he appreciated the sentiment.

Stern upbringing or not, at least the boy was polite, which was more than Ragnok could say for many wizarding offspring at that age.

…”

“Well,” Harry commented quietly, more than a hint of snideness in his tone. “That doesn’t seem promising.”

“Mmm.” Petunia nodded, brows furrowing a bit. “Did you note the plural?”

“Yes, Aunt Petunia.”

“Well.” Petunia forced her unsettled thoughts away – at least as much as she could as long as she remained in this dratted place – and focused on the now. Once the audit was completed, they would know what was bothering them – and the goblins it seemed – regarding the situation. Until then, there were errands that needed completed before returning to Surrey. “Enough of that.” Petunia eyed the Alley, gimlet gaze landing on the trunk store. “Come along, Harry.”

If she remembered right, his trunk could be made into a light and easy way to haul along his purchases.

She certainly didn’t want to have to pack them around like some Sherpa.

Petunia watched, steeling her nerves, and allowed Harry to make his own choices regarding his supplies, only insisting on having the sturdiest materials for it all, intending that he get the best use
out of his things – at least in part for value and not wanting to waste money but also to prevent having to squire him about the magical shopping district any more than necessary.

Following the instructions he’d been given by his aunt, Harry was shown the best quality for value trunks at the luggage-maker, discussing enchantments – per the knowledge gleaned from his mother’s books – that would make his life easier but also the use of magic less noticeable. As a result, he ended up with a steamer trunk in a clear-varnished oak with internal cedar lining with metal fittings, his initials of “HJAP” added at no cost, that had built-in spells for lightening and wheels and a handle that pop out with a press of a magical button on one of the trunk’s side hand-holds. It had four different compartments, as the shop-keep assured him would be wise and take him well through school and beyond, one “closet” compartment, one for books, one for potion supplies, and a last for everything else that had tidy cubbies to sort and organize his things. All of them bigger than they looked, and all of it protected with the additional “security” package Harry had added that allowed him to set passwords on the lock, with each compartment accessed by turning the provided key a quarter, half, three-quarters, or full turn.

Gathering his aunt who had set herself down on a chair by the door to wait, Harry wheeled his trunk from the store, with the expanded and “featherlight” school bag in a simple messenger style fashioned out of heavy tan canvas with black edging, also “locked” to Harry by password, they made their way to the next stop: uniforms.

Deciding to kill two birds with one stone, Petunia also had his new clothes for the coming year purchased at the clothiers as well, and other than a few of the styles many of them were normal enough, sifting through racks of trousers, shirts, underwear, socks, and even a smart new peacock-blue wool jacket in a pea-coat style and adding them all to the pile she’d begun on the counter after a short discussion with the proprietors, who would fit them according to the measurements taken for her nephew’s uniform and have them all ready to be picked up by the time they finished the rest of the shopping.

“How are your shoes, Harry?” Petunia asked, after being told that footwear had to be purchased either at a cobbler’s shop or the second-hand store.

“My runners are still good, but I’ll probably need a pair of thick boots for all but the warmest weather.” Harry told her after a moment and promptly found himself steered into the shoemaker’s next to Madam Malkin’s.

Petunia tsked a bit over a few of the more…fanciful materials or designs there, much as she’d done in Malkin’s, but had him fitted for a new pair of good leather shoes and a pair of winter boots in leather regardless after dismissing any notion of dragonhide.

This took much less time than the year’s worth of uniforms and clothes, the pair leaving in a trice with nice black dress ankle boots and a sturdy pair of calf-length leather boots in dark brown tucked away in Harry’s clothing compartment of the trunk.

By now, Petunia needed a replenishing cuppa, and managed to stiffen her spine to the point of accepting lunch at a tidy little café on the Alley, as she didn’t see much sense in prolonging the trip by venturing back and forth to London for a mere cup of tea and a salad – sandwich in Harry’s case.

“What next?” She asked after replenishing her resolve via tea. Her discomfort was as wearing now as it had been when she was dragged along on Lily’s shopping trips, but at least Harry wasn’t as bouncy as Lily had been. If her raising had done anything for the child, it had at least made him more level-headed than her sister – or god forbid James Potter – had been at that age, or ever in the case of James from the little she’d seen of him.
Harry dutifully cross checked the list he’d tucked into his pocket for easy-access, then reported:

“Potion supplies are the biggest remaining for the Alley after clothes.” He said. “Plus a few odds
and ends and my wand.”

“Wand last.” She sighed with a bracing sigh. “I doubt I’ll want to remain here after that.” Then she
wrinkled her nose. “Do you suppose you’ll be able to manage the rest while I wait here?” It was
much better for her nerves in this quiet corner tucked away from the hubble and bubble of the Alley,
with only a thing or two to remind her that she wasn’t in a nice little teahouse in Surrey.

“I should do, Aunt Petunia.” Harry said after a moment. He’d managed mostly looking after himself
for a long time now, and with the bits and pieces he’d sourced from his mother’s texts he’d done well
enough so far. “The Alley isn’t so big that I’ll be lost. Should I get everything else and come find
you here then?”

“Yes, I think that’s best.” Petunia nodded, sipping at her tea and failing to make eye contact with
that far-too-knowing green gaze. “Off you go, and don’t let yourself be cheated, mind.”

“Yes, Aunt Petunia.”

…

With his aunt left behind with his trunk, as he could return as needed to drop off his supplies and
didn’t need to pack it around the Alley, knowing full-well that she’d prefer to have nothing to do
with anything as blatantly magical as a wand, Harry headed for a wand shop he’d read of…notably
not Ollivander’s.

His mother had made a note in her Introduction book that spoke of finding Ollivander’s selection to
be limited in core options, to the point that she felt more than one of her classmates – unless using an
inherited wand – were perhaps not matched with the best option but simply the best he had, and had
gone along with one of her friends, a girl in her year named Alice, to another shop in one of the off-
shoots of Diagon Alley when Alice’s parents had had concerns about her first-term performance, as
she’d struggled more in those few months before the Winter break than she had in all of her pre-
Hogwarts study with other magical children.

It was called Blackwood, just Blackwood, and if you didn’t know it was there, you never would
have known it for a wand shop as the windows showed a clean waiting area, just big enough for a
single work-desk with a customer chair and a cushioned ottoman along one wall for others to wait.
Rather than being gloomy as one might think of from the name, the walls were paneled, and the floor
done in a gleaming and polished white oak with the desk pad on the white oak desk of clean lines in
a matte black, the same matte black leather that covered the seats of the desk chairs and the ottoman.
A single archway with a white curtain blocked the way from the waiting room to the work room,
where individual wands were crafted.

According to his late mother, Blackwood wands weren’t just wands they were individual works of
art tuned to a single wielder that would never allow another to use it, let alone steal or earn its
allegiance.

Their cost was also therefore higher as each wand was priced based on the materials it was made
from.

He didn’t know how Ollivander’s stayed in business from the reading he’d done since he sold his
wands for only seven galleons when a single unicorn tail hair cost ten galleons.
Did wizards have no understanding of basic accounting? Harry was ten and knew better than that.

He wasn’t too worried, since his books were already in hand – though he wouldn’t say no to picking up a few extra from the bookstore – and his trunk and uniform/wardrobe all paid for, leaving him with eighty galleons left and a few knuts and sickles in change from the other two stores and the café, the trunk coming in at nine galleons and his clothes and shoes at just over ten, with a few sickles and knuts going towards their tea.

Harry was still stunned that Ragnok had just handed over a sack of coins worth five thousand pounds without blinking an eye, since the current exchange rate according to the sign in the Gringotts lobby had one galleon at fifty pounds sterling...though it gave him more information to stack against his so-called “inheritance” and what his aunt had said about his father’s family having money. After realizing just what he’d been handed, his aunt had had no problem allowing Harry to make all of the purchases on his own. No sense in spending any of Vernon’s pay on Harry – and furthering the spite there on both sides – when Ragnok had been free – from her perspective – with handing over part of Harry’s inheritance.

The silver bell over the door chimed softly in the empty waiting room, sending a lean witch in plain black work robes with “Blackwood” embroidered in silver over her heart and crossed wands underneath striding from the work room behind the curtain a few moments later.

She was tall, taller than most women Harry had ever met, towering over his own slim four-foot and eight-inches of height. He was tall for his age but by no means the tallest ten-year-old boy he knew, but this woman – witch he supposed – must be at least a foot or taller than him. With ash blonde hair streaked with hints of silver and a bit of crinkling at the edges of her eyes, Harry knew she was likely older than his aunt but not elderly in any way, nor did her hands, when she welcomed him and gestured for him to sit opposite her at the work desk, have age spots or seem papery like the elder librarian in Little Whinging did.

“Welcome to Blackwood, young wizard.” The wandmaker waved him to the customer’s chair, the shop empty as few bothered to do their Hogwarts shopping until August at the soonest. “Please, have a seat. I am Wandmaker Melantha Blackwood, or Madam Blackwood. How can I help you today?”

“My mother told me,” which she did, after a fashion. “That I’d find a better match at Blackwood than I would at Ollivander’s, so I suppose I’m here for a fitting? Is that right?” He played up a bit, putting on a bashful manner to cover his quiet watchfulness.

“Very well, young wizard.” Melantha noted that he failed to offer his name, but there were few wizards his age with midnight-black hair and emerald green eyes. Still, if Mr. Potter desired discretion, he certainly had come to the right shop. “We shall begin with a simple test of your power, please.” She tapped her wand, ebony with inlay of fir and a core of braided dragon heartstring and veela hair, on the blotter that was synced with any number of storage drawers in her – and her family’s – workroom, summoning a box about the size of a muggle softball. Opening the case that was in a strange wood with clear varnish Harry had never seen before, she took out an egg-shaped clear crystal that was the size of a goose egg and picked it up with a square of raw silk cloth from one of the desk drawers, holding it out with an expectant look.

Taking a breath, Harry cupped his hands out before him and Madam Blackwood gently dropped the crystal then said:

“Close your eyes and breath, three counts in, three counts out. Just let your mind and power flow.”

It sounded a bit nonsensical to him, but he tried to do as she said, following the soft sound of her
voice which had slipped into a lyrical register instead of the brisk businesswoman it had been before.

“Very good, young wizard.” Her tone changed to pleased. “Open your eyes.”

Harry did so, only to have to squint until she covered the crystal with the silk and picked it back up, placing it in its case and sending it back for cleansing by her apprentice – also her granddaughter, Astrid – in the workroom.

“What did that mean?” Harry asked as he watched her summon a case using the enchanted blotter. It reminded him a bit of the fishing case one of his primary school teachers had used to keep small craft supplies organized, but being magical, it expanded and laid out to much more than that one had, covering the desk top with pieces of what looked like woods in different slots, dozens of them.

“That violet color?”

“Nothing at the moment.” Melantha told him with all honesty. “When you come of age, then it will mean something. For the moment, it simply gives me a place to start. Young magicals tend to have one of several colors, usually in shades of orange to red. Violet, as you said, indicates that you have a higher reserve than others your age and can use magic without a focus. For me that means I must craft a wand that won’t hinder that ability but still sensitive enough to harness that power for fine control.”

Harry didn’t have much if anything to say to that but took note of it as something he should research later, maybe once he was at school and had their resources to use.

“Now.” Madam Blackwood regained her business-like attitude, gesturing towards the woods. “Blackwood wands are fine tools crafted from multiple materials rather than those simplistic wands made by Ollivander. We will bind your wand to you with your blood, but first we must find what wood or woods and cores are to be used. I have an idea already, however, I want you to let your dominant hand drift over the air of the four sectional trays and see if one in particular feels more right than another. Don’t worry about trying to articulate why, just that it is will be enough for the moment.”

Following her directions, Harry did as asked with a light frown of concentration, though it didn’t take long for him to understand what she meant.

Two of the sections didn’t feel like anything to him, he might as well be touching the air itself instead of the magic in the woods – which was what he thought was supposed to be happening – while the third section gave a bit of a sparking feeling, like the air during a lightning storm, and the next feel heavy like the calm before the storm broke.

Despite being told not to bother with articulating, he did so anyway, gaining an interested arch of a blonde brow for his trouble, though he noted she didn’t seem displeased, something he’d become very fluent at reading on another face after living with the Dursleys for the better part of ten years.

Tapping her wand on the first two trays, she banished them back into the case, then expanded the two remaining.

“One for the base and one for inlay, I think. Power and stability.”

Harry had the distinct impression she was talking to herself and not him.

“Again.” He was told. “This time pick up each wood and hold it for a few moments to get a sense of it. And again: it doesn’t matter why though it helps me decide on a design. That you know it enough.”
Melantha found herself less than surprised – especially after the near-shocking reading on his power levels – to find him drawn first to a length of creamy pale beech that had the slightest pinky tone. His base, then for power, which would require an inlay for stability. There young Harry had a bit of waffling one his part, lingering in turn over ebony, cherry, and fir before settling on a fine – but thin – piece of white willow. A bit of insecurity then. Curiouser and curiouser, her mother would be quite upset with herself that the grand dame of house Blackwood had gone on a harvesting trip before the school rush with that rake old Gregorovich, if only for missing a chance to craft what was certain to be one of the most unique wands Melantha would make in her illustrious career.

The last customer who was such a challenge must have been the late Pandora Lovegood, the year before her daughter Luna was born after her first wand – from her home in Greece – was broken in a journalistic trip with her husband, hunting one of the rare creatures the Lovegoods tended to obsess over.

Not letting any of this show on her face, Melantha took up the two pieces of wand wood from Mr. Potter with a clean piece of raw silk and set them before him then tapped an intricate pattern on the blotter calling up all the cores that would accept being bonded to those two woods – which honestly didn’t leave him with much to choose from, though what was left tended to be the most powerful – and therefore often the biggest pains in her arse to work with – cores.

Phoenix feather, several – but not all they carried – species of dragon heartstring, thunderbird tail feather, venoms, webs, scales and fur of various species, all lined up between them on the desk, seventeen in total, including several she’s never matched to a client in all her career and Melantha had finished her apprenticeship a good fifty years ago.

Needing no instruction this time, Harry set right to work hovering his hand over the containers first before narrowing his focus to those that had been placed closest to him, no surprise there as they were the ones that were both most likely and the biggest “problem children” of her cores to both get to work with other cores but also combined woods. Not that it couldn’t be done, but it wasn’t going to be easy either.

In the end, Harry had what looked like a bit of leather string in a glass jar sitting closest to him, then some hair that would fade from his sight when he wasn’t looking at it sat behind the first jar with a piece of long black hair in another jar next to that.

“I can’t sort them any further, ma’am.” Harry told her after several frustrating minutes – for him at least. “The first one is very right, but the others are also right but I can’t choose one over the other.”

“Not a problem young wizard.” Melantha waved that off. “Like your woods, your cores have separated themselves into primary and secondary. Basilisk heartstring primary core with secondaries of demiguise hair and thestral tail hair…you are a tricky one aren’t you?” She laughed a bit, shaking her head. “If we weren’t going to bind this wand to you I wouldn’t be willing to make it in the first place, far too temperamental and choosy for that.” As she spoke she sent the other cores away, then gathered the two woods and the cores into a basket and sent it back to her workroom as well to wait for her. “But it will suit you Mr. Potter, of that I am certain.”

Setting out an empty crystal vial, a black quill, and a contract, Melantha stared at him with a serious gaze devoid of any flashes of humor or interest.

“Allowing another to have your blood is a dangerous thing, Mr. Potter.” She told him, tapping her wand on the contract and filling it in. “Never give it to another without a bonding oath, vow, or contract in place. Not even if it’s your only family, your closest friend, or your dearest love. Never, do you understand me, Mr. Potter?”
Harry nodded, a bit stunned – but appreciative – over the impromptu lecture.

“This contract will bind me to making your wand and binding it to you with your blood and compel me to either destroy your provided blood or return it, depending on what you wish.”

“Destroyed, I think.” Harry told her, finding his voice once more. “I don’t know what I’d do with my own blood.”

She smirked a little, breaking her mask. “I’m sure in time you’ll find more answers to that than you ever imagined might be possible. In the meantime, we each will sign the contract with a blood quill, a magical object controlled by law in most magical countries including this one for use only on magical contracts such as this or what you might find at Gringotts. It will tingle a bit, and draw upon your blood to bind the contract, do you understand?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Very good, Mr. Potter.” As a show of good faith, Melantha signed it first, showing him how it worked, then stopped him before he could do the same. “Always read it first, Mr. Potter. For all you know, you could be signing away all your worldly goods or agreeing to marry my granddaughter. If there’s anything about a contract that seems off, have it reviewed by your solicitor who is contracted to look after your affairs and work in your best interest. Do you understand?” She checked again. He seemed like a bright boy but she’d rather check than assume, especially considering his name and his power.

She would treat him with good faith, rather than risk it coming back upon her later when he becomes aware of all that had occurred in this shop and what it all meant.

Feeling a bit sheepish at needing to be told, Harry did as she said, reading the contract and looking for anything that felt off or seemed worded strangely. Thankfully, it all was straightforward. Blackwood would fashion his wand, using his provided blood for this purpose and in good faith, then destroy it. He agreed to pay a fee – which was a considerable fifty galleons, far more expensive than an Ollivander wand, but included an enchanted wand holster and a wand-care kit – with a retainer of ten galleons provided at the time of contract.

Finding it all in order, he signed, intrigued and repulsed at the same time to watch his blood dance across the “client” signature line before the contract flashed gold and he fished out the required ten galleons from his coin pouch.

Melantha snapped up the gold with an economy of movement, dropping them into a slot he’d seen on the far edge of the desk, and a slip – much like a regular receipt printer – popped out of it which she handed over in turn.

“You might wish to finish your shopping, Mr. Potter.” Melantha told him after pressing the vial to his wrist and tapping it with her wand, rich blood filling it without so much as a needle required or a puncture to his skin. “Choosing your materials took some time, and I will need at least a few hours to craft your wand. If it’s being particularly troublesome, you may have to collect it another day.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Harry nodded politely and climbed to his feet. “Thank you, Madam Blackwood.”

“Believe me, it’s been my pleasure Mr. Potter.”

…

Taking her at her word, Harry first checked in with his Aunt, who had settled herself nicely in her little cozy corner of the café. For all that he’d been longer than he’d thought at the wand crafter’s, it
wasn’t yet lunchtime and Petunia had brought along a book to read, knowing how tedious outfitting a student can be. Shooing him off after hearing his report and finding it sensible if a bit of an extravagance for what, when it came down to brass tacks, was simply a tool, she returned to her Darjeeling and her Austen, the café workers being most accommodating – and if she wasn’t mistaken, she wasn’t the only guardian of a student taking refuge while their young one scammed around collecting their supplies, though by simple deduction all must be those who were more trustworthy with funds than the average adolescent or teenager.

Harry could be many things, but she had found over the years that irresponsible wasn’t one of them.

Placated that his aunt wasn’t about to sic her husband on him for wasting her time, Harry made his way to the next longest task: potions supplies.

At the Apothecary, he found that they had both supply lists for each year for several wizarding schools or the option to provide pre-selected kits. Not knowing when said kits were packed – or even if they had such things as expiration dates – Harry went the long way about it but worked with an economy of motion provided by years of helping his aunt with both the cooking and shopping. At least he knew ingredients that were off when he saw them, though never had he needed to apply his knowledge to things such as beetle eyes or rat spleens. Better safe than sorry, he also purchased a third extra of each ingredient, in case of mishaps.

Potage’s, for all that it claimed to be a cauldron shop, also provided other supplies for potion making, Harry adding a bag filled with various cutting knives, ladles, and stirring rods, as well as a cutting board made out of solid maple that promised to be easy on his knife edges as well as spell clean after use, which seemed a good idea given that who knew what had been spilled on the school cutting boards or stations over the years, to go with his size two pewter cauldron, calibrated scales (not nearly the most expensive but not the bog-standard and seemingly flimsy student scales either), and a set each of glass and crystal phials after a discussion with the clerk who told him that some potions reacted differently to different containers.

Understandable, given what he knew from science class and cooking alike.

A pet was out of the question, Vernon barely tolerated him most days – and some not even that – let alone another creature, and the odds-and-ends shop the potions clerk had directed him to didn’t have much variety in ways of telescopes. Not that he cared much, with everything else there was to learn at Hogwarts, he didn’t see astronomy being one of his favorite classes though he was willing to be proved wrong. At the stationery store he didn’t find a single fountain pen, even years after his mother had started school, but purchased a self-measuring roll of parchment that after another round of clerk-questioning, he found was preferred by magic-raised students at Hogwarts for first and second year. Apparently essays and homework were done by inches or feet, and using the roll, you could measure it exactly and not have to take a ruler to a single sheet and hope for the best. Handy that. The clerk was so helpful, also pointing out parchment for correspondence (which he picked up a batch of self-sealing envelopes that needed only a tap of a wand in a nice cream that went with matching stationery that had a thin border of light green), that Harry added in a rack of inks in black, red, green, and blue for note-taking and homework, which would work, the clerk assured him, just as well with a muggle fountain pen after lamenting that the owner didn’t see fit to carry them as at least a dozen muggleborn or raised students asked after them every single year.

Supplies gathered save what they’d pick up in the muggle world, Harry dropped off his supplies, at least setting the bags each in their proper compartments, before realizing he had at least another half-hour to kill before picking up his wand, deciding to make one final stop before gathering the last two purchases (clothes and wand) and ensuring he had enough to pay for the latter.
With about five galleons left after his spending spree and the wand, Aunt Petunia telling him not to worry about the minor expense his last few supplies would be in the normal side of London, Harry headed off, destination: Flourish and Blotts.

Between the events at the bank and Madam Blackwood knowing his name without being told – along with the note left by Dumbledore – Harry knew he needed a book about current events.

Something wasn’t right and it had to do with him, likely his parents, and the man who killed them.

Harry had learned how to do several things and do them well, living with the Dursleys.

How to read a face or a room in a split second.

How to avoid his cousin if at all possible and out-run him if it wasn’t.

How to smile and nod; but do what he wanted anyway from reading about any subject that took his fancy to practicing his wishing – which he now knew was his magic – when Vernon tried to stamp it out of him.

More, how to practice his wishing and sharpen his mind without getting caught.

A big part of the latter required more than a bit of subterfuge given that half the time he and Dudley were placed in the same classes, and Vernon hated his wife’s freaky nephew outdoing his son.

Books became his friends and his allies, as he knew that without a scholarship he hadn’t a chance in hell to get out of the Dursley house once he came of age, and he wanted more than a go-nowhere job in Little Whinging.

Harry was smart by nature.

He’d become cunning and discerning by nurture – or rather the lack thereof.

Petunia wasn’t cruel but nor was she kind, being a guardian who tended towards stern, exacting, and impatient except when dealing with her own son when she became the disciplinary equivalent of a wet-noodle.

All of which helped keep him on-track after entering the bookshop on the main street of Diagon Alley and seeing row after row of books packed in a shop that seemed far too small to contain them, magic at work being the only sensible explanation. That was where sense and the shop parted ways. Harry couldn’t seem to find any logic at all to the layout, with cook books crammed next to current events, (where a tome titled Major Magical Events of the Twentieth Century was tossed into his floating basket after a quick glance at the index showed Potter, Harry; Potter, Lily; and Potter, James; all listed) and youth fiction next to Arithmancy.

A sign on the basket-holder at the front of the shop had told him – albeit in teeny-tiny print – that tapping the small piece of what looked like an inset chalkboard on the front of the basket would give him a total of all the books placed in it, a handy bit of charmwork that he wished the baskets at the Apothecary had had.

Being a type of thick historical tome, he wasn’t surprised that it rang in – plus taxes – at a galleon, though wasn’t pleased that one book would cost a fifth of his remaining “walkabout” money until the goblins finished his audit…and was equally a bit stunned that he’d managed to spend so much in a single morning that was just beginning to reach noon, he and Aunt Petunia would need to have lunch.
before continuing on with their day, though he knew she’d likely be more comfortable at a bog-standard curry or fish-and-chips shop than she would tucked away in the corner of a magical café.

Given what had been implied about his father and that side of his heritage, Harry added a pair of books on the wizarding world that were above and beyond the introductory one his mother had acquired during her first year, the two putting him up to another galleon between the seven sickles for *Etiquette and Manners for the Young Wizard* and *Governance: The Wizengamot, Ministry of Magic, and the Evolution of the Lord’s Moot* which was an older book based on the print date at nine sickles and fifteen knuts (plus taxes on both.)

That accomplished, Harry felt free to wander for a bit, several other books finding their way into his basket by the names of: *Hogwarts: A Self-Updating History; Quidditch Through the Ages* (which according to the Introduction was the Wizarding sport); *Curses and Counter-Curses;* and *Easy Spells to Fool Muggles,* which altogether left him with just enough to pick up a few copies of Wizarding periodicals for sale, Harry making quick work of tossing in *The Daily Prophet; Potions Quarterly; Witch Weekly; Which Broomstick; The Quibbler; and Magie du Monde;* the last of which appeared to be the only international-type paper or magazine available.

“Muggleborn for Hogwarts?” The clerk asked with a bit of a knowing smile at the books.

Harry shrugged, not seeing any reason to quibble over being muggle raised rather than muggle born. It wasn’t like the texts he’d picked were all that subtle – but still, the clerk must be quick-witted to picked it up at a glance.

“Here.” The clerk showed a few pamphlets to him before adding them to his bag. “Complementary for muggleborn students on your first purchase. Introduction flyers, owl-order catalogue, etcetera.”

“Thank you.” Harry nodded as he accepted the wrapped package, then made his way back towards the café. If he was right, after meeting up with his aunt, leaving his last few “extra” knuts for a tip, and picking up his clothes, his wand should be ready.

Unless, of course, it was being as tricky to make as the parts were to select.

…

Petunia took herself and the boy’s trunk over to the side of the room, watching out of the window and intently paying no attention – as much as she could manage – to the stern-looking witch who was speaking with her nephew after she had placed a carved box made of the same gleaming white-oak as the shop’s décor and inlaid with ebony with the crossed wands of the Blackwood logo, her nephew handing over the rest of his coin after checking to make sure that a wand was indeed within the box.

Melantha had greeted the powerful child and – if she knew anything about ambient power – his squib aunt, the woman settling for a polite but distant nod before settling herself down and allowing her independent charge to take care of his own affairs.

Not a happy family this.

Not that she would have expected one either considering the materials that went into his wand.

She set out a small bag that had wand-care instructions, the simple – but natural and effective – polish that her family made and sold to their clientele which should be enough to last him until next summer but that he could owl-order more of if not, a raw-silk cloth for polishing, and a pure wool one in case of harder-to-clean substances. Next to the wand box she laid out a simple – but well-
made – wand holster that already had auto-release, retrieval, security, and cleaning and sizing charms built in. At Ollivander’s shop such a thing would cost as much as a wand, while Blackwood took enough pride in their work and were smart enough to know that happy clientele were returning clientele.

First walking him through fitting the holster and activating it with a drop of his blood from the vial that she also brought with her both for this purpose and so that he could watch her destroy it – which she did as soon as the wand holster was in place around his right forearm – she then set the wand box between them.

“Handle and base of beech.” She described. “With an inlay of white willow in a latticed knotwork design along the wand body. Natural polish, with a core of braided basilisk heartstring, thestral tail hair, and demiguise fur. Bound with your blood, it will answer to no other. Eleven and a half inches, moderately balanced between stiff and flexible. Mr. Potter, I present your wand.”

At her gesture, Harry picked up the wand, needing nothing more than that to know that what she said was true.

_This_ was his wand.

…

Wand in place on his arm – and honestly, Harry was having a problem not lifting up his shirt-sleeve to pet it every ten seconds it felt so right – and everything else tucked away in his trunk including his now-empty coin purse, they made their way back through the Leaky Cauldron to Aunt Petunia’s sensible commuter car. Trunk tucked up in the back seat, as neither of them really fancied leveraging it into the boot, they set off in mostly-peaceful quiet for Surrey where they could get the last few things he’d need for school. At least shopping early would let them miss the rush for back-to-school (at both stops, muggle and magical) and give Harry time to practice with a fountain pen.

Not to mention: study.

The work that went into his wand alone, not to mention everything _else_ he’d seen that day, had done nothing if not whet his appetite to learn how it was all accomplished.

“Aunt Petunia.” Harry broached a subject that had been bothering him ever since he saw the book list the day before.

“Mmm?” She prompted as she guided the car into a parking space near the shopping center. At least they’d be able to have lunch in relative peace before picking up a few more things. With Harry using his inheritance and not the allotment for his supplies and having the sense to refrain from purchasing a pet, she thought he deserved a few extras. Perhaps some fiction books to take along, as she seemed to remember the lack of _normal_ literature to be one of Lily’s biggest complaints along with the lack of technology that worked with magic.

“What about my normal classes? Everything on my list was geared towards, well, _magic._” He lowered his voice in submission to his aunt’s feelings about the subject in public, especially as they weren’t alone in the parking center attached to the shopping complex. “How will I keep up?”

“That was a problem for your mother as well.” Petunia frowned. “I believe that the grades transfer over somehow. But if you want to continue your studies, I’m sure there are home-study materials available between the bookstore and the library.”

“Summertime then.” He sighed a bit inside. Summer wasn’t necessarily a _break_ for Harry, as he
didn’t go on holiday – ever – with the Dursleys instead being shuffled off to old Mrs. Figg’s house, and the gardening and weeding needing done more than ever along with other maintenance chores outside. But it hadn’t been all spent playing catch-up on a year’s schooling either.

“If you take a few texts with you, you won’t have as much to catch-up on during the summers.” She reminded him after placing their orders for small soups and salads to go with her tea and his – rare but deserving – fizzy drink. “Scheduling will be the key, though any sciences or such that require labs you won’t be able to continue.”

He wrinkled his nose even as he crunched away at the crisp green leaves of his salad.

That was too bad, as he’d been looking forward to chemistry.

But, on the bright side Potions at first glance last night had seemed a combination of that and cooking, so maybe he won’t miss out after all.

Maybe.

…

His aunt made quick work of filling their cart with several fountain pens, knowing that one or more might go missing over the course of the school year, a stack of composition books as well as a sketch pad of thick drawing paper that she’d explained with a brisk: drawings for reference, and a book of graph paper for diagrams. A lap desk made of solid hardwood, highlighters, bookcovers plus book-tape that wouldn’t tear the texts when the covers were removed, page markers/tabs, sticky notes, and a fresh set of colored pencils plus a sharpener joined the rest at the same clipped, economical speed that Petunia did most everything. Two pads of blank scratch paper for random notes, a handful of folders, and a school planner to help keep him organized and she deemed him done for his new stock of supplies combined with what he’d bought, already owned, or sourced from her sister’s things.

Harry almost died of shock when she stopped at the small book section of the store near the register and added a trio of references: a dictionary, a writing style guide, and a thesaurus, as well as half a dozen fiction books that were clearly meant for him as they weren’t any sort of the romances or dramas that his aunt preferred.

The Essential Shakespeare; Complete Sherlock Holmes; Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn; Treasure Island; The Jungle Books; and Utopia were hardly the things of books that found their way into the Dursley household, even when the pair of novels by Mark Twain had been assigned in one of their shared classes last year.

A hard, speaking glance from Petunia had his teeth clicking together.

The books were half-reward and half-bribe then.

He was one hundred percent alright with that, even if he knew that if Vernon found out about them what he could kiss his birthday gift – as meager as it tended to be, especially in comparison to the near-mountain of gifts Dudley received every year – goodbye.

It was just one more measure of inequality he’d had to get used to over the years.

Dudley got all the toys – if not all the sweets and junk food – that he could want and his aunt turned a blind eye to the “good natured” “rough housing” that went on between them.

Harry usually got his school clothes and a new pair of shoes, plus a second-hand book if he was lucky, and learned to out-run his cousin if he wanted to escape a round of fresh bruises. That was...
the way things were at the Dursley household. At least with magic, and now magic school, he’d had something that was his, something that set him apart from the Dursleys and helped him cope with everything else that wasn’t equitable about his situation.

He had – and still did – consider it a fair trade.

Dudley got spoiled and toys.

Harry got magic.

Of the two, he knew which he’d rather, even if there were days he really could use a fuller plate or to avoid Vernon’s temper.

Magic was his.

And he was never letting it go.

…

Audits apparently were much faster in the magical world, as it was only mid-August and a few weeks since Petunia had ordered it when the promised accounting arrived with the Thursday mail.

A strange détente had formed over the household between Harry’s acknowledged magic and Petunia putting her foot down with her husband.

Tense, and brittle as if the slightest shove one way or the other and it would explode, but a ceasefire if not a truce won out over the environs of Number Four, Privet Drive.

Harry’s magical trunk had taken up residence at the end of his slim single bed, that was made up with soft sheets turned grey from many washings and a simple hard-wearing but warm bedspread in blues and greens. A strange sight in the plain white-washed room, that had only a few science posters that he’d won at school from academic competitions, plus one of a new band out of the States that his aunt and her husband hated named Nirvana, but since he kept his music restricted to the personal tape player they’d gotten him as his only “frivolous” gift the year before, they tolerated it. He had a small desk with a cheap lamp and a chest of drawers to hold his clothes but no wardrobe which often had him seeming a bit scruffier than his cousin since he could only hang up a few things on the hooks on the back of his bedroom door.

A lone shelf above his desk held his textbooks from previous years, those that they’d had to buy rather than be supplied by the school, and a couple young adult fiction stories he’d been given over the years either by odd Mrs. Figg and her herd of cats or his aunt, though the latter – recent events aside – were few and far between.

Harry sourced more books for pleasure from his single trip to Diagon Alley and Surrey a few weeks before when combined with those of his mum’s than he had in the ten years he’d been living with the Dursleys.

And since reading was one of the few things he could do – quietly in his room or away at the library – that didn’t irritation the ever loving shit out of Vernon, that was a gap he was more than happy to remedy at least a little since he could only read and re-read the few Hardy Boys volumes or the Narnia collection Figg had given him so many times and the library had a limit on how many books he could borrow at a time.

The first thing Harry had done after getting home and hauling his trunk up the stairs (post ogling his wand for longer than he cared to admit, tracing the inlay over and over with his fingers) was organize
it all and add his books from his shelf, his mum, his “bribes”, and his purchases to the book compartment, then sort the potions ingredients and supplies, get all the clothes out of their wrapping (plus some of his winter clothes that he wouldn’t need but could still use later) and absolutely everything organized how he wanted it. He left out only a couple of notebooks, one of the pads of scratch paper, and the bookcovers and tape, along with his new writing supplies. After all, his first task, after protecting one of the only legacies from his mum with the covers, was learning how to write legibly with a fountain pen which took more than a bit of practice and about a third of the scratch paper to manage, keeping only a few pencils for his summer work, intending to write even his notes for his magical studies using his new pen.

Practice made perfect and Harry knew that some teachers once you hit secondary docked points or even a full grade for poor penmanship.

He also had to learn to clean, refill, and maintain his new pens, as well as read the pamphlets on wand care and the Intro ones given over with his purchases at Flourish and Blotts.

It turned out to be a good thing the clerk was quick on the uptake, since while much of them were repetitive after his mum’s materials, there were some new things to learn from them. Things, he gathered, changed slowly in the Wizarding World. A theory that was confirmed over and over again as he dove into his new books.

Which was also how he came to learn just why Madam Blackwood had known who he was.

His description – along with his scar and a whole host of other pertinent details – were all for anyone to see in his modern history text.

Because he was the Boy-Who-Lived.

Bloody fantastic.

He was famous because his parents died, taking a madman with them.

How callous was the Wizarding World?

Several weeks of chores and reading were more than enough to have a decent grasp on the wizarding world from his supplemental reading, as well as get a few chapters into his course books, the former being the first he’d torn through by necessity and inclination alike. He’d have plenty of time to do his pleasure reading. Right now he needed knowledge. And between the texts he’d bought, the periodicals – more than one of which wasn’t worth the paper it was printed on – and what he’d seen for himself in the Alley, that was exactly what he gained…though more than once he wasn’t happy about what said knowledge either implied or outright stated about the wizarding world in general and his potential place in it specifically.

A feeling that was only trebled and reinforced by the results of the audit of his accounts and total inheritance.

“Harry!” Petunia called him down after Vernon had left for work and Dudley to meet up with Piers in the park. “Come down, please!”

Her nephew had disappeared after helping with the dishes – as was his wont especially since that letter – up to his room to tear through book after book about that world.

She hoped he’d learned well thus far, as he’d likely have to explain at least part of the audit to her if it dealt with magical things as well as strict pounds and pence…or whatever it was the wizards called their money.
The thick officious envelope with the stamp of “Gringotts Bank, established 1474” with their motto in Latin “Strength through Loyalty” had arrived that morning to a sneer from Vernon, as he’d tossed it aside with a huff for her to go over with her nephew after he left.

It was better that way.

She’d said little about the implications of Ragnok and the audit, letting him believe that Harry simply had a fund set aside for his schooling. Not that Petunia wanted to prevaricate to her husband but…It was just better – easier – that way all around. He wasn’t likely to understand the expense of an item such as a wand after all, or see Harry wearing any of his new clothes, so what was the harm for the sake of familial, well, not harmony but at least not all-out hostility?

Opening the bundle, she set the folios aside, using a table knife to slice the seal on the letter that had been included as Harry tromped down the stairs with all the gangly noise of a growing boy, sitting next to her at the kitchen table and thumbing through the top folio while he waited for her to finish, the Gringotts crest, stamped into the top right of each folio, a dead giveaway to why he was called down.

To his surprise, she didn’t say a word though her brows had beetled into a full scowl before handing over the letter to read for himself, climbing back to her feet to fill the kettle.

News of this sort required tea.

Gallons of it.

Eyes flicking warily between his hacked-off aunt and the letter, Harry began to read as Petunia took out her frustrations on the sturdy kettle and her stoutest ceramic teapot, the tea tin suffering worse than either being a cheap metal jar with a seal to help keep the loose-leaf fresh.

14 August 1991

Gringotts Wizarding Bank

North Diagon Alley

London, England

Wizarding Great Britain

Mr. Harry James Antioch Potter and Guardian Mrs. Petunia Jane Dursley

Number Four Privet Drive

Little Whinging, Surrey

England, United Kingdoms

Mr. Potter and Mrs. Dursely:
Per the request by the legal guardian of one Mr. Harry James Antioch Potter, Mrs. Petunia Jane Dursley lodged with Branch Manager Ragnok of the Wizarding Great Britain Branch of Gringotts Wizarding Bank on 25 July 1991, an audit was completed by the Bank over all accounts, holdings, and inheritances held by Mr. Potter.

It is the grievous responsibility of the Bank to report that tampering has been found in Mr. Potter’s accounts and inheritances, though his physical properties (land, homes, etc.) have been untouched. All accounts were frozen and per the Law, recompense made for this grievous breach of Gringotts policy and goblin law per the Wizarding-Goblin Treaty of 1752, with the perpetrators subject to the highest penalties allowed under combined wizarding and goblin law depending on the species in question. As one of the perpetrators has claimed guardianship but supplies no proof of such, a notice banning this wizard, one Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore from all affairs regarding Mr. Potter has been enacted and forwarded to the wizarding Ministry Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

According to records on file with Gringotts, Mrs. Dursley, being a Squib, is now considered legally both Mr. Potter’s legal, physical, and magical guardian until Mr. Potter comes of age, is emancipated, or said guardianship is transferred to another magical being in good standing.

As a goblin was complicit in this grievous offense against the Bank and Mr. Potter, all associated fees and fines from 31 October 1981 through the receipt of this letter by Mr. Potter and his guardian Mrs. Dursley are considered null and void and have been returned to Mr. Potter’s vaults.

May your gold always flow and your enemies tremble.

Ragnok
Branch Manger, Gringotts London

“Were my Evans grandparents magical?” Was the question Harry decided to tackle first, since he was pretty sure it was what had his aunt bothered – though learning that his soon-to-be Headmaster had been helping himself to Harry’s gold wasn’t helping him keep his temper either.

He’d already had reasons to distrust the old man from his aunt’s recitation of finding him on their doorstep – in bloody November – with only a note and a blanket.

This was just the icing on the cake…though now that he’d read more about the Wizarding World, he’d be surprised if that notice to the DMLE actually did anything about the situation given the laundry list of titles the Headmaster had trailing after his name.
“Not that we knew.” Petunia told him, voice unsteady. “Though from what I understand they must have been Squibs,” and that sounded just as awful as Muggle to her ears. “As well.”

“Would have to be.” Harry agreed absently, giving her a nod in thanks as she set down a tea cup for him in a rare show of neutral civility – which kinda classified her behavior since he’d confronted them about his magic. “Otherwise you wouldn’t be considered a Squib either or eligible as my magical guardian.” Which made him wonder what would have happened with that if it had been the case. Maybe an assigned case worker or some such from the Ministry, though he’d yet to come across a children’s welfare department for all his reading. Which meant it either didn’t exist or the authors he’d read hadn’t considered them worth mentioning, with easy money betting on the former.

“How do they look?” She asked, changing the subject to one less likely to be hysterics-inducing, gesturing with her cup to the folios.

“They split them up.” Harry told her, frowning lightly as he examined the first and then set it aside a few pages in, flipping open the next, and then the third and doing the same. “Liquid funds, investments, property, with…” He flipped more thoroughly through the last folio with the “property” contents. “Any contents of my vaults that aren’t liquid galleons, sickles, or knuts. Easy to follow that way, since if what I’ve read before in my Intro and other books are right, I can’t do more than make withdrawals on the cash or have you help me with investments until I’m of-age or emancipated.”

“Do you want to tinker with the investments at all?” She asked after letting that sink in, though noting that he hadn’t answered the underlying question of what his inheritance consisted of.

“Probably.” He told her with a shrug. “Once I study them. If they haven’t had anything done with them in a good ten years or more, then I’m sure there’s some that are just dead weight and need trimming, but anything other than that can wait until I’m older and understand what amounts to magical economics.”

Harry took one more glance at the numbers at the bottom of the first folio’s summary.

Oh yeah.

He understood now how Ragnok could just hand over a hundred galleons from his vault – even just the trust fund without blinking an eye.

*Potter Family Vault*

*Vault Number 77*

*Total Balance: 37,895,745 G; 15 S; 19 K*

*Potter Heir’s Trust Vault*

*Vault Number 189*

*Total Balance: 134,900 G; 0 S; 0 K*

Which, after a quick glance at the transactions for his trust vault, meant that it was one that didn’t bear interest which investment vaults did, and received an automatic deposit of ten thousand galleons every year on his birthday plus the opening “base” deposit of twenty-five thousand galleons.
Even with nothing else, ever, by the time he graduated Hogwarts – his tuition being paid at birth according to a note in the folio’s section for the family vault – he would never have to work if he did nothing else but manage his money and not be a spend-thrift.

It brought to mind a saying he’d heard once, that is was impossible to spend away true wealth.

And those were only two vaults.

They didn’t count the properties – which whether land or items of value were extensive – or the investments which were considerable and from what he could tell between the two: properties and investing, was where the liquid wealth had come from.

Old money.

His father had come from old money and married a middle-class muggleborn descended from squibs.

Damn.

No wonder the Pureblood fanatics in the seventies had targeted them. That alone would have had some baying for blood. Add in that the pair actively fought against the Death Eaters and the ideology they supported – all while being in their late teens and very-early twenties – and their targeting wasn’t a surprise in the least.

Even in the modern era, in regular Britain and not Wizarding Britain that in many ways was stuck a few centuries in the past, that would have been one hell of a scandal.

Harry found that he liked his parents all the better for it…with as little as he knew of to like anyway.

…

By the time Harry was staring his thirteenth birthday in the face, he knew more about children’s welfare in the wizarding world – and where it lacked – than he’d wish on anyone, especially considering the events of the previous school year.

His aunt had grit her teeth through a second trip to the magical shopping district, though made him promise to figure out another way to get there as soon as possible for the next year’s shopping. The Alley had been much busier which didn’t help matters, the two rushing straight to Gringotts, completed their business – getting “exchange” books (like muggle cheques), a coin purse linked to Harry’s trust for spending coin with a monthly limit of one galleon, and hacking away at the thicket of dead and out-of-date investments Harry had hanging around his portfolios – and rushed back home. Harry had been the one to discover that the Surrey regular post office staffed a Squib to forward magical mail onto an owl-post office, apparently managed through something called the Knight Bus, giving him a way to send and receive mail – once his aunt had signed off on the forms at the Surrey hub – without the attention drawn by post-owls.

This also allowed him to receive subscriptions to *Magie du Monde*, *Which Broomstick*, and *The Quibbler* as he found the *Prophet* to be more gossip than anything, *Witch Weekly* was marketed towards the female set, and *Potions Quarterly* for the most part contained articles far beyond his current skill set.

One such piece of business had been hiring a solicitor as Madam Blackwood had assumed he already possessed and set him – one Edwardius Randolf Dodge, Jr., a sharply pressed-and-dressed wizard of indeterminate middle age – on the case of the widespread use of Harry’s name and image…all without contracts in place as reported by Gringotts.
Dodge had gotten nothing less than a wicked gleam in his eyes and set up a retainer contract in a blink then and there in the kitchen of his aunt’s home while the Dursleys were off on a weekend trip to Brighton, Harry considered “responsible” enough to be left with keys to the home so long as he stayed nights with old Mrs. Figg, giving him a place to conduct a bit of business or study without swimming through a dozen cats or dealing with a prying old biddy.

Petunia had imposed limits on his ready coin via the purse, but not legitimate expenses through his exchange books, Harry signing off on the retainer fee due through the contract with Dodge of two hundred galleons without a blink of an eye as it was within the range Gringotts had told him to expect to pay.

If it kept people from treating him as public property, it was money well-spent and not even a drop in the bucket of his collective wealth.

Once Harry was at school, an automatic forward would go on his name at the post office, all of his mail being re-routed at the owl-post to Hogwarts instead of Surrey, allowing only mail for his aunt through to the house until he returned for the summer.

Détente or not, Harry had no intention of returning to Privet Drive more than he needed to, a feeling that was more than reciprocated if the relief on Petunia’s face and the squealing of Vernon’s car peeling away from King’s Cross was any sign.

They were well rid of each other, both parties counting the days at this point until he turned fifteen and was eligible to apply for emancipation under wizarding law – another thing he’d wanted Dodge on retainer for.

He had keys to his vaults as well, but those were more symbolic than functional, the exchange books and purse more than enough to see him through until his majority.

The only real excitement Harry had his first term of school – other than some nonsense Dumbledore had tried to stir up about the third-floor corridor and the missing Professor Quirrell – had been at his Sorting.

Harry had expected a personality test of some kind given what he’d learned about the school from his mother’s letters and Hogwarts: A History, but never had a talking hat crossed his mind. He supposed, now that magic was indeed as real as he’d always thought it, that he’d have to get used to thinking of the formerly unthinkable if he didn’t want to be tossed for a loop every other week.

What the Hat had said to him stuck deep once Professor McGonagall called out Potter, Harry!, and he set the Hat upon his head.

“Ah an interesting one, I see, I see.”

“You’re talking.” Harry noted, more than a bit of concealed panic flashing through his mind. “In my head.”

“Yes, that I am young Mr. Potter.” The Hat said. “Now, let us take an inventory of you to see where you belong. Good work ethic, yes, quite a bit of study and keeping busy. But you’re not for Hufflepuff. That wouldn’t be good for you or them. Courage, when you need it. Yes, I see that too. And a healthy dose of Gryffindor ferocity as well. However, those are far from your strongest traits, there, but hmm… No, not Gryffindor, I don’t believe. Cunning and ambition now, those are well-developed to go with that surprisingly adaptive and quick mind, Mr. Potter. Slytherin or Ravenclaw, that’s where you belong. But which…hmm… Well. I suppose…there’s no harm in asking. Knowledge or power, Mr. Potter? Which would you rather?”
“Knowledge is power, Mr. Hat.”

A hearty chuckle was heard, but this time not just in his mind, as Harry focused outwardly once more and noticed the hall that seemed to be waiting on pins and needles for the near Hat-Stall to come to an end.

“Ravenclaw!”

And that was that.

Ravenclaw suited him as well as the Hat had thought it might. Better than Slytherin anyway. He would’ve gone mad trying to deal with all of that posturing and gameplaying every hour of the day.

The other ‘Claws didn’t mind if he studied everything he got his hands on, in fact since he was neck-and-neck with Gryffindor’s know-it-all Granger and Slytherin’s pompous prince Malfoy for points, they were perfectly happy to leave him to it, though more than one had come to him for help or a nudge in the right direction when they were stuck. The purebloods and magic-raised kids in particular when they found out about his copy of *The Elements of Style*, plus the dictionary and thesaurus which together helped guide them through their second batch of essays…particularly Professor Snape’s which other than a few rare exceptions tended to bleed red ink. Potions was the bane of every student, even many of the Slytherins, as he’d heard more than one of them moaning about their potions grades when they thought no one outside their house was around.

Snape was another interesting thing about his first term.

The Potions Master didn’t seem to know what to do with himself when faced with Harry.

A state which had led to the man mostly ignoring him whenever possible or sticking with a stiff – but not vitriolic as he often was to other students not Slytherin – professional manner when avoidance wasn’t possible such as in the Ravenclaw-Hufflepuff potions class or the group Christmas dinner that the school put on for the students and staff that stay over for the winter holiday.

Second year however, hadn’t been nearly so benign.

Harry had made no real friends during his first year, though he was in a firmly friendly-acquaintance relationship with all his housemates of his year and a few above, plus a scattered handful from the other houses in their year. The walk to and from the post office to send out owl-post wasn’t bad, but it was a bit tedious at times. Dudley hadn’t improved any by being sent to Smeltings, however he still wasn’t able to catch Harry, which between walking so many stairs each and every day actually kept him in decent shape despite the heavy meals that Hogwarts served as Harry wasn’t about to lose his only non-magical defense against his cousin.

People may have thought him odd or down-right barmy for running around the Black Lake unless the snow was thick on the ground, which during the thick of winter forced him into locating a few of the stationary staircases to run instead, but he’d stayed fit and that was the important thing between heavy foods and the lack of having to run away at least twice a week.

He traded letters – and homework help with Neville Longbottom, Potions and Defense for Herbology since they’d been partnered in the latter class – with some of his housemates and Dodge, who Harry had nearly been able to hear cackling all the way from Scotland in February when his case against several publishing houses, manufacturers, and periodicals went to court and was ruled in his favor.

The Wizarding World, apparently despite the evidence he’d known from his placement and the
mismanagement of his guardianship, took offenses against minors most severely.

Given that, he supposed the lack of children’s welfare at the Ministry wasn’t a great surprise, since only the worst of offenders were thought to prey on magical children.

A fact that made his second year at Hogwarts all the worse.

He hadn’t bothered with a return trip to the Alley, simply purchasing his books and a top-up of his Potions supplies through owl-order and exchange slips from his Gringotts chequebooks as he’d done for his casual reading that wasn’t sated by the Hogwarts library, with the rest of his supplies able to be gathered from the muggle world, his aunt’s instructions insuring that his uniforms and clothes all had grown with him and were standing up to the wear and tear visited upon them by a pre-teen wizard.

That said, he was most unimpressed by his Defense texts as anything other than the loosest fiction.

Entertaining reads to be sure.

But utterly lacking in any sense of veracity, the author hadn’t even attempted to ensure that that dates of some of his “deeds” hadn’t overlapped.

Second year was not shaping up to be enjoyable if dealing with a fallacious buffoon was on his schedule.

Quirrell, for all that he stuttered, wasn’t all that bad of a teacher despite his disappearance in May that had set the staff into a tizzy.

Harry only paid it the barest of attention, as he was too busy competing with Gryffindor’s Granger and Slytherin’s Malfoy for top marks, all three of them being bested in Herbology by Neville and Hufflepuff Wayne Hopkins in Charms. Harry’d ended up sweeping Defense and Magical Theory and tying for top marks with Granger for Transfiguration, Malfoy for Potions, and both of them for Astronomy. Granger had taken History of Magic, but honestly as boring as that ghost was she was welcome to it.

In their second year of magical education, they traded the pass/fail flying instruction on those rickety accidents-waiting-to-happen, (though he did enjoy flying), for a graded class once a week with the auspicious title of “Health for the Young Magical.” Much of which ended up being a magical version of the health classes any muggle-raised student had attended but it did include helpful information that didn’t crossover to the non-magical being. Such as that with the right potions or enough raw power, a male of old bloodlines could bear children not just sire them. And that the wizarding world – even stuck in the past Britain – recognized more than two genders.

Which answered a lingering question Harry had had regarding why same-sex marriages, bondings, or other forms of relationships weren’t looked down on according to his readings…unless both parties were muggleborn.

That aside, the class also taught spells for hygiene, contraception, and other basic health needs for a magical being.

But where second year took a dip into drama that actually affected Harry was also surrounding their health class, specifically the section regarding consenting for sex in the magical world and the caution a young magical needed to practice when it came to “gifting” their virginity on another magical being. The magic of a young magical will prevent rape so long as they were virgins. However, and it was a big however, it didn’t prevent anything but penetration.
So when he found a tiny elfin girl crying – and naked – with bruises on her body locked in a broom closest his reaction was…volcanic to say the least.

...

1 December 1992

Harry was coming back from a too-close-to-curfew visit to the library, messenger bag straining to hold all the texts he’d borrowed for his self-study in Defense, a necessity if he wanted to do well on the actual end of year exams proctored and set by the Department of Magical Education and not the ridiculous ponce of a professor they’d been saddled with this year, when he heard it.

A weak cry that made him think for a moment that someone’s kitten had gotten lost in the corridors.

Then it repeated, lower, with a sobbing hiccup that was certainly not feline.

Wand out, as his mistrust of being alone and therefore vulnerable had been well-cultivated by growing up with a cousin that would sooner beat him into paste and an uncle with a heavy swing to his fist hadn’t been eased at Hogwarts. If anything it had advanced with Dumbledore constantly watching him with either a plotting twinkle or barely-banked rage. Watching, however, was all Dumbledore was able to do. Between Gringotts and Dodge, while they hadn’t been able to do anything but make Dumbledore lose face as far as his political clout, they had been able to punch through a restraining order, keeping the old bastard from any contact with Harry or being alone in his presence. That didn’t mean he thought Dumbledore would always play along with the decree issued by the DMLE, hence the bared wand.

Powerful men didn’t take egg on their face with a put-upon sigh and a disappointed twinkle in any of Harry’s research and limited experience.

Dumbledore would retaliate.

It was how and when that made Harry kick himself for being out so close to curfew and worse, alone, without even Padma or Neville to accompany him.

The sounds were coming from a tiny broom closet near the Ravenclaw Tower entrance, Harry frowning the more he listened as the idea of it being some sort of Dumbledore-inspired trap diminished.

Whoever that was, they were crying like their world had ended: utter devastation.

Few were the students who would be able to do as such on demand and while there were spells that would manage it, this sounded too…authentic for him to really believe that the sobbing was manufactured. Harry may not cry anymore, having learned early on with the Dursleys that it didn’t benefit anything to bother, but he still remembered what it was to cry himself to sleep because he hurt so much and so deep inside that there was nothing else that his young mind and body knew how to do. This was the same.

Testing the door with one hand, he found it locked – though a quick spell showed that the locks were on the outside, and that fast his churning thoughts clarified and distilled down to two: bone-deep worry for the trapped and rage for whoever had done this to them.

It could be Pansy Parkinson, one of the most disagreeable creatures in the entire school, and Harry would still feel the same.

A few flicks of his wand had the weak, simplistic locking spell falling, then with a deep breath he
returned his wand to the sheath on his arm and opened the door with slow and steady care, not wanting to spook whoever he was about to find.

That said, what he did find did nothing at all to alleviate his worry and rage, if anything the small shivering form with wispy blonde hair fanned his dueling emotions.

The form – a tiny girl he thought he recognized as being a first-year Ravenclaw – shivered and whimpered, daring to peek over one bare shoulder as the light from the hall fell upon her form, showing blue-grey eyes that were normally dreamy but were filled and overflowing with tears as she hunched closer in on herself.

Harry didn’t think he’d ever moved as fast as he did next, his bag hitting the floor and his open robe whipping off his shoulders and wrapping around her bruised, scratched, and shivering form within moments. He didn’t stop to ask her name. He thought it was Lovegood. He didn’t ask what happened. It didn’t matter at this moment.

He wrapped her up, shushed her a little, and with a bit of a lightening charm had her in his arms and the two of them running for the hospital wing with his bag levitating behind them.

…

To say Madam Pomphrey was startled away from her contemplations of a quiet night with a cuppa and a book, no new cases of colds or flu cropping up today thankfully, when the doors to her ward flew open after being knocked into by the forward shoulder of a running second year, would be a vast understatement.

Poppy Pomphrey was a hardened veteran of two wizarding wars where she’d spent as much time patching wounds from spellfire as she had the scraps of children, and didn’t let her alarm keep her from moving into action as she noted at once the crying bundle huddled in the boy’s – Mr. Potter’s – arms.

“Put her here.” Poppy demanded, already rushing over to the first cot closest to the potions cabinet, snapping out diagnoses spells and warming charms the instant Potter obeyed. “Ms. Lovegood?” Poppy frowned, shocked to her toes at the state of the girl. “Mr. Potter what has happened?”

“I don’t know.” He seethed, hands clenching and unclenching, eyes burning the unholy green of the Killing Curse, his rage lighting them from their normal emerald to the shocking color of spellfire. “I found her locked – from the outside – in a broom closet near the Ravenclaw entrance without a stitch on.” Harry only had to catch a snatch of the first diagnostic result with the words bruising: mammary tissue, external genitalia, that continued on for several lines before Poppy grabbed it, cursed, and cast another round of diagnostics at the shivering girl then spelled her to sleep. “May I use your Floo, Madam?”

“Yes, Potter, go ahead. Summon your head of house and Professors Snape and McGonagall.” She waved him off, already working furiously to document absolutely everything before she could begin healing the poor child, one of the reasons why she had to spell her asleep instead of plying her with a calming potion.

Harry had every intention of doing so.

After he made his call first.

Something about this stank of more than bullying or even an older student preying upon another, and he wasn’t going to let it disappear. Grabbing a pinch of Floo powder, he tossed it in the already lit
fireplace, calling out: “Dodge House, Mr. Potter for Solicitor E.R. Dodge.”

“Mr. Potter.” Dodge answered rather than a house-elf pointing to him being up and awake if not working in his office. “What can I do for you at this hour?”

“I just found an eleven-year-old girl in a closet who has been abused by another student at best and molested by a staff member at worst.” Harry bit out, kneeling to talk to his solicitor. “I need you to go round up reps from the DMLE. I don’t see Dumbledore allowing this to get out and causing a stink after last year.”

But Harry wasn’t going to let this go away.

Not this.

His moral compass was more than a little fucked after growing up with self-preservation being his morning and evening prayers, but he had a line and whatever had happened to little Luna Lovegood hadn’t just crossed it, it had obliterated it into a million pieces in the process.

It took a moment for what his premier client had said to process, but as soon as Dodge had jumped into action Harry cut the Floo call, having been taught by Dodge how to use it in case of emergency, even ordering a small tin of Floo powder that would work in a muggle fireplace, then did as the mediwitch had demanded, summoning first the Potions Master – and wasn’t he just delighted to have Potter’s head in his fire – then McGonagall and his/Luna’s head of house. With all that activity it was only a matter of time before Dumbledore’s attention was drawn to the infirmary. The only question was whether Dodge would arrive with the DMLE before the barmy old coot was drawn from his plush office or not.

Harry’s temper was in no way abated by the scene that followed, with Poppy snapping orders at Snape and the dour man providing her with potions and a secondary witness to her report of Ms. Lovegood’s condition, Flitwick clucking anxiously over one of his Ravens being in such a state and McGonagall in hardly a better state than Harry, hissing under her breath in what he thought was Scots Gaelic as they watched the pair work.

When they’d done what they could, attention turned back to the barely-holding-his-temper Harry who had found the wounded girl and brought her at once for care.

“What happened?” This time the demand for information came in a silken-toned bass rather than Poppy’s frantic alto, Harry unclenching his tense form just enough to speak though all could tell his strain from his face, form, and voice. Though if they were aware enough such as Snape, they could also see it in the curling and snapping of his magical aura. Mr. Potter was one step away from a magical outburst. That he’d been controlling it thus far was a sign of his considerable magical control…but even the most controlled among the magical populace gave way under enough stress.

And finding a tiny, abused girl was clearly stressful for more than just the adults in the room.

If anything, Potter was as affected as the rest of them, if not more.

Harry repeated what he knew for the professors, a look exchanged between McGonagall and Snape had them turning for the doors to investigate the closet for any magical residue that might point towards who was responsible. Anything they could piece together without disturbing Ms. Lovegood was another piece that the young lady didn’t have to – potentially – discuss for herself in court. That charges were going to be brought was a foregone conclusion as Harry had had the foresight to bring Ms. Lovegood straight to Poppy and then involve the rest of the staff.
The mediwitch was a mandatory reporter and not even the Headmaster could prevent her from fulfilling her oath when staring straight at a clear-cut case of abuse, though how severe and who was involved remained to be seen.

“Mr. Potter, perhaps…” His Head of House began to – attempt – to send him away when the doors of the infirmary slammed back open, this time revealing a thunderous Headmaster trailing Harry’s solicitor and a pair of Aurors from the DMLE.

“Not for all the gold in Gringotts.” Harry told him in a carrying whisper as Snape and McGonagall rejoined them as well as Professor Sprout who must have been summoned by the Headmaster as given the severity of accusations Harry had leveled on behalf of Ms. Lovegood, the Heads were needed to help manage the situation.

Though how the irritating little shit had managed it Albus had yet to discover.

A searching – if fuming – glance at Harry was all the attention he was paid by the Headmaster as Dumbledore turned towards the school’s mediwitch who was already duplicating her report for the Headmaster and Aurors, handing them over as she gave them a verbal rendition of events as she understood them thus far.

One word in particular stood out to the Headmaster and had him internally cursing the air blue as he knew this was going to cause an even bigger stink than that damn boy’s injunction against him had the previous year.

The goblins had been most thorough and exacting in retrieving each-and-every text, magical item, and galleon that Albus had…borrowed from the boy’s vaults, including his father’s invisibility cloak that even after ten years of careful study he was no closer to confirming or discounting as the Cloak of Hallows legend. At this point, all he knew was that it was particularly well made. Nothing more, nothing less, and out of a rare combination of demiguise hide rather than hair and Leithfold skin.

As no locating spell Dumbledore tried in the last year-plus had found the Cloak inside Hogwarts, the boy must have left it in his vault – if he even knew it was there in the first place.

It was beyond infuriating.

If Dumbledore didn’t have use for the child still, he would have taken steps to correct the fallacious belief the dratted creature seemed to have that it was worth anything other than the blood it would take to kill Voldemort once and for all.

“Mr. Potter, is Madam Pomphrey’s account accurate?” One of the Aurors, Proudfoot, asked the twelve-year-old Ravenclaw.

“Yes, sir.” Harry replied, his polite words at clear war with his straining anger over the situation, though none of the adults had seen fit to mention it as yet, nor would they unless he began to show signs of his power slipping out of his grasp. “That’s the sum of things as I understand them.”

The other Auror, with gleaming chocolate skin in contrast with the dark bronze of his partner, one Kingsley Shacklebolt, grimaced at that. He’d really hoped they would be able to avoid having to possibly traumatize the girl further with questioning.

Dodge had posted up next to his client, standing just to one side and behind Potter’s right side and well out of the way of the pre-teen’s wand.

And hopefully out of the blast radius when the lad’s temper finally blew.
Snape took that as his cue, gliding forward and reporting his and McGonagall’s findings from the closet.

“The locking spell was rudimentary at best.” He reported with his stoic way, hands hidden inside the opposite sleeves and also hiding the enraged clench of them against his forearms – one of which had an ever-darkening Dark Mark. “Mr. Potter’s assessment was sound. Whoever locked Ms. Lovegood away in such as state was a student, with spell-residue suggesting more than one of pre-adult level power, however.” At that more than one winced as a however from Severus Snape was never a good thing. “Upon arriving in the infirmary, there was a lingering aura of spell damage specifically surrounding Ms. Lovegood’s head.”

“What color?” Proudfoot’s whiskey-brown eyes snapped over to Snape, having gone to school with him as a fellow Slytherin a year his senior, he knew better than to doubt the abilities of Severus Snape, no matter how foul-tempered a creature he was and had always been.

“Dark muddled red.” Severus’s scowl turned nothing less than fierce. “An adept magical has tampered with Ms. Lovegood.”

The sound of sucked-in breaths and curses were nearly unnoticed in the wake of Snape’s recitation. Harry had finally lost his grip on his rage and with his outburst of rage the entire castle shook down to its very foundations before Dodge grabbed his shoulder in a punishing grip, the bright shock of blooming pain all he needed to anchor him and for him to suck in a deep breath and force his power and temper back with it.

“Sorry.” He bit out, eyes gleaming and teeth clenched. “Temper.”

The four Heads snapped out Patronus charms, each being sent to their seventh-year prefects for the students to calm any of the younger students who had been disturbed by the brief but no less shockingly powerful mini-earthquake.

All four would rather deal with the fallout themselves but needs-must.

Ms. Lovegood was their priority at the moment, not dealing with the results of Mr. Potter’s most impressive outburst.

“Detention Potter.” Snape snapped, looking down his nose at the powerful little runt – a powerful little runt that was one of the taller boys in his year at five-foot-three and if that little outburst was any sign the most powerful wizard of his generation. More and more, it was looking like his survival of his former Master’s attack wasn’t a fluke – or even solely Lily’s doing – after all. “One month to help you learn control over your deplorable temper.”

“Yes, Professor.” Harry bit out, still keeping a stranglehold on said temper.

Little did he know at the moment – though he did figure it out later – but Snape’s preemptive action had kept him from a much worse punishment from Dumbledore.

“Who of the adults in the castle are of adept level or close in range, Headmaster?” Kingsley asked. “Including any sixth or seventh year students whether they’ve the credentials to go with the power or not.”

Albus ran one hand down his beard in contemplation, even as Minerva rolled her eyes and summoned a list of the staff and another on their students that kept track of their magical auras in case there were any – such as Mr. Potter – that required extra lessons in control or help to reach their potential, a list compiled through the Hogwarts wards.
Power was only as good as what you learned to do with it.

Mr. Potter might have more than either of his parents at his age or any other magical child of his generation, but he often spent as much of his energy keeping it in check due to his still-developing core as he did using it to cause mayhem…such as shaking the castle. In time, that power could be channeled into high-power spellwork such as advanced charms and transfiguration. At the moment, it was more curse than blessing both for him and for them as they did the best they could to keep him from blowing up the damn castle because he slipped one day.

“There’s not many adepts.” Minerva handed over said lists to her former students. “Most children don’t reach that stage until post-Hogwarts while most of our staff are at least Mastery level if not Sorcerer.”

In fact, every adult staff member currently in the room were all of Sorcerer level or higher, though only Albus with his “Grand Sorcerer” title flaunted it, unless Minerva was very mistaken regarding the power of her co-workers. Which she wasn’t. She might not have the mage-sense that Severus had inherited from the Prince line that allowed him to see what others merely assumed without a magical undergoing the process to be acknowledged as above the standard level of witch or wizard, but she wasn’t a fool either.

No matter how Albus treated her more often than not.

Kingsley arched a brow at the short list.

She was right, which limited their suspect pool considerably – at least regarding whoever had worked mental magics against a minor in the care of the school.

“We need a Mind Healer.” Proudfoot murmured. “With the girl compromised her testimony won’t be admissible alone. A mind-arts master will have to deal with the spell damage and then make a statement for evidence.”

“At least we won’t have to wake her.” Kingsley sighed, rubbing at his eyes. “Poor mite. You start taking statements from the girl’s yearmates, see if we can work on sifting through the students for that part while I send for Robards for the evidence and get the Department working on a Mind Healer referral for her.” He grimaced. “Scrimgeour’s going to be right pissed and just as he took over the job from old Mad-Eye…”

Robards, being one Gawain Robards, Master Auror, had made quick work of the shoddy spellwork on the girl, leading to the newest DADA professor leaving the school before dawn in magic-suppressing cuffs and babbling and crying all over himself.

Meanwhile, that wasn’t the only problem that had been unearthed.

Luna had been molested by Lockheart, which had the Auror department scrabbling to deal with the fallout as more and more accusations poured in regarding people who had been tampered with by the life-snatching pedophile.

Lockheart, hadn’t, however, been the one who’d stripped her naked and stuffed her in a locked closet.

No, that crime hung over the heads of three girls from Ravenclaw, two of them over the age of consent which took a case of bullying – that Dumbledore tried to argue for – and turned it into additional cases of sexual assault.
Locking her in a closet was bullying, not matter how vicious.

Stripping her and stealing her clothes on the other hand turned it sexual against an underage minor child.

The age of consent in the Wizarding World was fourteen while the age of majority barring emancipation was seventeen.

Cho Chang and Marietta Edgecombe, both in their third year, were both facing serious charges in the wake of Ms. Lovegood’s assault, while their second-year accomplice Mandy Brocklehurst being underage couldn’t be charged with the sexual aspect but still faced charges of standard assault nonetheless.

Being underage, their sentences and the results of the disciplinary committee they all faced at the Ministry weren’t publicized.

That didn’t stop the general population from finding out anyway but at least it wasn’t bandied across the *Prophet*.

Brocklehurst with being younger and a first-time offender was expelled with a mark on her permanent record and given mandatory community service. She would either have to attend one of the other wizarding schools – if they were willing to accept her – or be homeschooled.

Chang and Edgecombe however, were found guilty of a sustained pattern of abusive behavior against Ms. Lovegood. That night with the closet wasn’t the first time. It was just when they got caught.

Expelled, wands snapped, and remanded to the juvenile detention center in the Orkneys, both teens wouldn’t be up for parole until they were of-age, and even then would have to register as sex offenders in the muggle registry and with the Ministry of Magic of any country they attempted to move to in order to escape the cloud that would follow them all their lives.

Harry had given Solicitor Dodge his orders after all, which with the extent of the charges, the DMLE was glad to have him on their side inside of representing the accused – for once.

Gilderoy Lockheart on the other hand, had no such protection from being pilloried in the court of public opinion and no amount of former fame could protect them from the mob of outraged parents that wanted his head on a spike – especially once it came out that his perversion was no new crime but rather one that had followed in his wake.

Kingsley found himself glad that Lockheart had been such a hound for glory – stolen or otherwise – it made his footsteps easy to track and his victims to find.

In the end, it wasn’t a single charge of child molestation that Lockheart faced but over a dozen, along with various other crimes that had been found with only a bit of digging.

Dumbledore managed to escape any charges in the situation, but his reputation had taken further damage for hiring a pedophile and degenerate to work in a school around vulnerable children. He hadn’t lost any of his positions or his titles – yet. But he’d had to call in the last of his markers to escape an inquiry over the Lockheart situation.

By the time the students went home for the summer, Harry having acquired a shadow in the form of a quiet but blossoming Luna Lovegood, he’d finally landed on a scheme that should, finally, take some of the power back from that infernally irritating creature Potter and place it back where it rightfully belonged – with one Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore.
Author’s Note 2 Most of this is from Pottermore but not all:

On Harry’s wand:

Main Wood: Beech

The true match for a beech wand will be, if young, wise beyond his or her years, and if full-grown, rich in understanding and experience. Beech wands perform very weakly for the narrow-minded and intolerant. Such wizards and witches, having obtained a beech wand without having been suitably matched (yet coveting this most desirable, richly hued and highly prized wand wood), have often presented themselves at the homes of learned wandmakers such as myself, demanding to know the reason for their handsome wand’s lack of power. When properly matched, the beech wand is capable of a subtlety and artistry rarely seen in any other wood, hence its lustrous reputation.

Secondary Inlay: Willow

Willow is an uncommon wand wood with healing power, and I have noted that the ideal owner for a willow wand often has some (usually unwarranted) insecurity, however well they may try and hide it. While many confident customers insist on trying a willow wand (attracted by their handsome appearance and well-founded reputation for enabling advanced, non-verbal magic) my willow wands have consistently selected those of greatest potential, rather than those who feel they have little to learn. It has always been a proverb in my family that he who has furthest to travel will go fastest with willow.

Main Core: Basilisk Heartstring

Exceptionally powerful and sensitive to Parseltongue. Tends to choose magicians of both power and resolve who understand more subtle magics than those drawn to Dragon Heartstring. Can warn its owner of danger by emitting a low musical tone.

Secondary Core: Thestral Tail Hair

Thestral tail hair is also an interesting core - the wand cannot simply be mastered by winning them. It can only be mastered by a witch or wizard who is able to face death without fear.

It is regarded as an unstable, if not the most difficult substance to use in wand making, though Veela hair is also described as such, but has been successfully utilised.

It is assumed that one must be able to see Thestrals in order to utilise their hair, and since one must witness death first-hand to see a Thestral, anyone wishing to forge a wand with the hair must witness death, tying in with the story of the Elder Wand’s core being Thestral Hair and therefore being the “Master of Death.” It is unknown if the tail hair would be invisible to a wandmaker who had not seen death, as a Thestral would be, or if it can be seen once it is separated from the Thestral.

Secondary Core: Demiguise Hair

Demiguise hairs were long considered to not have enough oomph to make a proper wand, but with the advent of multiple cores they have gained favor for their strength in Transfiguration and the subtle arts. When combined with a stronger wand core they make potent wands, however, on their own they can be rather one-dimensional and difficult to use for anything but Transfiguration. They have found favor in students of all Houses, although they may be slightly rarer among the open Hufflepuffs as a wand with demiguise hair tends to bond to a magician with a propensity for secrets and hiding in plain sight.
I made an error in the original posting of this chapter. Harry's name should be "Harry James Antioch Potter." But I fixed it as of 4.21.18.
21 July 1993, Little Whinging, Surrey

If you had asked him, Harry would have said that he hadn’t thought a month’s detention in the
clutches of Potions Master Severus Snape would have amounted to anything but water-pruned hands
from scrubbing cauldrons.

That month being almost all of December of his second year of schooling at Hogwarts School of
Witchcraft and Wizardry, a punishment for his inability to control his temper – and therefore his
magic – after learning for a certainty that one Ms. Luna Lovegood (who in the wake of Harry’s
championing her had summarily adopted him as her older brother whether he liked it or not) had
been molested by an adult.

Given that if he hadn’t reined his temper back in nearly the same moment that it slipped he could’ve
leveled the castle rather than just shaken it up a bit, he hadn’t really fought the punishment.

However, had he not spent the month under the stern tutelage of one Severus Snape, Master of Mind
Magics under the guise of punishment – which his oft-splitting headaches could attest to – learning
actual Occlumency rather than the simple *modus of loci* meditation Harry’s picked up from one of his
pre-Hogwarts library books to keep him from snapping and setting Vernon Dursley on fire while he
slept, with the benefit of organizing his thoughts and collection of information, he would have
leveled Little Whinging by now.

And all for a simple reason:

One Marge Dursley, elder sister of Vernon, who had taken up residence in the guest room of
Number Four Privet Drive four days before with the intent of “visiting” her brother’s beloved family
– save for *that boy* – until they left for their annual holiday in Majorca.

Marge was going with this year while Harry as always would be left in the absent-minded care of
dotty Arabella Figg from neighboring Magnolia Crescent.

With Marge coming, Harry had been warned by his aunt to keep as low a profile as necessary until
they left on holiday, not the least of which was she knew full-well that Harry would never go along
with Vernon’s lie to his sister that the boy had been sent to St. Brutus’s Center for Incurably Criminal
Boys.
Ever since that letter had come two years before, Petunia had been wishing away the years until Harry turned fifteen and could be emancipated. She cared just enough – though she wouldn’t call it love nor would any reasonable adult – for her nephew to want that for him, and wouldn’t fight it when the time came rather than force him through another two years of her guardianship. However, when placed against the love she had for her normal husband and normal life, it often fell short, to the point that while she knew Vernon was heavier-handed with Harry than she’d like, she’d never spoken out against it either other than her insistence on him having an actual room and at least one meal a day.

Vernon had both been better – pleased in a smug way that he no longer had to spend his hard-earned funds or even the orphan’s allotment on Harry – and worse since Harry’s acceptance to Hogwarts. And the worse…it was so much worse especially with Marge to egg him on.

He had a healthy fear of magic, as he should given that when Harry turned seventeen there was nothing to stop him for coming after his aunt’s husband, but fear all too easily became hate…and if the Dursley siblings had a single trait that they shared above all others it was the ease with which they formed contempt, hate, and disdain for anything they feared from “perversions” such as the nice gay couple two blocks over, or one Harry Potter.

Marge, granted, didn’t know why her brother hated the boy.

Just that he did.

That was all she needed.

And having no legitimate fear over what might come back to haunt her in a few short years, she lacked the bit of restraint that kept Vernon from crossing a line he couldn’t come back from.

Harry could take a smack from that fat bastard, or even a twice-weekly belting as the former wasn’t hard to dodge if he wanted and the latter was never done hard or long enough to do more than bruise, welt, and burn with pain.

Dudley had caused Harry more physical harm over the years than Vernon, though that didn’t excuse either of them or Petunia for turning a blind eye.

All of which had only made Harry more defiant, more stubborn, more determined to survive them and become everything they told him he’d never amount to.

Slytherin, oh yes, Harry Potter was that, with a wicked vicious streak honed under neglect, bullying, and Vernon’s belt.

Slytherin enough to not really need help honing his ability to survive despite the odds against him or his considerable ambition…though he still wasn’t certain what he wanted outside of learning all he could while at Hogwarts. He was certainly doing a damn good job of the latter, taking first marks in Defense and Magical Theory for the second year running and tying again with Malfoy for tops in Potions and with Granger for both Health and Transfiguration. The mandated extra classes were finished with second year, allowing the students to start electives in third, Harry signing up for three electives which was the most his head of house Professor Flitwick advised, Harry taking on Ancient Runes, Arithmancy, and Care of Magical Creatures. Rumor had it that he’d be joined by Malfoy in all three. Granger, barmy swot that she was, had signed up for all five of the offered electives.

How the hell she was going to get away with that Harry had no idea.

It wasn’t like she couldn’t challenge the Muggle Studies OWL like Harry planned to do, she was a
freaking muggleborn.

Though it did kinda explain how and why she’d been placed in Gryffindor.

Hermione Granger was one smart witch alright…without a bit of common sense just like the rest of the brash idiots in her house for all her highly touted logic.

Occlumency tutoring from Snape or not – who was still visibly torn over how to treat Harry two years into his schooling, swinging from stern tolerance to cold dismissal and back – intelligence and cunning aside, Harry was still a thirteen-year-old orphaned wizard with a temper to rival that of his parents.

Four days into what he’d mentally dubbed “The Occupation” and he was hanging onto his control by a thread.

One would think that the Dursleys would have enough to be spiteful and judging about with the escape of mass-murder Sirius Black from prison, however this sadly wasn’t the case, though Black’s case was an interesting one being covered and hashed-over in both *Magie du Monde* and *The Quibbler* as he was a magical mass-murder and had escaped from Azkaban.

He was also, apparently, Harry’s godfather.

And had betrayed his parents to Voldemort.

The latter of which wasn’t exactly *helping* his temper stay stable though he’d set Dodge to hunting up everything there was to know about the case as none of it made sense compared with the information in Lily’s letters.

Lily had called him – and his dad for that matter along with their other two friends Remus and Peter – all kinds of things over the years.

But one doesn’t devolve from best-friend to traitor, irritating ponce to mass-murder in a vacuum.

Something was missing from the story, Harry just didn’t know what.

That *not knowing* almost as bad as the story in the papers rehashing the “tragic story of Harry Potter” over and over again *for the last two weeks straight*.

Tonight was the worst yet.

Vernon had broken out the brandy as they had only a few more days before their holiday in Majorca, and as the bottle poured, Marge and Vernon became less and less tolerable, even if Harry could barely hear them from the kitchen where he was helping Petunia with the dishes and plating dessert.

“It’s one of the basic rules of breeding,” Marge said, voice raised to intentionally catch his attention from the other room. “You see it all the time with dogs. If there’s something wrong with the bitch, there’ll be something wrong with the pup –” At that moment, the wineglass Marge was holding exploded in her hand. Shards of glass flew in every direction and Marge sputtered and blinked, her great ruddy face dripping.

“Harry, don’t-” Petunia tried to warn, reaching out to grab her nephew before he could do something she’d regret.

But her nephew had grown up having to dodge hits from Vernon and Dudley alike, let alone Dudley’s shitty friends and was far too fast for her to catch.
“Talk about my mother again.” Harry said, voice slow and cold as his eyes flashed bright green as both florid faces of Marge and Vernon turned towards him. “I dare you.”

“I think it’s time you went to bed, boy.” Vernon scowled piggy eyes flaring with panic as a breeze began to blow through the house – despite it being a heavy summer day without a hint of wind before, even with the French doors open to the patio and back garden.

“Bad blood will out.” Marge bit out each word with relish, then shrieked as the house shook and rumbled.

“I warned you.” Harry’s smirked, eyes flashing. “What was it you said? If there’s something wrong with the bitch…”

Light flared and Marge’s vicious dog Ripper yelped as from one moment to the next Marge Dursley disappeared, replaced with a yapping worthless little creature that looked more like an overfed Chihuahua than the mighty bulldogs Marge preferred.

“Boy!” Vernon roared, raising to his feet as fast as his great bulk would allow him. “You will-!”

“I’ll nothing.” Harry cut him off, wand out and pointing Vernon’s eyes crossing at the length of polished beech and willow that came mere inches from his bulbous red nose. “It’s nothing less than she deserved.”

Bitch-Marge yapped and yapped, growling then tumbling off her chair, charging him.

Harry flicked his wand at her and lifted a foot.

“Try it, bitch.” He gave one hell of a growl of his own. He’d never harm a real animal, even one as awful as Ripper, but Marge…Marge wasn’t a real animal. Just a bitch that didn’t know when to shut up. “And I’ll punt you out the window.”

“Harry…” Petunia whispered, hands wringing on her tea towel.

“I’m afraid, Aunt Petunia.” Harry told her with mocking-regret. “That I won’t be staying in your delightful home any longer. Do I have your permission to let a room at a wizarding hotel until my emancipation in two years?”

Petunia flicked her eyes from bitch-Marge to puce-faced Vernon to gaping Dudley than gave a slow nod.

“Thank you.” Harry bit out then turned and ran up the stairs to his room.

This place wasn’t home, it never had been, and with Marge staying most everything other than a few muggle fiction books and a few muggle clothes were all still packed away – or repacked away between Harry coming back from school and Marge’s arrival anyway. An annoyance before that now worked in his favor as all he needed to do was toss on a light summer cloak, though now a few inches short, shove an armful of things into his trunk to sort later, put a galleon in his pocket for the fare, and off he went. Slipping down the stairs with his trunk trailing, wand still out, Harry found none of his “relatives” getting in his way, though from the murmurs coming from the other room, it sounded like they had company.

Likely the magic reversal squad come to fix Marge and Obliviate her.

Almost made him wish he’d punted her when he’d had the chance though he doubted he’d get away with that as easily as he should a bout of “accidental” magic.
As it’d been done without his wand, it wasn’t as if they could prove it was otherwise.

After all, what thirteen-year-old had control – even a little – of wandless magic?

Harry’s was hit-and-miss at times – like when his temper was up – he’d be willing to admit, reacting a lot better now that he had some training in it instead of his rudimentary Wishing he’d done when he was younger, but it was there and only growing as he learned and devoured his way through the Hogwarts library.

Emotions just helped channel it, as Marge could now attest.

Creeping passed the kitchen and out the front door, he was glad he’d had the foresight not to give himself away completely with his coming down the stairs.

He’d made the curb and had his wand out for the Knight Bus as he glanced back in anxious caution, but it seemed like his escape was unnoticed thus far as the dining room was near the back of the house and the rear garden rather than the front and the curb.

Harry thought he saw a shadow moving in the bushes but before he could think on it too much, the Knight Bus appeared with a raucous crack and squealing of brakes, and Harry was off as “Nigel Cornfoot” to one of the secondary entrances to London’s magical district, the one tucked between a pair of marked lampposts that led to Horizont Alley rather than through the main entrance of the Leaky Cauldron.

With Stan Shunpike telling him it’d be at least an hour, and having the dosh without digging for it, Harry took him up on the Daily Prophet, even springing for a few back issues Stan had on hand, noting that other than Black’s breakout, the only thing of real note to be found was the Weasleys winning a galleon draw held at the Ministry and going off to Egypt for the summer with the proceeds.

Not what he’d do with such a windfall – to them – in their position, but it wasn’t his concern.

“Horizont Alley.” Stan announced after Harry’s chair had spun and danced all around the Knight Bus throughout the trip, Harry just waving him off and feeling a bit dazed as the adrenaline from confronting Marge had well and truly worn off plus that spurred on by escaping before the magic reversal agent sent to deal with his outburst could corner him and try and convince him to stay.

Harry blended in well enough in the shadows that cloaked Horizont Alley after dark, even with towing a wheeled trunk behind him on his way to the mid-level bed-and-breakfast that catered to singles or couples visiting the magical district rather than the scraping-bottom clientele at the Leaky or the high-end hotel in Regal Alley.

Blueblossom’s Bed and Breakfast had been established in 1601 by Maureen Blueblossom and her wife Jonquil. The two had been childless, witch-only couples at that time not having the modern alternatives that today’s witches did for procreation, and after the passing of Jonquil in 1714 at the grand age of one hundred and sixty-three years of age, passing it on to their niece Astrid, so left it to her daughter in turn, and so on until it came into the care of the current Ms. Blueblossom, one Gardenia, and her husband Timothy. Both now in their seventies, they were as hale and hearty as they were when Gardenia’s mother Marigold passed the family icon in Horizont Alley to them forty years before.

Comfort and discretion were the by-word of Blueblossom’s and that was exactly what Harry was in need of for the remainder of the summer break and possibly the next two to come.
He was just glad Petunia had signed his Hogsmeade permission slip at the start of the holiday or he’d be shit out of luck after transfiguring Marge into a Chihuahua.

Albeit – a very fat one.

“Checking in dear?” Ms. Blueblossom herself asked of the teenaged wizard who entered with a cheery jangle of the silver bell over the B&B’s front door.

The former foyer of a house that predated Horizont Alley, from the time when the magical districts had been populated with wizarding families instead of the patchworking of various shops, pubs, restaurants, and a few rowhouses turned into flats for young witches and wizards just out of Hogwarts with only a few residential areas for families left speckled through the magical district, the entrance was bright and as cheery as the jingle of the bell, papered in a creamy white with sprigs of jonquils, the reception desk keeping watch before the doors and archways that led into the B&B made of solid wood painted a soft blue.

It was as welcoming as the brochure that had ended up in Harry’s possession – Flourish and Blotts wasn’t the only shop that provided owl-order services, and from what Harry could tell all of them did a bit of advertising by tucking in flyers and brochures in with purchases, something he would bet netted them a tidy little profit – had promised and just what he needed after the stress gauntlet he’d been running for the last four days.

“Yes, please.” Harry told her, putting on his polite mask that worked wonders on adults of a certain type…though Snape had yet to fall for it. “My family is leaving on holiday and won’t be back in time for the Express. Do you have any rooms available until the first?”

“Oh dear, that is too bad.” Gardenia clucked her tongue, studying him carefully, noting the strain showing in the tense lines of his face, before agreeing with a nod. “I have something that should suit. Summer’s a busy time, mind, so it won’t be much. Let’s see, just sign here dear.” She pulled out the log book and a quill, then punched a few numbers on the old-fashioned cash-register. “Forty-one nights, dear me.” She tsked, thinking harsh thoughts about the family values of some people. “That will be eighty-two galleons for the single-occupancy room, it doesn’t have a proprietary bath but there’s only one other room on that floor and he’s a long-term boarder so it shouldn’t be a bother. Breakfast included, but for three sickles we have a plated dinner, just fill out a card at breakfast and it will be served at six, with your tab of dinner meals due on Fridays, along with laundry service.”

She explained all as she bustled her way up to the third and top-most floor. It was a bit cramped, holding only two single-occupancy rooms, one a bit bigger than the other with room for a bookshelf along with the single bed, wardrobe, and small desk, with the one for let to Harry being the smaller, along with a wash room that had only enough room for a pedestal sink, commode, and tiny shower stall that would have a grown man having to watch for his elbows – or it would if her current long-term guest on this floor wasn’t handy with his expansion charms. Harry’s room was done up in a warm cream walls and curtains, with linens in the soft blue that was a theme – though thankfully without a flower in sight – and the wood of the desk, bed, and wardrobe all in a nice honey-stained oak.

Ms. Blueblossom opened one side of the wardrobe and showed him the hanging hamper found therein.

“Just place any personal items you’d like cleaned in here dear and they’ll be returned the next morning. Laundry service is one sickle a day, with the provided linens included in your room fee as well as a weekly clean for long-term guests.” She gave him a bit of a wink, as long-term guests got a better rate being the implication. “Though if you leave any books or somesuch out on the desk they
won’t be disturbed.”

“Thank you, Ms. Blueblossom.” Harry thanked her earnestly, making her blush and flutter a bit on her way out the door, waiting to smirk and roll his eyes until she’d shut the door behind her.

Blowing out a heavy breath, he sank down onto the slim bed finding it pleasantly soft under him as he eyed the trunk that took up much of the room not filled with furnishings.

A problem for another day.

Right now, all he wanted was sleep.

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*Castillo de Slizar de Navarre, Location Unplottable*

Tomas Marvolo Slytherin, Duc del Sol de Alcantar y Comte de Slizar de Navarre, looked up from studying a warding schematic for Riddle Manor in England when a firm rap came on his office door.

Just a single, firm knock, the calling sign of a particular Marked follower, one of his best and brightest.

“Enter.”

Most thought that if the line of Slytherin had had a castle or manor, that it had been lost to the ages along with the wealth of the Gaunt line, as nothing in Britain had ever been found that matched any existing documents from the time of the Founders.

Of course, most people thought a wizard with the name of Salazar was of English – or perhaps Irish – extraction rather than being of Basque heritage.

Most people, in Tom’s opinion, were good for little more than cannon fodder.

That wasn’t to say that Lord Slytherin, once known as a no-heritage nothing orphan from London as Tom Riddle, didn’t have holdings in Britain. It was his home, his line in the sand. He’d always have holdings there, Riddle Manor among them.

It wasn’t, however, his base of operations and never had been to any but his lowest minions no matter what that old bastard Dumbledore or the bumbling Ministry officials believed.

Walking in the door was perhaps Tom’s finest operative, on par with the skills and abilities of either his right-and-left hands Lucius Malfoy or Severus Snape. A metamorphmagus, from an old and ancient line, he was without compare in the ranks of Tom’s highest ranks. Oh yes, Regulus Black was a dangerous man.

That the world thought him dead merely made him moreso, not less.

His “death” had been a well-planned strike to plant one of his alters, Mordred Rue, in the ranks of the Unspeakables, though even Tom hadn’t expected him to rise to the station of Head Unspeakable in the fifteen years he’d been planted among that most interesting and independent department of the British Ministry.

Regulus Black had a dozen such aliases of all ages and genders, from black-tempered Rue with his crimson hair and black eyes, to sweet-if-simple Dorothy “Dotty” Sweetbriar, a rather reclusive elderly Squib who lived in a bedsit off Carkitt Market, though when he appeared in private to the
Dark Lord who he’d sworn life, wand, and loyalty, it was always with his own face: that of a very handsome man of aristocratic features with dusky olive skin, midnight-black hair, and the quicksilver eyes that with his hair marked him as a Scion of the House of Black.

In the sixty or so years he’d had to consider the matter, Tom had come to theorize that eyes and hair aside, Blacks had a singular tell in their walk. It was that they didn’t walk, but rather moved with a grace so predatory in nature, as if they were dragons and all else sheep, that in the males it was remarked as such while the females it tended to be dubbed a slinking, sinuous form of movement. Even those not raised as Blacks did it unconsciously if they were close enough of the blood, as the predatory saunter of one Harry Potter, grandson of Dorea Black, and the arrogant prowl of Draco Malfoy, son of Narcissa Black spoke of.

Tom hadn’t enjoyed possessing Quirinus by any measure, but the first-hand exposure to an all-unknowing – or considering the boy in question just uncaring – Harry Potter had been invaluable. The boy had been a surprise.

Like many, Tom had to admit that he’d rather expected a carbon-copy of James Potter with the pure green eyes he still remembered almost mirroring the AK that had felled his mother – though there was a fogginess over that memory even more than a year after regaining his corporeal form that he didn’t like.

Harry Potter at eleven however, had been every inch the Black as he’d known them both in his own school years and most of the members of the following generations: intelligent, quick-witted, and utterly uninterested in anything but his own concerns. Blacks were perhaps the epitome of old-school nobility. They only gave a damn about what they wanted to give a damn about and never did anything but what they wanted to do.

Dumbledore had found that out to his own surprise and Tom had to admit that it had almost made up for a decade as a wraith – almost – that he’d been present at the staff meeting where the old bastard had been served with the notice of the Ministry’s decision regarding the Potter “situation.”

Almost.

Tom didn’t however, with time to consider matters and finding that things didn’t quite fall into place in his memory like they ought, believe that Harry Potter was the enemy that Tom had been so quick to mark him as.

The boy’s power wasn’t to be underestimated, he would agree to that, and once fully-trained Tom believed that he could become the threat he’d been marked as.

Could.

But given his placement in Ravenclaw and his reclusive nature, Tom was more than prepared to continue on with working in secret towards his goals and allowing Harry Potter time to grow and perhaps even choose a side for himself rather than the one Dumbledore was so quick to try and force him into – for all the good that had done thus far from what had been reported of the boy.

“My lord.” Regulus gave him a short – but honest – nod of deference before approaching at Tom’s signal. “I have news.”

“Report.” Tom set aside the warding schematics. If it was important enough for Regulus to apparate from London to the Castillo, it was important enough to warrant his full attention in turn.

“This evening at approximately seven-fifty-two, an accidental magic reversal squad was deployed to
the residence,” given the contents of the report he’d read Regulus couldn’t bring himself to call it the boy’s home. “Of one Harry Potter at Number Four Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey.”

Tom arched a brow, that alone was of interest, as never before had any of the Dark operatives managed to get their hands on confirmation of Potter’s address.

Dumbledore’s doing with complicity from the DMLE he assumed as it was likely only Regulus recent promotion that enabled him to read an unredacted report.

“What did he do?” Tom prompted, breaking off the flow of the story. After Severus’s report of the boy’s power levels and the reaction to the case of one Luna Lovegood – shaking the very castle, indeed – he expected it was rather interesting.

“Reports from the muggles and squibs report everything from sudden breezes, shaking ground, and the, ah, accidental,” Regulus smirked. Accidental his arse. He knew intent when he saw it and the memories that had been copied from the family before being Obliviated for Potter’s safety had reeked of intent. “Transfiguration of a particularly nasty specimen of mugglaris-vulgaris into a Chihuahua.”

At that, Tom lost it, breaking into laughter and Regulus joining him, finally breaking his “Dutiful Death Eater, TM” mask to slump into a chair with helpless chuckles.

“You should have seen it, milord.” Regulus told him, then handed over the copy of the memories he’d made for that exact purpose. “He warned her, she mouthed off, and next thing you know, there’s a yappy little dog in place of this vile muggle woman who’d been narking off his mum that he’s threatening to punt through the window.”

Tom let out another snicker as he picked up the vial Regulus had provided, his reflection – not of a deformed creature but the handsome face of his youth thanks to the Elixir and his most-accessible Horcrux from the Peverell Ring, once again firmly on his finger where it belonged – showing in the glass against the silver-white of the memory.

“Is he still there?”

“No,” Regulus flashed the quicksilver grin that he shared with his brother. “He gave his loving family the metaphorical finger, got verbal permission from his squib-aunt to spend the rest of the next two years until his emancipation elsewhere, and was on the Knight Bus before the reversal squad could do more than realize who’s house they were at.”

“Then where is he?”

“Blueblossoms.” Regulus told him. “Confirmed it myself on the guest log, though he managed a decent Notice-Me-Not spell on his signature that should keep any but the most persistent from noticing it. I don’t even think Gardenia knows who it is that she just let out a room to until First September other than being a youth in need who could afford the expense of the b&b.”

“Keep an eye on him.” Tom ordered with a sigh, humor ebbing away in the wake of everything else that was going on as he had to work with only his most trusted and covert operatives at his side. Quirinus couldn’t so much as step foot outside of the Castillo with Dumbledore searching for him and summoning Severus would alert the old bastard faster than anything else. Thankfully his three finest had evaded capture in Azkaban and were working on the same orders he’d left them with: Regulus his multi-tiered infiltration and information gathering, Severus ingratiating himself at Hogwarts, and Lucius gathering monetary and political power. “Until I make a decision I don’t want anyone else making it either.”
“Yes, milord.” Regulus nodded, internally pleased at that.

Harry was Siri’s godson.

Regulus hadn’t been able to do shite for his brother before this summer despite the fishy circumstances of his imprisonment, let alone let him know he was still alive.

Looking after the not-so-little Potter was the least Regulus could do for his big brother who had shielded him from the worst of their parents and Bellatrix’s mania when they were children.

30 July 1993

The day before his thirteenth birthday found Harry meeting with his solicitor in the parlor of Blueblossom’s, Dodge needing to catch him up on the most recent challenge Harry had dropped in his lap.

For the first couple days, Harry had done nothing but wallow in the freedom and sheer quiet of his room, coming down for breakfast and dinner, settling for a midday snack of fruit pilfered from the breakfast spread with the tea that was on-offer all day in the parlor for the guests. He’d slept, ate, and reveled in having no Vernon to bellow, Marge to nark, Petunia to scold, or Dudley to swing on him. Even at school he didn’t have quiet as much as he’d like. Ravenclaw was more spacious than Gryffindor was said to be, they and the Hufflepuffs for some Circe-forsaken reason cramming all the students for a year into two dorms split by arbitrary gender identifiers when the wizarding world acknowledges at least five genders and multiple sexualities.

Ravenclaw was sensible, simply sticking with giving each student a room about the same size as Harry’s little rented room, just big enough for a growing pre-teen or teenager to sleep, dress, and study, with a jack-and-jill bathroom shared by every two rooms which had automatic locking spells that kept the opposite entrance shut if someone was already using the facilities.

No worries about stairs turning into slides or any such nonsense.

Just the expectation that you would be considerate enough of your bathroom partner not to hog the facilities.

Though, he had to admit that at least his dorm room, small as it was, made better use of what space it did have with high shelves for books or nicknacks since if you couldn’t spread out you might as well spread up.

An owl sent off to the owl-post office took care of the mail situation, as even in the midst of an euphoric adrenaline rush and the subsequent crash, Harry knew that having his mail continue to arrive at the Dursleys wasn’t a good idea. Ms. Blueblossom had allowed him to borrow the guest-owl, another service provided, this time for two knuts, to redirect his mail for holding at the owl-post office at Carkitt Market rather than the main one on Diagon. Harry’d gotten good the last few years had being unseen when he wished, especially in a massive school full of students and staff that didn’t quite know what to do with him – except for Luna who had a mind-boggling ability to always find him – that was helped along with an affected mien of affability, his longer hair hiding his infamous scar, and appropriate usage of a hooded cloak.

One of the letters that had been held for him to pick up once he poked his head out of the B&B was a request for a meeting from Dodge.

Harry had him working more than just the information-seeking case on Sirius Black, having
discovered after taking a closer look at his portfolios that the Ministry had helped themselves to his family home in Godric’s Hollow, turning it into a national landmark without so much as a by-your-leave.

He wanted it back and he was going to get it no matter what fuss the Ministry threw.

They weren’t quite at the level of siccing the press on the heels-dug-in Minister for Magic Fudge but they were fast approaching it and while playing the lost little orphan boy wasn’t by far his favorite game, he’d do it to get a cottage that had been in his father’s family for seven hundred fucking years back.

Godric’s Hollow was where his family name became Potter from Peverell, it had massive historical and familial significance, and no fucking body was going to take it away from him, even if he had other estates and homes scattered around the British Isles plus a holiday chateau in France, and interest in a pair of castillos in Spain. One in the Basque region of Navarre and one in the mountains of Western Spain in a region known as Cáceres. Neither of which he owned outright but that he had an interest in at about a tenth of their revenues and value, meaning that while the legal owners: the Duc del Sol and the Comte deSlizarse – the latter name having tickled his ever-rampant curiosity – could do whatever they wished with the properties, he had to be compensated for the lost revenue and asset-value for his portfolio due to a distant relationship that repeated itself often enough in their family trees for him to end up with a ten-percent interest in each of the two holdings.

Compared to the physical holdings and investments prevalent in his portfolios, his liquid assets were pocket change.

Potters and apparently Peverells before them, Peverell being the first true “surname” used by his family after the Roman remove from the Isles most often before that going with a place-name such as “of Powys” or a generation-identifier such as “son of Peredur”, believed in the value of investment over keeping large amounts of gold moldering away in an almighty hole in the ground, it only being in the last handful of generations – since the fall of the House of York really – that they started concerning themselves with becoming gold rich to go with their sprawling landholdings and business affairs.

Land-rich and investment-flush but gold-poor were the Potters before the death of Richard the Third. Now they had both types of wealth but their once-great family that was vast enough to require extensive landholdings to support them through both feast and famine had been whittled away to a pair – presumably as he’d seen no documentation that placed either the Duc or the Comte as the same person – of distant Spanish cousins through the Potter descent.

That was all.

His other “great house” of wizarding descent was doing much better than that at least, with the Blacks having dozens of cousins for Harry to identify, including more than a few that he went to school with his slowly-becoming-a-friend Neville among them, but even they had been pared down from dozens of Blacks-of-the-Name to two men: one recently escaped from Azkaban and the other presumed dead, with their three female cousins all wed and taken their husbands’ names.

Like the two Spanish wizarding houses, which Harry still wasn’t sure how had come to be related to him, the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black crossed with the Potter or Peverell family tree more than once as Harry had found just doing a basic lineage-trace in his books, along with other Houses showing up through marriage such as the Malfoys, Rosiers, Longbottom, and even the Ollivanders.
Harry wished he could say that from his research his was the only family who had been hit so hard by the last two wizarding wars, but that was far from the truth.

Hogwarts once upon a time could house a cap of three thousand four hundred students before closing admission to others.

Harry’s incoming class was less than fifty-strong, with those ahead and behind in the same straights though rumor had it that this year’s incoming class would at least double that of his own as people had become comfortable enough in the cessation of the Voldemort War to start having children again, therefore making themselves vulnerable to attack.

His family hadn’t had the luxury of waiting, nor had many others that needed heirs as his two “cousins” Neville and Draco were ripe examples of, both being only-sons along with himself of long and illustrious names.

That Harry’s History of Magic homework for the summer was on tracing his ancestry and doing a report on one of his “founding-fathers-or-mothers” was beside the point, though Linfred of Stitchcombe aka the Potterer was an interesting “founding father” at least with his eldest son Hardwin being the one to intertwine the nascent family with the Most Ancient and Noble House of Peverell by marrying the only grandchild of Ignotus Peverell, Iolanthe, his granddaughter.

“What do you have for me?” Harry asked after both of them had made up cups of tea to their liking and Edwardius had taken out both a file folder – that looked like it had the words “private and confidential” blacked out on the cover – and his ubiquitous leather-bound legal pad for notetaking.

“There isn’t much on Sirius Black to be found I’m afraid.” Dodge explained, jumping in after setting up privacy wards – his being made of much sterner stuff than the standard solicitor-client wards his colleagues used…especially given who his now-main client was.

His cousin Elfric Dodge who like Edwardius had taken over his father’s place, Elfric had taken his uncle’s partnership in the law office founded by the original Dodge, E.; and Dodge, E.R.; in Knockturn Alley had pouted and sulked in his cups of late-night brandy over the cache Edwardius’s foremost client had brought to them. Discretion was their byword and had been since their fathers’ time. Edwardius simply thought that Elfric missed a bit of the, heh, dodgier clientele they used to represent before said discretion had brought them to the attention of the likes of the House of Black and one Harry Potter.

“My father handled the original appeals of his sentencing on the basis that his then-client Arcturus Black, Lord Black, had found that no trial documents had ever been lodged with the Wizengamot Administration Offices regarding his so-called white-sheep of a grandson. It was blocked at every turn.” Edwardius glared down at the milky tea in his cup at the affront to law.

Dodge and Dodge might have a liking for the shadier sides of grey within the law but they still worked within the law.

Throwing a man away without a trial was a direct assault on that, one which he was hoping his powerful client – who had the name and presence in the Wizarding World as the Boy-Who-Lived that old Lord Black did not given that family’s reputation as being “Dark” – would want him to correct.

Harry Potter was still a young wizard and learning, that was true.

But there were times when he had more sense than all the ministry drones Dodge dealt with put together, plus the stones to see through tasks that would leave another wizard shaking – such as
doing an end-run around fucking Dumbledore to ensure a young girl’s molester was brought to justice.

If nothing else, being Harry Potter’s solicitor gave Dodge – a Slytherin who was all too familiar with Dumbledore’s brand of house prejudice – a chance thus-far yearly to tweak that old bastard’s beard.

“Given recent events, what with Mr. Black escaping and all,” Harry mused out loud, knowing enough that plausible deniability was something he was going to want in this case. “It might be politic for that to reach public awareness at last, don’t you think? As Minister Fudge is being so…obstinate on the matter.”

Dodge’s grin was nothing but shark-like as he gave a crisp nod then handed over the file, having a copy for his own use – such as passing to a few reporters he knew – back at the office.

“And the cottage?”

“Still in a stall,” Dodge sneered. “This time using the excuse of the prison-break to mark his refusals.”

Him being none other than Cornelius Fudge, Minister for Magic.

It had been his predecessor Bagnold that had stolen the cottage from the newly-made orphan making Fudge the easiest route to regaining it, as it wasn’t like he’d ever stinted at throwing mud at his former boss before.

“Then I suppose it’s time to work around him.” Harry waved that off. They’d given Fudge a chance. It seemed he’d underestimated the resolve of a twelve-year-old orphan facing the theft of his family home. More fool him. “Lodge the petition with the Wizengamot and send the notice to all of the major wizarding papers – local and international.” Harry ordered, taking out his exchange book and scribbling out a sum. “This should cover full-page adverts, front-page preferable but second or third still acceptable.”

Hot green eyes burned in a face that was fast gaining an elegance from years of refined breeding mixed with an influx of beauty and power from his mother.

“I want my home back, Mr. Dodge.” His low voice showed no signs of the irritating cracking he’d dealt with in the year parts of the year from February through June. “And I will have it.”

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Finding Friends

When Darkness Comes

Author’s Note: Ao3 double-uploaded my original posting for this story. As a result, some of your reviews (8) were deleted when I had to pull the duplicate story. So, so sorry for anyone that happened to!

Finding Friends

31 July 1993, Blueblossom’s Bed and Breakfast, Horizont Alley, London

Harry puttered his way through a breakfast of a veggie and ham omelet, already making plans to find something anything similar to a running track or a muggle gym on the alleys. At least here he could – probably – get access to them whereas in muggle London he’d need a guardian to sign off because of liability and insurance issues. Being thirteen was a pain. At least he only had two more years to wait until he was able to file for emancipation and by then he’ll at least be able to pass as legal…with a magically forged set of id’s anyway.

Thirteen.

It didn’t feel any different than twelve save for the changes to his upcoming schoolyear.

But then…Harry hadn’t really been much of a child since he was about seven and really understood that his family wasn’t…right.

Petunia did what she would – he couldn’t even say could because there was a lot more she could’ve done but didn’t – to keep Vernon from leaving him with permanent damage, but that didn’t take away any of the effects of had did happen between November of ’81 and July of ’91 when he received his Letter and they settled into a tense detente.

Normal families didn’t let one child use the other for a punching bag.

Normal families didn’t have a pantry and fridge full of food and limit their nephew to one scant meal a day – which hurt a lot worse during the summer when he didn’t have the state-provided lunch program to supplement with.

Normal families didn’t look the other way as the father belted one of the children until he was black-and-blue with raised welts from shoulder to arse.

Normal families didn’t do much of anything like he’d grown up with, except the expectation that he help with chores – and even there was an inequality between what he did and what Dudley did.

The Dursleys, for all their pride in being perfectly normal, had treated him little better than an unpaid – and particularly stupid – indentured servant.

Harry, however, was no dreaming Cinderella and bedamned if he waited around for a prince or a fairy godmother to rescue him. He’d had his magic, his Wishing, and his sheer-bloody-minded determination to not just survive them but to thrive despite them. He still wasn’t sure why Dumbledore had left him at Number Four Privet Drive almost twelve years ago now – though he had ideas – but whatever it was, it had nothing to do with his protection as the only magic around that place was an ambient magic taken on from years of him shedding magic with every breath he released, every drop of sweat or blood that hit the ground, and every tear he’d wept before he’d
learned the futility of it.

Whatever *wards* Dumbledore used to excuse his original placement there, they obviously didn’t take.

Given that from what he’d learned over the last two years, if they had something to do with his mother’s bloodline, he wasn’t surprised. He knew he was powerful. But warding like that wasn’t a one-way street. It would’ve needed help from his maternal relatives: Petunia and Dudley, to really *take* and settle over the residence. And they were squibs without any access to whatever bloodline his mother descended from before (likely) being cast out for being born with a magical core that ancestor couldn’t fully or partially access.

They didn’t *have* the power to support wards, even with Harry and Lily providing most of the base.

One would *think* a man as intelligent as Dumbledore would realize that but as Harry’s relatives were most often referred to as muggles by the press and public – or had been before Dodge’s lawsuit and subsequent gag-order – obviously not, if he even thought of it at all.

The wards were an excuse.

Dumbledore wanted him there for a reason that had nothing to do with his protection.

Harry just didn’t know what it actually *was*…yet.

Though one thing was for certain: Harry was actually starting to *enjoy* his summer hols away from Hogwarts unlike the year prior.

After breakfast he tossed on the best-fitting clothes he owned, as despite sizing enchantments woven into the fabrics he had mostly outgrown all of it save for a few things his aunt had bought him the year before. Still in the middle of a growth spurt – or so it seemed as he was *always freaking hungry* – he also didn’t want to waste either time or money on a new wardrobe or uniform when he could get extra wear out of them by waiting a few extra weeks…hopefully enough time for his upshot height to slow. At least it was summer and even in the magical district no one really paid any mind to a teenager rolling his pantleg to his knees, which doubled as hiding that they were a good inch short at the ankle even *after* he’d maxed the sizing charm.

A plain short-sleeved cotton button-down in the plain workman’s blue Petunia preferred for his clothes since it was a sturdy material left open over a white vest tucked into his almost-too-tight waistband after a week of solid meals and he was off with his wand holstered at his arm and his bag slung over his shoulder containing his exchange books and vault keys.

If nothing else, all the time on the alley would be well-spent in helping him learn more to better blend with the magical populace, when not spent digging through and sorting out the vaults that let him in – if not let him take things out – before he came of age.

Some were well-organized others were heaps of jumbled nonsense, but slowly he was making a dent into them even if he’d only been at it a few days after one of the cart operators – Griphook – showed him down to the vaults for the first time. Something Petunia never would have gone for. He was glad he did though, as between his mum’s books and the ones from his father he’d found in his trust vault – the only one that let him withdraw items to his heart’s content – he only needed to buy things for pleasure reading…and even that was just for two more years and he could access the library vault that was filled to the brim with precious and rare tomes too valuable to risk putting on display, even with the high-level of warding against theft and accidents alike that he’d read about being on most if not all of the Potter properties.
One thing he’d found both odd and flabbergasting about his portfolios was that he didn’t just own Potter properties, artefacts, and investments with his inheritance.

Apparently, it had become a trend of some sort to “thank” him for offing Voldemort by leaving him a bequest in a will.

In some cases it was a token, perhaps a few galleons or a book.

In others where a witch or a wizard was the last of a line…it was the lot.

Over a hundred magicals from all over Western Europe had done the latter in the last twelve-ish years, making for over a hundred vaults that Harry needed an inventory from before the items could be moved and the vault returned for Gringotts to reuse.

That had been a task he wasn’t looking forward to at fifteen but since he was there and already spending a good block of hours at the bank dealing with his actual inheritance and not this other quagmire, he might as well get it done then.

The first thing he’d done with them – the day before actually – had been to designate the largest vault he’d gained this way as a “resell” vault, a place for everything that he didn’t need and/or want. What could be sold would – once he was of-age – and the rest tossed, all for a fee by Gringotts of course. That that largest vault had been filled with nothing but dosh let him easily sign off on it all being moved and emptied to the main Potter vault, as Gringotts had already done the work of separating gold from items even before he’d hit upon the realization that some of his inheritance could and should be sold on rather than let it rot.

The goblins liked him very much for that practical lean of mind, as it was more than one vault in their care that was filled with little more than out-of-date clothing and a pile of fourteenth-century children’s toys.

Griphook had become his unofficial minder as he moved from vault to vault, bag slung across his back with a folio and a fountain pen in his hand as he inspected the inventory lists Gringotts had made during the audit and decided on what to keep and what to move for sale in two years exactly.

As it was all business geared towards future profit, costing Harry not one knut to have a goblin on-hand to take note of what to move where and what vaults were ready and approved for repurposing, and so on.

Finishing with the second vault of the day – this one filled with a few pieces of awe-inspiringly-ugly jewelry and what had to be a hundred years’ worth of paperwork – Harry glanced at the next name on the alphabetical list before coming to an abrupt stop in the long line of vaults that had been set aside for his “bequests” when the goblins realized what was going on.

“Is this name correct, Griphook?” He asked in honest bafflement.

It had to be, goblins made no mistakes when it came to their record keeping until actual crimes were afoot…but he still couldn’t figure out how it was correct. It went against everything he knew. Especially about this witch.

Griphook glanced at the list the young wizard had tilted down and over for his confirmation, giving a toothy smirk as he noted the name, merely giving a nod in confirmation.

The name was Black, Walburga Bellatrix, and to a thirteen-year-old who had heard a great deal of the Black family history over the weeks since her son’s escape from Azkaban…there was no earthly reason Harry could think of for that late-witch to leave him anything but a curse on his name.
Which wasn’t to say that that wasn’t exactly what she’d left him, but there was no way to know until he looked in on the, he glanced at the inventory for that vault, assortment of items from paperwork to clothes to a set of Quidditch balls…really?

What the hell.

“Lead on, Griphook.” Harry said with a roll of his eyes after looking at the inventory. “This is a mystery that isn’t going to sort itself.”

The goblin just continued smirking before leading him to the next vault door in line and opening it with a press of his palm on the door then waved him inside. As he’d done in the last two vaults, and the ten they’d done the day before, Harry only spending the morning at the task before breaking for food and returning to tackle trying to sort through his family vaults, Griphook conjured a small stool just inside the open door, settling in with a newspaper unless his assistance was further required. Which it had been in the case of a few cursed items.

Harry knew a curse-detection spell from his extracurricular reading, considering his position it was a good piece of magic to know along with the potion and poison detection spells he ran on his food after discovering they existed, which helped him keep from being cursed by the contents of his vaults. Anything he found – after some serious haggling with Ragnok after the first dripping-dark cursed item had been found – he was given a receipt for by Griphook who had a nullification bag on him, the goblin taking custody of the item and it being sent off to the Gringotts cursebreakers, all for a fee of course.

Cursebreakers who were apparently ecstatic over getting to deal with some seriously old and hard-to-break curses from some of the deepest Gringotts vaults.

Whoever thought the Potters were a family of “Light” wizards had clearly never taken a stroll through their family vault.

The vault left to him by Walburga Black was filled with neatly-packed boxes, some still with the Ministry seal on them which gave him an inkling regarding why she had left him anything at all.

A sealed letter on the sole counter-height shelf protruding from the small vault answered that question and confirmed the slowly-emerging theory, as well as helping some of the pieces regarding the situation around her son slam home.

…

1 May 1985

Lady Walburga Bellatrix Black

Most Ancient and Noble House of Black

Number 12 Grimmauld Place

London

Heir Harry James Antioch Potter
Heir Potter:

I am witch in my prime, yet I feel my life fading.

I lost one son to your father and Azkaban and the other to some fate unknown.

I had little love for Sirius Orion Black the Third, disappointing fruit of my womb that he was, but never I believed that he would betray his cousin, your father, nor was so lost to the ways of our people to break the bond between godfather and godchild to endanger your life.

That after three and a half years Sirius is still alive – if not well – in his imprisonment confirms this.

I have no proof to offer, as my father has done all he could and has been blocked by the Ministry and Wizengamot at every turn.

After his arrest, his affects were given into my care.

I now pass them onto you.

In magic,

Lady Walburga Bellatrix Black
Harry tapped the letter against the shelf with a moue of concentration on his lips and his eyes staring into nothing before he flipped the letter back over to look at the wax seal one more time: a pair of hunting dogs against a field of stars, with the motto: *Toujours Pur* in a ribbon winding along the bottom.

No forgery then.

A few other things of interest were left on that same shelf: a pair of journals, a blank piece of parchment, a mirror with an ornate silver frame, and what must be the wand of Sirius Black – though how it came to be in this vault instead of snapped was a mystery that he would bet had more to do with galleons in the right palms than any magic beyond that of wealth and greed.

Digging out an empty leather-bound journal, one of more than a dozen he bought yesterday at lunch and packed around after figuring out that while he couldn’t remove any books from the vaults, if they weren’t protected by copyright charms he could take a copy, he set the blank journal atop the first journal that after a glance at the dates covered Sirius Black’s life from pre-Hogwarts through second year, and had his wand in hand with a flick of his wrist. No one had told him, but his few tests he’d done last summer had proved that his custom wand didn’t have the standard Ministry-trace on it that wands bought from the mainstream suppliers like Ollivander’s did. The copy charm was a second-year charm, taught alongside other household spells to copy things like notes from scratch paper to a notebook or scroll. But with enough power, it could be used to copy entire tomes, something he’d practiced first on the muggle encyclopedias and dictionary at the Dursleys before trying it on any of his own books.

Getting around a copyright charm was still beyond him, but he didn’t really need to either since anything he couldn’t access now would be available to him in two years or he could just buy and then resell at the secondhand book shop once he had full-rights to his vaults.

Five minutes later Harry was tucking a pair of copied journals away into his bag along with the letter, since as it was addressed to him he was allowed to take it (he’d checked the first time he’d found one), and the blank parchment as parchment in and of itself wasn’t considered to have value depending on what was written upon it.

“Leave this one, but maybe move it closer to my vaults?” Harry suggested, cocking his head to the side as he thought.

“Are you certain?” Griphook frowned. “Many of these items are quite valuable.”

“I’m certain.” Harry nodded firmly. “None of this was Lady Black’s to give away, though I suppose her son would be surprised to learn she didn’t simply destroy the lot. I want Mr. Black to also have unlimited access to the items in this vault.”

Which as an adult wizard and still on the books as Harry’s godfather, Sirius Black would be able to obtain said access – all he needed to do was enter Gringotts and try.

Griphook’s eyes shot wide in shocked surprise but before he could question his client again, Harry was out of the vault and moving back towards the cart despite having finished only three vault inspections.

Scrambling to keep up and making notes at the same time, Griphook muttering under his breath all the way, he sent the cart screaming upward to the surface after a single glance at the turned-to-stone appearance of the young wizard.

He didn’t ask what was contained in the letter, it wasn’t his place or his business.
Besides which, he like all goblins of a certain age had all either had dealings with the late Lady Black or had cause to learn of her. He wasn’t surprised that whatever she’d written had affected the boy negatively. Harry thanked him with a polite nod as he climbed out of the cart, well-knowing the way to the Alley entrance from the carts by now and pulling up his concealing hood on the light summer-weight cloak as he did so.

“I’ll be back at noon.” Harry announced after a glance at his motion-powered wrist-watch he’d bought when his cheap muggle version in plastic had been fried by the ambient magic at Hogwarts two weeks into his first term at the school. It was only ten o’clock. “We’ll work more on the Potter artefacts vault then. May your gold flow.”

“And yours, young wizard.” Griphook nodded back, opening the gate to the lobby of the massive building with a snap of his fingers. “Noon.”

... 

Harry had never been to the law offices of Dodge and Dodge in Knockturn before but he was too unsettled to bother with sending a request for a meeting when his legs worked perfectly well and the shadiest-side-of-the-law alley was known to be safe enough to traverse for most with at least a modicum of common sense during the morning hours. It was when the day began to wane and it drew close to dusk that someone like him – due to his age if nothing else – should make themselves scarce from the narrow side-street of the London magical district. For certain he knew there were at least three bars, what he thought was a brothel, a junk shop, and a candlemaker that specialized in both cursed and uncursed items.

Cheery place.

But there were also shops and offices that catered to a clientele that preferred the discretion available in Knockturn that couldn’t be found elsewhere in the district, such as the law offices of Dodge and Dodge, a tattoo parlor, and Mulpepper’s Apothecary which specialized in hard to acquire potion ingredients and was known to have both a better-quality stock and a better selection than Slug’s and Jigger’s on Diagon.

Walking into the law offices through the drowsy denizens of Knockturn, Harry snorted to himself. Yes, just because there’s a few darker shade of grey shops let’s lambast all of them as Dark. Wizarding stupidity at its finest as far as he was concerned.

“Potter to see Edwardius.” He told the reception witch with a crisp nod, settling into a waiting chair and picking up the latest edition of the Prophet, giving another snort – this time of clear derision – over the Ministry’s fear-mongering regarding Harry’s godfather. He wasn’t certain Black was innocent by any means, but more and more it was starting to appear that he wasn’t a traitor.

Harry flipped back to the business section, ignoring the rest of the drivel and was folding it up, pleased with an investment he’d requested be made was clearly paying off in spades thus far, when the reception witch stood, catching his attention.

“Mr. Dodge will see you now Mr. Potter.” She told him in a clear alto, having used the two-way parchment at her desk to send back the message. Moving towards one of the two doors that led to differing corridors, she tapped a specific rune with her wand and then opened it up straight into Dodge’s office.

Portal magic, very rare and very interesting.

And handy, he imagined, for keeping all of their clients confidential.
Dodge was worth every galleon.

“Harry.” Dodge rose and shook his hand, a bit of a frown scrunching his brows. “I wasn’t expecting to see you here, especially so soon after our last meeting.”

“Found a few somethings in one of my random-inheritance vaults that is applicable to the issue with my godfather.” Harry told him a beat later after Dodge pressed the inset gem on his desk that had ward work not unlike that at Gringotts coating the room in a bright net of blue magic before dissipating. Harry didn’t even want to think about how much that must have cost the law firm to install. He sat at Dodge’s wave towards one of the chairs and dug out the more recent journal and the letter from the late Lady Black. “The journal is iffy, I haven’t had time to look too closely at it, and a copy besides. But if there’s anything relevant between my permission and a Wizengamot subpoena Gringotts should be willing to provide the original. The letter I feel speaks for itself.”

“Interesting.” Dodge murmured, eyes flicking lightning quick over the letter contents before flipping open the journal and seeing who had written it, then flipped to the final entry which was dated about a week before the fateful Hallowe’en of ’81. “Very interesting.” He closed the journal and letter, setting them aside to look at more closely later and fit them into the case he was building to bring to Amelia Bones.

The Wizengamot had already proved with their refusals at Lord Black’s requests to provide the missing trial that they were a dead-end.

Irritating as Madam Bones’s stiff-and-stern moralizing might be, in this case it would work in their favor if the evidence – whether second hand and circumstantial or not – was significant enough she would insist on a trial to keep the noses of the DMLE clean in the kiss-on-sight sentence currently hanging over the head of one Sirius Orion Black the Third.

Especially since before November of 1981…Sirius Black was one of the finest Aurors the DMLE had on staff.

The whole situation stank all around.

Amelia would hate it, which only made Edwardius that much more insistent on completing this task.

“In other news.” Dodge told Harry as the young wizard rose to see himself out, never one to waste time if he could help it. “The adverts will be out tomorrow. Might want to collect your mail before you head back to Blueblossom’s and hunker down for a day or two.”

Harry smirked, eyes gleaming.

“Why, my dear Mr. Dodge, it’s as if you don’t know me at all. I’m not afraid of weathering the hurricane, indeed I’m planning on enjoying it thoroughly.”

Ducking back out of the law office, Harry made his way back towards Diagon, specifically that little café his aunt had haunted while he did his first year shopping for some lunch, then with his stomach appeased, he made for the owl-post office after a glance at his watch determining that he had more than enough time to gather his mail and drop it off at Blueblossom’s before heading back to meet Griphook at noon.

As always, he wrinkled his nose at the smell of the owl-post office, debating the merits of getting his own post owl now that he’d cut ties as much as he could until he was emancipated with the Dursleys.
Though, it would have to only be for his personal correspondence as the owl-post office automatically sorted his mail and anything that wasn’t on his “allowed” list for forwarding was sent on for one of the clerks at Dodge and Dodge to scan for curses, while fan mail were replied to using a form letter, and anything that Edwardius thought might be of actual interest was sent on in a weekly packet to Harry along with any business that needed his attention.

Dodge and Dodge wasn’t just a criminal and civil firm after all, they also handled more delicate issues of business for many fine families, including tax law – which given that Harry had international holdings was worth what he spent on them yearly over and above everything else he’s tossed at Edwardius in the last two years.

The little café had been one of a handful of shops that Harry had gone to in the last week or so and set up a weekly tab, the only real way he could work around the allowance limit on his coin purse since most places didn’t accept exchange slips for any amount under a galleon, and even with Harry having stockpiled his allowance for the last two years except for treats from the Express trolley, he couldn’t be certain that his remaining twenty-two galleons would last him for forty days’ worth of lunches, snacks, or groceries from Carkitt Market when he tired of eating out.

Fortescue’s Ice Cream Parlor was one such business he’d tried to set up a weekly tab with, only for his coin to be refused. Florean, the owner, refused to even think of it, though Harry had argued him down to a single ice cream a week gratis instead of all the ice cream he could eat every day. It also turned out to be an excellent place to gather information or obscure knowledge, as Florean had apparently studied to gain a Mastery in History of Magic…only to be denied the position by Dumbledore in favor of that barmy ghost that did nothing but bang on about the goblin rebellions.

Walking back towards Gringotts after dropping off his gathered mail – which included a few packages that looked like birthday gifts, a first – Harry glanced towards the owl emporium with a considering look.

Luna had adopted him – mostly against his will but he hadn’t fought it that hard given what she’d been through – and between her and Neville he was suddenly finding himself pondering over whether he’d actually acquired friends, Morgana that was a strange thought, friends who would have an easier time of things if he had a personal owl.

Harry had never considered himself lonely by any stretch of the imagination, if anything he was vastly enjoying his isolation from any contact other than what he sought this summer.

But he’d never been outgoing, Dudley having done too good a job ruining any chance at friendship with the other kids from their neighborhood or at school. An introvert, through-and-through at this point. So, he was finding himself more than a bit at sea over the whole situation, though at least knew enough of standard social contracts that given Neville had purchased him a token at Yule – a simple set of Herbology tools so he wouldn’t have to borrow from the school set anymore as he’d heard Harry complaining about it often enough – that he’d sent a birthday present to the shy Gryffindor.

Though, Harry smirked knowingly, not so shy that he didn’t cling onto Harry like a limpet when he got the idea – somehow, Harry still wasn’t quite sure how…maybe it was remembering Neville loathed chocolate frogs so he didn’t buy any on the train last September? – that he’d found a friend in Harry.

While Harry was walking and thinking, there was a bit of a commotion over at the owl emporium, Harry himself being deaf to it as he was lost in his thoughts and letting his feet guide him towards the towering white edifice of Gringotts.
Or at least, he was.

Right up until there was a sudden weight on his left shoulder and claws digging into his cloak – though not his skin.

Stopping in his tracks, Harry looked over and met the gaze of perhaps the prettiest owl he’d ever seen in his life, staring right back at him with bright amber eyes before giving a soft – but, chiding, maybe? – bark.

The clerk from the owl emporium ran over to them, hair sticking up at odd angles and scratches on her flustered face.

“I am so sorry.” The words fell out of a nicely-shaped rosebud mouth like brook water over rocks. “She’s never done that before, so sorry, here, just let me take her…” Hands reached out towards the pure-white nocturnal predator, who had only a few flecks of black feathers to mar the unsullied snow coloring, only to flinch back as that pivoting head snapped around and the clerk found herself the recipient of a disparaging bark of disapproval.

“I don’t think she wants to go.” Harry said with more than a little amusement. It seemed an owl had chosen him whether he was ready for one or not. “How much?”

“Oh, I couldn’t possibly.” The clerk fretted over the pair even as Harry moved them out of the street and into the shop, easily spying the knocked over stack of cages that must have gotten in the snowy’s way. “She’s been chosen and returned a dozen times, I couldn’t…”

“Maybe because she wanted to be the one doing the choosing.” Harry arched an unimpressed brow at the young witch, maybe just a few years out of Hogwarts – though with the slow rate magical humans aged she might very well be up into her fifties and he’d never know unless she’d been prematurely aged by stress or tragedy. “She seems to want to go with me.” The snowy gave a soft bark of approval at that. “How much? Plus a perch with an automatic shrink and expand feature and a year’s worth of owl treats, plus a water bowl.”

“Well, I suppose, if you insist…” The clerk clucked and hemmed, finally waving her wand and righting the store, then summoning a trio of perches. “These are all we have right now in that line.”

Harry studied the options, all of which looked like they’d been standing in a forest somewhere only moments before, save that they’d been stripped of their bark and varnished in cherry, a light honey oak, and ebony.

“It’s your perch.” He looked over at the snowy. “Which would you like?”

Taking no chances on her boy leaving her behind now that she’d caught him, the snowy pointed a wing at the cherry with a definitive bark.

“Clever girl, aren’t you?” Harry arched a brow, the clerk snorting.

The lad had no bloody clue just how clever that blasted owl was.

“That’ll be seventeen galleons and six sickles.” The clerk did the math, shrinking the perch with a tap of her wand and stowing it in an expanded bag that already had the treats and the plain silver-toned water dish Harry selected. “Unless you’re wanting a cage as well?”

“No, thank you.” Harry said, already digging out his exchange book. “I don’t think she’ll take kindly to it after working so hard to escape the last one.” Filling out the slip with quick strokes of his pen and signing it, he blew on the ink, watching as understanding lit up the clerk’s face.
“Mr. Po-” was all the further she got before being silenced by a shake of his head.

“He asked with a disarming smile. “I’m rather enjoying my little holiday in the safety of the alley. I wouldn’t want that to be ruined by unneeded attention. You understand, I’m sure?”

“Of course, sir.” The clerk blushed and bobbed a bit of a curtsy. “I won’t say a word, I promise!”

“Thank you, if that’s all…” He prompted leadingly, holding out one hand for the bag she was still holding hostage.

More babbles and blushes followed him as she handed it over and waved him out the door, Harry shaking his head once it finally clanged shut behind him.

“You probably want a fly,” he noted, looking over at his new owl. “But if it can wait a bit, I’d like to get you fit for one of the warded security pouches and anti-hex anti-tampering bands Gringotts offers.”

As the snowy settled her wings and hunkered down a bit, he gathered that that was perfectly acceptable to milady.

Bugger.

He was going to have to figure out a name for her, wasn’t he?

He shook that off.

For today, she’d chosen him and he was finding that at the moment that was more than enough, not unlike his reaction when he’d figured out that both Luna and Neville had no intention of leaving him to retreat back into his automaton-student shell anytime soon – at least not around them.

…

Once his new snowy had been fit with her leg band and pouch that would prevent tampering and other kinds of disasters occurring with his mail and to his owl, the pouch one that she could carry easily in her talons and that could be hung from her perch when not in use, unlike the permanent addition of her leg band, Harry continued on with his day which had already been packed full and it not even an hour into the afternoon.

Little did he know, he wasn’t done yet, as this was one birthday that was filled to the brim with comings and goings and interesting events.

…

Regulus had kept his distance, observing the now-teenaged wizard without anymore contact than a nod over the breakfast spread Ms. Blueblossom put on. Despite the plethora of identities he could take up and then put back away when their purpose was served, there was only one that had anything to do with either the bed and breakfast or the bank, the only two places one Harry Potter spent any amount of reliable time since fleeing his unlamented-relatives’ house.

And wouldn’t you know it, it was one of his most irascible identities and the one that he wore the most often these days: that of Mordred Melanthios Rue, Head Unspeakable.

Or, as Ms. Blueblossom knew him, the reclusive young wizard that let her other third-floor room rather than worry about having to hunt up a proper flat or house.
Being an Unspeakable, Gardenia expected him to come and go at odd hours, or to behave a bit off from standard accepted behavior.

That didn’t mean she approved by any means of either “Mordred’s” habit of riling up the Purebloods with his habit of reading muggle science tomes and flaunting his wandless magic in the middle of the Leaky, or his occasionally staying out for days or sleeping twenty-hours straight, but it wasn’t odd – for Mordred – either.

Mordred was one of his more entertaining identities, especially as Regulus had made him as far from Regulus’s own storied background as possible while staying in the same general age and gender.

The Head Unspeakable was known to be: a half-blood, the product of an early Death-Eater raid, a foundling as a result of the former, and a bastard from an ancient line who enjoyed making the presumed or confirmed Death Eater families and supporter families squirm over whether he would ever do a lineage test at Gringotts.

He wouldn’t, of course.

Metamorphmagus or not, Regulus’s genetics didn’t change as the magic was strictly limited to his external or surface features not his genes, his blood, or his internal organs. His mind was still his mind, and his magic his magic. He would never be able to fool Gringotts in such a way if he entered the building for more than the most perfunctory business in any of his identities.

As a result, Gringotts was perhaps the only institution that knew Regulus Black wasn’t dead, leading to him being “presumed” as such when the Ministry was denied the Gringotts confirmation they sought in order to seize the Black inheritance and accounts after his mother’s death.

The Most Ancient and Noble House of Black was his, Gringotts knew he was alive, and it waited for him and the day where he could once again wear his own face and name in public instead of that of another.

Siri was perhaps the only one who could fight him for it, however his disinheritance by both their mother and grandfather made that a legal impossibility so long as Regulus was still alive.

Mordred Rue was a recluse, yes, but he was also a follower of the Old Ways.

As such, a casual invitation to the other semi-long-term resident of the bed and breakfast to celebrate the Harvest Rite would be in character if a bit out of his normal comfort zone.

More, it would give him a chance to get a better read on the young wizard.

Regulus hated relying on second-hand reports and vague impressions.

That was the way of slipshod information and worst of all in Regulus’s profession – mistakes. Mistakes that could lead to such as the disaster of 31 October 1981. Regulus snorted to himself. His Lord should have waited for Regulus to finish gathering information, as they’d agreed he would. Regulus still didn’t know what had happened to change his lord’s mind between setting Regulus on his path and going to Godric’s Hollow…but he’d certainly be willing to kill to find out given that his lord’s mind was still missing memories from before and during his time as a wraith.

Siri might have the right idea after all, if why his brother had finally shed his shackles was what he thought.

Peter Pettigrew had better be careful when he finally showed his beady rat eyes back in England.
More than one Black was on his scent – though which would be worse for the Animagus remained to be seen. Sirius likely only wanted to kill the rodent after all. If Peter had done more than turn traitor on his own best-friend well…it would be far kinder a death that Siri would give him than what he would have at the end of Regulus’s wand.

...

All he needed was one look at Harry.

Just one.

He’d come close at Privet Drive, felt his pup’s power rich in the air in the middle of that strangely-same neighborhood.

Harry had even looked back towards him, but his face was shadowed by his cloak, not even his bright eyes showing as the Knight Bus squealed to a stop at the curb.

He’d stayed around just long enough to get a lock on his pup’s scent, it had changed since he was a baby though the base notes of rich, hot earth and the zing of a lightning storm remained the same. Base notes tended to do, not changing unless faced with a major event – he thought. It was hard to remember.

Scents weren’t a good memory they just were, like his being innocent of what he’d been locked away for.

His fault but not his guilt, though that likely wouldn’t make any sense in a mind other than his own.

Harry’s home wasn’t a good place.

The scents never lied not about simple things to a canine nose.

What he lacked in sight in his Grim he more than made up for with interpreting smells.

And Four Privet Drive smelled of rage, and hate, and the bitter cold that Sirius knew as disdain from the very first moments he’d returned to Twelve Grimmauld Place after gaining his Grim.

There were other scents as well.

Smug satisfaction, discontent, the harsh sting of muggle chemical cleaners.

Good, rich earth tended by his pup’s hands, cheap brandy, shock and fear, old tears and that certain lingering scent of Hogwarts that wafted from one window on the second floor and had followed Harry and his trunk as he stormed away.

Not that Sirius could blame him.

He’d heard what that bitch – and wasn’t that a decent bit of wandless Transfiguration? – had said about Prongs and then about Lily-flower.

Sirius would have – hell, had – done worse to anyone who spoke about them like that.

Things were still foggy from Azkaban and the Dementors, even as much as he’d hid as Padfoot, but anything to do with Harry was crystal-clear for the first time in a long time. Wormtail was gone, in Egypt according to the article Fudge had so helpfully given him. That said, he’d still swung through Ottery St. Catchpole before making his way to London’s magical district, watching and waiting for a shot to get through one of the less-conspicuous entrances by Horizont, Vertic, or Knockturn Alleys
or Carkitt Market instead of the heavily-guarded one at Regal Alley or the busy entrance at the Leaky.

Horizont, Harry had told Stan, so to Horizont Padfoot had come, catching Harry’s newish-old scent lingering around the bed-and-breakfast there.

A good place for the pup if he wasn’t going to stay at a friend’s house for the rest of the summer.

Though there was another scent there that he thought he should recognize but couldn’t. Something new-old like Harry’s was new-old. Not that that helped him any. Short of Harry, Moony, Prongs, and Lily-Flower he didn’t have much of his good memories left – or at least not that he could easily recall. The Dementors had taken their toll on him and he knew it, knew he was no good for a strong young wizard like Harry no matter how shitty his family was – and how the fuck he’d ended up with Petunia he couldn’t fathom.

He was only good for one thing anymore, one last task, and then Prongs and Lily could at last rest in peace.

But first…he just wanted one look at his pup before he started the long trek to Hogwarts to settle into a hideaway before Wormtail returned in the clutches of the clueless family he’d been hiding among like the rat he truly was.

And honestly, what the hell kind of witch and wizard were Arthur and Molly anyway?

Rats didn’t live twelve years after already being adults, not even in the Wizarding World.

There was no such animal as a “magical” rat.

No more than there were magical cats or dogs, just kneazles, crups, and Grims.

Sirius had been locked away in Azkaban for twelve years, he could be excused some level of idiocy and hare-brained thinking.

What the fuck was their excuse?

Ears perking up, Pads lifted his black head off of his paws from where he’d been laying under a shrub across from the b-and-b. A harried witch had been so kind as to toss a roll at him earlier which he’d snapped out of the air and nearly swallowed whole it had tasted so good, and a wizard down the street had tossed away the morning’s Prophet which Pads had helped himself to, happier than he could say to see the date – even with the distasteful picture of himself screaming like a loon on the front – he might get to see his pup on his birthday, the first since his first. Though it was a bit curious, even to his patchwork of a brain, that there was no “celebratory” article on his pup the way there had been in previous years when he’d been tossed a taunting frontpage from the Prophet on 31 July.

Must have finally slapped the papers with a lawsuit or injunction or something.

His ears had been right, as soft-but-firm steps came around the corner from Diagon, his pup a sight to see with his stride that was straight out of his Black heritage. Pads felt his lip lift a bit and gave a huff. Harry walked like Reg of all people. Like the world wasn’t just his oyster, it was his hunting ground and everyone in it either another predator or simply prey.

Looked like a Black too, he decided with a bit of a whine and a confused cock of his head.

There was James in the curve of the brow, there was Lily in the shape of the eyes and the color, a
mix of them both making the nose.

But the lines of jaw and cheek, the plush of the lips, the thick black lashes and even thicker hair, that was all Black, though with his canine eyes he couldn’t tell if Harry had the usual pearly-white Black skin or if he’d taken the darker bronze of James, who was a quarter Punjabi from his grandmother Lakhi and also had some Middle-Eastern from a Shafiq ancestor as well as North-African from a Shacklebolt ancestress added to the mostly-English with some French mixture that was James.

None of Lily’s freckles though, which was probably a relief.

All he’d wanted was a look, which he’d gotten, but he couldn’t make himself leave.

Not while Harry was still there, jeans rolled up over his knees and scuffed black chucks, a white vest tucked in and a shirt open over it, all with a light summer cloak thrown back with the hood down in the hot humid late-afternoon London heat.

The pup had his hair pulled back, but a few pieces had fallen out of the neat tail, plastering themselves to his neck and sides of his face, no scar in sight thanks to the very specific parting of his hair.

He was beautiful, even sweaty from the walk from Diagon or wherever he had been, and with the smell of owl Pads was betting either the owl-post office or one of the pet stores or both.

A wand was holstered on his arm, smart lad, and there was a bag dangling from one hand rather than thrown over his back and adding to the layers of heat from shirt and cloak.

Pads blinked, suddenly feeling a bit panicked, as Harry was also looking his way.

…
The Dog Star

When Darkness Comes

The Dog Star

It was the whine that drew his attention.

Harry knew he...he knew he wasn't right.

It wasn't that he didn't understand, his understanding was just fine, whether of people, of their motivations, of their private thoughts that could given even them pause let alone another, oh yes Harry understood people just fine.

He just didn't like them.

People were stupid.

They were cruel and weak and far too prone to a distancing blindness to what could be staring them right in the face.

A person was different.

A person could be intelligent or wise.

They could be kind and so strong and brave enough to stare even the darkest of hearts in the face and spit in their eye.

But put more than two of them together and well.

Then you have people.

And Harry hated people with an ice-cold derision that should make all the stupid, weak, cruel, blind people he’d known in his short life ecstatic.

Because it was cold.

It was solid and unchanging, an opinion closely held and developed from years of watching Petunia turn a blind eye as Vernon slipped off his belt, of watching teachers ignore Dudley and his growing gang shoving smaller or slower children into the dirt, of hearing the sheeple of Privet Drive parrot back Vernon and Marge’s party-line when it came to the “freakish, delinquent” Harry Potter.

As such, it wasn’t like to erupt and leave nothing in his wake but scorched earth the way his other reaction to humans other than a rare few could.

His hate, if but they knew it, was far preferable for them than his rage.

His rage that could shake an ancient magical fortress on its very foundations.

Give him a few years and a bit more strain on his temper and he might just follow through with that scorched-and-salted earth idea.

Thankfully for the sanctity of Hogwarts – or just life in general – the people who could incite his rage were as few and far between as those who could do the same for his well-hidden protectiveness,
a trait just as fierce for all that it wasn’t as well-developed as his rage.

People.

He gave a shiver.

Give him a book or an animal any day.

Those now, while he might not always understand them as well as his did people, no book or dog or cat had stood aside while he was beaten black and blue or turned a blind eye as his cousin chased him up a tree for the third time that week.

His snowy had been sent to find his open window – the wards on the b-and-b keeping his room safe, besides which his narrow window faced the garden and not the street – and Harry almost back to the relative quiet of Blueblossom’s when he heard it, the whine, and a huff, his eyes darting across the street to the sight of a large dirty mutt, probably a stray if the matted fur, that was maybe black underneath all the dinge, was any sign.

It was resting from the heat of the day under one of the bushes that sat below the portico at the pub “Fountain of Fair Fortune” that was squashed between a tobacconist and a barber shop, but had its head lifted and its ears perked towards Harry, his tail even thumping a bit half-heartedly at the sight of a person.

Harry gave a half-smile at that.

It reminded him of when he was younger, before he’d found his magic, when he still had a shard of hope in him that maybe, just maybe, this time – this teacher, his aunt, anyone – would finally act the way the books he read told them they should.

Should was a concept that didn’t make it to his tenth birthday.

He imagined that was the beauty of being canine: no matter how horrible people were to them, whatever it was inside the canine heart and mind, it never really gave up on them.

“Hey there,” Harry said quietly, hunkering down into a squat with his forearms resting on his knees and his hands open and loose so the dog could see he wasn’t holding anything. “You okay over there?” He asked, cocking his head a bit to the side and ignoring that he was sweltering in the heat and that his damn cloak was dragging on the ground. “Need some water, maybe?”

The dog gave a soft, inviting woof, and Harry glanced right and left before standing back up and crept over towards the creature, frowning a bit as he took in all that heavy matted fur. Poor thing.

Another glance around – trace or not, if he was seen using magic and visibly underage he’d have a shit ton of explaining to do – and then he flicked his wrist sending his wand settling into his palm, and transfigured the rumpled Prophet the dog had been laying on before moving back a bit at his approach into a simple ceramic bowl.

“Aquamenti.”

Harry had barely started filling the dish before the dog was right over there, lapping up the water like mad and splashing him in the process – which actually felt pretty good if it wasn’t for the dog-drool aspect – Harry laughing a bit as he backed out of range but kept the spell going until the dog had had, a quick check, his fill and the bowl was spilling over before cutting it off.

It was tempting to just pour water on his head let alone the dog, but Harry knew that would be hard to explain to Ms. Blueblossom.
“Merlin, that can’t be comfortable.” Harry fretted a bit over the coat, narrowing his eyes and doing another check of the street. “I’m going to try a couple spells to help with your fur, okay boy?” He asked, the dog just sneezing in response.

Harry thought quickly, recalling the fur-care instructions and spells in his mum’s Care of Magical Creatures text – not the compendium by Mr. Scamander but the actual care text.

De-tangling the fur first, then cleaning it, then dealing with any pests was the right order…he thought. Worst-case if he was wrong he’d end up needed to re-cast a spell or two. As long as they didn’t gain an audience – and it wasn’t yet end of the workday – they’d be fine.

“Furrure sa nodo.”

The magic washed over the black dog from nose to tail, then the dog sneezed again and gave a great shake, a shower of dirt and he-didn’t-want-to-know-what flying off with the fur unknotted, the only thing saving Harry being his quick reflexes from years of ducking fists snapping up a basic shield charm with a scowl.

Though if the happy woof the dog gave, just that much must have felt fantastic, even moving towards him where before with each use of Harry’s wand he’d been inching back and to the side, ready to run if needed.

He’d been on the wrong side of one then at some point, which wasn’t helping Harry’s often-volatile hormonal-teenaged temper.

But the dog hadn’t done anything wrong so it was just one more thing to seethe over later regarding the evils of the human race as a species.

“Deaeco furrure.” Harry cast the next charm while the dog was distracted by his now-freed fur, cleansing it and revealing a deep ink-black coat underneath all that fur that was startling against the silver-grey eyes. Another shake was his reward, then he snapped off the last of the spells that he was reasonably certain he could manage without practice as they were similar enough to human grooming and cleaning charms. “Deiectionem pestes,” should purge him of any pests.

In thanks, Harry found out that while his shield charm was more than enough against flying dirt and fleas, it was rather useless against several stone of massive black dog as he was bowled over and his face enthusiastically licked, hands easily finding the crease of ears for a scratch, a brief frown furrowing black brows as he noted the too thin ribs under his hands as he gave a manual check of whether the spells worked completely or not.

He didn’t have any food on him, and Ms. Blueblossom wouldn’t likely let him haul a stray in off the streets for dinner and a kip.

“If you’re hungry, stay here.” Harry told him, having given up after a brief moment of thought on discovering why this dog seemed to understand most of what he said. If he was smart enough to both recognize intent and a wand in hand, he was smart enough to know some words. “I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

…

Sirius knew he shouldn’t stay anymore than he should have when his pup noticed him and spoke, let alone came over.

But it felt so good being clean for the first time in years.
And Harry was so sweet taking care of a mangy stray, how could he not stay?

Until his pup got tired of taking pity on a formerly-dirty mutt, Sirius was going to keep his padded-feet right were they are and see what Harry did next, even if it shamed him a bit having to accept the help of a boy who he should be taking care of not the other way around.

…

Harry bee-lined straight for the covered tray that had his dinner on it, giving a wave in thanks to Ms. Blueblossom who clucked her tongue and shook her head over the state of him: sweaty, with dirt and dog drool mussing him up further, with the hem of his cloak an inch deep in mud and dirt from taking care of that stray.

Oh, she’d seen what he was about.

But as it was the first time she’d noted him willingly interacting with anyone or anything, she didn’t say a word about her good roast chicken probably ending up as the dog’s dinner while the young wizard fed himself on those cold-cuts he had in the little take-away cold chest he’d found at the market for his room. It took up scarcely-available space, even wedged as it was between the side of the desk and the wall, but it helped keep the hunger pangs of a growing young wizard at bay, like with the mutt, she didn’t say a word. Even if she did wish he’d eat the hot meal he paid for and give the dog the cold-cuts.

So long as it wasn’t served up on her china, Gardenia was content to look the other way…provided he didn’t try sneaking the dog into his room.

Rushing upstairs, Harry set the tray on the cleared space he left for that very purpose on the tiny postage-stamp sized bedside table, his new snowy barking bit at him in concern.

Dropping his bag and tossing his cloak into the “please launder” hamper, Harry had her perch out and set up, water dish attached and filled, in a matter of moments, giving her a scratch for good measure before turning considering eyes to the food under the cloche that had a permanent heating charm on it to keep the guest-trays warm and fresh no matter when Ms. Blueblossom had time to make up their ordered dinners.

Ms. Blueblossom’s dinner was as well-rounded as he’d come to expect, Harry eyeing up the generous portion of sliced roast chicken – white meat and dark as she knew he liked both from other meals – that would make a perfect dinner for a starving dog.

Snatching up a copy of Magie du Monde that he hadn’t already tossed for recycling, Harry repeated his earlier transfiguration of newspaper into dog dish, then plopped the entire serving of chicken plus some of the roasted carrots into it for good measure, not remembering for certain which foods a dog could have but feeling generally at ease with what he’d picked. Whether it was good for the dog or not he wasn’t certain either, but anything that wouldn’t make the poor thing sick was better than nothing at all or rummaging through trash bins for dinner. An absent-minded grooming charm on himself this time cleaned away the starting-to-dry-and-itch combination of dirt and dog drool, and then Harry was back out the door and carrying his offering over to the patiently-waiting and now full-on-tail-wagging black dog, setting down the bowl of food next to the water dish.

He took another suspicious glance around then quick as a whippet had his wand back out and a notice-me-not cast over the pair of dishes, the dog rearing back for a moment when his dinner disappeared until Harry tapped him on the head to key him into the spells.

It was a bit advanced for a thirteen-year-old but so was making earthquakes whenever he was riled
and that didn’t stop him.

“There you go, boy.” Harry whispered, running one hand through the shaggy hair on the back of the dog’s neck. “I can’t keep you, my new owl is going to cause enough of a raucous, but if you hang around I’ll take care of you as long as I can until I have to head to school or you find a home, okay boy?”

The dog gave a soft woof, and a nuzzle to his hand, then with a last swipe of his tongue through the now-devoured chicken and carrots and a slurp at the water dish, the dog trotted off about his business with what passed for a full-stomach for the first time in years.

“Guess that’s a yes then.” Harry cracked a smile, a real genuine smile without a trace of his usual bitter-tinge or icy demeanor, then spelled the food dish clean, already making plans to stock some simple hunks of cooked meat from the market in his cold-chest – if only because he didn’t know the right spells to keep raw from contaminating other food in such a small space. “Though I’m going to have to figure out something to call him, I can’t keep calling him the dog or the mutt or the stray all the time…”

Just one more to add to the list and he had a feeling that his snowy would never forgive him if he spent anymore time around another animal before he finished settling her in and come up with her name.

He’d only just gotten her today, it wouldn’t do to have her in a strop with him on the very first day, now would it?

…

Regulus heard the teen talking as he wandered down the hall towards the tiny second room on the same floor as “Mordred’s” long-term rental.

That was a first.

He’d had only a few chances to observe him over the last week or so, Potter doing one hell of an imitation of a hermit for the first several days, barely leaving his tiny room for more than using the washroom and collecting food at breakfast and dinner from the “guest” dining room downstairs.

Quiet, at the very least, had been Regulus’s impression, despite the power that nearly seethed from that growing form with every breath. Potter shed magic into the air the way most people shed dead hair: with unconscious and steady frequency. It lingered in the washroom after the teen showered or in the hall as he walked back and forth between the few place he spent more than a few moments during his stay, to the point that Regulus was willing to bet once Potter returned to school, Gardenia was going to have a hard time letting that tiny room again to a low-powered wizard, it would be so steeped in the interesting magic of one Harry Potter.

What was intriguing above and beyond this magical bleed back into the world where most magicals hoarded their magic, only releasing small amounts during sleep, fighting, or sex especially outside of spellwork, was that it didn’t give Regulus a magical signature that could be used to trace Potter. A simple spell one day while Potter had been in the shower had confirmed that the teen didn’t have a Trace on him, due to the custom wand Regulus had spotted on his arm two days before at breakfast, but a magical signature wasn’t the same as the ministry mandated Trace spell on underage witches and wizards. It was innate.

And if you had any magical sense abilities at all, whether versions of Sight or the dozens of other ways a magical being could sense magic beyond the basic knowing when a spell is cast from a
wand, you could usually pick up on a magical’s personal signature with exposure, the same way you could recognize a person on sight or their voice by sound even in a crowd.

You knew the person by those signifiers much like you could learn their magic.

Regulus wasn’t magic-blind, he’d grown up in a Dark House that still taught many of the old ways, and had spent years under the tutelage of both the Dark Lord – who was a magical genius by any measure – and the Unspeakables.

There was no damn reason he shouldn’t be able to pick up a signature off of the ambient magic Potter shed with every breath.

And yet, the fact remained that he was no closer to putting a magical signature to the young wizard than he had been a week ago and it was maddening.

Moving closer, he saw the reason for both being able to hear the teen despite the excellent silencing enchantments woven into each bedroom and washroom as well as the teen’s own quiet nature: the door was cracked a bit with the garden-facing window open to allow for a cross-breeze to carry the flower-and-herb laden breeze through the small room. A soft bark gave him the answer regarding why the quiet boy had been ostensibly talking to himself. He’d acquired an owl – a female he hoped given what he was hearing – and was listing off names for her approval.

“Freya?” The teen offered, sounding like he was reading from one of those baby-naming books. And if the tired pitch was any sign, they’d been at it awhile. “Means lady and is the name of a love goddess.”

Harry looked up at his snowy, who lifted an indifferent wing.

“Okay…” He trailed a finger down the page then flipped through a few more. Rather than a baby-naming book, he had out a text on important magical figures and was browsing the index then flipping to the entry. “What about Galadriel?” He diverted from the magical names for a moment. “The Noldorin queen of Lothlorien in Tolkien’s works?”

A ruffle of his snowy’s feathers was his answer to that, Harry pouting a bit.

He really liked that name if not the character very much.

“Hedwig?” He offered, cocking his head in interest at the blurb on the witch from the middle ages who somehow became a patron saint of orphans.

An approving bark, finally, four dozen names later, had Harry giving a relieved laugh before climbing to his feet and offering his newly-dubbed Hedwig an owl treat from the open bag in his bedside table.

“Hedwig it is then, girl.” He gave her a few scritches behind her ears as he’d already discovered she prefers. “Good choice.”

“I agree.”

Harry whipped his head around with an audible crack but managed to control his instinct to lash out at the being invading his privacy. It took a second, but he placed the wizard leaning his right shoulder against the hallway wall/doorjamb, hands tucked visibly away in muggle-style black skin-tight leather trousers – the zipper gave it away, wizarding trousers still used buttons or a lace-up fly since the metal of a zipper could react poorly to some spellwork – with short-cropped but mussed hair in rich brown and a cocky half-smirk at surprising him. Maroon-brown eyes had a wicked glint
that nearly shouted that the wizard was bad and not only knew it but reveled in it to go with the muggle-style but wizard-made black t-shirt with a silk-screen of Slytherin’s crest.

Mordred Rue, his floor-mate for the time being, and according to the gossip around the breakfast tables from the short-termer boarders, the Head of the Unspeakables at the unholy-young age of his early twenties.

And a bastard – both by birth and inclination – that never let anyone forget it.

It had taken Harry a couple days when he first came to stay to place the tugging sense of knowing Rue before he remembered: he was the wizard in the Leaky on his first visit with Petunia reading A Brief History of Time and playing with his wandless magic whilst being side-eyed in disapproval by a pair of elderly witches across the room.

Rue didn’t know – and Harry was damn sure never going to tell him – but that little display had done more to encourage Harry in keeping up with both magical learning and his muggle education than anything before or since, as well as how the two might be used to work together as from what Harry could tell, wizards had taken to magic-powered steam trains and Wizarding wireless and left the rest of the inventions of the nineteenth century and beyond to rot.

He was probably the most interesting person Harry’d met in the wizarding world, for his sheer audacity in the face of the stick-in-the-mud magical society if nothing else.

As a creature with more defiance in his little finger than most citizens of Wizarding Great Britain had in their entire bodies from what Harry had observed over the last two years, he could appreciate that in a person.

“Didn’t mean to startle you.” Rue continued when it appeared Harry wasn’t going to speak, even if his words were contradicted by the amused tinge to his oddly-colored eyes. “But your door was open. Didn’t know if you knew the silencing charms only kick in when it’s shut.”

“I knew.” Harry said after letting the silence linger a beat too long. Because he could be an arsehole like that when disturbed even if he’d done – theoretically – the disturbing in the first place. It wasn’t like silence bothered him any, though as all the reaction he got over one of his best and oft-used asocial weapons was an arched brow, he rather thought Rue was as good at the game of putting others on the backfoot to deal with him as Harry was – if not better being near to twice his age. “Didn’t think it’d matter since you keep odd hours, Mr. Rue.”

Ms. Blueblossom had, as a matter of course, introduced the two the first morning after Harry had checked in, the pair of them flustering her with their appraising glances and stiff nods, neither giving a fig for social conventions with strangers unless there was something in it for them, which she knew very well about Rue and was coming to learn about her youngest guest.

“Festival day tomorrow.” Mordred told him, lingering in the doorway even though it would be clear to anyone at all that Potter wished him to bugger off. “Even the Unspeakables take the main festivals off whether they follow the Old Ways or not. No point in trying to research anything when the magical fluctuations from rites being performed all over Europe and parts of European-settled former colonies will bugger everything up.”

Harry wrinkled his nose at that, tension uncoiling muscle by muscle as he gave in to the fact that he wasn’t getting rid of Rue until the wizard got whatever it was he came for – within reason – and propped a hip against the desk that was next to Hedwig’s new perch and the open window, crossing his left arm over his chest and under his right, leaving his wand arm unhindered in contrast with the older wizard who didn’t move to free his hands, giving at least an illusion of safety and power in
Harry’s hands, though given that he’d seen him perform wandless magic before, there was no guarantee that Rue couldn’t perform it with a simple thought instead of relying on an extremity as a focus.

He was the Head Unspeakable after all, it was well within reality and not Harry’s paranoid flaring up thank-you-very-fucking-much.

“Fascinating.” Harry’s tone nothing short of sarcastic – even though it was, a piece of offered information that he’d theorized before from his readings about the Rites performed by practitioners of the Old Ways that coincided with the holidays provided to most magical workers in wizarding Europe but this was the first confirmation of it he’d ever come across.

“The point being,” Regulus held in his amused-frustration with the brat with the same iron-will that allowed him to slip from form to form with a thought and fool even the likes of Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape his created Occlumentic identities were so good. Harry fucking Potter was a mix of him and his brother from the top of his black head to the bottom of his scuffed trainers. Pure fucking Black attitude inherited honestly through James Potter and his mother Dorea Potter neé Black. As a kid himself he hadn’t realized just how much James had taken from his Black half, too busy being hurt and then infuriated over James taking his place as Sirius’s closest friend and confidant. But Merlin-and-Morgana it must have been a hell of a lot for Harry to be organically such a Black without any contact since he was a toddler with a Black of House Black. The little shit. “That tomorrow we’ll be on our own as the Blueblossoms go to visit their children in Dorset and spent the holiday with them.”

“Oh.” Harry frowned at that, finally allowing his right arm to cross over in a wordless lessening of suspicion.

There went his plan to hit Carkitt Market for that meat for the black dog, he’d have to split his meals with him until the day after.

And damn he didn’t want to have to name anything again any time soon after Hedwig had been such a chore.

“Listen, kid.” Regulus rolled his eyes a bit as he shoved off the wall. “Gardenia will set out meals for us before she leaves. I do a little Rite in the back garden every year if you want to join me. Relax a little, will ya?” He smirked, entertained at the irony of what he had to say next. “Not everyone is going to be a Death Eater after your head or a fame-whore looking for some Savior-loving or coat-tail-riding, yeah?”

That he was a Death Eater but wasn’t after Potter’s head – at least for the moment – was his to know and hopefully that powerful little shit to never find out.

Regulus wouldn’t look good as a smear on the pavement and he wasn’t kidding himself. With the amount of power Potter breathed let alone had to use, it wouldn’t take much for the kid to do it. He actually hoped that his lord didn’t want to kill the teen anymore, it would be such a waste of raw potential.

Little did he know, that was exactly the kind of thinking that had kept Albus Dumbledore from outright murder of both Harry Potter and one Tom Riddle while they were young and relatively vulnerable over the years, the infernal question of what-if.

…

“I heard you spoke to Unspeakable Rue last night, Harry dear.” Ms. Blueblossom commented as she
clucked over him the next morning, fretting over leaving him without “adult” supervision for the day, nevermind that he spent most of his time lately with the goblins at Gringotts – and still could as the goblins didn’t observe any of the Rites in a way that led to closing the bank ever, if they followed the Old Ways at all, for all Harry knew they had their own form of religion or belief that had never been written about – and that Rue was going to be hanging around the place all day.

Harry had to hold in a laugh as the implication hit him between the eyes.

Ms. Blueblossom didn’t consider Mordred Rue an adult – at least not for the purposes of keeping a teenaged wizard from being sold into a Knockturn brothel or whatever it was she worried would happen without herself or her husband about.

“What did you think of him, lad?” Mr. Blueblossom, “call me, Timothy lad, I’m not decrepit yet” asked, lifting his head from where he was double-checking the bag they’d packed for their overnight at their eldest’s house in Dorset.

“Irritating but interesting.” Harry said without hesitation, having had time to consider the matter last night, talking out loud more than once to Hedwig before she’d left him to hunt with moonrise.

“Hah!” Timothy slapped his leg with a snort of laughter. “That’s far kinder a description of the irascible creature than I’ve heard in a bit.”

“Timothy.” Ms. Blueblossom scolded her husband with a light scowl. “Mr. Rue is one of our best guests and has been for years. There’s no need to be unkind, and especially with young Mr. Potter as an audience.”

“Wasn’t unkind from what I can tell.” Harry shrugged. “Just an observation. And probably an accurate one given what I’ve seen of Rue’s morning-manner which makes me seem bright and cheery.”

“He’s an odd duck.” Timothy told him as his wife threw up her hands and bustled off to fret over the platters she’d placed under stasis charms for the two guests – enough to keep the two for a week if she was true to nature and pattern. “But an interesting one, that’s not up for debate. Smart as a whip. If he’s taken an interest in you, it might be worth it to see what you can learn from him lad, what with your…situation.” He finished as tactfully as he was capable.

It was decent advice, Harry had to agree even as he waved the couple off as he tucked back into his tea and the book he’d brought down after a glance out the front-parlor window to see no sign of the black dog having come around in hopes of breakfast. He’d still go out in a bit to fill the dishes with fresh water and some of the eggs and ham from the overlarge platter that’d been made for breakfast, Ms. Blueblossom having overcooked half out of concern and half habit as far as he could tell. Their portkey swept them away to Dorset and Harry felt himself relax with a sigh.

Blessed hours – or however long until Rue roused for the day – of peace and no people.

Incoming torrent of mail – hateful or otherwise – over his latest lawsuit aside, today was shaping up to be a great day.

…

Regulus took a glance at the headline of the Prophet as he wandered down from his room and gave a
whistle which garnered him an exasperated glare from his hormonal teenaged housemate.

Time-turners were wonderful things that allowed him to maintain his covers that needed more attention than others, but even with sleeping extra it wore on him, making him not the *perkiest* morning person there was. That didn’t mean he wasn’t going to be entertained when entertainment literally flew through his window. Though from the look at the newspapers spread allover the table in the guests’ dining room, he wasn’t the only person who had a morning delivery, even if these papers – judging from there being some spread out that wouldn’t have been delivered yet – were mostly advance copies.

“Damn, kid.” He told Potter as he tucked his *Prophet* under his arm as he hunted up the platter Gardenia always left for his breakfast just in case he missed the buffet spread she usually puts on. “You’ll have stirred up one hell of a hornet’s nest come tomorrow when the Ministry opens back up if that,” he flicked the fork he snatched up from the sideboard at the mostly-covered table as he found a free patch at the far end to sit and eat. “Is any sign. Fudge blew you off?”

A vicious sneer was all the answer the kid gave as he leaned over one of the foreign papers – hadn’t been content with slinging mud at the Ministry from within their own borders then, smart little fucker as no sane counsel would’ve advised it – though Regulus gathered it was more for some of the editorials that had been written by various staff at said papers rather than for Regulus himself.

Some of the populace – at home and abroad – were far too concerned with not ruffling feathers than was healthy for a functioning government.

But since that was about all the WGB governing body did – function – and not all that well in the process, as he had cause to know in more than one of his identities, it wasn’t hard to see why Fudge and others like him spent so much time pandering to the press and ignoring the public.

It made his lord’s job easier.

That was no lie.

But Regulus’s pride as an Englishman from a Most Ancient and Noble House would rather that his fucking people cared more about things like balancing progress with tradition instead of becoming ever-more-stupid varieties of easily-slaughtered-sheep.

“When is your rite?” Harry asked several long moments later when Regulus honestly thought the teen had forgotten he was even in the room, so engrossed was he in – what looked like a French – newspaper advance copy.

“Sunset, same as most others.” Regulus told him after plugging back into the present instead of thinking of a million and a half things he had to do today, most with use of a time-turner since more than a couple of his identities needed to be seen out and about for the holiday. “In the back garden.”

Harry nodded and stood, gathering his newspapers by hand in an untidy stack, then stuck them under his arm to carry his platter of “extras” to keep him fed until Ms. Blueblossom returned, leaving Regulus to his breakfast and his own copy of the *Prophet*.

He perused the headline once more:

*Ministry Steals Inheritance from Boy-Who-Lived!*

*Refuses to Return Ancestral Property in Godric’s Hollow!*

*Avarice or Absurdity? The full story page 3*
“There’s going to be no living with Fudge after this.” He grumbled to himself, stuffing a forkful of cheesy omelet into his mouth and chewing moodily. Couldn’t just return the brat’s property could he? Had to make an arse of himself and all of Wizarding Great Britain with him instead and would be blaming everyone but his own incompetent ass for the fallout.

It was a distant hope that his lord would speed up his plans with all the drama Potter seemed to delight in kicking off and then dropping in the Ministry’s lap.

The cunning little shit.

If he wasn’t a Hat Stall over whether to toss him head-first into Slytherin, Regulus would eat his wand.

…

That evening at dusk found the two wizards sitting across from each other with the small stone fire-circle the Blueblossoms maintained for small rites in their backgarden between them.

Lughnasadh wasn’t – technically speaking – a true “fire” based rite for the wizarding world the way it was for muggles who followed some of the Old Ways, but rather an earth-based rite, one of harvest and the first day of fall. Still, most had a fire regardless, even if just a small one given that August First or the first full moon thereafter was generally the warmest of the annual rites, especially in Britain. The main thing was giving thanks to the earth and to magic for another year of life and another harvest to see them through the winter, nothing more nothing less, so long as that was followed making it also one of the most accessible of the Old Rites for the new practitioner of the Old Ways.

Harry wasn’t, strictly speaking, a new practitioner.

Being a Ravenclaw, and given that House’s feeling regarding knowledge, Ravenclaw tower still had possession of many tomes and texts that had long since been removed from the greater library, which had allowed Harry to research the rites to his heart’s content after witnessing about half his House celebrating the Mabon – more commonly known as the Autumnal Equinox – and took it from there. With eight Rites a year, he certainly had enough time to practice either alone or with others as he chose. Surprising to most, given that he rarely involved himself in anything resembling a group activity unless forced by a professor, the Rites had become one of the few times a year that his House got used to seeing him, all save for Samhain for reasons none really needed explained to them.

They weren’t idiotic Gryffindors and even they had stopped asking after Harry once it became known that Professor Flitwick had granted him his sought-after absence from the Hallowe’en feast.

He wasn’t so tasteless as to bloody celebrate the death of his parents, even if all he knew of them was from letters written between his mother and a few friends, and the scribbles in the margins of her passed-down books.

Lughnasadh and Ostara – or the Vernal Equinox – were Earth Rites, ones that given Harry’s predilection for shaking said earth when he was in a temper he always made certain to pay reverence during. The two solstices were the Fire Rites, Midsummer and Yule; Water held Imbolc and Mabon; whilst Air – or Spirit depending on the person and family traditions – held Samhain and Beltane. Altogether, Harry due to his schooling was able to practice seven of the eight Rites without trouble being away with the last, Lughnasadh coming during the break.

Even so, he he’d managed last year.
That didn’t mean he wasn’t relieved not to have to sneak around to pay homage to the magic that made the world keep spinning and the blood flowing in his veins or to the earth that put up with his overpowered temper-tantrums, but he would have managed nonetheless.

Sometimes, it was a relief to just be able to do, rather than have to manage his way through a situation.

And that night, with the crickets chirping in the background as Mordred Rue let the fire, both of them sitting in quiet contemplation as they fed the fire their offerings of wheat stalks wrapped with fragrant herbs, drinking the sweet honey mead that Rue had procured for the occasion and thoughtfully and thankfully consuming the rich-flavored buns Ms. Blueblossom had fashioned with many grains and studded with late-summer berries, Harry felt the tension ease from his shoulders and the paranoia drift away – if only for a moment – from his mind as he let himself just be in company that wasn’t demanding anything from him.

Who let him be, but was also there, allowing him to be both included and apart as he pleased.

Sighing out, breathing out the ever-present stress of dealing and pretending and managing around people, Harry tilted his head back, rich black hair gleaming under the light of the rising moon and the dancing-snapping firelight, looking – though he didn’t know it – more than a little fey to his audience.

Cracking open his eyes he watched the stars wheel and turn as the earth breathed and sighed with him, soaking in the power offered it from rites all over the world and pulsing under his bare feet, both wizards dressed in simple plain – if fine – linen shirts and pants with no shoes or other coverings to block them from the earth and no cloak or hat to conceal them from the stars and sky.

Were either alone, they might have even gone skyclad, but there still were proprieties to be observed between a grown wizard and a year-from-consent adolescent.

Rue had a look of melancholy as he stared up at the stars when Harry finally came back down to earth after allowing himself to drift for an endless moment that might have been a second or an hour for all he knew.

Odd maroon eyes turned black from the shadows cast by the fire met curious green.

“I’m waiting.” Was all he had to say in response to the questioning look. “No need to stay if you’re finished. I’ll be out here all night until just before dawn.”

“What are you waiting for?” Harry asked, trying to think of the progressions of the sky and what would rise just before the sun.

“To say good morning and good night.” Regulus said, making no attempt at all at being anything less than cryptic.

“You knew Sirius Black.” It took Harry all of a second to put it together. “My godfather.”

Regulus arched a brow. That was rather quick of him, even for a boy as voraciously intelligent as Harry Potter was reputed to be by Hogwarts’ gossip and the annual year placements, the top ten of which were published in the Prophet every 1 July after students had returned home and tests were graded. He hoped – for the entertainment factor if nothing else – that Potter had an eye towards politics. It would be vastly amusing to watch him run circles around the Wizengamot though the wizard would likely be dreadfully bored in the process.

“Many years ago.” Regulus answered. “He was named, the way many of his House were, for the
stars. Sirius, for all that it’s known as the Dog Star, means glowing and is the brightest star in the night sky.”

“You miss him.”

“So would you if you remembered him, lad.” Regulus told him, melancholy having him firm in its grip. “Those who don’t didn’t know him at all.”
Maelstrom

When Darkness Comes

Maelstrom


Harry waited with a patience rarely afforded to anyone other than the pair of young witch and wizard who were due to come through the public floo at Ludus for his – he still had problems believing it – friends.

Dodge had been right.

His “going public” with the issue of Godric’s Hollow had caused nothing less than a maelstrom in the minds of Wizarding Great Britain, with many magicals torn over the subject – at least at first. Many agreed, according the letters written to him, the Ministry, and various publications that it was wrong for the Ministry of Magic to have annexed his family home without so much as a nod towards propriety. What hung them up was simple: they also didn’t want to give up what had become a national landmark, rightful owner or no.

It wasn’t until the second set of articles and adverts regarding the damn statue in the town square which would remain no matter if the Ministry gave him his home back or not that sentiment began to swing fully in his favor.

In between, Dodge had been run ragged dealing with the fallout as the Ministry tried to unbury itself from the veritable mountain of Howlers, letters, and complaints regarding the situation from the public – at least according to Mordred Rue who was more entertained by the situation than any ministry-worker had any right to be.

Harry supposed that being an Unspeakable, let alone the Head, had shielded him from the turmoil the rest of that ignoble institution was dealing with, allowing him to wallow in the absurdity.

For all the exploration of the London magical district that he’d undertaken, he hadn’t found a gym or anything similar despite his best efforts. There was a “Rapier’s Salle and Swords” on Regal Alley, which was a dueling club/shop and a miniature Quidditch pitch that he’d taken to running laps around in the park that separated Regal Alley’s district from that of Diagon, but no real gym. Which considering that London’s Magical District was comprised of seven or eight different areas covering a square mile under a ton of wards, was surprising.

He’d thought everything one might want could be found here, but there were still obvious lacks, even if you had to haunt the various alleys and residential areas to find them.

The lack of a gym was one such, with there also being no lakes, pools, or even a stream for swimming during the summer being another. He also found it odd that both the government buildings of the Ministry and the main London hospital weren’t attached in some way, shape, or form to the main London magical district but were freestanding elsewhere in the city. There were healer offices, law offices, the headquarters for various newspapers, periodicals and publishing houses, dozens of places to eat, drink, and be merry, but it still felt incomplete without common sights in other towns – which the London Magical District qualified as given the services on offer and the self-contained population in the two residential and two mixed-use areas – like transportation, government, and public health services.
Though there was a public library, it was just located in the upper-crust area of Regal Alley and not the more pedestrian areas of Diagon, Carkitt, or Horizont, with Vertic straddling the difference between the wealthy district of Regal Alley and the residential area of Old Westminster that it shared with Regal with the less up-market areas of the magical district.

Vertic and Regal Alleys were where Harry planned on doing his school shopping this year, intent on dragging Neville out of the drab robes his grandmother had chosen the last two years from Madam Malkin’s – if they were going to be friends Neville was going to have to deal with Harry hauling him along with him as he discovered that things like silk didn’t just exist but were wonderful – and letting Luna, his fellow Ravenclaw, loose in the nicer bookstores with excellent selections that could be found in the two upper-market alleys than on Diagon where the average Hogwarts student did their shopping.

None of them were so dreadful a thing as average, and Harry after all the muck-raking that’d gone on between the issues of Godric’s Hollow and his godfather was running out of fucks to give as far as letting people pass him off as brilliant, quiet, but an “average wizard” nonetheless which his robes and secondhand books had given credence to.

The books would stay.

But the robes could go, especially as he’d outgrown them and simply been waiting for closer to school to pay what was sure to be an exorbitant amount on new ones at the magical tailors on Regal Alley.

Before the full media storm had hit, Harry had had time to go through his birthday presents – only putting them off for a day and opening them after leaving Rue to his watching of the night sky, a record for him as last year he’d forgotten them nearly until the beginning of school – netting a rather nice set of books from Neville and Luna, a joint gift that they’d both pitched-in on, on the subject of Forgotten Magics. Where they’d found them Harry had no idea, though with a bookshop or two on all six of London’s magical district, let alone those scattered throughout Wizarding Great Britain including Ottery St. Catchpole where Luna’s home of the Rookery and Windermere in Cumbria outside which Longbottom Manor has stood for over six hundred years. That they existed at all, let alone his friends had combined resources to purchase them for him, was more than he’d ever hoped for.

The tomes covered, at least shallowly, everything from Mind Magics to Elemental Magics (and just a brief glance at that subject had answered a lot of questions) to genuine Lost Arts like gem-singing and dragonriding.

It was the best gift he’d ever gotten, leaving clothes and other books in the dust.

He’d have to give a great deal of thought to Luna’s birthday present in February, as this past birthday she was just beginning her long recovery from what had been done to her.

At least he knew Neville would have liked his gift, Harry having owl-ordered it from Splendiferous Flora, a florist and greenhouse on Vertic Alley, Harry going with a recommendation from Mr. Bindweed, the owner, and having them send off an excellent example of a wiggentree sapling, known for offering protection against Dark Creatures among other properties and uses, and coming complete with Bowtruckles already in place in the magical species of rowan.

A gift that cost a pretty penny but not worth more than the knowledge his friends had given him, which just goes to show that even he could find friends despite his prickly exterior and general disinclination towards socializing.
Granted, neither friendship had begun organically, Neville being originally his partner in Herbology and needing his help in turn in Potions and Defense while he literally saved Luna from whatever fate would have followed after her being bullied and molested – just the most recent in an already tragic history as he’d come to know – but they had begun in the first place.

For someone like Harry, that was perhaps the most difficult part: allowing a friendship to begin instead of ripping it out root and stem the way the Dursleys had always been so quick to do before Hogwarts and Harry had continued on afterward from sheer habit rather than any sense of malice towards his fellows.

At least, no malice then.

Familiarity didn’t just breed contempt but also dislike, disdain, and a disinclination to engage with many of the twits with which he took lessons.

He’d also, to his surprise, gotten a few gifts from some of the other students in Ravenclaw who participated in the Rites, little tokens such as chocolate frogs or a new pair of gloves or scarf for winter in blue and bronze, but still: remembrances outside of school nonetheless.

Harry had full intentions of repaying at least part of the thoughtfulness of his gift from Neville and Luna on their joint shopping trip – if they would ever bloody arrive.

Surprisingly, it had been Neville who had had a harder time convincing his grandmother to allow him free rein with his school shopping this year than Luna, who was both a year younger and been through a seriously traumatic event a little under a year ago. Xenophilius Lovegood it seemed, was of the absent-minded if loving sort of parent. A trait that was useful for their purposes today but still decidedly odd to both Harry and Neville as both had grown up under the auspices of guardians who were nothing short of stern and took more than a bit of a dip into abusive if of very different sorts.

You knew it was bad when Harry would rather deal with Vernon’s beltings or withholding food or Petunia’s piling on of chores than the browbeating Neville took day in and out, let alone being thrown into the ocean to sink or swim or out a window to “scare” magic out of him.

They were rather a study in contrasts of how a child deals with abuse differently: Harry turning cold and defiant, Neville shy and with a crippling lack of self-esteem.

Speak of the devil and he shall appear: the Floo flared green and out came the careful steps of Neville with the light, dancing steps of Luna just behind him.

“Harry!” Luna’s smile sparkled along with her silver-blue eyes. They weren’t as dreamy as they’d once been, though her voice still had the same airy quality he’d noted the few times he’d noted her as a teeny first year that kept to herself, not unlike he’d been the year before her. There was a sharpness there that had overtaken the dreaminess, the girl brought down to earth from the clouds in one of the harshest ways possible. But she hadn’t had to do it alone, and in the end that made all the difference. “You look fantastic for a boy with a murderer after you.” She teased him a bit over the adoration in the Prophet and Witch Weekly alike had been making over the renewed tragedy of Harry Potter. Though the writing had been much more entertaining than the norm as the injunction the wizarding press was under regarding him and using his name without consent meant they had to dance around the subject.
He’d never been referred to secondhand “Sirius Black’s ultimate target”, indeed, in his life.

At least the Quibbler, owned by Luna’s father, and most of the international press had kept him out of it as much as possible aside from the approved articles and adverts Dodge had been keeping up to hack away at public support of the Ministry, Wizengamot, and Dumbledore until they caved and returned his client’s property.

“Well, she’s not wrong.” Neville told him at the exasperated sigh and eyeroll Harry gave in response. “Though we really need to get you some new robes, Harry. Showing that much leg is fine in the summer, but I doubt you want to be bare-ankle-deep in snow come winter.”

“That’s the plan.” Harry told them as Luna linked arms with both boys and towed them out of Ludus, more than one patron of the pub and eatery turning to watch them go, likely storing away the sight to gossip over later. “Between Vertic and Regal we should be able to get everything we all need and avoid the droves on Diagon and Carkitt.”

“Are you finally going to take us into muggle London, Harry?” Luna asked, tilting her head in a near-coy gesture that had her curly blonde hair cascading down her side to her waist. “Since you refused earlier in the summer.”

“You were out of the country most of the summer if I recall.” Harry shot back with an arched brow, not letting her dump that in his lap. “And prying Nev away from his grandmother nearly requires a blasting curse or the Imperious. I’m still half-shocked she agreed to this trip. Even still, I doubt we’ve time for something like Harrods but a stop by Selfridge’s for notebooks and a few muggle stationary supplies we could do depending on how long everything else takes.”

“Her cousins Muriel and Tessie are visiting the Manor.” Neville explained with a grimace. If there was one thing that was a pain, it was how interwoven the English wizarding purebloods were. A prime example being his gran’s cousins Muriel and Teresa “Tessie” Prewett. Muriel was the aunt of Molly Weasley neé Prewett and the dreaded “Great Aunt Muriel” of Weasley fame while Tessie was the mother of a squib accountant whose daughter Mafalda would be starting Hogwarts this year, and a Black through her mother Lucretia’s line. Giving Neville yet another shirt-tail relation at the school along with all of the Weasleys, Draco Malfoy, and Harry himself all through their Black relations…and that was just one of the houses of England that had spiderwebbed blood connections all across the island and even into their nearest neighbors such as France, Navarre, and Spain.

“They’d rather I wasn’t underfoot, what with Great-Aunt Enid and her husband Algie coming over for the day as well.”

Harry’s green eyes narrowed at that name. He’d like a few moments alone under privacy spells with Algernon Wood, husband of Enid Wood neé Longbottom to…instruct him about how one did not treat their relatives. Not as badly as he’d like an hour alone with Gilderoy Lockheart, but at least he was in Azkaban now where he would stay for life, so severe were his crimes when they were done being stacked against him.

“No thoughts of murder today, Harry.” Luna scolded him with a cheeky grin, tugging at his arm as Nev shrugged in hapless apology when she shot him a glare over mentioning that name in front of Harry.

Such an odd creature was her friend.

Couldn’t fathom for the life of him that they should be offended on his behalf for all that he has enough stored up and bubbly fury at his own relatives to shake the ground earlier that summer but one word of Neville’s own hardships, even just mention of a name, and off he went plotting murder and mayhem.
Silly creature.

“Today is a good day.” She said with a firm tone that dared either boy to contradict her. “We are shopping and laughing and having far too many sweets before we have to go back to Hogwarts.”

The so there wasn’t spoken but heavily implied, both of the boys hearing it loud and clear and nodding quickly in response.

Harry might be the powerful one with a temper that didn’t stop and a vicious streak not far behind it but Luna was mean and sneaky when riled as they’d had cause to learn to their own misfortune not long before the summer break from school. Far too soon for them to want to tempt their luck with her again.

“As the lady commands.” Harry gave a flamboyant sweeping bow and wave of his wand arm, Luna attached like a barnacle to his other. “Onward, Sirrah Longbottom. To Twilfitt and Tattings!”

Neville groaned and slumped in place whilst still walking at that, already knowing that Harry was going to use the trip as an excuse to “replace those awful brown things you call casual clothes” as he’d been threatening to do since midway through first year.

It wasn’t as if it was Neville’s fault.

His gran had settled on brown clothes for him because of how much time he spent “scrabbling in the dirt like a poor, common muggleborn!” since they hid stains from plants and dirt the best.

Harry for some reason that had yet to be explained had issues with brown clothes.

And it wasn’t about them offending his sense of style as he claimed often enough given that Harry tended to wear interchangeable outfits of muggle jeans or trousers with plain cotton shirts in either short sleeves or long depending on the weather, with a jumper during the winter…and that was it outside of his uniform. He had casual robes that he color-coordinated over the muggle clothes, or more and more during second year as he grew wizarding versions of the same. But still, he was hardly a fashion-plate like Draco Malfoy.

Though, if Harry made them appointments with Masters Twilfitt and Tatting, Master Tailors, then Neville supposed that was about to change, as even Draco still bought his school uniform robes at Malkin’s.

Neville quickly found as he was towed and steered through Vertic Alley and through the park to Regal Alley that Harry had clearly done as much exploring as his few letters had made it seem, the dark-haired teen knowing exactly where he was going and how to get them there.

As a result, Neville hadn’t been in London for much more than a quarter hour before he found himself standing on a pedestal in Master Twilfit’s showroom, Harry on the same for Master Tatting, with Luna flitting through the various displays with one of the shop apprentices on her heels as she pointed to various things and described others and ideas for their clothes to the young witch who looked a little overwhelmed at the speed the Lovegood heiress was tossing out orders for their wardrobes.

“No need to worry, Heir Longbottom.” Master Twilfitt assured him after seeing where Neville’s rich brown gaze was trained rather than focusing on the fitting. “Your friend is in capable hands with my grandniece Euphasia and from the looks of things.” Jerome Twilfitt cast a hidden sneer at the pile of rubbish the Longbottom Heir had worn into his shop, barely a step more acceptable than that of Heir Potter’s if only because they mostly fit even if they did nothing for the lad. “Has a better idea of
what a young heir should be wearing than either of you.”

Master Tatting gave a soft snort in agreement, neither man afraid of offending the young wizards in their charge.

Twilfitt and Tatting’s wasn’t the sort of place one went to be pandered to, no matter the number of galleons one was willing to drop on a single outfit but where one went because they were masters of their craft, something that they held an English monopoly on as many craftsmen did as less and less suitable apprentices were found in each graduating class of Hogwarts. Other countries such as France and Navarre had no such problems. Indeed, if it wasn’t for young Euphasia taking to their craft, Masters Twilfitt and Tatting may have had to resort to searching aboard for apprentices.

Even so, manners were manners and neither man would be outright rude, no matter how offensive they found the shambles the teens had worn into their shop before having to shed said shambles for plain white linen undergarments of short pants that clung and a short-sleeved top that did the same, the best for taking accurate measurements and showing other fabrics and cuts to advantage.

Measurements taken, the Masters turned to ask regarding the specifics of their orders when Luna popped back up, Euphasia at her heels and hangers of clothing samples already selected in two very different color schemes.

Wise, as Harry and Neville not only had very different colorings but House Longbottom and House Potter also had House Colors on opposing sides of the spectrum.

“They’ll each need six sets of Hogwarts uniforms.” She rattled off, helping Euphasia hang the appropriate samples next to the right boy. “Three each in wool-blended silk for cool weather and three in linen-Egyptian cotton blend for warm weather. Harry’s in the alternate male uniform of trousers, shirt, and waistcoat in Ravenclaw striping with the House Crest on the blazer pocket. Neville will take the standard uniform in Gryffindor.”

Thankful for Dict-A-Quills, the tailors nodded as they started handing things to their living mannequins to try on and pin, their young vivacious friend and Euphasia having already collected the appropriate samples and thanks to the linking-spell on Euphasia’s scroll for notetaking, they were in the closest approximation to the boys’ sizes.

Luna continued, arms folded over her chest and arching a brow whenever it looked like one of the boys might object.

They’d brought this on themselves by procrastinating – especially Harry. Now they could suffer the consequences. Not that being well-dressed was a bad consequence, but she was well-aware that standing still and playing dress-up was often considered a sort of torture for boys her own age after listening to the Weasleys year after year growing up when she still played with Ginevra.

In this, Harry and Neville were no different than any other boy.

Silly creatures that they were.

Luna patted her lovely silk-and-linen swing skirt in shimmery blue with white embroidery.

It wasn’t as if she was going to turn them into subjects of mockery, she was an Heiress and knew well even at twelve what was expected of young persons of their station, though Harry’s was higher than either of them.

Most of the time, she simply didn’t give a hoot for conventions.
That didn’t mean she didn’t know when it was appropriate to pretend to follow them.

“Ten pairs of casual trousers, five in wool-silk and five in a thick Egyptian cotton. Harry’s should all be in either black or greys, though a dark green would be acceptable as well. Neville’s in black or tan, no brown. Seven long-sleeved shirts, three button-down in peacock, teal, and white wool-silk, two mandarin collar in peacock and soft grey silk, two lace neck in black and cream silk-linen. Seven short-sleeved woven shirts, four in silk-cotton blend black, cream, peacock, and emerald, three in cotton soft grey, deep blue, and crimson. He’ll need a dozen undershirts as well and a dozen pairs of boxer-brief cut pants in similar colors to his shirts.”

“Luna.” Harry hissed, a bit of a blush rising on his cheeks at her picking out his underwear.

“Really, Harry.” She rolled her eyes. “It’s just pants, not anything to blush over.”

Harry and Neville shared a mortified glance over the monster they’d created in letting Luna loose in the shop but bore it with a stoicism usually reserved for Ron Weasley’s endless diatribes on the evils of Slytherins or Hermione Granger.

“Are you going to the Wizengamot meeting next week before the start of school?” She asked, then added. “Or any of the parties held during the winter.”

“I’m not.” Neville told her, already knowing that he just got out of additional fittings for formal clothes.

“I am.” Harry sighed, even as Luna started adding more onto the order.

“Then a semi-formal jacket, peacock with light grey edging, and the Potter crest.” Luna added. “And a set of formal trousers in black, a formal silk shirt with French cuffs one shade lighter than the jacket, plus a tie and pocket square.” She frowned, thinking. “We’ll have to stop at the jewelers Harry, since you won’t be able to take any of the Potter cufflinks out of your vaults.”

“Yes, Luna.”

“Four overrobes as well.” Luna added. “Harry favors the knee-length of a more eastern cut, and one should be sleeveless for warm weather.”

“Wool-blend silk as well, Heiress Lovegood?” Euphasia asked, as her uncle and Master Tatting were busy getting the young wizards in and out of outfits and pinning and taking measurements.

“Yes, that’s fine.” Luna waved that off. “Plus socks, men’s trouser type in an array of blacks and greys should suit, though Neville will need some in a cream or tan as well.”

“Colors for Heir Longbottom? Are you doubling the order?”

“No lace-neck shirts for Neville.” Luna told her, looking over her shoulder to check her notes. “Add more button downs instead. And they’ll both need a few jumpers for cold weather. Say, three. Harry’s in dark blue, slate, and black. Neville’s garnet, rust, and pine. Earth tones for Neville on his shirts: garnet, rust, pine, pumpkin. Dark reds and oranges, dark greens, and blues, one or two black.”

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“Not that I don’t appreciate it.” Harry told her after Luna had had her turn on Master Tatting’s measuring platform, Harry and Neville conspiring as much with the tailors and Ms. Euphasia Twilfitt as Luna had marched in and taken over their own turns. “But why so much peacock?”
“It’s the color of your House, Harry.” Neville told him gently, knowing it burned Harry how much he had to find out secondhand about his own family. “Potters came from the Peverells, and their colors were two different shades of grey, a dark charcoal and a soft mist. Your house founder kept the lighter of the two greys, and married it to the peacock blue/teal from the feather he’d used as a maker’s mark for his potions.”

“Oh.” Harry’s face had that blank look Neville and Luna hated. The one that meant he was stuffing away some hurt or rage that he couldn’t direct at a target. At least not at the moment. “What about you two?”

“Aubergine and light blue.” Luna told him promptly, Neville adding:

“Garnet and pale gold.” He smirked. “Just off Gryffindor, yeah?”

“Look at it this way, my boys.” Luna pulled them along in her wake, heading straight for Goldstein Jewelers and Timepieces that was two storefronts down from T&T, with that side of the street having T&T, then Honoria Brown’s Ladies’ Wear, Goldstein’s, and then Leatherman’s Fine Footwear which would be their next stop. Luna could have gone to Brown’s for her clothes, but they catered more towards the debutante and ladies-who-lunch set rather than pre-coming-out young witches. T&T was perfectly fine for now and with the amount of coin they’d gotten in exchange for two wardrobes and a few pieces for Luna, they were more than willing to deal with the hassle of having Harry’s outfit for going to the Wizengamot ready in time, with the rest to arrive at their homes – or the bed and breakfast for Harry – just in time for them to pack the night before the Express.

Thankfully, with spellwork and not needing anything truly formal done, it wasn’t as onerous as the order would be otherwise.

“At least barring a massive growth spurt with the spellwork a master tailor like T&T can use, in nine days you’ll have the base of a wardrobe to last you at least until you start formally socializing at fifteen.”

Both teenaged wizards brightened at that.

Luna was a sneaky ninja clothes genius, especially with making sure that they had all kinds of clothes that could be mixed and matched.

Harry still wanted a few things from muggle London, like a warm peacoat, but now he had a base to work off of.

The three students wandered around Goldstein’s, but not for long or aimlessly as Anthony, who was in the same year as the boys and a fellow Ravenclaw like Harry and Luna, popped out of the back of the shop and started talking to Neville after a friendly greeting to both his housemates. With Neville occupied, Luna tugged Harry over towards the men’s cufflinks but didn’t do anything more. She’d already taken the reins over his wardrobe, it wouldn’t do to completely squash any of Harry’s choices since this was one of the few times she knew of where he was free to do shopping without having to worry about what his dratted relatives would ssay.

Besides which, he was the one who was going to have to wear the cufflinks. It wouldn’t do to pick something he really hated or didn’t know how to put on. There wouldn’t always be someone around like herself or Harry’s landlady at the b-and-b to help him along with those sorts of things.

The sorts of things he should know but thanks to the aforementioned relatives and Dumbledore’s shoddy guardianship, he didn’t.
It didn’t take him long to settle on a pair of diamond shaped labradorite cufflinks with a nice shine and a deep blue-teal color that would go nicely with most of his shirts.

“See Harry.” She teased him a bit as they wandered back out of Goldstein’s, Anthony bidding them a cheerful good day that was only partly spurred on by the price Harry had parted with for his cufflinks. “You do have good taste once you’ve been pointed in a direction.”

“Yes, yes, yes.” Harry rolled his eyes and wrinkled his nose at Neville when he laughed at him. “I can wear more than plain blue or white shirts with denim trousers. So you’ve told me. What’s next, shoes? Mine are a bit dodgy after a couple years of use…and I’m pretty sure my feet are growing ten times as fast as my legs.”

“Same.” Neville complained with a bit of a pout. “My toes keep crunching up even with built-in expansion charms.”

“Leatherman’s.” Luna steered them into the shop next door. “All of us need new shoes and boots I think. Plus formal calf-boots for Harry to wear to the Wizengamot. Then a break.”

“Oh thank Merlin.” Neville whispered to Harry as their blonde-haired dynamo of a friend left them in front of the men’s boots and flittered to-and-fro over by the more brightly-colored young ladies section. “My tum’s starting to think my teeth are fused together.”

“And to think.” Harry said with more than a hint of dire warning in his voice. “This is only the clothes. We both still need potion supplies, general school supplies, and you need your books, plus everything again for Luna.”

“Why did we think this was a good idea?”

“Never been shopping with a young witch before.” Harry shivered. “Lesson well learned, my friend.”

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They did get their break at Nuada’s Spear, an up-market gastropub in Regal Alley, before Harry shanghaied Neville into hitting Blackwood’s for a wand consult.

To no surprise, his dad’s wand was most definitely not right for Neville.

“Gran’s going to cork it if I come home with a new wand.” He fretted, even as they finished the rest of their shopping on Vertic Alley, Neville’s new wand — less hassle than Harry’s to fashion with it’s reasonably pliant single-wood of English Oak (Harry learning that it was the issue of his dual woods that had added an additional challenge to his wand, as well as the problematic cores) with twin cores of dittany stalk and unicorn tail hair bound with Neville’s blood — set to be ready in about an hour of crafting.

“How would she know unless you tell her?” Harry arched a brow. “You bought a holster for it and I paid for the wand itself,” which thanks to the more commonly found wood and cores wasn’t near as expensive as Harry’s. “And unless she’s decided you can be “trusted” to cast magic at home, it’s not like she’s going to see it.”

“Unless one of the professors mentions it.” Luna pointed out reasonably. “Though I don’t think I’ve heard anything about any of them being on good terms with Madam Longbottom.”

“Dumbles might just to be a shit after the trouble he’s in.” Harry groaned, muttering under his breath for a moment. “I know from Dodge that the ICW at least is considering a vote of No Confidence
given the scandals in the last few years coming from Britain.”

“Scandals you’ve kicked up you mean.” Neville teased him a bit, glad to have something else to think about besides the coming fight with his gran – whether his summer or later, she’d find out and kick off eventually.

“Right. That.” Harry shrugged, completely unrepentant. If Dumbledore hadn’t been an epic shit guardian, none of this would be happening – except probably the issue with Sirius Black – so it was the man’s own damn fault. Not that he likely saw it that way but that wasn’t Harry’s problem until the old goat finally got off his duff and did something about it. “Which means he might strike out at either of you since he can’t get to me, Dodge has seen to that.”

“We know we’re targets Harry.” Neville told him, brown eyes taking on a serious cast as Luna skipped ahead, the crowds parting for her like air. “We were targets before we ever became friends with you. Our lives are better for being friends with you, not worse. Even with barmy old goats to worry about.” Neville gave him a bit of a sly smirk and a shoulder nudge. “We wouldn’t trade it. At least it makes things interesting.”

“Fair enough.” Harry laughed. “At least you’ll never be able to say I didn’t try and warn you.”

Harry trudged back through the Horizont access point from muggle London, Neville and Luna already whisked away on the Knight Bus towards Longbottom Manor and The Rookery, all three of them hitting that peculiar wall of too much running around, too much sugar, and too many adrenaline spikes for one day.

If Stan didn’t have to shake one or both awake at their stops, Harry would eat his new set of notebooks, binding and all.

He brightened up at the sight of Snuffles – no matter how many times the dog gave a huffing-sigh at the name, it’d stuck considering the way the black creature tended to snuffle at Harry’s hands, pockets, face, anything he could reach really – waiting and dozing under “his” bush across from the bed and breakfast. Harry hadn’t figured out where Snuffles was going or what he was doing when he was elsewhere, other than scrounging for handouts anyway like any self-respecting stray, but whatever it was tended to leave the dog in need of another shampooing charm. Not that Harry minded, it was good practice at least for his Care class starting this rapidly-approaching schoolyear.

Snuffles returned, day in and day out, to doze under the bush and wait for Harry to either pop his head out from his studying and reading or to return from another day out in the magical district.

Today was the first time Harry had really diverted from that self-imposed habit, let alone wandered out into muggle London, but it was worth it to see the looks of wonder on his pureblooded friends’ faces at the tube, Kensington Park, and Selfridges, which merely made him ever more set in his decision to haul them into Harrod’s next summer.

Harry himself had never been to the landmark shopping center, as many natives of such places tended to overlook them, but even he found himself a bit excited at the idea.

Besides which, even he, as choice-crippled as he’d once been for anything not having to do with school, knew that personal shoppers were a thing.

Though it might take a bit of convincing to make an appointment for a trio of teenagers but it’d be worth it to get Luna at least into something with a little more shape than witch’s robes tended to
favor, even if Luna had done a good job of talking Masters Twilfitt and Tatting to take in her bespoke dresses a bit more at the waist and bust than tended to be considered “suitable” for a young witch.

Suitable meaning anything not a shapeless sack made of varying materials or bulky jumpers and school robes.

“Hey Snuffles.” Harry knelt down to pet his canine friend, ignoring the shopping bags he was still toting around since he hadn’t wanted to out his wand use outside of school, relying on shopkeepers to shrink things on the alleys and having to tote around his muggle purchases as-is. “Sorry I’m late, boy.”

Snuffles gave him an adoring look, then lived up to his namesake by snuffling at his hands and face, Harry laughing at the sensation that tickled a bit on his cheeks, then rose.

“I’ll be right back, Snuffles, promise.” Harry told him, trotting across the narrow cobblestone street that had never heard of automobiles let alone expanded to accommodate them, dropping off his bags and robe. Snatching up a portion of the cooked, de-boned chicken Harry had stored in his chill-chest, he made it back down to the patiently waiting Snuffles within a matter of a couple minutes, handing over the chicken into the dog dish and refilling the water bowl after a cautious glance around before flicking his wand out of its holster. “I don’t know what I’m going to do about you when I have to leave for school, boy.” Harry murmured anxiously, one hand petting along the silky black fur. “You’ve been doing so much better these last weeks than when I found you.”

They stayed like that, boy and dog, for long minutes even after Snuffles finished his dinner.

Harry petting the massive black dog that was regaining some of its former mass thanks to regular meals, and the dog resting his squarish head in Harry’s lap once the boy sat cross-legged on the hard-packed ground, staring up at him with adoring silver-grey eyes.

A daily reprieve from weathering the stormy waters of Wizarding Great Britain, one each needed just as much as the other.

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Author’s Note:

*Neville’s Wand: English Oak* - A wand for good times and bad, this is a friend as loyal as the wizard who deserves it. Wands of English oak demand partners of strength, courage and fidelity.

**Primary Core: Dittany Stalk** - Dittany is a healing and restorative herb, in addition to Dittany's essence being applied topically, the raw plant can be consumed to heal shallow to moderate wounds. Extremely powerful, a wizard with a core of dittany stalk has a strong predilection for both healing and earth magics though not necessarily herbology. Dittany prefers to help not harm, as such it is unsuited for the wand of a warrior or duelist, though is capable of casting strong spells to protect another.

**Secondary Core: Unicorn Tail Hair** – Unicorn hair can be used in wandmaking; they produce the most consistent magic, least subject to fluctuations and blockages, most difficult to turn to the Dark Arts and the most faithful of wands. However, they do not make the most powerful of wands (unless the wandwood or another core compensates) and are prone to melancholy if mishandled.
Blood of My Blood

When Darkness Comes

Author’s Note: Gender-neutral nouns for wizarding culture: plural – wixen; singular: wix.

Blood of My Blood

29 August 1993, British Ministry of Magic, London

It was the scandal of the decade.

The Ministry of Magic for Wizarding Great Britain accused – and unable to rebut – of stealing the inherited ancestral property of not only an Heir of a Noble House, the Potter line dating back to 1180 with the birth of Linfred of Stitchcombe “The Potterer” who was responsible for the base of many modern potions including Pepper-Up, but also that of the Boy-Who-Lived.

The hue and cry was raised not just among the average magical citizenry but also the gentry and nobility, the case affecting those both great and small for varying reasons but one in particular that struck all most deeply:

If the Ministry could do as such to Harry Potter, what might they do to them?

It was the same rallying cry that was causing a ruckus over the imprisonment and Kiss-on-Sight order regarding Sirius Orion Black III.

If then-Minister Bagnold and then-Head of the DMLE Barty Crouch Sr. could toss away a son of an Ancient and Noble, let alone ridiculously wealthy, House such as the House of Black, was anyone safe?

The articles nearly wrote themselves as far as the main Ministry Correspondent Martin Mimblewimble was concerned, though the more lurid speculations he left for Rita Skeeter’s column.

That both sources of outrage for Wizarding Great Britain could be traced to the law offices of Dodge and Dodge and likely their very high-profile client Harry Potter, which was a given for the former and an assumption on the latter, occurred to very few outside those who either knew for a certainty or were well-versed enough in political manipulation themselves to spot when another was dabbling in it.

Though Edwardius would be the first to point out that when it came to his client Mr. Potter, there is very little dabbling in anything going on.

Potter was a strange creature from Edwardius’s studied observations.

He had a power that was unheard-of in a wizard his age, most only gaining the full breadth of their power after their third and last magical influx at sixteen, let alone before the second at fourteen, and even among mature wixen was perhaps occurring in one magical human in a generation or less. But it wasn’t just power. As if Potter’s power was just anything.

Wixen tended to think of power in a limited number of ways: magical, political, familial, social, and financial.

Doing so overlooked another source of power, one that Potter was harnessing to his advantage much
in the same way that the two of his same ilk that came before him had done: knowledge.

More: attaining knowledge and learning to apply it.

Knowledge just for knowledge’s sake was no more useful than a tchotchke in a windowsill: pretty, decorative, if of a certain rarity something to brag over with friends or enemies, but ultimately only that and nothing more.

*Applied* knowledge on the other hand was what made Voldemort far more terrifying than Grindelwald for those who had lived through both regimes.

Grindelwald had the greater body count, this was true.

But where Grindelwald relied upon his army of followers and his own powers, Voldemort did things with magic that had never been imagined or conceived of, even by the foil to both Dark Lords: Albus Dumbledore the unspoken “Light” Lord of Wizarding Great Britain.

Harry Potter had all the inventiveness that made Voldemort terrifying, the social approval that made Dumbledore a near-king in political venues, familial magics dating further than Dumbledore could claim and equal – or nearly so – to that of the last Heir of Slytherin, more money than both of them combined, and raw magical power at thirteen to equal them.

He was terrifying, and he was only thirteen and gone through a single magical influx at eleven.

Though part of Edwardius’s pessimism over watching the rise of who he was certain would become the next leader of wizarding Great Britain was assuaged by what he’d chosen to do with his power thus far.

He’d insisted on seeking justice for a young witch.

He’d sought restitution of his ancestral property.

And he was seeking justice, again, this time for his own godfather and third cousin.

Hardly the acts of a rising Dark Lord, but ones that had at the same time squarely put him in opposition with both Dumbledore – who from what Edwardius could tell his young client loathed – and now the Ministry of Magic.

He wondered how long it had been since England had claimed a Grey Lord of Magic?

Still, Potter was young, Edwardius glanced at his client out of the corner of his eye as he led the growing wizard down to Courtroom One, the largest courtroom the Ministry boasted, a necessity given the amount of attention the lawsuit against the Ministry had gained before the Wizengamot demanded that the issue be brought before them for mediation given that the Ministry was making no attempts to remedy the situation themselves.

There was plenty of time for the teenager to set himself a path.

After all, with his power, all his power, he could do anything he wanted or nothing at all.

Edwardius was simply glad that he’d chosen Potter’s side early with taking on his case against the media and publishers who had been using his name and image without permission.

It would, he was certain, without a doubt prove a safer place should anyone spur the temper of Harry Potter than anywhere else on this island.
Cameras flashed, and the press cried out questions from both sides of the long corridor as Edwardius led his client into Courtroom One.

It was a first in modern history, a private citizen taking on the Ministry of Magic and the case actually making to a public hearing before the Wizengamot without either being bought-off with a settlement or hushed up using less scrupulous means.

Edwardius looked as pious and stern as any fire-and-brimstone vicar from the Regency with his starched black robes with only the bit of relief offered by the snow-white cravat at his throat and the lapel pin set with a moonstone to denote his mastery of an area of Mental Magic. Moonstone by and large was well-represented in the Wizengamot chambers or the halls of the DMLE if no where else. Occlumency Mastery was a requisite for higher-level law enforcement or magical solicitors like himself. And while there was no actual rule requiring members of the Council of Magical Law (a subsidiary of the Wizengamot that oversaw simple matters of law-breaking), the Wizengamot, or the Lords’ Moot be Master Occlumense, it was certainly encouraged.

At his side, his client was a bright splash of color in his semi-formal jacket in the style of affluent wizardry, the rich peacock blue of the Acromantula silk gleaming in the light of the corridor and the flash of the cameras with the open collar, styled lapel, and cuffs in a real-silver embroidered black velvet complementing the light-bronze skin of a young wizard who had spent quite a bit of time out-of-doors exploring the London Magical District. Worn open over a soft-grey silk shirt and woven silk-cotton trousers in black with matching black dragonhide ankle-boots, Harry Potter looked every inch the young heir and future Lord of the Noble House of Potter, down to the labradorite cufflinks at his wrists that were a near-exact match for the peacock blue of his jacket. For once, Harry hadn’t pulled his hair back in a severe tail to hide his infamous scar but allowed it to softly wave – tamed with charmwork no doubt – to his shoulders.

All that was missing, many thought after getting their first looks at the Potter Heir since his parents had died, from the picture of a perfect pureblood heir was a signet ring on his hand and a betrothal cuff upon his wrist – the latter lack being one certain to send the eligible parties of the Wizarding World into a tizzy when it hit the pages of Witch Weekly.

They were dressed to provide a certain impression, especially considering the impression usually made by the day’s opponents.

It would be in extremely poor taste for the Wizengamot to allow Chief Warlock Dumbledore to preside over the hearing, given that he is one of the parties listed – once again – in the lawsuit. He, along with former-Minister Bagnold, and the current Minister for Magic Fudge, were the “opponents” whom Dodge had to present the case alongside and defend against though one of them – likely Bagnold – had caved to wisdom and agreed to the presence of a Law Advocate, one Pius Thickness who was usually one of the DMLE’s fiercest prosecutors with his shoulder-length dirty blond hair and humorless mien. Harry hadn’t had to be in court the last time, when Dodge took on several publishers in a mass lawsuit over his name for two reasons: one he’d been at school and two he’d been eleven.

At thirteen, however, and with the hearing intentionally scheduled towards the end of the summer break, Harry was present and set to impress in contrast to both his own starkly-dressed solicitor and the ludicrously attired Fudge and Dumbledore, through Bagnold at least had the sense to wear simple-but-correct robes in a deep navy and Thickness wore the expected robes of a Law Advocate in the employ of the Ministry rather than one working in the private sector.

Harry wasn’t there as the Boy-Who-Lived or a student.
He was there as the future Lord of House Potter and from head to toe that was how Luna had helped turn him out.

All the same, it took the utmost of control – on both their parts – when the journalistic morass parted before the gateway to the courtroom floor and the “defense” bench and Harry and Edwardius saw Dumbledore tricked out in flamboyant magenta and lemon robes beside the awful lime-green bowler-and-suit of Fudge.

Honestly, it was enough to near-sear their corneas from the warring whirl of colors.

Neither sense nor taste was the considered opinion of more than one of both the old guard of the Wizengamot and those present in the public galleries, though few would dare say as such even with the currently-tarnished state of the Headmaster’s reputation.

Well, aside from a few reckless or idiotic souls such as Rita Skeeter.

For Harry it was enough that the Minister and Headmaster suffered in comparison to himself rather than they be eviscerated in print, though he did enjoy it when Skeeter got in a particularly clever play on words regarding either wizard.

The Wizengamot itself was filled to brimming with both the official representatives and varied seat-holders as well as their Heirs who while unable to vote on the matter were there both to learn from the process, Harry’s case being the first of its kind, and to gather their gossip first-hand. Members were easy to discern from their Heirs by the golden “W” crest pinned to the left breast pocket or lapel of their semi-formal black robes while their Heirs for the most part were attired either in plain black like the Members or in their House colors like Harry, none so garishly attired as Dumbledore or Fudge. What was of particular interest for Harry was laying eyes on a few of his cousins for the first time.

In the process of his genealogy research for History of Magic, he’d found that he had much more relatives within the fifth-degree – the degree required for a relation to be considered for guardianship – than he’d thought.

Neville he’d known as his god-brother had informed him of both their distant relation, being third cousins once removed, and their status of having mothers that named one another as their godmothers.

That conversation had been early in their friendship in first year.

Harry had tucked it away for later thought, especially with the project handed down to research one of the “founding” wixen of their family lines sending Harry tunneling further into the bloodlines of his wixen family than ever before.

He had only one relative more distantly related than Neville within the fifth degree, one Emma Hitchens his fourth cousin, another third once-removed in Mafalda Prewett who would be joining them at Hogwarts this year, it was once you got closer in relation (not counting his Spanish – or perhaps Basque – cousins he could find frustratingly little about) that he got angry. There was no need for him to go to the Dursleys. None. Not with a total of twenty – roughly – relations alive and kicking within three degrees of relation, several of which included both Andromeda Black Tonks and Narcissa Black Malfoy, Barty Crouch Senior, Arthur Weasley, and Arnold Prewett, all of whom were adults with children of their own and more than capable of serving as Harry’s guardian.

The problem, from what Harry could see, was that if Dumbledore had allowed Harry to go to a wixen home they would have immediately become his legal and magical guardians as well as
physical, preventing the old bastard from accessing both Harry’s vaults and his political power as Heir Potter and the Boy Who Lived.

He’d lost that power in the end but it had been a run of over nine years that he’d had it and used it to build himself up.

Fucker.

Harry knew himself well enough to realize that a good third of how he behaved was motivated solely on spite.

Dumbledore had given him more than enough reason to want to spite him and if it took Harry nine times nine years to take away every bit of prestige and power the coot had gained by using him and his dead parents he would do it – plus interest.

This lawsuit was only the newest in a set of opening moves to curb Dumbledore’s power and tarnish that prestige.

Harry was young, yes, but he knew the value of the long game.

And of the two of them he had more than enough time to see it through, even with the extended lifespans of wixen the world over.

When they won this court case – and they would – it would be one more strike against Dumbledore.

Another point on the tally and reason for increased oversight at Hogwarts.

The latter of which had already begun with the governing board taking an active interest in the old coot’s hiring practices after last year’s pedophile, staving off the hiring of the grounds keeper – a perfectly nice but uneducated man – for the Care of Magical Creatures professorship though they’d found nothing wrong with his candidate for Defense or so he’d been informed by Petunia who didn’t take an active interest in Harry’s board seat but was kept appraised by Lord Malfoy, the Head, as was proper.

That it probably irritated the blood purist to deal with a squib regarding the Board was merely icing on the cake for Harry, though he’d never met the wizard himself.

Malfoy wasn’t hard to find thanks to sharing the same platinum-blond hair with his son and Heir that Harry easily spotted in the Wizengamot member gallery, Draco seeming to have had a growth spurt or two of his own as his features had refined from the unfortunate pointiness they’d had last year over the summer, smoothing into a less pinched demeanor. Eyes drifting from one blond wizard to the other, Harry took in the differences of which there were many despite common opinion regarding the pair. Draco had taken quite a bit from his mother’s Black blood, particularly in the eyes. He had the white-blond hair of a Malfoy but it was joined by quicksilver eyes that marked strong Black blood, fine nose, and a high brow. Lucius was…softer. His features just as noble as the aristocratic cheekbones and cut jaw he’d given his son but, yes, softened by elegant arching brows, lush lips, and bright sapphire eyes.

Heir Malfoy was well on the way to being a pretty man.

His father was beautiful, a thought not helped a bit by the long platinum hair that trailed over one shoulder and elegant hands with a heavy signet on his right middle finger resting on the head of a cane before him, let alone the dark bookends on either side of him.

On Lord Malfoy’s right was a wizard any student of Hogwarts recognized, Professor Snape joining
the Wizengamot in the guise of Lord Prince for this occasion in his stark black robes only lightened by the golden “W” of a member’s crest while on Malfoy’s left was who, based on the black and deep maroon of his robes, was none other than another of Harry’s cousins – Altair Rodolhus LeStrange, Draco sitting on the row behind his father and cousin and between them – with Altair’s grandfather and the current Lord LeStrange on his far side.

Cousin Altair – second cousin once removed the same as Altair’s first cousin Draco – was as dark as his mother and father (though none were certain which of Bellatrix’s LeStrange husbands had fathered him they’d named him for the elder of the twins regardless) with ink-black hair in a short stylish cut, olive skin from the LeStrange side, and eyes almost as dark a brown as Professor Snape’s infamous black.

Blood will out, Altair was as darkly handsome as Lord Malfoy was beautiful, a trait those of Black blood at least seemed to share even if Altair’s mother was as crazy as a bedbug.

Still, having all of the Old Houses present would work in Harry’s favorite given that they loved nothing so much for the most part than spitting Dumbledore a trait Harry could appreciate given that it was one of his own favored pastimes.

And they were all present, every last one that had a member capable of lodging a vote if Harry’s count was right and judging from the carefully-hidden dismay on the part of Bagnold he thought he was, Dumbledore too arrogant and Fudge too idiotic to realize that such would not be working in either of their favors.

Many of those members, being of old families, remembered the Old Ways.

Harry was blood of their blood.

The Blood War had been so terrible in many respects because those who’d followed Dumbledore had forgotten that, earning themselves the appellation of blood-traitor, choosing nascent loyalties towards the Ministry or the Order of the Phoenix instead of the word of the Lord’s Moot or the dictation of their families.

As history showed over and over again, there was no conflict so bloody and horrifying as that of brother turned against brother.

Adding magic merely changed the playing field.

Edwardius and Harry took their places and the most-senior member of the Wizengamot – and the Lord’s Moot for that matter – Lord Tiberius Ogden stood to call the court to order.

…

“Court Scribe.” Ogden commanded as Lucius took in the two opposing sides of the matter.

To the right: a trio of ministerial arrogance with their unfortunate law wizard assigned by the DMLE.

And on the left: a pair of wizards that had spent the last two years steadily consolidating their power, Heir Potter running a master class on how to manage the concerns of a Lordship even whilst years away from gaining said lordship as his solicitor did everything within the power of the law to use the name of Heir Potter towards the Heir’s interests.

Potter was powerful of that there was no contestation, even Lucius’s best friend in one Severus Snape – who had nothing good to say regarding one James Potter, could not deny that Harry Potter was a different sort than his father and grandfather, more in line with his Black grandmother than
anyone else in close relation…though Lucius could admit with the temperance granted by time and maturity that Lily Evans had been both powerful and cunning enough to shame any Slytherin Pureblood worth either distinction.

More importantly to his Lord – and therefore Lucius himself – Harry Potter, heir to the Potter Lordship, wasn’t a Light scion as his father had been though he likewise wasn’t Dark but rather Grey.

Britain hadn’t had a Grey or Neutral Lord in over a century.

They also hadn’t had a Grey Lord that was more inclined towards Dark over Light since the creation of the Ministry of Magic.

Not that Potter was a Lord of Magic.

Not yet.

Perhaps not ever.

Still, it was worth the effort and time to wait and watch and keep their council until Potter decides who he would become one way or another whilst Lucius’s Lord re-forges the Dark Campaign from the shadows.

To give James Potter credit, while many had been outraged by his spurning of his betrothal contract to Pulmeria Parkinson for the sake of his muggleborn love, he’d made a powerful heir whose looks had only benefited from Evans’ loveliness, even if he yet had the occasionally-awkward angles of a young teen and the roundness of youth in his cheeks. One day he’d likely be one of the most attractive wizards of his generation. Barring any unfortunate events during his maturation or spell damage anyway.

Lucius was curious to see it.

Not for Draco’s sake, no, his own son and heir had already developed a fierce and devout attraction for the fairer sex.

But with the power of young Potter and the recent addition of fresh blood to his line, Harry Potter would in only another year be of the age of consent and able to receive courtship offers. Lucius’s contemporaries would be just as likely to seek out his hand on their own accord as for their heirs. In a society that lived to well over two centuries if prudent with their health, a gap of even as much as thirty years or more was negligible though most preferred to keep company with those within twenty-five years of their own age. Fifty was still young for a wixen. A hundred years approaching middle age barring spell damage or delving into more toxic or wearing branches of magical study.

Yes, Potter would be quite the catch indeed given the state of the pureblood houses.

Eventually the court scribe ponderously stood and began to read the charges brought by Dodge before the Wizengamot on behalf of his young charge and Lucius’s attention was snagged by the matter at hand.

“Brought before the Wizengamot this the twenty-ninth day of August, Nineteen Ninety-Three, is the matter of Potter versus the Ministry of Magic for Wizarding Great Britain. Wherein the complainant claims the following: that the Ministry of Magic did seize without cause the ancestral property of the Noble House of Potter whereupon being made aware of claimed seizure House Potter did attempt resolution out of court but was rebuffed by the Respondents and in an attempt to peacefully resolve this complain has lodged it with the Wizengamot for mediation. Complainant undersigned: one
Harry James Antioch Potter, heir of House Potter. Counsel for the Complainant: one Honorable Edwardius Dodge, Law Wizard. Respondents: one Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot at the time of alleged seizure; one Honorable Millicent Bagnold, Law Witch, Minister of Magic for Great Britain at the time of alleged seizure; one Cornelius Fudge, current Minister of Magic.”

“At least we won’t be bored.” Lucius’s nephew by marriage Altair murmured under his breath in amusement after a glance at the myriad colors that the “respondents” were turning from the Scribe’s recitation.

“No, no we won’t.” Sev agreed quietly, amusement carefully hidden as always in public. “Potter can be accused of many things but being boring certainly isn’t one of them.”

“These are serious accusations.” Chief Warlock Pro-Tem Ogden noted once the Scribe retook his seat. “I hope Law Wizard Dodge that you have documentation to support your claims of attempted resolution before bringing this matter before the courts.”

Whilst not strictly against the law, it was very much considered bad form for one to bring an issue straight to the Wizengamot instead of seeking other methods of resolution or recompense first.

Standing, Dodge gathered a folio that still had the seals intact from an independent authenticator, likely believing – rightly given Fudge’s habits let alone those of Dumbledore – that if he’d relied on the DMLE some or all of the materials he’d collected regarding the case would have gone conveniently missing the day of the trial when it was too late for him to recover whatever copies he’d made for such a happenstance.

Many traditions have atrophied in the last century in Wizarding Great Britain but paranoia wasn’t one of them.

At a gesture from Ogden a bailiff collected the folio from Dodge – only one of several all with seal intact – and offered it to the Chief Warlock Pro-Tem, who read through the authentication in silence before handing it back to the bailiff who cast a quick and precise duplication charm that had copies of the originals that were returned to Dodge zooming over to appear before each Wizengamot Member.

Lucius and his political bloc, which included his godfather Roland LeStrange, Severus as Lord Prince, and Nigel Rosier who despite his youthful appearance was coming up on a century of age, could almost feel the glee coming from the Moderates, especially Amelia, Lady Bones and the head of the DMLE, at the paper trail that included letters sent and received between Dodge and Fudge or his office regarding the matter and listing out almost a year’s worth of attempts at resolution outside of the courts.

Fudge, that damned idiot, had ignored or out-right refused all requests save for a few blustery responses that read very much like a callous disregard for the severity of the issue.

“Very well.” Ogden said, waving his hand towards Dodge. “Present your suit, Law Wizard Dodge.”

Dodge nodded and stepped out from around the carved oak table, taking easy command of the cavernous courtroom as lights flashed from the reporters’ cameras and the viewing galleries hummed with whispers, the stern eyes of the Wizengamot bearing down upon him – not that you’d think he’d noticed by the ease of movement and speech the wizard used as he made his case before them.

“Wixen of the Wizengamot.” Dodge began, his voice in no need of charms to reach all corners of
the massive room thanks to long years of practice and elocution. “Today on behalf of my client Harry James Antioch Potter, Heir of the Noble House of Potter, I bring before you all a most grievous offence. By the presentation of evidence and testimony, we will prove beyond doubt that the Ministry of Magic over Great Britain did knowingly, willfully, and unlawfully seize the ancestral property of House Potter.”

Advocate for the respondents, Pius Thickness, stood at that and waited for acknowledgement of the Chief Warlock Pro-Tem before registering his rebuttal to the complainant’s opening statement, beginning the “arguing” portion of affairs which would volley back and forth and include the presentation of evidence and if necessary eventually give way to testimony beyond that of the claimants and respondents.

“Members of the Wizengamot.” Thickness spoke in a voice as equally resounding as his opponents. He already knew he was going to lose this case, they didn’t have a leg to stand on. Still. The respondents and therefore the Ministry didn’t have a choice but to try thanks to Fudge’s stout refusal to treat with Heir Potter. “That the property currently known as the Potter Monument in Godric’s Hollow was obtained by the Ministry of Magic in 1981 is not in dispute by the respondents. However, it is the assertion of said respondents that the property was lawfully transferred into the care of the Ministry of Magic of Great Britain and defy Law Wizard Dodge to prove otherwise.”

“Oh, Pius I thought you’d never ask.” Dodge shot back teasingly. It was a bit unprofessional, yes, but given how many times the Council of Magical Law and the Wizengamot combined had seen the pair arguing cases opposite each other since they graduated in the same year from Hogwarts and finished their law studies neck-in-neck for the top of their class it was also an expected bit of unprofessionalism. “Under what law did the Ministry obtain possession of the ancestral Potter property?”

Thickness glanced down at the notes on the case he’d cobbled together with help of several junior law wizards and researchers in the DMLE.

“It was a legal transfer of property overseen by Minister of Magic Bagnold on behalf of the Ministry of Magic and Chief Warlock Dumbledore as Heir Potter’s magical guardian.”

“What payment was rendered for the transfer of property?” Edwardius continued with his line of questioning, leading Pius to an end that from the ever-deepening scowl on the face of both Thickness and Bagnold at least some of them could see coming. With Dumbledore’s affectations it was impossible to tell if the old man ever knew what was going on or not.

“None.” Pius admitted reluctantly. “The Ministry of Magic has no record of payment either being demanded or provided regarding the property transfer.”

“And what date was this legal transfer of property?”

Pius took a deep breath, refraining from sighing. He’d known it was going to come down to this. The only question was whether Edwardius was going to use the gathered evidence for this matter to beat home another that had been in the gears for the better part of two months or Pius was a sea monkey.

“First November, 1981.”

“First November.” Edwardius repeated softly. “Not even a full day after the tragedy of Godric’s Hollow and Mister Dumbledore and Minister Bagnold were stealing the ancestral property of the newly orphaned Potter Heir. More,” he continued ruthlessly as he held out folios to the bailiff for authentication and dissemination to the Wizengamot. “At that time, Mister Dumbledore was not the
magical or legal guardian of one Harry James Antioch Potter as the court case from Summer 1991 regarding Mister Dumbledore’s other unlawful actions of kidnapping has made clear. As Mister Dumbledore was at that time not Heir Potter’s guardian, that office was still in the hands of Sirius Black and any legal matters, including the transfer of property, were therefore illegal without his permission and authority.”

Harry almost couldn’t hear himself think over the roar from the galleries – including the Wizengamot gallery not just the press or the public – at that masterstroke.

It took Ogden several long minutes to call the courtroom back to order before he was free to review the documentation regarding Dodge’s statement, including the notarized affidavit from Gringotts that made it clear Dumbledore hadn’t been registered as Harry’s guardian in their halls until November the Fourth after Sirius Black’s remanding to Azkaban Prison.

An affidavit that included his sentencing to Azkaban but, curiously, no documentation of his trial.

A lack that as of the end of this public affair would become a matter of public record over and above the media firestorm that the Ministry was currently undergoing regarding Sirius Black.

“Sirius Black is a murderer!” Fudge burst out, face an unbecoming puce as he was unable to keep himself under control any further. Or the silencing spell he’d been placed under pre-trial had finally worn off. Either way. Judging by the sneer and eye-roll from Bagnold one wouldn’t have to look far to find the culprit if he had been under a Silencio.

“You don’t say?” Dodge asked idly, a layer of satisfied smoke curling through his voice as the Wizengamot turned – one by one – varying degrees of shocked pale, angry red, or for the most controlled among them retained their neutral masks as he kept careful watch of their review of the curious case of Sirius Black. Fudge’s refusals to treat with Harry about the Godric’s Hollow cottage was an annoyance. But it was an annoyance that allowed them to do an end-run around both the DMLE and the bowler-hat wearing idiot and his spangled old coot of a puppet master since anything in regards to Godric’s Hollow could be used as evidence to help mediate the dispute. Including evidence that leaned heavily towards Sirius Black being unlawfully remanded to prison in the first place. “Since, as of midnight last night when the deadline for submission of evidence for this case was complete, there was no evidence on record for the case of Sirius Orion Black. Not for murder. Not for treason. Not for collusion to commit murder. Nothing.” Edwardius’s eyes narrowed on the pair squirming on the hard chairs of the courtroom. Dumbledore didn’t bother. He knew they couldn’t do more than continue to hurt his reputation with this line of arguing their case. If it was an inquest into the sentencing of war criminals that would be a different story. “As far as the law is concerned, twelve years ago a man – a noble, Pureblooded Heir to an Ancient and Noble House – was thrown in prison and his place as guardian to another figure of high public importance was usurped without so much as a by your leave!”

“Enough, Solicitor Dodge.” Ogden commanded. “This is not your personal soapbox to advance your client’s agenda regarding his godfather but a mediation hearing.”

“Yes, MW Ogden.” Dodge tilted his head in genial agreement with the order.

At least he’d said it in open court and made it a matter of record first. Worst case, it’d be talked about in the gossip columns tomorrow and stick in the minds of Wizarding Great Britain. Best case, the Wizengamot would immediately overturn Sirius’s sentence pending a trial. What would likely happen would no doubt fall between the two extremes if Edwardius was reading the Members correctly – along with the public galleries as the latter often meant more than the former when it came to what the Wizengamot decided when it came to cases of open court.
“Advocate Thickness, do the respondents have any evidence to provide the court contrary to Solicitor Dodge’s claims?”

Thickness conferred with the lackluster trio for a long moment, shaking his head often before addressing the court, facial expression and body language making it clear that he didn’t agree with whatever had been said but given his position had to spout it anyway.

“Merely that as Mister Dumbledore served as Heir Potter’s guardian for almost a decade without issue.”

“Because Heir Potter didn’t see hide nor hair of him during that time.” Someone from the gallery heckled. “Soon as the mite returned to the Wizarding World, the old coot was out on his spangled behind!”

Harry almost choked on his need to laugh at that, as did several members of the Wizengamot as the galleries once more fell into an uproar.

Edwardius stood in the wake of the storm, calm and collected, as he waited for Ogden to bring the court back into order. That didn’t mean he wasn’t going to laugh his arse off later. Oh no. That was one for the record books.

And coin well spent in just the right pocket no less.

“As had been made clear given the authenticated documents provided by your opposition, Advocate Thickness.” Ogden noted dryly. “Term of guardianship aside, at the time of the transfer of property it was not within Mister Dumbledore’s authority to sign part of Heir Potter’s inheritance away. Court will recess while the Wizengamot debates, a time to be no less than fifteen minutes.”

Bang! Went the enchanted gavel and a shield charm went up over the WM gallery obscuring the Members from the rest of the courtroom, Dodge retaking his seat for the first time since he originally stood to open the case.

Smirking a bit at his young client he noted:

“So, that went well I thought.”

Snickering, Harry hid his mouth from view with his robe sleeve lest an opportuning photographer snap a picture of him laughing unseemly in the courtroom and spin it against him, rolling his eyes at his solicitor’s uncanny sense of dry humor.

…

Harry watched as those in the press and public galleries fluttered here-and-there, turning to talk to their neighbors or ducking out for a break but none going very far from what he could tell as when the warning chime for the end of the recess sounded at fifteen minutes on the dot it took only a matter of moments for the seats to fill back up.

He and Dodge had kept their seats, both observing all the others around them rather than discuss anything where they might be overheard and being observed in turn – especially by both Thickness and Dumbledore though Harry would venture a guess such was for vastly different reasons.

“Come to order.” Chief Warlock Pro-Tem Ogden commanded the room, folding his hands before him and waiting patiently for silence to take over the court. “We the Members of the Wizengamot have come to a resolution and mediation decision regarding the case of Potter v. the Ministry of Magic but first we have a statement we wish to make.” He announced. “Many of our body find it
troubling to say the least some of the issues that have come to light thanks to the diligent research of Solicitor Dodge and conversely the lack of research and responsibility that has likewise been shown by this Ministry. This matter never should have proceeded to this level of the courts and should have been handled at the Ministry level before ever reaching the Council of Magical Law let alone the Wizengamot. In the future, this body expects that the Ministry of Magic follow due process of law and fulfill the requirements of its Charter lest the Wizengamot or Lord’s Moot take steps to ameliorate the situation.”

Done bollocking out the Ministry as a whole over the clusterfuck, Ogden continued after taking a breath and a sip of his water glass to relieve the dryness to his throat after the mini-speech.

“In the case of Potter v. the Ministry of Magic for Great Britain, this body rules in favor of Heir Potter.” The public gallery broke out in cheers as Harry gave a slow smile, especially seeing as Ogden wasn’t done. “As the property was unlawfully seized, any back taxes owed are hereby ordered to be paid equally by former Minister Bagnold and Mister Dumbledore as it was their agreement which led to the property being removed from the oversight of the Potter Estate. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement will remove any and all wards surrounding the property at the request and inclination of Heir Potter for scheduling removal. Minister Fudge, former-Minister Bagnold, and Mister Dumbledore as also hereby ordered to pay a sum of four hundred galleons each to cover the court and solicitor fees of Heir Potter.” Ogden banged the gavel one final time. “Such is the ruling of the Wizengamot. So mote it be. Court adjourned.”

“How about that.” Harry observed as Fudge fled from the courtroom like Ogden had lit his robes on fire not ordered him to pay what amounted to a fine for stupidity. “This must be a red-letter day for you, Dodge. You got to humiliate three highly-placed members of our government and they have to pay you for the privilege. Not too shabby.”

Dodge snorted, eyeing the confabulation forming between Ogden, Bones, and Scrimgeour.

“That’s not all that’s going on today.” He noted. “That spells trouble for our illustrious Chief Warlock and Minister alike if I’m not mistaken.”

“Oh, I’m sure it does.” Harry gave into a smirk as they cleared the courtroom, a proximity spell tossed up by Dodge – able to use it now that the case was finished and no one could accuse them of using magic to cheat – kept the crowds of reporters and gawkers alike from swarming them. “Thanks to your research they’ve got more than a little egg on their faces regarding Sirius.”

“He’ll get a trial at this rate at the very least.” Dodge agreed. “If not being out-right exonerated to prevent further humiliation.”

“One can only hope.”

…

Daily Prophet Headline August 31st, 1993:

Suspensions Galore!

Fudge, Crouch, Dumbledore All Implicated in Miscarriage of Justice!

Nobles and Muggleborns Alike Tossed Away Without Trial!

Will Dumbledore Survive This Latest Scandal?
Remus Lupin had been at war with himself since he was six years old and was both attacked and infected with lycanthropy by Fenrir Greyback.

A war which had only deepened in the wake of the loss of his pack and his cub being taken and hidden in the Muggle World leaving him with nothing but his loathing and self-hate to dwell on beyond the promise of one day – maybe – being reunited with Harry.

The flurry of mixed or flat-out contradictory reports that had filled the papers since Harry had reentered the Wizarding World certainly hadn’t helped him make heads or tails of what was going on with his cub.

Especially as at least once a year there were rumors and reports that implied a conflict between Harry – his cub, the last link to Remus’s pack – and the Headmaster of Hogwarts Albus Dumbledore whom Remus owed so much as without the elder wizard’s intervention and arrangements he never would’ve been able to attend school with other wizarding children and met the other members – even the traitor – of his pack.

Compounding this was the tidal wave of articles that came as the summer passed once again placing Harry and the Headmaster on opposing sides of an issue – this time over the ownership of Godric’s Hollow – and an owl bearing a job offer from the Headmaster for Remus to take up the position of Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor at his alma mater.

On one hand it was yet another thing he would owe to a man who he couldn’t trust – not entirely, there was too much speculation regarding his fraught relationship with Harry that just kept coming for him to be completely trusting of the Headmaster – and whose motives he couldn’t place. On the other: his cub.

And in the end that was all that mattered as no matter how much Remus searched or how hard he look he couldn’t find Harry in the muggle world and Dumbledore’s offer would put him in the castle and teaching his cub, able to ascertain for himself – even if from a distance alone – Harry’s health and happiness.

That Sirius had escaped from Azkaban for a reason no one can place – and worse, once more compounding Remus’s mixed feelings on a variety of subjects, never having received a trial in the first place, even a closed one like most high-nobility got under the Lords Moot charta – potentially putting Harry in danger hadn’t hurt as whatever his old friend’s motives Remus knew how his mind worked to an extent and can hopefully help protect Harry if Sirius was a threat.

Which given the godfather-godchild bond…Remus wasn’t certain if that was even truly possible.

But given how much Remus was uncertain about anymore he wasn’t really surprised about that when once he would’ve said with utter certainty that going against the bond wasn’t possible under any circumstances.
Or that is was possible for someone to live with the backlash for almost twelve years.

And yet *that* was what everyone insisted had happened.

Sirius had broken the bond and betrayed their friends and their cub but *still* managed to survive the godparent bond breaking between himself and their cub.

The facts didn’t fit.

Shoddy research from what Remus could tell which offended his scholarly soul.

Making his way to the last carriage on the train, Remus set his case down and tossed his cloak over himself, content to take a nap for a bit after setting a proximity ward on the door.

…

2 September 1993; Wizengamot Chambers

Chief Warlock Pro-Tem Lord Tiberius Ogden called the closed meeting of the Wizengamot and Lords Moot to order.

He was as ecstatic as the next Lord that Dumbledore had gotten mud on his face once more.

Let alone that blow-hard Fudge or harridan Bagnold, the latter of whom had used the few privileges available to Minister of Magic during wartime to supersede the Lords Moot – no doubt with the *valued advice* of Albus Dumbledore.

It was the manner in which it *occurred* that left a bad taste in the collective mouths of the Lords Moot and had them calling for the Wizengamot to rectify the situation.

A Lord’s Heir tossed into Azkaban *for life* without so much as a by-your-leave or the slightest form of due-process.

Another *stolen* away in the night, kidnapped, his ancestral lands usurped and position leveraged for political gain before his parents’ bodies were even cool.

That Fudge had the *utter gall* to issue a Kiss-on-Sight order for Sirius Black – a power that *did not* rest with the Minister for Magic even during wartime – when the wizard had never even received a proper trial or sentencing as confirmed by Lady Amelia Bones in her position as the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement was a horrific abuse of power.

Tiberius quite enjoyed watching Heir Potter and his law wizard run circles around Dumbledore, Bagnold, and Fudge, if for no other reason than the evidence presented during his successful attempt to have his property returned gave the Lords Moot the excuse they’d been looking for *for years* to suspend Dumbledore.

Being able to do the same to Fudge and know that Bagnold might be looking at jail time let alone a massive fine was just the gilding on the niffler.

Popularity, in the end, could only take you so far as Dumbledore was learning the hard way.

The Lords couldn’t move except in the most discreet of ways to ameliorate Dumbledore’s changes to ancient laws and wizarding culture as a whole when he had all of Wizarding Britain eating out of his proverbial hand, believing he was *The Greatest Wizard to Ever Live, Defeater of the Dark Lord Grindelwald, The Only Wizard Voldemort Feared*, and so on.
That was, until Harry Potter stepped forward two years before and started – systematically if Tiberius didn’t find it a bit of a reach to believe of an eleven-year-old muggle-raised boy – taking apart Dumbledore’s reputation and glowing popularity piece by cautious piece.

Now, they could move.

Start making real strides towards repairing the damage a Dumbledore-led – for decades nonetheless – Wizengamot had done to their world.

And Tiberius knew just where to start while he had the chance as it wasn’t a guarantee that enough proof of wrong-doing would be found to strip Dumbledore of his position as Chief Warlock permanently.

Though at the very least the International Confederation of Wizards had called a vote of No-Confidence in the twinkly-eyed manipulator following his suspension a few days ago from the Wizengamot.

Small blessings.

Small steps and unending patience would get the Lords Moot into position to counter Dumbledore.

Tiberius was ashamed that for many years even he, a scion of an Ancient Line and raised to be a Lord and take his place helping to lead their world, had been blind to the real danger of the small changes Dumbledore made piece by piece until their entire culture and world was in danger of being snuffed out.

It wasn’t until the latter days of the Voldemort Blood War that the reality of what Dumbledore’s vendetta against the Heir of Slytherin had cost them as a whole.

As a people.

Hundreds dead, entire Lines wiped away, Heirs and Lords alike murdered under suspicious circumstances or tossed away – like Sirius Black – into Azkaban.

It could not happen again.

It would not happen again.

If it was the last thing Tiberius did in his long life it would be to ensure that Wizarding Great Britain would remain, would endure the near-disaster that had overtaken them, and come out the other side stronger for it lest Magic strike him down.

“Members of the Wizengamot and the Lords Moot.” Tiberius rose to his feet after the last WM had strolled in – late, there was always one – and began to speak. “The events of the last few days, both in and out of Court, have shown clearly that there has been a rampant miscarriage of justice carried out under the aegis of Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge and Chief Warlock Albus Dumbledore. Madam Bones?” He gestured the head of the DMLE and member of the Lords Moot forward. “Please present the facts of the situation.”

“Upon review of certified documentation provided during the case of Potter v. the Ministry of Magic,” Amelia’s voice needed no help from a spell to reach the corners of the room like many trained law witches and wizards. “The Department of Magical Law Enforcement and the Ministry Archives have confirmed that no trial, sentence, or other required steps of due process are on record for the case of one Sirius Orion Black the Third.” She barely paused a moment as her confirmation led to an uproar in the seats. “Furthermore,” she continued, the WMs and Lords – though more of
the former than the latter – having to hush in their histrionics to hear her. “That a Kiss-on-Sight order as espoused by the Minister for Magic has been issued by the Minister’s office for one Sirius Orion Black the Third without the knowledge or approval of the Wizengamot, Council of Magical Law, or Lords’ Moot which led to the searching of the Hogwarts Express yesterday afternoon at approximately 1653, leading to the distress and mental harm of several students including Heirs Potter and Longbottom and Heiress Lovegood.”

If the uproar over the lack of due process for Sirius Black was bad, that over having no less than three noble children in the presence and under the effects of Dementors of all vile creatures was nothing short of riotous.

Perhaps, Tiberius had to admit in a moment of hidden humor, it wouldn’t have been a bad thing at all to have Dumbledore leading this particular session of the Wizengamot and Lords’ Moot.

He might’ve been able to watch the manipulator lose his head.

At least figuratively when the Longbottom Dowager got her claws in him if not literally since if her reaction was any sign, Augusta Longbottom had no ruddy idea that her grandson had been exposed to Dementors.

Shame, but hindsight and all.

No one could predict everything all the time, no matter what Dumbledore liked to think.

…

“How are you feeling, Harry?” Luna asked, worry written in her misty grey eyes as her friend joined the rest of the Ravenclaw table for breakfast the day after they arrived at Hogwarts.

Of all the students on the Express, Harry, Neville, and herself along with their new defense professor had had the closest encounter with the Dementors.

Which made sense after a fashion when one thought about it logically she thought.

All of them had witnessed or had horrible things done to them.

It said quite a bit regarding the, damage, that had been done to all of them over the years that she was glad the Dementors had merely made her feel faint and like she’d never be happy again instead of having a flashback like Harry or hearing his parents’ screams like Neville.

Their professor had driven the Dementor off, leaving them a bit unsteady on their feet and feeling cold to their bones in its wake before passing out bars of Honeyduke’s Finest to combat the effects of Dementor exposure.

At the least, their professor had proven he’d be much better than the rotation of random teachers or aurors they’d dealt with last year and likely miles better than what Neville and Harry had said Quirrell was like.

Neville was watching from the Gryffindor table as Harry sank onto the bench next to Luna at the Ravenclaw table, looking more like a sleepwalking wizard than the normally wide-awake Harry they were used to seeing in the morning. He wasn’t a morning person as far as he said. Rather, it was a habit from years living with his relatives and having morning chores.

Habits, Luna knew, could be hard to break.
Better one for early rising than something worse like a dislike of reading or a sullenness enforced by those people.

Luna wasn’t often one for violence, but she’d like five minutes with a wand to talk to the Dursleys.

Neville likely wouldn’t even need that much, especially with how well his spells were working now that he’d gotten a new wand over break albeit at Harry’s insistence.

They’d only worked on a few spells on the train so Neville could get a feel for his new wand since Lady Longbottom was as stern and untrusting a guardian as ever, but after a bit of help from Harry and practice spells started coming much easier.

Well.

Except when he overpowered them after being used to have to force his father’s wand to behave even in the slightest way.

That still needed work but now they had all school year to work on it!

“Like I either didn’t sleep enough or slept way too much.” Harry finally managed to articulate after snagging the pot of hot chocolate and the biggest mug he could find on the table to fill. He’d given thought to just using a bowl but didn’t want to give away that much he was still dealing with what he thought could be classified as a Dementor-hangover. “Groggy, foggy, and really not ready to try and stay awake through History of Magic. How’re you doing?”

Luna gave an airy wave and took a dainty sip of her own mug of chocolate as she watched – half-worried and half-amused – as Harry rather than sticking with a somewhat-healthy meal like he tended towards filled his plate with chocolate-chip pancakes that he topped with butter, and a cup of sliced berries.

For a boy who rarely strayed from simple meals, it was quite the telling change much like him going for the chocolate instead of a morning tea or juice.

“Better than you.” She told him simply, giggling at the half-hearted glare her answer got her before Harry lowered his head and set to ignoring her in favor of his sweet-filled breakfast.

No, he wasn’t himself, not yet.

But that glare said he was getting there.

Now if only the Dementors would be removed from around the school then things should get back to their normal – if often odd – series of events at the beginning of the school year.

…

Third Year was a shock to the system for many students, especially those who’d gotten used to having free periods but took more than two electives.

With how packed Harry’s own schedule was, he didn’t understand how on earth Granger from Gryffindor was supposed to be taking four or five classes between there just not being enough hours in the day and with having Divination at the same time block for the third years as Arithmancy or Muggle Studies during the Ancient Runes block.

Of the five electives on offer for third year through OWLs, there were three main camps students tended towards.
There were the overachievers like Granger who packed their schedules with electives or independent study, lazy students like Ron Weasley who took two of the “easy-O” options of Divination, Care of Magical Creatures, or Muggles Studies, and then the more sensible students who took two or three electives based on what their future plans were after Hogwarts.

Though as it was twelve-year-olds making the original selections, *most* were told what to sign up for by their parents or guardians.

Neville, for example, had originally wanted to take the “easy-O” route of Divination and Muggle Studies before Harry had convinced him to copy his own selections since even if his friend did end up pursuing a Mastery in Herbology like he talked about sometimes when after-Hogwarts comes up in conversation with Harry and Luna, knowledge of Ancient Runes is useful for anyone expected to manage an estate with wards like Longbottom Grange while Arithmancy helped keep math skills sharp for balancing accounts.

That was what Harry told Neville anyway, though the normally-shy boy hadn’t been interested in joining Harry in Care of Magical Creatures, giving one of the pair a few hours free a week that Harry didn’t enjoy with his packed schedule.

Homework after classes or dinner and on the weekends wasn’t exciting but at least half of his classes tended to give minimal homework as they were more focused on practical performance like Care and Defense.

And they had a skilled Defense teacher that year which only made life better.

Even so, Harry could’ve done without meeting a Boggart, though the experience was an interesting learning opportunity he had to admit.

Rumor whipped through Hogwarts quicker than Ron Weasley on a plate of food after the Gryffindor-Slytherin first class with Professor Lupin, thanks in large part to Neville’s bone-deep fear of Professor Snape and how the professor *encouraged* Neville to find the ability to laugh in the face of Snape’s glares and sneers.

Professor Lupin almost didn’t let Harry participate but he stepped forward nonetheless, his curiosity greater than his caution.

Though perhaps, in hindsight, it would’ve been better if he’d allowed the Professor to stop him after all.

…

Harry watched as the others in his class faced their fears from the mundane: spiders, snakes, etc.; to the deeply set and tangible like Susan Bones’s Inferi, the witch having lost all of her family in an Inferi attack as a toddler except for her aunt Lady Bones, waiting for his turn to step and trying to puzzle out what he feared.

Or, well, *truly* feared not just didn’t like or was repulsed by like spiders.

Nobody needed that many eyes *and* that many legs.

No.

Just no.

But he wasn’t *afraid* of spiders.
Honestly, he really couldn’t think of much he actually feared, not even Voldemort like most people would expect given that the Dark Lord wasn’t some undefeatable monster…he was just a man. A wizard. A powerful one, yes, but a mortal human wizard nonetheless.

That said, what did appear from the darkest of his thoughts wasn’t something he expected, and it shook more than him to the core.

The formless mass twisted and swayed for a long moment, almost taking on a black cloak at one point, then growing taller then smaller, until it finally took shape.

That of one Albus Dumbledore from the half-moon spectacles on his nose to the brightly spangled blue and pink robes he wore to the bumpy wand in his hand.

“Ah…Harry my boy.” More than one jaw dropped in the room, Professor Lupin’s among them, and shivers coasted up more than one back at the sinisterly-sweet tone lacing the words. “It is too bad it has come to this, but, never fear. It is all for the Greater Good…Avad-“

Before the Boggart-Dumbledore could finished the spell as it raised its wand, Harry flung out his own like a whip sending a massive wave of magic crashing into the Boggart and throwing it – still in the form of the Headmaster – into the wardrobe that housed it.

Harry panted a bit at the effort it took before casting a wordless – and icy – glance around the class, Professor Lupin snapping out of his daze to dismiss them.

It was more than he could hope for that his Boggart – and his reaction to it – would stay a secret.

But then it was no mystery to either himself or Dumbledore that there was no love there, especially with the restraining order in place and the more recent events of that summer.

Even so…Harry was surprised to learn that he actually feared Dumbledore would try to kill him, but not as surprised as he could be.

After all, Dumbledore was still a powerful man.

And powerful men, when spited as effectively as Harry had done more than once now, were nothing short of dangerous.

…

“Ah, Remus my boy.” Dumbledore beamed at the newest Defense Against the Dark Arts professor as he took his seat around the conference table in the staff room. “You’re looking well. We’re just waiting on...”

Before he could finish his sentence the doors to the staff room opened with a bang! Ushering in sight of Professor Severus Snape in his billowing black robes and an even sourer look on his sallow face than normal.

“Severus!” The Headmaster twinkled up at the dour wizard whose glare was fit to kill when he caught sight of Lupin.

Though it took little to guess why.

One of the first classes that each DADA professor was required to teach during third year was that of Boggarts.
Students often at that age rarely had truly traumatizing or dangerous fears, facing them in a structured and safe environment before they changed to the much more complex fears of adulthood stood them in good stead as well as teaching them how to handle a Boggart in an effective manner.

Needless to say, given Professor Snape’s...demeanor, there was always one or two students who had taken up the stern Potions Master as their greatest fear whether warranted or not.

Also needless to say, for the next week or two until whatever hijinks had occurred using the Professor’s Boggart doppelganger, he’d be in quite the mood.

“Now, let’s begin.” Dumbledore called the staff meeting to order. “How are things going thus far this term?”

It took quite a while to get to the third years as they started with the seventh years and moved down, allowing the elective teachers for the upper years to be excused one they reached OWL levels and then again the remaining OWL elective professors to depart after the third years before the core curriculum instructors moved on with the first and second year, giving Severus plenty of time to fume over the latest indignation he’d faced at the hands of a Boggart-form, this time if rumors were true to the tune of being dressed in drag alá Augusta Longbottom and Remus more than enough time to ponder just how he was supposed to tell the Headmaster that one of the students’ deepest fears was the man himself.

And not that of a Death Eater’s child but of Harry Potter.

It made Remus cautious to say the least, as what Harry feared was nothing to easily dismiss given the enmity between the boy and the elder wizard.

Remus didn’t live in a cave after all, he was well aware of the ongoing issues between his new employer and former Headmaster and that of his pack’s cub.

Worse, Harry’s Boggart form of the Headmaster had been scarily accurate, down to the verbiage used.

He couldn’t count how many times he’d heard the Headmaster use the phrase “for the Greater Good” during the war.

When the time came, Remus was still struggling with his mental war which had only grown since arriving at Hogwarts and seeing his cub for himself and how different Harry was from either of his parents or any expectations he’d had regarding the teen except, perhaps, for his friendship with young Neville Longbottom as they’d played whenever it was safe for their parents to meet or at Order meetings.

“How did the third years react to their Boggart lesson, Remus my boy?” Dumbledore finally asked the question, watching with sharp eyes as the werewolf who’d been giving bland, rote answers to the rest of the years seemed to gird himself and sit up straight though his self-effacing gaze never lifted from studying the grain of the wooden table. “Were there any unexpected fears divulged that need additional help or counseling to combat?’

Since this was – ostensibly – one of the reasons for the lesson the question was well within the Headmaster’s purview to ask.

That it also gave him an insight into how to further manipulate many of the young wixen under his “care” would likely only occur to Severus though the Potions Master was well-enough under his thumb to never voice such a thing.
“Ms. Granger from Gryffindor has a crippling fear of academic failure.” Remus sighed, starting with one of the lesser issues before moving onto the chief of them. “She scored a Dreadful after completely losing her nerve and running from the room crying at the sight of Minerva berating her.”

Severus scoffed under his breath, several of the other teachers who had the Gryffindor in their class rolling their eyes or muttering as unless they threatened her with points losses and detention as well as setting limits to her essays none of the other students even bothered to attempt to answer questions in her presence - with the exceptions of Harry Potter or Draco Malfoy - or the professors would be buried under her need to beat everyone about the ears with her intelligence, Minerva herself pursing her lips in disapproval.

Both for the unsympathetic attitudes of most of her colleagues save for Pomona who was the softest-heart of the teachers, and the need to have yet another chat with the child regarding her insecurities. That she was clearly a Ravenclaw in Lion’s robes when it came to academics if nowhere else didn’t help matters.

“The others had understandable fears: disappointing a parent, spiders, and so on. Ms. Bones’ fear of Inferi was the most dangerous of the Boggart forms presented.” Remus continued, Pomona letting out a soft “poor lamb” over the not-unexpected revelation. “However…” He swallowed harshly then looked up and met the Headmaster’s gaze head-on.

In this one area if none other being a werewolf was an advantage, his wolf giving him a natural resistance to mental magics such as Dumbledore was known to be a skilled practitioner thereof.

“The most disturbing fear presented was of Mr. Potter during the Ravenclaw-Hufflepuff class.”

Albus nodded his great bearded head understandingly.

“I imagine the sight of Voldemort was quite unsettling to a group of thirteen and fourteen-year-olds.”

Mr. Potter was the youngest – if only by a day compared to Mr. Longbottom – in the class with some of his fellows already receiving their second magical inheritance at fourteen and coming of the age of consent before even returning for third year.

“It wasn’t Voldemort, Albus.” Remus shook his head slowly, eyes never leaving the Headmaster’s aged face or stumbling over the moniker of the Dark Lord as the other professors slowly focused sharply on the Defense Professor’s visage at the dark tone in his voice. “Would you care to explain to me why the child of my oldest and dearest friends fears that you mean to kill him, Headmaster?”

You could have heard a pin drop as at his pronouncement the others took a gasp or deep breath in unison, shocked and shook to their toes as Dumbledore’s face froze in shock and his eyes turned ice-cold as he stared off with the defense professor.

“Perhaps this is a discussion for private quarters, Professor.” Albus finally announced, rising slowly to his feet. “The rest should be able to carry on without us, don’t you agree?”

“Quite.” Remus bit out, his temper well and truly riled the more time he’d had to consider the matter. Though that it was approaching the full moon wasn’t helping either as his wolf roused at the thought of a threat to his cub.

The pair turned a left, neither noticing the looks exchanged between the heads of house behind their backs, in particular between Severus, Filius, and Minerva at the revelation, Pomona still quite shocked that a student, any student, would actually fear death at the hands of their Headmaster above anything else.
Let alone that it had come from clever – and powerful – Mr. Potter.

Though if you asked Severus, he’d likely tell you that was exactly why Potter was afraid of the Headmaster as many Slytherin students had been in the past, particularly when he’d been a student at Hogwarts during the height of the Blood War.

…

Remus kept a firm grip on his temper as they walked together from the staff room to the Headmaster’s office, one step behind and to the side of Albus, his need to focus such that he was nearly blind to the calculating light in the Headmaster’s eyes – but not entirely – no, his life for far too long had been predicated on his ability to avoid suspicion and live either up or down to the expectations of others to avoid detection as a werewolf for him to ever completely drop his guard.

Especially with the thoughts that had begun to plague him two years before when the first article trumpeting the strife between the Headmaster and his cub had becoming public.

A werewolf didn’t infiltrate wild packs run by Fenrir Greyback by being a complete gullible, malleable fool, no matter what the Headmaster thought.

And if the old man assumed he was going to be able to pawn Remus off on this topic – the safety whether mental, emotional, or physical – as pertaining to his cub he was dead wrong.

He wanted answers.

And if he wasn’t happy with them…well.

Harry would find himself with a werewolf bodyguard whether the reclusive teenager liked it or not, the Headmaster’s orders and reminders regarding “fair treatment” and “favoritism” be damned.

They remained silent through the entire walk as Remus kept a stranglehold on his temper and Albus ruminated on how to use both this new information into Potter’s infuriating psyche – even feeling smug that the brat feared him to such an extent – and recover from the damage the very implication had done among his employees, Remus and the Heads of House in particular as none of them were ever easily pawned off with platitudes, neither wizard speaking until they’d ridden the circular stair up to Albus’s office and the warded door was shut firmly behind them.

Fawkes was absent from his perch as he often was these days, and Remus prowled around the circular room with its magpie-esque collection of trinkets and magical doodads as Albus bustled over and sat behind his massive desk in the clear position of power he’d enjoyed for several decades, growing as confident as ever when seated in what amounted to little less than a throne.

More than one person on seeing the Headmaster’s office for the first time was half-convinced that if Dumbledore had an Animagus form it was of a corvid from the glittering collection of artifacts surrounding him.

“Why,” Remus repeated himself, voice low and dangerous – not that such things mattered to Dumbledore who was so secure in his position that there was nothing he truly considered a threat – “Is my cub scared of literal death at your hand, Headmaster?”

“Remus my boy,” Albus sighed, seeming to shrink and age in a moment as he folded hands with crinkled crape-paper skin on the missive-and-paperwork strewn desktop. “I will be the first to admit that young Mister Potter and I do not have an amicable relationship due to some matters I didn’t handle as I, perhaps, should have. However, never have I posed a threat to young Harry’s life.” He spread his hands helplessly before him. “Who can understand the dark thoughts that can dwell in a
mind, Remus? Especially one that has recently come into contact with Dementors?"

Though that was likely to change soon if the Wizengamot and Lords Moot got their way, yet another event that had Dumbledore near-hissing in fury.

Whether the little brat’s doing or that of his infernal solicitor, Sirius Black was certain to receive a trial – an event he’d worked quite hard to subvert and blockade for years, and with the residence of the manhunt that would come along with that decision would be the remove of the Azkaban guards from the school perimeter.

He needed the demonic things to teach that infuriating brat fear, of which, if Remus’s report was any sign, they had already made quite the inroads to doing.

Granted, Albus would prefer if the creature didn’t fear him, but at this point he’d take what he could get if he wanted his other plans to work out since hiring the filthy werewolf Lupin – indebted to the Headmaster or not – wasn’t proving to pan out the way he’d hoped when he’d conjured the idea.

No matter.

He’d never been one to rely on only one avenue of action after all.

Where one failed – or a dozen or more – there was always another waiting in the wings.

“This was no irrational fear, Albus.” Remus hissed, eyes flashing gold at the headmaster as he whipped around and faced off with the powerful wizard. “You didn’t see it. Didn’t hear it. Or Harry’s reaction to it. He was as surprised and shocked as the rest of us at what form the Boggart took.”

“What did it say?” Albus needed to know if only to work the enraging child’s perceptions into his plans.

“For the Greater Good.” Remus sneered, an expression that was almost out of place on the normally kind-faced werewolf but for the vicious scarring on his cheek. “That is what the Boggart said. That Harry’s death would be For the Greater Good.”

Albus couldn’t help a lift of his brows at that, wondering where the creature would’ve heard him use that phrase as it was one he rarely uttered in public except for around his most trusted employees and the members of the Order.

Perhaps lingering memories from when he was an infant at Order meetings or something of that sort.

Which – worryingly – made him wonder just how much the confounding brat remembered not only of his early years but everything since.

And worse – how much he noticed of what went on around him.

“He is a child, Remus.” Albus switched into soothing-placation now that he had the information he’d desired. “An intelligent child, yes. But a child nonetheless. Who knows why he fears what he fears?” He waved an airy hand. “I have never had an encounter with the child alone, per the Wizengamot order. Perhaps due to events outside either of our controls I have taken on the appearance of an uncaring monster to the boy. There is little I can do to remedy the situation, however, so long as the Wizengamot order is in place beside continue to treat him with the same even-handed treatment all students of Hogwarts are entitled to receive from their Headmaster.”

Remus clenched his jaw then turned and left – notably without being dismissed – supposing Albus’s
words were all he was going to get from the old wizard.

Not that he was content with them: no.

His cub was convinced, soul-deep, that the Headmaster was a threat to his very life.

Remus would not be content with anything until he found out why.

…

_Daily Prophet Headlines, 15 September 1993:_

_by order of the lords moot:_

_Kiss-on-Sight Order on Sirius Black Rescinded!_

_New Evidence Unearthed by Outside Party Demands DMLE Investigation!_

_Sirius Black: Mass Murderer or Maligned Innocent?_

_Full Story Page 3_

_Dementors Surrounding Hogwarts Ordered to Return to Azkaban:_

_Security Measure or Scare Mongering?_

_You Decide!_

_Full Story Page 6_

…

_Daily Prophet Headline, 19 September 1993:_

_Wizengamot Impeaches Fudge!_

_Special Election for Minister of Magic Announced!_

…

Sirius was beyond frustrated.

He’d enjoyed – reveled really – spending time with his pup, even if Harry didn’t realize that the mutt he’d taken care of for half the summer was his godfather while Sirius waited impatiently for the Weasleys to return from Egypt.

But despite his best efforts – including appropriating a wand from a drunk in Knockturn Alley – he’d not managed to get his paws on that traitorous rat.

He was of two minds now.

Did he stay haunting Hogsmeade and Hogwarts until he finally managed to catch the rat?

Or did he return to London and present himself – finally – for the trial he’d been waiting twelve years to happen in the worst place on earth?
If he left, took the easy road, got his name cleared and what-not, he would surely lose his shot had apprehending the rat even if it did end with him walking out of the Ministry as a free man.

That he, personally, would rather strangle Peter with his bare hands than turn him into the Aurors was neither here nor there.

And so he waited and he watched – with much greater ease of mind now that the Dementors had been banished back to their hell-hole of a home and breeding ground – while he tried to clear away enough of twelve years’ worth of mental damage to make a decision or something resembling a plan.

That his pup was a third year and certain to visit the village soon, well…that was just another reason to take his time in figuring out what to do.

...

Harry appreciated that Professor Lupin gave him time before holding him back after class to discuss his Boggart form.

As it was all over school by dinner the same day of the lesson, and more than one student had taken to looking at him like he was completely cracked with – notably mostly Slytherins and a few of his fellow ‘Claws – some watching him with an increased level of consideration than ever before.

His disastrous revelation of how deeply his issues with the Headmaster ran had made him more interesting to his schoolmates – in one way or another – than he’d been since the furor over having the “Boy-Who-Lived” attending meals and classes with them had worn off.

When he’d proven over the last two school years that he was little more than a stereotypical Ravenclaw down to his thirst for knowledge and general disinterest in people besides his growing friendships with Neville and Luna, albeit a powerful Ravenclaw who competed handily for top marks with the others in his year, they’d started ignoring him as just another part of attending school at Hogwarts along with the moving staircases and a semi-friendly poltergeist.

He didn’t have rivals – other than a minor academic one with Draco Malfoy and a fierce, more on her end than his, dislike because of the same with Hermione Granger – or enemies. A few students he could do without. A few he genuinely disliked. But nothing that really bothered him on a day to day basis especially compared to having to take meals under the ever-watchful and avaricious eyes of Albus Dumbledore.

He only really gained real friends over the last six months no matter how friendly he’d been with Neville and a few members of his housemates in his year before that.

He was plain, ordinary-Ravenclaw Harry Potter and he’d liked it that way.

As a Ravenclaw his performance in his classes was expected, being Harry Potter is was nearly mandatory that if he was a ‘Claw instead of a Gryffindor that he be the best of them in terms of school performance. Spending hours and hours in study in the library drew little attention. In fact the only thing he did – besides saving Luna – that drew any attention at all for being out of the norm by mid-September every year was his habit of running to keep fit.

Five minutes in a defense class and all that work at appearing innocuous was torn down and shredded, likely never to be recovered.

Another rumor would eventually come around as they always did and his Boggart would fade the backs of the minds of his teachers and peers but it would never go completely away. It would linger. Something as shocking – even to him and he’s the one whose mind it was conjured from – as
fearing your Headmaster would kill you didn’t just go away.

Not ever.

And no amount of clever damage control or political spin he wanted to put on it would make it disappear.

That didn’t mean he wouldn’t use it to whatever advantage he could manage…he wasn’t an idiot no matter how much self-flagellation he wanted to heap on himself for being so ill-prepared for the form of his Boggart he’d been…but even so, there was only so much that could be salvaged from the situation.

Towards that end, he supposed a meeting with his defense professor was the next logical step.

Though if the whole clusterfuck of a situation had taught him anything it was that pure magic worked just as well – if not better – for dealing with Boggarts than the spellwork Professor Lupin had taught them.

“You wanted to see me, Professor Lupin?” Harry asked politely the Saturday after the awful lesson after knocking firmly on the professor’s third-floor office door and being bid to enter.

“Ah, yes, come in, Mr. Potter.” Remus waved his cub inside, firming his resolve at the sight of the teen with the gangly limbs of a growing youth, bright green eyes, and messy hair tamed back in a ponytail with just a few wisps escaping their bonds to dust his forehead. Merlin, his cub was still so young. That he had worries regarding his health and safety when all he should be worrying about was grades, Quidditch, and whether he liked boys or girls or both or what-have-you was one of the greatest failures on the part of the Wizarding World in the last decade. Particularly on the part of those – like Albus – who were supposed to watch over, guide, and care for him. “Shut the door behind you, please. Can I interest you in joining me for some hot chocolate and cake?”

Harry gave him a grim little smile and an arch of a brow as he closed the office door with a soft click and took in the tray already in place between two of the Professor’s upholstered office chairs on a side table.

“Going to be that bad, huh?” He asked with no-little amount of dark-edged humor.

“Maybe,” Remus agreed with a crooked half-smile. “Maybe not. Still, one thing I’ve learned over the years is it never hurts to be prepared for the worst eventualities and that there is little that can’t be helped – at least a little – with a thick application of chocolate.”

“In 1001 Magical Herbs and Fungi it says that chocolate is a natural anti-depressant.” Harry noted, moving at the Professor’s urging wave and taking the seat opposite him in the little sitting area rather then across the room opposite his desk chair. “Which is why it’s an ingredient in many mood-altering potions.”

“Correct.” Remus’s smiled stretched into a rueful grin, shaking his head. Lily, you’d be so proud of him. “Though I’m not much use around a cauldron, I’m afraid.” He leaned forward a bit confidentially. “Scraped an EE on my OWL by the skin of my teeth and was more than happy to drop the subject for NEWTs. Though in a classroom with the likes of Severus Snape and Lily Evans,” he added as he took a careful sip of his chocolate, watching Harry’s reaction out of the corner of his eye. “Everyone else might as well have been scraping by in comparison, including your father and Sirius Black who were the next-best potioneers in our year.”

Harry swallowed the mouthful of chocolate harshly as his eyes shot wide at the implications of that.
“You,” he blinked, shaking his head as his professor watched him with amusement nearly beaming out of amber brown eyes. “You knew my parents?”

**Professor Snape knew his parents?**

Really, as that clicked into place, it explained *so much* he couldn’t figure out about the Potions Master’s wishy-washy behavior regarding himself of not knowing whether he hated him or liked him which often settled into a professional indifference as a middle ground.

“Yes, yes I did.” Remus set his mug of chocolate down on the tray with a click, turning fully in his chair to face the painfully-young – and at the moment half-stricken and half, well, suspicious – face of his cub. “The Headmaster had requested that I keep this information to myself in order to prevent any hint of favoritism occurring, however, given recent events.” He scowled when Harry gave a nearly-imperceptible flinch. “I find myself unable to continue obeying that particular *suggestion,*” which he knew full-well was supposed to be an order no matter *how* it’d been phrased. “As everything I’ve noticed about you during the last fortnight or so points to you not being the type of person who easily accepts help without knowing the motivations from which such help is offered.”

“There’s always strings.” Harry murmured, a bit taken aback at the – bit simplistic – but spot-on read regarding how he viewed others in general and those in authority in particular. He supposed knowing his parents and even, possibly, Harry himself as an infant and toddler might’ve helped. But still, he didn’t like knowing that a veritable *stranger* had peeled back his public persona even that much. “If I don’t know where they are it’s easy to get tripped up or tangled in them.”

“Your father was one of my best and closest friends.” Remus told him softly, feeling a wrenching deep in his chest at the sheer cynicism behind that statement from his pack’s cub. Way more than any thirteen-year-old should possess. “My chronic health issues excluded me from being able to sue for custody when James and Lily were killed and Sirius…”

*That* explained something he’d only just started to question before the thought had even fully formed in Harry’s mind, though it left other questions lingering after it.

Professor Lupin *couldn’t* be his parents’ only friends after all, or the Longbottoms for that matter.

There *had* to be someone else who could’ve taken him in other than the Dursleys and he *already* knew that they weren’t his only relatives either except on his mother’s side.

Damn meddling Dumbledore striking again, most likely.

Remus couldn’t – *wouldn’t* – finish that thought with everything that’d been plastered across the Prophet recently.

He’d spent the last decade arguing with his wolf and fighting himself every full moon over abandoning his mate. If it was true that Sirius had never even had a trial… What else that he *thought he knew* was wrong? Had he wasted years hating himself, his wolf, and his mate for *nothing*? Or worse – *what if he hadn’t* and the only thing that comes out of the trial is Sirius being remanded right back to Azkaban?

Honestly…even if he managed to forge a fresh relationship with his cub he wasn’t certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that having Sirius’s treason to their friends and their bond confirmed wouldn’t kill him this time.

“I don’t think he did what they say he did.” Harry decided to extend just a bit of trust on a gamble to the Professor. His feelings weren’t exactly a secret on the matter considering everything he had
Edwardius working on all summer and continuing in the weeks since he’d returned to school. Even if it turned out that Professor Lupin wasn’t to be trusted after all and ran tattling to the Headmaster or someone else it wouldn’t be a surprise or even that bad of a leak since he’d passed on Sirius’s journals and the letter from Walburga Black to his law wizard. “His mother didn’t either.”

“Mrs. Black?” Remus felt his brows shoot up towards his hairline in surprise as he worked to keep from spluttering over his hot chocolate in shock. “How...?”

Harry shrugged. “She left me his things with a letter about it when she died. I found it this summer.”

That... Remus shook his head. He wasn’t sure what to do with that.

Realizing they’d gotten a bit off topic, he brought them back around to what he’d actually asked Harry there to discuss.

“I wanted to ask you, with you knowing that it is as a concerned friend of your family and not a member of the staff – though there’s a bit of that too – or one of the Headmaster’s employees, about your Boggart, Harry. If I can call you Harry?”

Normally when an adult gave him a soft, concerned smile like the one Professor Lupin was sending his way it did nothing but get his back up.

But for some reason – maybe a latent memory of being around him when he was a baby – he felt...if not comfortable at least at greater ease with mild-mannered professor than he usually was around authority figures.

And definitely none of the disgust than he felt regarding some of the adults he’d met in his life like Vernon.

Or rage like Lockheart.

“I don’t see any reason why not.” Harry decided to allow the informality. If nothing else there’s worse things in the world than for his defense professor to have a soft spot where he was concerned.

“Wonderful.” Remus beamed over at his cub, nudging one of the small plates with the small triple-chocolate tea cakes over towards the teen, eyes shining suspiciously. “Away from Hogwarts you can call me Remus or even Moony if you like.”

“Moony?” Harry frowned. Now that struck a chord but he wasn’t entirely certain why. He wasn’t going to worry about it at the moment, not with Remus – Moony – asking questions that he needed to answer a certain way to avoid the professor drawing the wrong, or maybe right, conclusions.

Remus blushed a bit, rubbing at the back of his neck.

“Right, you wouldn’t remember.” He mumbled under his breath. “A nickname your father and, and Sirius, gave me when we were at Hogwarts.”

“O-kay.” Harry restrained his inclination to arch a brow. It wasn’t like Moony was any worse than some of the nicknames he’d heard before in his life. And it was miles away better than the oh-so-loving appellation of Freak that his loving relatives had gifted him with. “Professor Moony.”

Remus snickered, remembering more than one joke about that when he was Harry’s age coming his way, but waved for Harry to continue.
“I wasn’t sure what my Boggart was going to be.” Harry admitted. “I certainly didn’t expect the Headmaster. I’ve been…” He searched for the right word for the right impression. “Cautious, regarding him due to actions he took with my guardianship and inheritance.”

“The entire Wizarding World is aware of your restraining order, Harry.” Remus pointed out drily. “And I’d say your Boggart proves your issues with the Headmaster go far deeper than caution.”

“Tampering with my accounts and inheritance after leaving me – alone, in a basket, in November – on a doorstep for my aunt to find the next morning then never doing even a single welfare check throughout my pre-Hogwarts years didn’t exactly instill me with trust, that’s for sure.” Harry agreed, rolling his eyes. “I could’ve died before she found me. Been mauled by a passing fox or other wildlife. That at that point he was actively giving away my ancestral property and setting up the ability to drain my vaults for years to follow, caution is entirely the correct response to a man who still has a nominal amount of authority over me even if a restraining order magically prevents him from actively harming my person.”

And none of the research he’d had Edwardius do into Dumbledore over the years since he hired him had shown him anything but more reasons to be wary of the old goat.

“Even so,” Harry continued, half-musing. “Fears by their very nature don’t operate under a requirement of being rational.” He chewed on the inside of his cheek a moment, considering that point since it was, when he got right down to the bones of the matter, what he’d come up with as he meditated over the subject at hand over the last several days. “It’s far and away an extreme extrapolation of my imagination that the Headmaster would or could actively work towards my death or kill me himself if for no other reason than should it be linked to him it’d be political and social suicide.”

Remus slowly blinked, processing that as his cub finally shrugged and bit into the cake he’d given him humming a bit under his breath.

Harry’s argument against his own fear was that it wasn’t altogether rational given that Dumbledore was politically aware enough not to seek out the death of his political reach. Not a moral argument. Not even an ethical one. But rather that – reading a bit between the lines – Harry considered the elder wizard smart enough not to want to take the risk of it backfiring.

If the Sorting Hat didn’t consider Slytherin for his cub, Remus would eat his tattiest robe patches and all.

“None of that really makes me any less worried about you, Harry.” Remus admitted several long moments later filled with sips of the hot chocolate and bites of rich flourless cake.

The teen jerked a shoulder. “You asked.”

Yes, Remus chuckled half-heartedly. Yes, that he did.

“Well.” Remus set his fork down with a click then finished the dregs of his cup. “Since there’s little I can do to help you overcome a fear you’re working on – and working out from the sound of it – yourself, and the Headmaster isn’t likely to be pleased with my diverging from his preferred behavior anyway, how do you feel about regular tea-time chats?”

“If they can include defense tutoring – including the Patronus like you used against the Dementors,” Harry said immediately, jumping at the chance for real instruction in the field. “I’d be delighted.”

“Every Sunday at three, then? Starting tomorrow?”
“Brilliant.”

…

_The Castillo, Navarre_

“What’s the likelihood of Madam Bones running for Minister now that she’s gotten a taste as pro-
tem?” Tomas asked his most valued and trusted follower as he reviewed what the papers – English and Internationally – were reporting regarding Fudge’s inglorious sacking.

That Barty Crouch – while not named in any of the publications – had likewise found himself facing punitive measures over the Ministry-wide loss-of-face was nothing less than the man had deserved and a great deal less than he had coming since he’d only been quietly demoted into a minor position in the Magical Accidents and Catastrophes department of the Ministry instead of being sacked altogether.

Too much bad press all at once he supposed.

Understandable – but maddening all the same.

Given the hierarchy of departments and line of succession in case a Minister was removed from office for any reason, the honorable Lady Amelia Bones had been shoved into the position as Minister Pro-Tem until they could have a public vote to replace Fudge, not unlike Lord Ogden’s position as Chief Warlock.

The main difference being that Ogden wasn’t likely to be replaced as the next-ranking member for the position in the wake of Dumbledore’s ongoing political troubles, even if rather than make the removal official the Wizengamot had simply “extended” the original suspension until after the conclusion of the “Sirius Black” matter.

Tomas was quite interested in this Ravenclaw-spawned political animal that Harry Potter had become, given the sheer amount of upheaval he’d caused in a mere two years.

Regulus’s reports had only whetted his intrigue.

“Slim to none.” Regulus offered, studying the color of the brandy in his glass as he pondered the question. “She’s the sort that would step into the breach if needed but when push comes to shove her interest in is the law. Lady Bones is a competent, effective Head of the DMLE. With your return to political maneuvers over terror,” Regulus smirked unrepentantly at the dire muttering that came from his lord at the poke regarding his former lapses. “It’s better all around to have her return – willingly – to her preferred posting.” He narrowed his eyes, considering the Ministry players who were already making moves to secure alliances among those in power before making their position public. “None of ours are ideally suited or visible enough to challenge Scrimgoeur.”

At the moment, anyway.

“Is it certain he’s going to run?”

Regulus nodded. “Definitely. He would’ve gone up against Fudge anyway in the next election and leveraged his auror career and wartime efforts in the doing.”

Tomas grimaced. He remembered Rufus quite well from school and his exploits afterward. The giant pain in the arse that he’d been.

Bloody Gryffindors.
“But,” he agreed with a sigh. “Rufus’s very stiff-necked rigidity makes him easy to both predict and maneuver. Much easier to manage for our goals than Lady Bones would be.”

“Quite.” Regulus lifted his snifter in a mock-toast before scoffing the dregs. “And that’s before my brother dearest is eventually exonerated and becomes eligible to take up guardianship of our young Heir Potter.”

“Do you think he’ll try and use his proxy over the Potter seats?”

Regulus barely held in a snort. “Not Siri. He doesn’t have a political bone in his entire body. It’s what Dumbledore might convince him to do on his behalf that worries me.” He sneered. “I may love the idiot but he has a blindspot the size of the Knight Bus when it comes to the old fool.”

“A worry for another day.” Tomas waved that off, setting the publications aside and pulling some other paperwork forward. “What else stirs in the halls of the Ministry thanks to our Heir Potter’s machinations?”

“Well…”

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